Michigan Journal of International Affairs

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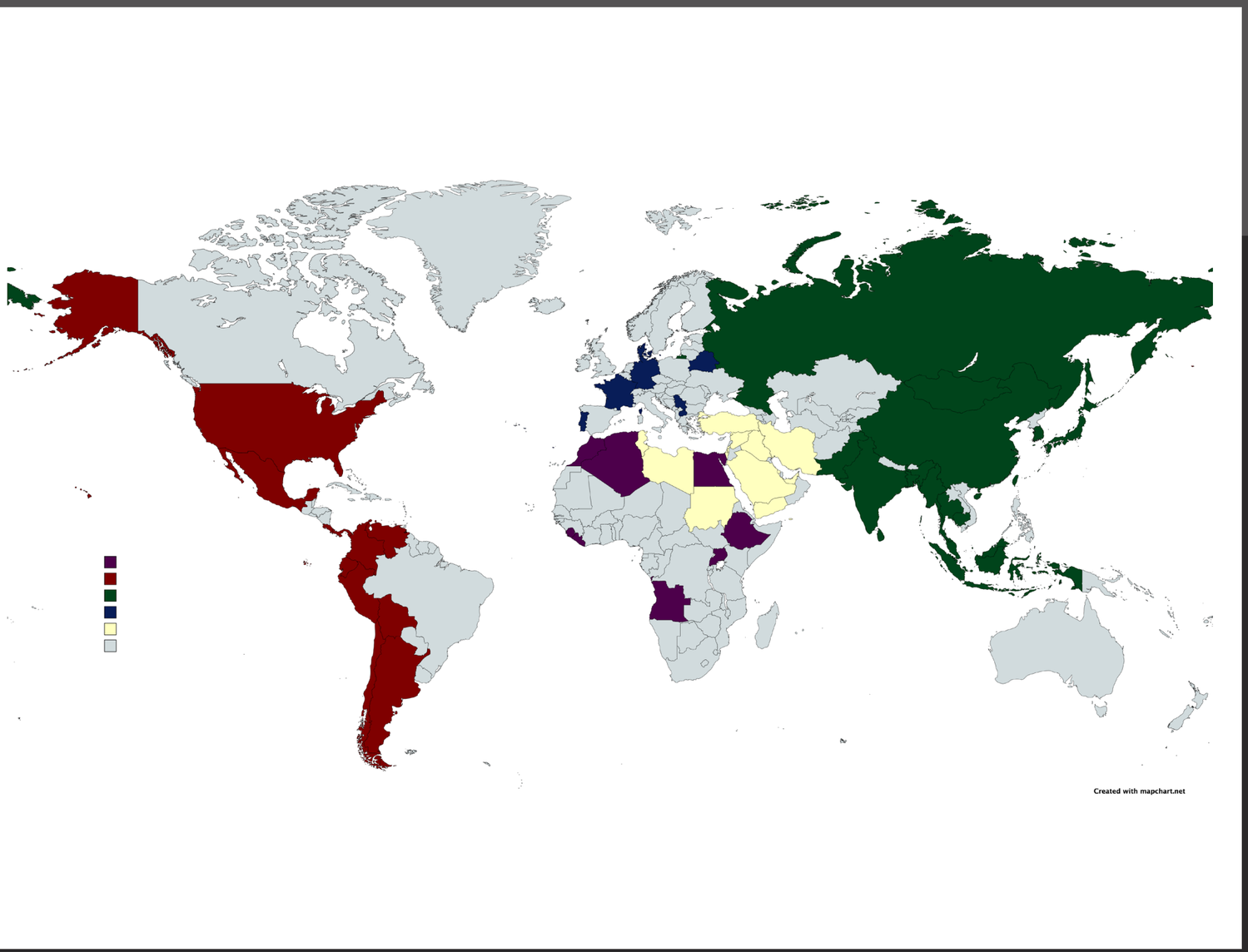
DOUBLE SPEED



LETTER FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD

The theme of our last issue was "A Global Pause." We chose this theme as the world ground to a halt as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, more than a year after the initial outbreak, the world seems to have embarked on a road to recovery at Double Speed. Fortunately and unfortunately, the pace at which international events and conflicts seem to be playing out is also at Double Speed.

Throughout the semester, our writers have been reflecting on the rapid changes we are seeing in the emerging aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. In considering the recent coup in Myanmar, Maheem Syed notes how the events have magnified and sped up the calls for unity among Southeast Asian neighbors in reacting to the crisis. Heba Malik writes about the historic Abraham Accords, which normalized relations between some Arab Gulf states and Israel after 18 years of using normalization as a bargaining chip for Palestinian rights and freedom. Double Speed changes have come not only in international politics but in culture as well: Kerri Kenney highlights the growing push to move away from gendered pronouns in European languages while Alberto Della Torre notes the rising popularity of bicycles in Buenos Aires as COVID-19 shut down public transportation, a movement that could become permanent. Not all changes in recent months have been in a positive direction, and some conflicts have been worsening at Double Speed. Hanna Schechter writes about the potential for cyber warfare between Egypt and Ethiopia over the Nile, which she argues displays as a new form of modern warfare. As well, internal calls for change have grown at Double Speed around the world as well, with an increased focus on inequality and racism, which Maeve Skelly discusses in the form of endemic and worsening Islamophobia in France.

Thus far, the course of global events in 2021 have proceeded at a breakneck pace. While vast swathes of the world continue to reel from a pandemic that has inflicted at least 3 million deaths, the survivors have been inoculated at a rate virtually unimaginable just six months ago, with five hundred million adults receiving at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. As production numbers continue to crank up, this rate may well increase further in the coming months, yet the distribution of these vaccines remains remarkably unequal. These efforts once again display the best and worst of globalization, and as the articles to follow demonstrate, business as usual on a variety of fronts has accelerated to Double Speed. Unprecedented monetary and fiscal stimulus, pent-up human ingenuity, and discontent with the status quo lead the way for another year where abnormality is perhaps its most normal feature.

Michigan Journal of International Affairs
Editorial Board

Website http://MJIAUM.org

Contact MJIA.Info@umich.edu

TABLE OF CONTENTS

AFRICA

6 **The Time For Uganda's Museveni to Leave Office Has Come**
Ethan Story

8 **Angola & Its Oil Dependency Through a Green Lens**
Glennie Webster

10 **Nile Dispute Introduces the New Modern Warfare: Cyber Conflict**
Hanna Schechter

11 **To the Moon? AfCFTA and Economic Liberalization**
Jeh Z. Mory

13 **Phosphorus Security and The Western Kingdom**
Kenny Larson

15 **A Check in With Algeria**
Will Brown

16 **An Unheralded COVID Success Story in West Africa**
Zack Blumberg

17 **Vaccine diplomacy offers crumbs. African countries should push for the whole cake.**
Zayna Syed

AMERICAS

20 **After the Pandemic, Buenos Aires is Embracing the Bicycle**
Alberto Della Torre

21 **Where Did the Water Go? A Climate Change Conundrum and Management Mess in Latin America**
Ayla Kaufman

23 **Mexico's Drug Cartels are Investing in Avocados, to the Detriment of the Avocado Farmer**
Billy Keim

25 **Attacks on NGOs and Nonprofits: The Ongoing Battle for Human Rights in Venezuela**
Brendan Tilds

26 **How the World is Praising and Failing Green Costa Rica**
Emmanuel Orozco Castellanos

28 **Gender Ideology and the Catholic Church's Pro-Life Crusade**
Jordan Halpern

29 **The Venezuelan Migration Crisis Through the Lens of Host Country Colombia**
Josephine Ness

31 **Fishy Activity: Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing Operations a Threat to South American Environment, Economy, and Sovereignty**
Kayleigh Crabb

33 **Panama's Diplomatic Problem with Illicit Financial Activity**
Noelle Seward

ASIA

36 **Addressing Deficiencies in Human Capital in Cambodia Through Anti-Corruption Measures**
Anna Heiss

37 **The Geopolitical Impact of Sino-Russian Relations in the Arctic**
Brett Bolog

39 **Creativity in the Midst of Chaos**
Group Article

43 **The Myanmar Crisis in Bangladesh's Hands**
Jonas Gomes

45 **The Myanmar Crisis and the Case for Southeast Asian Unity**
Maheem Syed

46 **Docile vs. Defiant: The Role of the Generation Gap in the Thai Protests**
Juhui Oh

48 **Sri Lanka's Childcare Desert**
Olivia Howard

49 **How India's Farmers Started a Free Speech Conundrum**
Ryan Woock

50 **Evaluating Singapore's Adaptability to COVID-19 and a Post Pandemic World**
Tanmay Arora

51 **"Modern Slavery" in Southeast Asia**
Victoria Tan

EUROPE

53 **The Long-Term Effects of Europe's Bungled Vaccine Rollout**
Aidan Woutas

54 **French President Emmanuel Macron Faces A Tough Challenge To Convince The French People To Re-Elect Him**
Benjamin Miller

56 **The Emergence of Portugal's Conservative Moment**
Grace Manella

57 **Shifting Winds of Power**
Julian Florez

58 **Is Berlin the Next Washington? Far-Right and Populist Sentiments in Germany**
Daniel Evans

60 ***Il, Elle, Iel, Ille*: The Status of Inclusive Language in Europe**
Kerri Kenney

61 **Growing Islamophobia Exposes Value Contradictions in France**
Maeve Skelly

62 **Belarus' Triumvirate and the "Women in White" Demand to be Heard**
Rachael Merritt

64 **The Morava-Vardar Canal: New Connections, Old Problems**
Samuel Rosenblum

MIDDLE EAST

66 **The Arab Spring: Ten Years On**
Regional Collab

69 **A Shift in Power: The 1979 Siege of al-Masjid al-Haram**
Ethan Concannon

70 **Private Contractors and Regulating a New Age of War**
Addison Egen

71 **Greed, God, and Glory: The Price of the Abraham Accords**
Heba Malik

72 **Can Egypt Be Forgiven?**
Maya Chamra

73 **Gulf Feminisms After Loujain**
Maheem Syed

74 **Old Wounds, Freshly Opened**
Quentin Powers

75 **The Future of Tunisia is in Flux**
Ruchita Coomar

77 **Left High and Dry in Al-Ahwaz: The Rural Toll of Iran's Water Shortage**
Sophie Clark

79 **What does Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention mean for the feminist movement in Turkey?**
Mia Whitfield

81 **ClubHouse: The suppression of free speech in Middle Eastern authoritarian states**
Sumayah Basal

82 **Now is the Time For Women: Yemen's Feminist Movement**
Sophie Clark

83 **Russia's Economic and Geopolitical Motives in the Syrian Civil War**
Sophie Clark

AFRICA.

The Time For Uganda's Museveni to Leave Office Has Come

Ethan Story

On January 14, 2021, Yoweri Museveni won his sixth term as President of Uganda. Far from free and fair, Museveni's victory was marred by internet blackouts, rampant human rights abuses, and outright corruption. Uganda, with a median age of under 17 years old, will continue to be ruled by a 76-year old autocrat desperate to remain in power. Museveni's regime draws comparisons to those of former Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe, who was thrown out of office in 2017, and other African strongmen who've been removed from power in recent years. Museveni has long been a strategic ally of the west, protected under the guise of regional security and stability. With the tides in Africa shifting and a young, democratically-minded challenger in Bobi Wine waiting in the wings, the international community should reverse its support for Museveni and choose to support democracy and progress in Uganda over the status quo.

Despite evidence of election fraud and vast human rights abuses, the international community has remained relatively muted in the aftermath of the January election. This is nothing new; for decades, Western powers have implicitly supported autocracy in Uganda in exchange for a stable regional ally. Since rising to power in 1986, Museveni has received billions of dollars in aid, with the United States pledging over $500 million in 2021 alone. Uganda is a leading ally in the War on Terror, contributing a significant amount of troops to the African Union's mission in Somalia. President Bill Clinton used Museveni's military to funnel arms to the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) rebels in the 1990s, giving Museveni easy access to America's military weaponry. Ugandan troops are even found in Iraq, where they assist American forces with security. American presidents from both parties have showered Museveni with praise, citing Uganda's post-war recovery and impressive AIDS record while ignoring the increasing autocracy of Museveni's regime. Western media and commentators, who once hailed Museveni as a member of a new generation of African leaders, have largely been indifferent to growing human rights abuses in the country.

Museveni's past electoral transgressions paint a clear picture of corruption and repression. In 2005, Museveni forced Parliament to remove term limits for the Presidency; in 2017, he again extolled Parliament to remove the age limit that would have prevented him from running for his sixth term in 2021. Since his first re-election in 2001, elections have become progressively less free and fair. In recent years, opposition leaders have been beaten and jailed, protesters killed, and internet access cut while military vehicles roam the streets. Museveni's 2021 challenger Bobi Wine, born Robert Kyagulanyi, has been beaten by security forces on several occasions, while MPs like Betty Nambooze either fall in line or risk enduring violence. Nambooze, who opposed the 2017 bill to remove age limits for elections, was kidnapped from Parliament by suspected Museveni loyalists and beaten nearly to death. These stories are not uncommon in Uganda: Museveni rules the country with an iron first, emboldened by a war chest in part siphoned off from foreign aid.

Some Western aid, which pays for medical supplies and social programs, has undoubtedly benefited Uganda, lifting thousands out of poverty. Much of the aid, however, only benefits Museveni and his government. In 2013, Human Rights Watch published a report that found Uganda has repeatedly failed to punish high-level corruption. Donor funding worth $12.7 million USD, supposed to help rebuild some of Uganda's poorest regions, was stolen in 2012. Earlier, in 2005, officials stole $4.5 million that was meant to help fight AIDS and other medical crises. In light of Museveni's recent abuses, the international community has pledged solidarity with protestors, with both the U.S. and the E.U. releasing statements expressing concern for Ugandan democracy. However, these alone are not enough. The international community's support for Museveni has undoubtedly contributed to his current grip on power. Museveni's long-bought image as a Central African peace guarantor has given him diplomatic leeway, while billions in aid and military supplies have given him the means to solidify his autocratic mission.

The rising star of challenger Bobi Wine has changed the dynamics of Uganda's fight for democracy. Wine's National Unity Platform picked up over 50 seats in the January election to become the main parliamentary opposition party, enjoying significant support from many of the poorest in Kampala and the rural Buganda region. Nicknamed the Ghetto President, Wine offers a breath of fresh air to a young population disenchanted with Museveni's authoritarian regime. Similarly, Wine's charisma and artistic background have endeared him to Western media, where he has enjoyed profiles in TIME and Rolling Stone just as coverage of Museveni's leadership has turned negative. While young, Wine represents the opposition's best hope for ousting Museveni in decades. Just four years old at the time of Museveni's ascent, Wine has consistently preached democracy, urging his supporters to engage in non-violent protest while hinging his presidential hopes on Uganda's court system and an international cohort of democracy advocacy groups.

As with any upstart opposition leader in a country that's only known authoritarianism, there is risk in anointing Bobi Wine as the democratic future in Uganda. Museveni was once seen in a similar light, as successful AIDS programs, new education reforms, and compassionate immigration policies bolstered his reputation as a competent and democratic leader. However, those successes soon turned sour: the AIDS program became stricken with corruption, education reform failed to increase upward economic mobility, and liberal immigration policies largely took in refugees that Museveni's military helped create. Wine's generation-based populism could potentially head down a similar path, succumbing to power and corruption. However, with risk comes reward, and a potential Wine government offers plenty of the latter. Wine has long stood against democratic backsliding while arguing for tolerance and freedom in a country where neither is guaranteed. His nuance is rare amongst revolutionary leaders: he has consistently criticized the west for what he sees as their damaging support for Museveni while admiring their liberal democratic values and recognizing their importance in his fight for democracy. Wine is no sure bet, but he is certainly right about one thing: the time for Museveni to leave office has come.

Angola & Its Oil Dependency Through a Green Lens

Glennie Webster

As international organizations continue to champion multilateral climate change policies like the Paris Agreement, the demand for oil has decreased dramatically. Subsequently, the markets of economically oil-dependent countries have become more vulnerable. This is especially true in Angola where, according to the IMF, oil accounts for 95 percent of exports and generates 75 percent of the government's revenue. This undiversified economy features several foreign and national oil companies like BP Angola, Sonangol, and others that shape the country's bureaucratic elite. These companies have unscrupulous ties with the Angolan government, creating a structure that makes Angola disproportionately dependent on oil.

While Western global powers have historically benefited from a close economic relationship with Angola, they have drastically reduced their oil imports in tandem with climate change policy in recent years. This illustrates the great volatility in Angola, motioning the country to diversify their economy for future stability. Yet moving past this dependency is not an easy feat. International climate change policies that affect economies like Angola's should be carefully enacted, with support and concern from global powers, many of which previously invested in Angola's oil economy in its development. Angola needs to diversify its economy, but the broader international community also needs to craft climate change policy that helps the climate, society, and developing countries' economies.

Western academics often refer to Angola as a classic example of an "oil curse." This describes a paradoxical relationship where there is an abundance of oil resources in a country, but the result is a lack of development as oil revenues disincentivize other profit-generating industries from forming. These are industries that would develop national economies considerably, making the market generally less prone to volatility due to this diversity.

In Angola's case, however, the benefits of oil have trickled down to the average Angolan with the development of public services. The increase of government revenue from oil exports in the past 15-20 years allowed for the provision of healthcare, education, and infrastructure. This was shown in the opening of health clinics, healthcare worker training schools, and several universities. Further, oil companies have provided private health care for their local employees, which helped to increase Angola's average at-birth life expectancy by 15 years since 2000, according to the World Bank.

Angola has been producing oil since 1955 yet did not gain the investment interest of major Western powers until the early 2000s due to internal instability. In 2005, OPEC stated that 25% of the United States' crude oil and petroleum product imports came from Angola. Now, the United States has significantly reduced its imports, with <1 percent of its petroleum product imports originating from Angola in 2019 according to the EIA. With such a dramatic decrease, Angola has turned to alternative trading partners to continue fulfilling this dependency.

In recent years, Angola has increased its exports to developing powers, namely China, which accounts for 70 percent of Angola's 2019 oil exports, and India, accounting for 9 percent. This shift of trade partners illustrates a broader power dynamic change from old colonial ties to independent relationships with other recently developed countries. However, overall exports to both China and India are currently declining, with a respective 17 percent and 24 percent drop in oil export market growth since 2018.

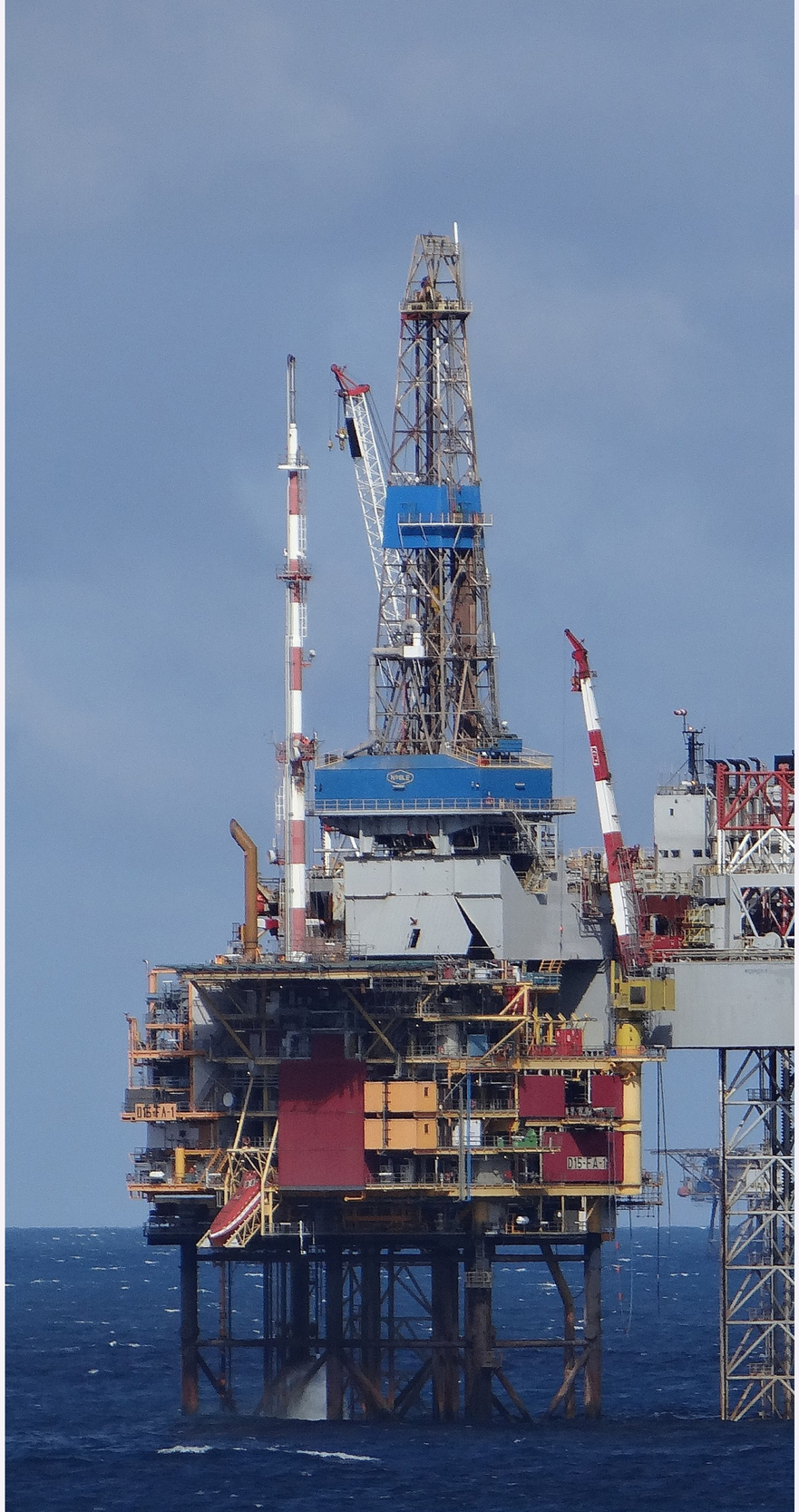
Possible reasons for this decline are the overarching effects of the pandemic in reducing oil demand, as well as the duties of various export recipients as signatories to the non-binding 2016 Paris Agreement, when all UN member-states pledged to decrease their carbon emissions with nationally determined contributions. These actions include reducing the burning of oil and creating less carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas responsible for warming the planet, in the atmosphere. Therefore, countries need to reduce their oil imports in order to fit the guidelines they set out for themselves in 2016. In tandem with the negative market effects of 2020, this places Angola's economy in a fragile state.

International organizations like the UNTAC have pointed to industries in Angola such as honey production as a replacement. However, this would fail to replace the, on average, $30 billion a year generated in oil exports in the country's current market revenue. Other export industries, like diamond mining or ship building, barely make up 1 percent of exports per year in Angola. A comparable market to oil would be difficult to develop without significant foreign investment, which could put Angola in a similar situation if this market encased all of its exports again. Thus, this uncertainty and the subsequent government revenue losses leaves Angola in a perpetual

state of financial uncertainty.

Angola's economic uncertainty brings attention to a wider experience of developing countries across the globe who are subject to the economic decisions of global developed powers, often Western powers. Historically, Western countries were given the opportunity to industrialize and develop when climate change was not a policy concern. But the same liberties are not given to developing countries now who desire to industrialize and develop in the same ways. This contraction is at the core of this oil dependency issue, where developing countries are kept in a loop that restricts them from achieving the next level of development through cheap energy generation and exports from oil. Angola had an immense economic opportunity upon their discovery of oil, which they utilized to their advantage heavily, but this sudden decline of revenue highlights the danger of their dependence on oil from global powers.

For Angolans and other developing countries, economic well-being needs to be accounted for while climate change policy is implemented. While Angola has already identified the need to diversify their international trading partners they cannot sufficiently prepare for losing $30 billion from their economy. Receiving more foreign aid to recover lost government revenue from the UN, NGOs, and from other states, comes with strings attached; strings that can keep Angola submissive to the major global economies of the Global North and South leaders. To lessen the blow, a slow transition phase of implementing oil-free policy would allow Angola to have more time to develop new industries that would strengthen their economy and benefit the lives of Angolans. In practice, efforts to diversify Angola's economy and detach from dominant global powers will be a trying process for Angolans. Angola needs to be economically and environmentally sustainable, but the road to get there should not be at the cost of Angolans' wellbeing.



Nile Dispute Introduces the New Modern Warfare: Cyber Conflict

Hanna Schechter

In a new era of technological advancement and nationalism, the escalating dispute over who will control the Nile may result in Africa's first cyberwar. In 2020, Ethiopia finished building the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile located in northern Ethiopia. The Blue Nile connects with the White Nile in Khartoum, Sudan's capital, to form the Nile River, and accounts for approximately 85 percent of the Nile's overall water flow. From Sudan, the Nile River flows through Egypt, where it provides 96 percent of the necessary water for Egyptian agriculture use and domestic consumption. If Ethiopia wishes, through GERD, they have the power to squeeze the water flow of the Blue Nile, consequently drying Egypt. Egypt's protests are growing more desperate and, as Ethiopia continues to ignore these pleas, a cyber war becomes more likely.

To Ethiopia, GERD is an economic boon, potentially lifting Ethiopia from a low-income economy to a middle-income economy. GERD will be the largest dam in Africa, generating approximately 6,000 megawatts of electricity. Ethiopia plans to harness this power for its own population and for export at an estimated value of $1 billion per year. The people of Ethiopia celebrate the dam as a national accomplishment and have integrated the dam's success into their national identity. Since the dam's completion last year, all that remains is filling the dam's reservoir by diverting water from the Blue Nile into it.

This diversion, Egypt believes, will result in drastic changes to its water flow. Egypt has demanded GERD's reservoir filling be dependent on rainfall to ensure a consistent water supply to the Nile. A reduction of Nile water of only 2 percent could cause Egypt to lose thousands of arable acres as well as reduce electrical output from Egypt's Aswan dam. Egypt is already below the UN water poverty line and many Egyptians worry that Ethiopia's dam will endanger their lives and wellbeing. According to an interview with the Middle East Eye, Mostafa Metwally, an Egyptian farmer, summed up the conflict by saying that the Ethiopian dam will "definitely be our death." Beyond the economic consequences of GERD to Egypt, the Nile has been the symbol of the Egyptian people since the time of Pharaohs and Egyptians view the Ethiopian dam as an attack on their cultural identity and survival.

Egyptian anxiety regarding the Nile's water flow culminated with a cyber attack against Ethiopia from the Egyptian leftist nationalist group Cyber Horus Group. On June 13th 2020, Cyber Horus Group hacked multiple Ethiopian government websites to broadcast the message: "If the river's level drop, let all the Pharaoh's soldiers hurry and return only after the liberation of the Nile," and "engaging with Egypt in a war may cost you more than the lives of an Ethiopian people." A Cyber Horus hacker stated in an interview with Foreign Policy that the attack had been fairly easy, more attacks could come, and that cyber warfare could be more powerful than weapons. No evidence links the Egyptian government with the Cyber Horus hack. The absence of evidence, however, does not mean the absence of a link. Cyber warfare has another advantage of greater anonymity, allowing governments to have plausible deniability. Although the Egyptian government has toyed with the possibility of direct military action against Ethiopia since 2013 regarding their long dispute over the Nile, the possibility of a more conventional war is unlikely. Egyptian president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has made public assurances to find a peaceful solution and going back on this promise would negatively impact perceptions of his ability to lead. Egypt's resources are spread thin as the government works to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and its military's attention is currently drawn to Libya. Under these conditions, cyber attacks against Ethiopia could be strategically advantageous as these attacks have the potential to seriously harm Ethiopia's government and civil activity without the need to mobilize Egypt's armed forces. Cyber attacks have already harmed various African nations with 11 nations and the African Union falling victim to a malware designed to harvest and transmit classified government information. Cyber attacks have the potential to sabotage vital infrastructure such as telecommunications, banking, and energy. In 2016, a hack against Liberia resulted in approximately half of the population being unable to access their banking systems. After the Cyber Horus attack, it took the Ethiopian government approximately two weeks to relaunch its websites, signaling weaknesses in their ability to ward off and recover from potential Egyptian cyber threats. With Egypt exhausting almost every peaceful tool to cooperate with Ethiopia coupled with Ethiopia's cyber vulnerabilities, cyber-attacks begin to look more attractive.

The Cyber Horus hack symbolizes just the tip of the iceberg of Egypt's growing flirtation with integrating hacking into its foreign policy. The National Cyber Power Index (NCPI) classified Egypt as having low cyber capabilities and low intent to conflict on digital platforms. This classification means that either Egypt has not developed adequate cyber capabilities to be considered a threat, or that there is not sufficient evidence to determine Egypt's cyber power. The 2020 report generated by the NCPI cautions difficulty in determining Egypt's cyber priorities and information regarding Egypt's military intelligence— a sign of Egypt's reluctance to be transparent regarding these matters.

However, there is a level of risk involved in initiating cyberwarfare. If the attack was to be disguised as another Cyber Horus Group hack, to prevent the attack from being traced back to the Egyptian government, the government would have to hide their 'digital tracks' very well. If Egypt were to initiate a cyber attack, the government would have to be prepared for retaliation or escalation beyond the cyber domain. Additionally, Egypt would face pushback from the African Union and United States who have attempted to facilitate peaceful conversations between Ethiopia and Egypt through various forums.

Both Egypt and Ethiopia have economic and political gains from seeing their agendas succeed. Both countries' youth have taken to social media to express their animosity for the other side, with the hashtag #EgyptNileRights trending in Egypt and with an Ethiopian influencer posting a TikTok dance video captioned "distracting the Egyptians while we fill the dam." The Egyptian rhetoric of "doing anything for The Nile," and Ethiopia's nationalistic ties to the dam's success will create an impasse between the two governments leaving little room for cooperation.

To the Moon?

AfCFTA and Economic Liberalization

Jeh Z. Mory

The liberal international order established under the United States's aegis has overseen a historically unprecedented period of rapid economic development. America's post-Cold War unipolar moment has seen global per capita GDP increase by about 50 percent from 1991 to 2017, according to World Bank data, as emerging markets rapidly developed. One curious aspect of the current wave of globalization is its regional disparities. Consider one simple statistic — the percentage of people living in extreme poverty (defined by the World Bank as living on under $1.90/day in 2011 US Dollars, adjusted for purchasing power). Over 40 percent of the world's population lived in extreme poverty in 1981, a figure that rose to over half of South Asia's population and a whopping four-fifths of that of East Asia. By 2015, the global figure had declined to just 10 percent; the corresponding figures were about 15 and 2 percent for South Asia and East Asia, respectively.

In this vein, the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) represents an enormous opportunity to lower tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade in order to foster increased trade within Africa, inducing economic growth and accelerating its citizens' rises in living standards. Over 40 percent of sub-Saharan Africa's population continues to live in extreme poverty, a figure driven by the continent's comparatively lackluster growth as other regions globalized. AfCFTA promises to drive sustainable growth by developing a more cohesive single market for large corporations and small businesses alike to operate in, creating jobs, investment, and consumption opportunities for millions of Africans.

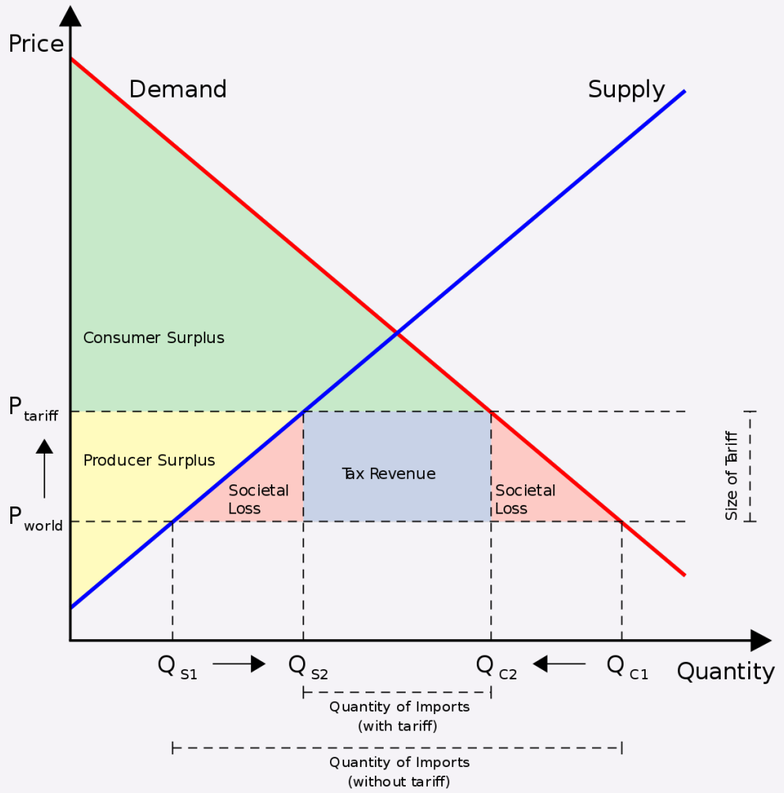
Launched on New Year's Day 2021, AfCFTA substantially integrates 54 African Union member-states and 1.3 billion people into a more cohesive economic unit. The world's largest free trade area in terms of the number of member-states, it represents a large-scale attempt by developing economies to remove barriers to trade and increase the mobility of labor and capital within their borders. AfCFTA also offers the long-term goal of creating a single market along the lines of the model provided by the European Union. A robust AfCFTA could provide a dual benefit to signatories, massively accelerating growth as millions of Africans connect to the global economy.

AfCFTA would thus induce growth in intra-regional trade, which has played an increasingly crucial role in this era of globalization. According to the World Economic Forum, 59 percent of Asian countries' exports and 68 percent of European countries' exports are intra-continental — both a cause and effect of deepening economic integration along regional lines. By contrast, this figure is just 17 percent for Africa. Thus, dissolving tariffs and non-tariff trade barriers, from exacting customs checks to onerous regulations on foreign businesses or workers to outright corruption, will foster the environment necessary for goods and services to move freely between nations. Kenya and Ethiopia, the two largest economies in East Africa, serve as an interesting example. Despite enduring and longstanding ties, trade between the two countries has been moribund at best — Ethiopian exports to Kenya constituted just 0.5 percent of all Ethiopian exports in 2019, while the corresponding figure for Kenyan exports to Ethiopia was just 0.09 percent, according to the IMF Direction of Trade Statistics. AfCFTA includes a robust effort to foster good governance by promoting trade integrity, which provides an external incentive structure for countries to remove criminality, opacity, and corruption from international trade transactions to enhance their legitimacy. Thus, AfCFTA promises to continue dissolving cross-border barriers to trade and improving market access, trade volumes, and economic growth across the African continent.

Crucially, this growth is projected to be accompanied by the upliftment of large swathes of African societies. A recent World Bank report estimates that AfCFTA is projected to lift an additional 30 million people out of extreme poverty by 2035 relative to its projections for a non-AfCFTA scenario. This effect is especially pronounced in Africa's poorest countries, from Guinea-Bissau to Mali to Niger. Additionally, an estimated 67 million additional people are expected to exit moderate poverty (defined by the World Bank as living on under $5.50/day in 2011 US Dollars, adjusted for purchasing power parity) over the same period, as massive increases in cross-border trade drive increased household consumption. Overall, the agreement is expected to result in additional increases in wage growth by 0.5 percent-0.9 percent year-on-year from 2021-2035 across various categorizations by skill of labor, gender, and region, with especially pronounced effects on women's wage growth.

One key concern surrounding AfCFTA centers around Africa's state of industrialization. In order to truly leverage the power of this new African single market, governments and policymakers should commit to creating a conducive market environment for large-scale industrialization and infrastructure development, from transportation links to robust electricity and water systems to communications networks to large-scale housing developments. A physically interconnected economic network will increase the continent's relative attractiveness to investment as consumer spending increases and companies can more easily service the demand of 1.3 billion people plugging into the global economy. This will allow investors, corporations, and entrepreneurs to more effectively operate in a single market-liberalized environment and integrate African manufacturing facilities into global supply chains, replicating the conditions that helped transform the economies of Japan, China, India, and ASEAN economies that have been united by a common free trade area since 1992.

In conclusion, while AfCFTA is a meaningful first step to a substantial rise in incomes and living standards, African governments should commit to a slew of robust economic and political reforms to unlock its full potential. Broad-scale economic liberalization along the lines of that exhibited after the fall of the Soviet Union would incentivize foreign investment and allow African companies to compete effectively across the continent. Indeed, African leaders are set to undertake negotiations on further phases to economic integration; developing protocols on investment, competition policy, intellectual property rights, and e-commerce, and have contextualized AfCFTA within a broader "Agenda 2063" that seeks to wed economic development with political integration, improvements to justice, and pan-African geopolitical stability. Thus, AfCFTA has a revolutionary potential to integrate a pan-African political economy conducive to the rapid growth enjoyed by other global regions in this era of globalization.



Simplified graph showing the effect of tariffs on an efficient market for goods and services.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Phosphorus Security and The Western Kingdom

Kenny Larson

Morocco, a state quintessentially defined by sprawling Saharan Deserts, is rarely recognized as the lynchpin of global agriculture. But in recent years, The Western Kingdom has proven itself as the cornerstone of industrialized agribusiness. As United Nations estimates project a world population of nearly 10 billion by 2050, the international community's dependence on phosphate-based fertilizers to meet increasing food demands have emerged as a pressing concern: and one only Morocco can solve.

Phosphorus, a naturally-occurring element found in phosphate rock deposits, is among the most essential global resources. Considered a building block of life, phosphorus plays a fundamental role in enriching the nutrients of plant-based organisms through the phosphorus cycle. As such, the element was commercialized through synthetic fertilizers for usage in food production, particularly in the wake of widespread nutrient depletion of soils used for crop growth. As a result of this decades-long agricultural revolution, today, nearly 90 percent of all mined phosphate rock is used in food production, undergirding food security for billions globally. This figure is only expected to grow as demand from newly industrializing countries skyrockets. In particular, as developing countries increase their consumption of meat and dairy products, by 2050, global food production will be required to increase by 70 percent of 2013 levels to meet projected aggregate demand according to a report by Columbia University.

Internationally, these resource pressures have exacerbated concerns from academics and governments alike, particularly apropos peak phosphorus. Although comparable elements such as nitrogen — another core component of synthetic fertilizer — are considered indefinitely renewable, phosphorus' finite nature has raised scarcity concerns. Certainly, economic models forecasting peak phosphorus production differ substantially, pegging the date anywhere between 2030 to 2430; nonetheless, the expansion of economically-viable mining operations is unanimously considered a necessary step to maintain high crop yields required to feed a growing planet.

Morocco has aptly recognized its inevitable role as the provider of phosphates for the global agricultural sector. Current geological models from the Institute for Sustainable Futures suggest that Morocco and its disputed Western Sahara region contain anywhere from 70-85 percent of all remaining phosphate rock reserves on the planet, dwarfing the second-largest holder of phosphate reserves, China, at 5 percent. As such, Morocco has enthusiastically expanded the operations of the OCP Group, Morocco's state-owned phosphate rock mining conglomerate, which both extracts and processes phosphate rocks for utilization in synthetic fertilizers. OCP's sweeping control of Moroccan phosphate has cemented its status as a monopolistic power player in the nation's economy, particularly as the company expanded its phosphate extraction operations from 28 million tonnes to 45 million tonnes from 2008-2018. Notably, this exclusive control extends beyond domestic considerations on a de facto basis; the unevenly distributed geographies of phosphate reserves ensure that all but a handful of countries will become entirely dependent on Morocco for synthetic fertilizer production critical to the lifeblood of their own growing farming industries.

Presently, Morocco and its OCP affiliates preside over a period of relative regional socio-political stability, and as such have been successful in scaling up phosphate exports at commensurate levels with demand. However, these conditions are abruptly heterodox with empirical trends in northwest Africa, and mounting evidence suggests the fragility of this status quo. Chiefly, Morocco enjoys a tenuous relationship with Western Sahara, a territory it dogmatically and violently controls in opposition to Saharawi separatist groups, primarily the self-proclaimed Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). Despite a formal ceasefire from 1991 which provided Saharawi locals the right to a self-determination referendum, major clashes reoccurred for the first time in 29 years last November when Moroccan military forces cleared Saharawi protestors from blocking a controversial infrastructure project.

Despite formal denials from the Moroccan government that clashes had occurred, the SADR officially declared war on Morocco last November and has begun bombing targets in the territory's southern regions. These hostilities are of particular concern to the OCP, as nearly one-sixth of Morocco's claimed phosphate reserves are located in the SADR; in fact, nearly 10 percent of Morocco's phosphate income originates from a single Western Saharan mine in Bou Craa. An independent Western Sahara would not only boast the second-largest phosphorus reserves in the world but threaten Morocco's unilateral control of future phosphorus deposits. As such, economic incentives are likely to only galvanize future military action and present risks to phosphorus security globally.

Unfortunately, the primary losers from a Moroccan-SADR conflict would be the globe's poorest consumers. Interruptions to mining operations caused by regional instability and military conflict would cause rippling supply shocks, disrupting global phosphorus markets almost entirely dependent on northwest African phosphorus. Although not as a result of Moroccan instability, in 2008, financial markets witnessed a similar style phosphorus supply shock exacerbated by higher oil prices, increased fertilizer demand, and short-term phosphorus inavailability. As such, food prices surged, leaving over a billion people hungry, particularly in developing countries. The magnitude of comparable shocks in the near future is likely to be compounded with bolstered dependence on Moroccan phosphorus in addition to increasing interconnectedness of international markets.

Ultimately, Morocco currently faces two carefully balanced and high-stakes realities: one as the breadbasket for a surging global population, and another as the benefactor of rare sociopolitical stability. Should one of these conditions change -- whether because of innovative alternatives to phosphorus or the outbreak of regional hostilities respectively -- the future of industrial agriculture will be permanently altered. With no alternatives to synthetic fertilizer in sight, it is all but guaranteed that Morocco will single-handedly determine the diets of billions.

For countries heavily dependent on Moroccan phosphorus, this conclusion necessarily recommends substantial investment into policies which can provide resiliency to supply shocks. Phosphorus recycling, for example, has proven to be a promising alternative to mining by recollecting runoff phosphorus carried by agricultural wastewater. Countries could also collaborate through multilateral phosphorus security partnerships, involving phosphorus insecurity risk assessments, involvement of local and international actors and shareholders in policy-making, and promoting dialogue with local governments and mining companies. For Morocco, this unique situation provides a critical opportunity to improve their geostrategic positioning by forging alliances and friendships with foreign governments through "phosphorus diplomacy" facilitated by free trade and open markets. Ensuring the kingdom's own political stability ought to be an utmost priority for Moroccan leadership to fully capitalize on its newfound mineral wealth, although only the coming decades will reveal how successful these efforts are.

“With no alternatives to synthetic fertilizer in sight, it is all but guaranteed that Morocco will single-handedly determine the diets of billions.”

A Check In With Algeria

Will Brown

The streets of the Algerian capital, Algiers, have begun to resemble those witnessed during the days of the protests that took place across the nation between February 2019 and March 2020. Thousands of protestors have again taken to the streets to express their discontent with the government and to make clear their goals from 2019 had not been fully met. These demonstrations, dubbed the "Revolution of Smiles," due to their peaceful nature and the clever songs and chants created by the protestors, were initially centered around demanding the resignation of then-President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, _____. The protests continued even once he had resigned, with the focus shifting towards broader reforms of the government, such as a commitment to the rule of law, a focus on increased civil liberties, and resignations from more long-time government officials.

On its face, this movement, called the "Hirak," (the Arabic word for mobilization) was initially successful, with the president stepping down. However, this was only the tip of the proverbial iceberg for the Hirak, and many of its broader goals went unfulfilled after this "victory." An election took place before the Hirak felt they had gotten their point across and Abdelmadjid Tebboune, a former Prime Minister under the ousted President Bouteflika, was elected. This came after much of the country boycotted the election as they felt it was simply a continuation of the previous regime with a new leader. Turnout for the election was officially listed as 39 percent, but independent groups estimate it was closer to 8 percent. So, protests continued until the COVID-19 pandemic forced leaders to suspend demonstrations. When the initiative moved online, social media was censored and activists were arrested by the government, only adding fuel to the fire. General disillusionment with the new government has brought these protestors back to the streets of Algiers, along with other cities across the nation, and they are once again calling for reform. So, what does Hirak really want? What would bring an end to the protests and return Algeria to normalcy? Simply put, the Hirak wants widespread governmental reform and an ousting of all the officials in power in the capital. Specifically, the protestors have outlined 14 demands, including separation of judicial and executive powers, allowing foreign constitutional experts to be brought in to help oversee reforms, a dissolution of the legislature, and a separation between the military and elected government.

When Tebboune was first elected in December of 2019, he promised a "reshuffle" of the government as an attempt to quell the concerns of protestors, however this promise went unfulfilled. Very few key government officials were removed, and those in charge of the harsh crackdown of protestors by the government, namely Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerad and Justice Minister Belkacem Zeghmati, remained part of the new government. The protestors were of course not satisfied with these minor changes, and have again taken to the streets and chose to do so on the two-year anniversary of the first demonstrations in 2019.

Much of what the Hirak is seeking has not changed; they still want a massive overhaul of the government, a commitment to increased transparency amongst leadership, rule of law, civil liberties, and a replacement of all officials in government as they are viewed as generally corrupt. The only thing that has changed is the president, and even then, this new leadership is seen to be largely part of the same regime that was ousted a little over a year ago. The Algerian people have not yielded in their peaceful effort against their nation's political elite. Unfortunately, the situation is becoming more and more dire. Protestors have been arrested by the hundreds and are alleging that they have been tortured by police and military forces while in custody. There is also evidence of excessive force being used against peaceful protests throughout the country.

Ousting President Tebboune would likely be an equivalently small step for the Hirak as the last presidential removal. Protestors have been clear that they do not plan to return to normalcy under this regime and will continue to protest until all their demands are met. However, the legacy of the bloody Algerian Civil War in the 1990s looms large, and neither side wants things to devolve into violence. The Hirak is in a precarious position, one in which they cannot, and should not, resort to violence to achieve their aims of political restructuring, but also are aware that peaceful efforts did next to nothing in 2019. The Hirak now faces the question of negotiation with the very government they are trying to overthrow as a means to a possible compromise. The path forward for the people of Algeria relies entirely on their patience.

The parliamentary elections brought about by the chamber's dissolution by President Tebboune will take place this year, and the people of Algeria need to show up to vote. Turnout in the 2019 presidential election was low due to boycotts by the people, but this strategy clearly will not work, as it led to an unsatisfactory government the last time it was tried. The Hirak should organize and elect officials they feel are sympathetic to their cause to the parliament, all while continuing to protest the nation's political elite. This will be a battle of attrition, as any large sweeping changes are unlikely to happen under the repressive Tebboune regime. The Hirak must continue their weekly protests from 2019, while simultaneously exercising political power to "takeover" the government. A single pronged approach of constant protests will bear no more fruit than it did in 2019, but it must continue to be a part of the fight against the Algerian political elite.

An Unheralded COVID Success Story in West Africa

Zack Blumberg

The COVID-19 pandemic has transcended borders, wreaking havoc across the globe. Nations of all statuses and sizes have suffered, facing massive death tolls and economic crises. However, some states have handled the pandemic surprisingly well, including two small nations in West Africa. In taming the COVID-19 pandemic, Sierra Leone and Liberia have defied realistic expectations and largely kept Covid in check. Relying upon their experience from the 2015 Ebola outbreak, the two countries have made prudent public health decisions and successfully overcame the WHO's concerns about poorly-funded healthcare systems and weak infrastructure, ultimately suffering fewer than 200 total Covid deaths as of April 8.

When COVID-19 first exploded into a global pandemic, it was not unreasonable to worry about how poorer African nations, including Sierra Leone and Liberia in particular, would hold up against the disease. Generally speaking, developed nations with comprehensive, accessible public health services and strong underlying health metrics are considered the best-equipped to handle pandemics, while Sierra Leone and Liberia are among the worst-off nations in these regards. The two countries are sufficiently underdeveloped that they are not included in many comprehensive healthcare rankings, which typically rank anywhere from 50 to 80 countries. However, in terms of life expectancy and infant mortality rate, two metrics which are representative of overall healthcare quality, both nations struggle greatly: according to World Bank data from 2019, Sierra Leone had the highest infant mortality rate in the world and 189th highest average life expectancy, while Liberia had the 10th highest infant mortality rate and 164th highest life expectancy. A comprehensive WHO report from 2000 ranking all countries' healthcare systems placed Liberia and Sierra Leone 186th and 191st out of 191, respectively. Additionally, extreme poverty prevents many people in these two countries from even accessing healthcare, a systemic issue which dwarfs concerns about individual metrics. Both countries' development levels are classified as "low" by the UN's HDI metric, which aggregates national metrics on health, education, and income. On paper, there seemed to be ample reason to worry about COVID-19's impact on the two west African states.

Despite these causes for concern, Sierra Leone and Liberia have both done an exemplary job handling the COVID-19 pandemic. With a total population of about 12.7 million, the two nations are roughly the same size as Belgium; however, while Belgium has recorded over 908,000 cases and 23,300 deaths as of April 8, Sierra Leone and Liberia have had fewer than 7,000 cases combined. Crucially, the two nations have used the lessons they learned from the 2015 Ebola outbreak to inform their decision-making, namely taking proactive measures and showing a willingness to act decisively.

First, the countries set themselves apart by acting early. In January 2020, Liberia started screening incoming travelers for COVID-19 symptoms at airports, making them one of the first countries in the world to do so. The country simultaneously also instituted a mandatory two-week quarantine period for any travelers arriving from countries with over 200 cases. Similarly, Sierra Leone's COVID-19 task force decided to require all people who tested positive, even those who were asymptomatic, to quarantine for two weeks. The two countries' early focus on proactive travel measures protected them from large-scale undetected spread, preventing the disease from overwhelming their healthcare infrastructure.
In addition to taking the disease seriously from the beginning, both countries also did an admirable job implementing effective public-health measures. Both countries had previously used contact tracing extensively while handling Ebola, and understood the importance of re-implementing similar policies. This led the countries to take steps other nations might not have considered; for example, Liberia has made a specific effort to recruit contract tracers to work within their own communities in order to build trust in public health. Past experience from the Ebola outbreak allowed both countries to ramp up their tracing programs quickly and efficiently, and the tracers were also tasked with helping provide information and advice to those they contacted in order to combat misinformation. Sierra Leone's contact tracing program was so successful that the U.S. state of Massachusetts turned to them for advice on implementing its own program back in July 2020.

Beyond contact tracing, both countries also instituted a variety of other public health measures and found creative ways to effectively implement them. Sierra Leone instituted a nation-wide mask mandate beginning in May, and harnessed the power of community institutions to promote their distribution and usage. Since many citizens could not afford masks, the government provided large numbers of masks to community leaders, who were then tasked with distributing them. Similarly, the government created PSAs and other informational material which included influential figures such as renowned Paralympian George Wyndham in order to promote mask wearing. By promoting public health policies through community institutions, Sierra Leone was able to offset costs while simultaneously building trust among vulnerable populations. Although it took Liberia slightly longer, it had also introduced a mask mandate by the beginning of June, representing the urgency with which both nations approached COVID-19.

It is important to acknowledge that although both Liberia and Sierra Leone have done an admirable job fighting COVID-19, certain extenuating factors have almost certainly burnished their respective records. First, both countries have very young populations, which lessens the disease's impact. Due to the countries' young populations and limited testing capacity, it is likely that Sierra Leone and Liberia have both underreported cases significantly. Both countries have experienced some degree of asymptomatic spread which, without extensive testing, has gone unnoticed. Additionally, neither country is particularly widely-visited, which lowers the risk of the disease being imported from abroad.

Ultimately, while Liberia and Sierra Leone likely benefited from these aforementioned advantages, their responses still serve as a testimony to the power of good policy making. While both nations lack the resources or infrastructure of wealthier, more developed countries, their willingness to take COVID-19 seriously and act early has set them apart. Their responses further demonstrate the importance of building upon past knowledge when confronting public health crises. Much of the world was caught off-guard and unprepared for the pandemic, leading many nations (even those with the requisite resources and infrastructure) to make missteps which wasted crucial time. Meanwhile, Liberia and Sierra Leone were able to effectively harness the lessons they learned in their battle with Ebola to quickly and effectively set up proactive policies which helped prevent large-scale spread.

Vaccine diplomacy offers crumbs. African countries should push for the whole cake.

Zayna Syed

The COVID-19 pandemic has irrevocably changed life for most people across the globe. Many Europeans are experiencing their 3rd or 4th lockdown, while some Asians and Africans have endured martial law to flatten the curve. Millions are grieving the loss of loved ones and grappling with the avoidable nature of their deaths. Yet for many in rich countries, there seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel: vaccines.

Vaccines have been touted by public health experts, economists and governments as the golden ticket back to normal life. Vaccine passports, or documents that signify vaccination against COVID-19, mean access to travel, office buildings, and in some cases, even nightlife. What's more, they offer peace of mind — with most vaccines presenting at least a 60% efficacy rate, the risk of serious illness from COVID-19 is almost null. It's no wonder vaccines have become a cornerstone of diplomacy. Many countries are using their leftover vaccines as a soft power tool to leverage influence around the world.

However, while public discourse around the distribution, effectiveness and influence of vaccines proves abundant in the global north, their counterpart has been having an entirely different conversation. In a tale of two cities scenario, the global south, and African countries in particular, have been wondering — how do we afford vaccines?

The Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (ACDCP) estimates that over 114,000 Africans have died from COVID-19 with over 4.2 million total infections in the continent. That is only a fraction of the fatalities and infections found in individual countries, such as the United States or Brazil, that were harder hit. However, COVID-19 will prove to be a problem much longer for the 54 states across Africa.

While the United States will have enough doses to vaccinate its entire adult population by May, Africa will only be able to vaccinate 35 to 40 percent of its population by the end of 2021, and only 60 percent by the end of 2022, according to the ACDCP. Even that might be a hopeful estimate: Kenya, a wealthier state, expects to inoculate only 30 percent of its population by mid-2023. This lengthy vaccination period will not only have harsh social, political and personal consequences, but also dire economic ones. The World Bank estimates that 124 million people were forced into extreme poverty by the pandemic in 2020. That number will likely grow for many across the global south.

Unlike COVID-19, this problem isn't hard to diagnose: rich countries have hoarded vaccines. According to reporting from The New York Times, Western countries have received about 90 percent of vaccines delivered thus far. Canada purchased four times the quantity of vaccines required to completely inoculate its population in order to hedge against some companies failing to bring a vaccine to market. On the other hand, the entire African continent, which forms 17 percent of the world's population, has only received 2 percent of the world's vaccines. While many healthy young adults in rich countries are fully vaccinated, hundreds of thousands of frontline healthcare workers and elderly in poor countries have yet to receive a single dose.

International and human rights organizations believe rich countries cut the line. Instead of relying on international organizations to purchase shots and spread bets across vaccine makers, rich countries bought vaccine doses straight from pharmaceutical companies through bilateral deals. They paid hefty prices that poorer countries simply could not afford. For example, the United States paid Pfizer Inc nearly $4 billion for 200 million doses at about $19.50 per shot. Pfizer, on the other hand, demanded that South Africa put up its sovereign assets as collateral against civilian lawsuits, although it has since backed down after international backlash.

To make up for this gaping disparity, the world has offered the global south crumbs. Programs like Covax, backed by the World Health Organization (WHO), have promised to deliver free vaccines to 20 percent of people in participating countries. As of mid-March, the African continent received 90% of its vaccines from the program. However, Covax doesn't always deliver and comes with a cost. In Kenya, only a quarter of promised vaccines were delivered, and those doses arrived one month late. The program also expects countries to pay for the doses for 10% of its population, which can be arduous, even for wealthier countries in the global south, many of which are struggling with large sums of debt.

Programs like Covax attempt to put a Band-aid on a systemic but very simple issue: intellectual property rights. Billions of taxpayer dollars have been spent helping companies like AstraZeneca, Moderna and Pfizer BioNTech develop and produce vaccines. However, these companies refuse to share their recipes with the rest of the world. If other pharmaceutical companies had access to the same research and knowledge, vaccines could be produced at a faster rate, thus increasing accessibility to poorer countries. This wouldn't fully solve the problem, as there is still the issue of manufacturing and distributing vaccines, but it would significantly speed up the process.

The United States has the leverage to make these companies share their recipes. The U.S. owns a patent for a key step to making at least five major Covid-19 vaccines. Public health advocates have asked the Biden administration to use the patent to push for broader vaccine access, however, the administration has thus far resisted, hoping not to frustrate the companies supplying vaccines to most Americans. Instead, the U.S. shared four million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, made at a troubled factory with millions of discarded doses, with Canada and Mexico through loans.

Infections in the African continent might not be as high as in the United States, but they are rising. While some public health officials initially hoped Africa might have avoided the worst of the pandemic, the South African variant of the virus has made matters worse. Now, with the pandemic's strong grasp on India, a key vaccine manufacturer for the Covax program, vaccine access to poor countries will be delayed even further.

Vaccine inequality is not only a moral failure, but an economic and public health one. A prolonged pandemic not only disrupts global supply chains, it also increases the risk of more deadly and contagious variants that may be resistant to existing vaccines. Worldwide vaccination makes us all safer and more prosperous. It's high time rich countries take this rising inequality seriously. Vaccine nationalism, while understandable and politically expedient, is harmful in the long-term.

With an increasingly globalized world, it is only a matter of time before another pandemic forces the world to pause. Governments need to build legal infrastructure around vaccines now before the next health crisis ravages the world. Instead of offering poor countries their leftover vaccines or donating insignificant sums to Covax, rich countries should use their patent and funding leverage over pharmaceutical companies to push for greater vaccine access. If nothing else, these governments can consider it a form of reparations for colonization, imperialism and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It is not a coincidence that some countries are in a better position to afford vaccines, while others are not.

If rich countries won't use their leverage over pharmaceutical companies, poor countries should demand it. Why settle for vaccine diplomacy, when they can have vaccine justice? Why eat crumbs, when they can eat cake?

AMERICAS.

After the Pandemic, Buenos Aires is Embracing the Bicycle

Alberto Della Torre

Last year, cities across the world began to lock down in order to reduce the community spread of COVID-19. Streets lay barren, cafes closed, and life in general paused. This standstill created a moment where local leadership could reflect on the issues plaguing their respective cities. As these cities began to reopen, self-reflection turned into tangible measures. A key action item to address was the issue of urban mobility. The oversaturation of private automobiles has caused air pollution, noise pollution and excess pedestrian injuries and deaths in cities worldwide. Buenos Aires, the second largest metropolitan area in South America and the fourth largest in the Western Hemisphere, is a leading testing ground for the future of urban mobility in cities. The Argentine capital has utilized the pandemic to improve its urban mobility in a simple but effective way: incentivizing the use of bicycles through the addition of bicycle lanes. These new additions are key to the goal of creating a more sustainable and safe city.

Even before the onset of the pandemic, Buenos Aires was an active member of a global community of cities looking to build for the future. It is a leading member of the C40 organization, which is a collective consisting of most major global metropolises that focuses on reducing emissions and improving sustainability among its member cities. In 2014, Buenos Aires won a Sustainable Transport Award from the Institute for Transportation & Development Policy for improving the equity and sustainability of its transportation system by introducing hybrid buses and a bikeshare network program that was free for residents and tourists.

Buenos Aires has the potential to be a pioneer in urban mobility. More than half of residents' daily commutes are less than five kilometers. Yet, cars have reigned supreme since their introduction in the 20th century, creating congestion and pollution. Signature giant avenues, or avenidas that consist of five or more car lanes, cut across the city. Normally, Avenidas are full of the cars of the city's two million residents and four million daily commuters. However, they were eerily empty throughout most of last year due to the pandemic and shift to remote work. The municipal government took these empty streets as an opportunity to diversify their transportation infrastructure. Several avenues were restructured so that multiple lanes were designated to be exclusive to bicyclists. The construction of these lanes also came with further protection for the bicyclists. A speed reduction for cars, from 60 to 50 kilometers an hour, and specific designs to accommodate loading and unloading zones for commercial areas were added to promote the safety of the bicyclists. In total, 17 kilometers of new bicycle lanes were introduced to the major arteries of the city. The transportation department promoted the project online with the hashtag #CicloviasEnAvenidas, or "Cycle Lanes on Avenues" to encourage residents to experiment with the new renovations.

The project has been a major success. Local officials stated that there has been a 45 percent increase in cyclists in these corridors after the lanes were added, and they expect up to a 250 percent increase by 2023. The city government plans on reaching a million daily bicycle trips in the city by the same year. The Ciclovias En Avenidas project has shown that if the proper infrastructure is implemented, the citizens of Buenos Aires will choose to bike, rather than drive. Cycle lanes will be used extensively not because they are environmentally-friendly, but because they are merely a more convenient method of transportation.

The introduction of bicycle lanes on the major arterial roads of Buenos Aires is representative of how cities across the world can make the best of this global pandemic. Previous research has shown that commuting via bicycles instead of driving drastically reduces the rate of developing cardiovascular disease or cancer. Furthermore, the adoption of bicycle infrastructures humanizes the city. Traveling via bicycle allows us to enjoy the little serendipitous moments that are abundant in urban landscapes, but impossible to enjoy from a car. As we rapidly approach a post-pandemic future, cities around the world must take the lessons learned from the lockdowns and apply them so that our built environment becomes more enjoyable for everyone. where they recognized an opportunity to simultaneously reduce congestion, improve sustainability, and make people's lives easier. They seized the opportunity.

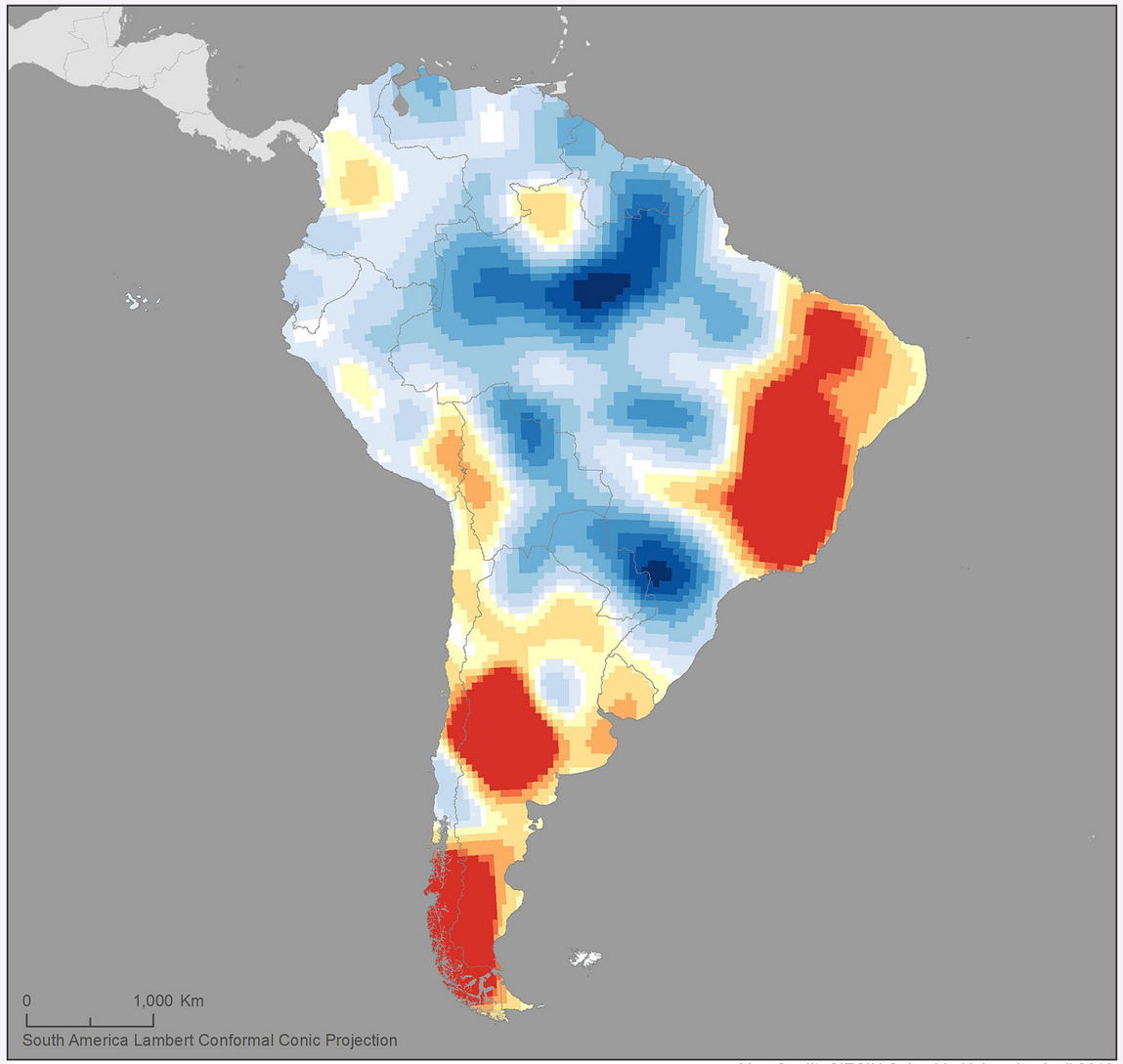
As Argentina continues to battle its economic woes of hyperinflation and debt to the International Monetary Fund, Buenos Aires is a beacon of hope for the future of development of not just Argentina, but the rest of the Latin American world. As one of the most urbanized regions in the world, it is imperative that Latin American countries properly manage their growing cities that are facing problems of sustainability due to traffic congestion and air pollution. Buenos Aires is setting a trend that fellow South American metropolises can follow by incentivizing the use of bicycles. Cities similar to Buenos Aires, such as Bogota and Mexico City, can pursue similar projects that help reach targets of sustainability and denizen happiness and health.

Buenos Aires still has a long way to go to achieve its goal of becoming an equitable and sustainable city. The introduction of bicycle lanes will not change the wealth disparity in the city or the lack of affordable housing. Buenos Aires has also yet to deliver on a promise to roll-out an all-electric fleet of buses. Nevertheless, just the small detail of painting and zoning new bike lanes on the major thoroughfares of the city shows that Buenos Aires is working towards a transportation system that is sustainable and equitable.

Where Did the Water Go?

A Climate Change Conundrum and Management Mess in Latin America

Ayla Kaufman



Trends in Global Freshwater Availability from the Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment (GRACE), 2002–2016, South America
Source: Wikimedia Commons

Industrial society depends on fresh water for agriculture, energy production, manufacturing, and drinking water. As the world's population continues to grow, industrial demand and the number of thirsty mouths will only rise. To meet global water demand, countries will look to Latin America; of all the water on Earth, only 3 percent is freshwater, of which 31 percent is in Latin America. However, despite this abundance, nearly every country in the region has witnessed dramatic reductions in water supply, leaving 36 million people without safe drinking water. The budding water scarcity crisis is a consequence of global warming and poor water management. With proper infrastructure, governance development, and climate change mitigation, Bolivia, Peru, and Chile can reverse their water woes. Otherwise, water scarcity will threaten regional agricultural sectors, the mining industry, and socio-economic progress as a whole.

Bolivia and Peru's water hallenges bear many similarities. The Borgen Project reported that over three million Bolivians and five million Peruvians are afflicted by water scarcity. This scarcity exists despite water abundance; for example Peru holds 4 percent of the world's fresh water resources. In both countries, the culprits for water scarcity are global warming and mismanagement. Climate change has induced dramatic precipitation loss, drought increase, and glacier shrinkage. According to the United Nations, 40 percent of both Bolivia and Peru's glaciers, critical fresh water sources, have disappeared. These problems are compounded by management problems. In Bolivia, only 27 percent of wastewater is treated, forcing consumers to use polluted water. In Peru, poor management prioritizations account for the country's distributional challenges as 90% of groundwater is used by farm conglomerates rather than civilian consumption. Although Bolivia and Peru are naturally rich in fresh water, water scarcity is rising.

Latin America's water crisis ismost profound in Chile, whose privatized water industry aggravates scarcity. The NASA Earth Observatory has attributed 25 percent of Chile's decade-long megadrought to anthropogenic warming. Glacier recession, rain and snowfall declines, and increased evaporation have left millions without drinking water. The remaining water is poorly distributed due to industry privatization under the Chile Water Code of 1981. Consequently, over 80 percent of water is managed by private companies who hike up prices for profit. With prices soaring and fractured oversight, citizens are left without water. Combined, global warming and poor management means that Chile is predicted to become the world's most water stressed country by 2040 according to the World Resources Institute.

Global food security is threatened by Latin America's water losses. As food demand rises, Latin America's abundance of natural water resources and uncultivated land renders it one of two regions on Earth that can expand arable land to meet food needs. However, poor water management threatens agricultural gains. In 2016, Bolivia declared a state of emergency as 283,000 hectares of agricultural land were lost to drought. In Chile, the government similarly declared a state of emergency in 2019 when agribusiness suffered from drought. Maintenance of Latin America's agricultural industry is necessary both for global food production and also to sustain regional economies; the region produces 11 percent of the world's food and agriculture drives Latin America's economies. As freshwater supply falls, global food and local economies are at risk.

Furthermore, a resource tradeoff exists as Latin America's mining industry directly reduces water available for consumption. For instance, high quality lithium ore deposits are only found in Andean countries, but the mineral is found in salt pans that necessitate evaporation. A Bolivian mine reported using 50,000 liters of water a day as mines compete for salt pan water — a staggering quantity given the country's water scarcity. Essentially, countries must choose between mining or using fresh water for other purposes. These efforts are further complicated by runoff from mining extractions that reduce water quality. The Latin American Observatory of Mining Conflicts found that 90 percent of Latin American countries are affected by negative externalities from mining, including water pollution. Water-treatment facilities are necessary to treat polluted water for drinking, however these facilities are scarce. Runoff has further contributed to social conflict. In Peru, 25 percent of current conflicts in the southern copper mining corridor can be attributed to water scarcity. Latin America faces a resource crisis, where extracting mineral resources trades off with providing clean water.

Consequences of water scarcity disproportionately impact minority and low-income communities. The most impoverished communities in Latin America pay 2.8 times more for their water than their wealthier counterparts, according to the World Water Council. Minority communities in urban areas often don't have water piping, while rural communities often have few pollution treatment facilities and limited distributional access. The history of privatized water means that when the Bolivian, Peruvian, and Chilean governments fail to supply water, citizens are forced to turn to private water truck deliveries. Without regulations and with desperate demand, these trucks can charge high costs unaffordable to low-income communities. Additionally, truck water is frequently untreated and at high risk for pollutants as the water is often gathered from polluted streams and stored where mosquitoes nest. Moreover, indigenous groups face scarcer water supply. In Chile for example, due to the privatized industry, indigenous groups must register their water use. When governments don't recognize their claims to ancestral water basins, those water sources are reallocated to mining use. Consequently, indigenous tribes, like the Aatacameños, de Aymaras, and Quechuas lose access to ancestral water sources and their river basins are polluted by mining runoff.

Bolivia, Peru, and Chile each face water scarcity issues from strikingly similar causes. Climate change is exacerbating shortages, but the abundance of natural freshwater resources in Latin America should provide a buffer to warming-related losses. However, when water becomes an unregulated commodity and insufficient infrastructure dampens supply, scarcity persists. Both climate change and management issues are manageable; achieving universal access to water would cost about $29 billion USD. Current investments by NGOs, the World Bank, and private-public partnerships are insufficient to realize this target. To achieve long-term sustainability, governments should renationalize water resources and partner with private actors to increase investment for sewage treatment, desalination plants, rainwater storage facilities, irrigation projects, water reservoir construction, and satellite mapping. Otherwise, Latin America's forecast includes worsening thirst, agricultural loss, mining depletion, and inequity.

Mexico's Drug Cartels are Investing in Avocados, to the Detriment of the Avocado Farmer

Billy Keim

Dubbed by some as the "Blood Diamonds of Mexico," avocados and their explosive rise in popularity among American consumers over the last two decades have become a double-edged sword for Mexican farmers. The United States imported a record 2.1 billion avocados from Mexico in 2019 alone, meaning four out of every five of the avocados at Whole Foods, Walmart, or any other American grocery store originate from Mexico. With this rising green tide comes a new era of prosperity for Mexican farmers, lifting entire communities out of poverty and reducing the likelihood of mass emigration from affected regions. American consumers get their gameday guacamole and Mexican farmers earn a nice payday for grueling work — it should be a win-win situation, right? Unfortunately, wherever there is money to be made in Mexico, drug cartels will attempt to capitalize on the opportunity and further marginalize the poor. The avocado industry, subject to the new phenomenon of mafia capitalism in Mexico, is just the latest iteration in a long history of the country's high crime rates and large cartel presence crippling its economic potential.

Avocados and Mexican mobsters have a storied history, with the creamy fruit originally serving as a means for cartels to launder their drug money into spendable cash. Avocado farms sell high volumes with consistent demand year round, and the budding nature of the industry twenty years ago allowed for abuse and elusion of Mexican trade regulation. Cartels began to realize around the late 2000s that avocados were more than just proxies for laundromats or casinos. As the United States' obsession with guacamole, avocado toast, and all things superfood catapulted the avocado to celebrity commodity status, cartels began to actively acquire small avocado farms through extortion and violence to cash in. Local farmers and their families were threatened with beatings, kidnappings, and murder if the farms refused to pay "protection" fees and contribute a portion of their earnings to the cartel controlling the territory.

Innocent civilians cannot look to the police for protection, because oftentimes the cartels' sicarios and enforcers hold a stronger presence than any police units in remote areas. Ever since Mexico's War on Drugs began in 2006, the state military and a plethora of cartels have battled for regional control across the country. Less than ten percent of homicides are solved in Mexico, and about thirty thousand occur annually. Thus, in many rural areas prime for avocado farming, farmers must rely on themselves to break out from under the heel of the cartels. Local militias developed into an odd phenomenon: the avocado police, a multi-million dollar industry where armed security groups contract out their services to avocado farms for protection against cartel violence and extortion. Prominent players, such as the Jalisco, Sinaloa, and Zeta cartels, fight with themselves, avocado farmers, and the Mexican government to cash in on the United States' $2.4 billion avocado market. Due to the endemic corruption and violence tied to their involvement, avocados have directly or indirectly created over 300,000 jobs in Mexico as of 2019. Avocados have brought great opportunity and prosperity unto Mexico's people, but tied inseparably to them are the systemic cartel issues that have plagued Mexico for the last century.

The advent of the avocado police is just one of many short-term economic boosts drug cartels have created for the Mexican economy that experts anticipate will have long-term negative effects. After the narco-friendly PRI government was voted out of office in 2000, closing out a 60-year reign of relatively relaxed enforcement, remaining cartels splintered and began to compete with each other. In effect, an industry that had once been essentially state-protected (due to internal corruption) was suddenly opened to free competition as the new Mexican government reaffirmed its hardline drug policies and allegiance to the United States' Drug Enforcement Agency. Thus, mafia capitalism was born, and it has since crept into nearly every municipality in Mexico. From new high-end boutiques and salons cropping up in the wealthy suburbs of Mexico City to the appearance of flashy new car washes and fast food restaurants in rural areas, cartels have begun to invest in money laundering fronts at a rapid pace across all economic sectors and geographic regions. In Sinaloa, cartels have laundered more than $680 million on average through the state's banks annually, comprising more than 20 percent of the state's cash in circulation and providing a major short-term economic tailwind for entrepreneurs and consumers.

With the cartel's steady infusion of drug money, however, comes the curse of perpetual violence and insecurity, scaring off foreign investment and deterring long-term economic growth in Mexico. In Sinaloa's neighboring state, Chihuahua, its largest cities are experiencing record closures of businesses due to the increase in homicides and violent crimes in recent years. With increased competition in mafia capitalism comes the increased use of violence as an economic resource, disadvantaging U.S.-backed firms and international conglomerates unable to compete on the axis of violence. Many companies in the international community have, in turn, chosen other, safer destinations for their manufacturing needs. Numerous American companies, from Ford to Nestle, have reconsidered investing in long-term manufacturing projects due to the relative lawlessness in many Mexican cities. Additionally, the percentage of Mexico's population living in absolute poverty has maintained its 30 percent level since the mid-2000s, despite the dramatic increase in local business development fueled by drug money in the same period. The increase in cash has only benefited the cartels in the long-term. Mexico's cartels may be pumping up the economy in the short-term with their large investments in various sectors across Mexico's economy, but the violence associated with this brand of mafia capitalism deters foreign investment and ultimately results in a net negative economic effect for the Mexican people.

The rise of the avocado's demand around the world would usually catapult its agricultural producers out of poverty, as most popular exports do for developing countries, but Mexico's avocado farmers have yet to see that change. Constant and violent involvement in the sector by drug cartels, emblematic of their ever-inching grasp on many legal industries in the Mexican economy, has captured a vast majority of the farmers' share of this avocado revenue. Unfortunately, the very factors that make a cartel's recruitment offer sound so appealing — a quick escape from poverty and powerlessness — are the results of the predatory policies the cartels practice on avocado farmers. Without a government crackdown on the cartels' unabated money laundering and violence, this vicious cycle will continue to marginalize avocado farmers, turn civilians toward organized crime just to pay their bills, and rob Mexico of the economic prosperity tied to the avocado's global success.

Attacks on NGOs and Nonprofits

The Ongoing Battle for Human Rights in Venezuela

Brendan Tilds

After replacing former Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez following his death in 2013, former union leader Nicolás Maduro quickly implemented measures to consolidate power and uphold the former's legacy. In May of 2018, Maduro won his second term as president; however, his victory was marred by severe allegations from both the opposition and multiple NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, both of whom alleged the election was not free or fair. Since early 2019, Venezuelan citizens have been unable to recognize a single president. The Maduro regime's corruption and resistance to outside influences, including NGOs and nonprofits, have stymied much-needed opportunities for solving the country's human rights issues. As of January 2021, 60 nations recognize the interim president Juan Guaidó, while 20 nations recognize Maduro. This inconsistency has led to an escalation of repression by Maduro, specifically against the NGOs and critics speaking out against him. The raids and intimidation methods used against NGOs by the Maduro regime threaten the social stability of the nation and its ability to meet basic human needs.

The Maduro regime's repressive techniques have consistently been used to target dissenters, nonprofits, and independent government institutions. Furthermore, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have indicated citizens' widespread inability to access clean water, electricity, food, as well as shortages of basic medical supplies. Furthering the human rights crisis, nonprofits within Venezuela have noted a significant increase in harassment by the Maduro regime. An HIV nonprofit named Blue Positive was one of the most recent targets of their attacks in January of 2021. The nonprofit group focuses on the prevention of HIV in poorer regions outside of the capital. Five members of the nonprofit were detained on the 12th of January, held, and charged with criminal association and money laundering. While they were released 30 days later, under a probationary period, all five members are required to return to Venezuelan court on a monthly basis. The arbitrary harassment of this group is one of many demonstrations of how Maduro has worked to consolidate power.

An additional method of attack the Maduro regime uses against nonprofits in the region is direct raids on organization offices. Since November 2020, the Maduro regime has forcibly and repeatedly entered the offices of numerous human rights organizations and nonprofits in Venezuela, citing the Law Against Hatred. This law has often been criticized, particularly by the Inter-American Commision on Human Rights, for the power appropriated to the government for the intention to silence and censor citizens. Notably, the raids serve as a scare tactic, and as an assertion of power by the Maduro regime to show strength. Nonetheless, the regime's alternate tactics, including arbitrary detention, threats of violence, forced labor, and extrajudicial killings by death squads, are used to hinder the spread of information or criticism of the government.

A further demonstration of this consolidation of power by the Maduro regime is its lack of cooperation with NGOs, which is part of a broader attempt to cover up the repressive nature of its government. Recently, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights attempted to make a visit to Venezuela in order to assess the current human rights violations in the country. However, the Maduro regime barred the Commission representatives from entering the country, providing another obstacle to progress on human rights issues. Further actions that have been taken to implement obstacles for NGO participation include the expulsion of EU ambassador Isabel Brilhante. The action, initiated by the Maduro regime, came as a result of sanctions placed on the country by the EU. However, this movement away from international assistance and open dialogue indicates Maduro's intransigence.

The lack of a strong financial base has forced multiple organizations to shut down for good, removing many of the remaining protection measures the citizens had for their basic human rights. A direct result of the instability threatening both NGOs and nonprofits in Venezuela is the looming economic crisis that the country currently faces. Sanctions placed by the United States on the nation's largest industries targeted resources, officials, and the organizations that currently support the Maduro regime. Consequently, as the economy of Venezuela dramatically worsened, so did the fate of multiple nonprofits and NGOs. As a result, there is no consistent cash flow through the economy. This has enhanced the already significant absence of solutions to the human rights issues at hand. Centros Comunitarios de Aprendizaje has been a direct recipient of the looming economic crisis. Coupled with harassment from federal banks in Venezuela, the sanctions placed by the United States and other international entities have had numerous negative impacts on the operations of their food kitchens. Similarly, Acción Solidaria, a diabetes organization, fears that the further sanctions on the government rather than individuals will force the closure of aspects of their organization.

Ultimately, the survival of nonprofits and NGOs in Venezuela is not a guarantee. The overwhelming majority of these organizations face threats from the police, the Maduro regime, and other citizens who support Maduro. The essential functions that these organizations serve to protect human rights are weakening due to the lack of internal stability. Without the removal of Maduro, it seems unlikely that many of the nonprofit organizations and NGOs will withstand the threat that his regime poses to them.

Currently, there are roughly 20 countries that recognize Maduro as the legitimate president of Venezuela. Of these, Maduro's closest ally is the Russian government, which is currently the main supplier of munitions and economic aid to the Maduro regime. However, the Russians have failed to provide humanitarian aid on multiple occasions. Consequently, numerous human rights violations have occurred, resulting in condemnations from multiple NGOs that the administration has failed to act upon. As a result, Nicolás Maduro has successfully created a failed state in which NGOs and nonprofits, organizations intent on providing aid in the region, are threatened and attacked. In order to protect these organizations and achieve basic human rights in Venezuela, a stable and open environment must be created so that these organizations can aid in the ongoing human rights crisis in Venezuela.

How the World is Praising and Failing Green Costa Rica

Emmanuel Orozco Castellanos

The Costa Rican economy is struggling. The COVID-19 pandemic has indefinitely halted tourism, the backbone of the country's economy. This has jeopardized the government's ability to finance Costa Rica's progressive social programs. To address the mounting debt crisis, the government requested a package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and also proposed privatizations, tax increases and pay freezes for public sector workers, measures that have proved to be extremely unpopular. As the country runs out of revenue sources, many legislators and desperate Costa Ricans have considered turning to the fossil fuel industry. This threatens to overturn the nation's pledge to carbon neutrality that the world has long praised. If Costa Rica continues to bear the cost of decarbonization alone, despite its insignificant role in causing the climate crisis, the world might witness the end of the country's green environmental legacy.

At the end of 2020, Costa Rica sought help from the IMF to offset the economic blow of the pandemic. The fiscal deficit represents 8 percent of its GDP, as the country's debt-burdened finances failed to keep up with unprecedented losses in the tourism industry brought about by the pandemic and the maintenance of Costa Rica's generous welfare system and environmental policies. The situation grew so dire that, in the fall of 2020, President Carlos Alvarado requested a $1.75 billion loan from the IMF. In exchange, the IMF mandated that Costa Rica raise taxes. This proposal was contested by union leaders and activists in Costa Rica, who ultimately forced the president to renegotiate the package.

This debt crisis threatens to reverse Costa Rica's acclaimed environmental policies. Many legislators, faced with a tight budget, proposed last-ditch measures, such as resorting to the country's vast oil and mineral reserves for additional revenue. The center-left Citizens' Action Party, which fiercely opposed mining ten years ago, has now allied with conservative parties to propose a repeal to the long-standing bans on mining and ocean fracking. The proposal proved controversial, but it has galvanized significant support. Given that the country sits on a literal gold mine, its supporters claim that lifting environmental restrictions would create 6,500 jobs and would add $9.52 billion to the economy. For a small economy like Costa Rica's, this prospect is particularly tempting, especially at the onset of the current economic downturn.

As discontentment with the adverse economic effects of decarbonization grows, many in the country are increasingly drawn to fossil fuels. For years, the country has been under tremendous pressure to invest in green infrastructure that it can barely afford. An illustrative example is the transportation sector, which is the source of 59 percent of the nation's carbon emissions. Since developed countries have a monopoly on electric cars, Costa Rica lags behind. In addition, the nation is running out of environmentally friendly sources of revenue. The pandemic disrupted ecotourism, the country's foremost green industry. Alternatives such as carbon taxes, for example, will produce little revenue since the country's emission levels are low. Thus, in the face of the current debt deficit, continuing the country's sustainable trajectory is becoming increasingly burdensome.

Developing countries — which are hardly responsible for the current environmental crisis — need financial support to move towards carbon neutrality. However, the international community has failed to provide this support. Costa Rica, and developing countries in general, illustrate the exorbitant costs of climate adaptation. Countries around the world will have to dismantle centuries of carbon-based infrastructure, which is a costly endeavor. While wealthy nations have the resources to afford this transition in the long-run, developing countries face almost insurmountable financial challenges. This was acknowledged by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, whose

members advocated for the creation of the Green Fund to help developing countries achieve carbon neutrality.

Since its implementation, the Green Fund has fallen short in many regards. First, contributing members have not reached their goal of raising $10 billion by 2020. Furthermore, the OECD and Oxfam International report that only 14 percent of the funds went to nations in the Least Developed Countries category, while much of the funding that poorer countries received came in the form of loans. Therefore, it is not surprising that much of the rising debt in Costa Rica, and in the developing world, is attributable to the cost of climate mitigation. As Tracy Carty, co-author of the report, claims, poor nations should not bear the financial liability of an environmental crisis they did not create. Costa Rica thus provides an instructive example of this paradox. While the international community celebrates the Central American nation for its commitment to sustainability, the Costa Rican economy is highly indebted and virtually unaided.

The failure to fund climate mitigation will only increase the price tag of addressing the crisis. Avoiding the cost of prevention will lead to more environmental destruction, resulting in costlier climate mitigation in the future. In fact, global investment on climate change is going increasingly towards post-crisis mitigation. According to the OECD, during 2018, up to 70 percent of the Green Fund was used for mitigation, not adaptation. This is particularly obvious in Central America; this past November, two hurricanes, Eta and Iota, swept across the region, with devastating consequences. The death toll amounted to more than 200 people, 94 of them from Nicaragua, whose entire Atlantic coast is in ruins. The economic losses are estimated to be $738 million. As long as the international community's support falls short, developing countries will remain in the front line of climate devastation.

The international community should incentivize developing countries' efforts to decarbonize, not punish them. Costa Rica's green economy has earned the world's praise, but the country's willingness to bear the cost for sustainability should not be taken for granted. The fiscal restraint advanced by the IMF, coupled with the lack of international financial support to decarbonize is fueling Costa Ricans' growing disenchantment with sustainability. If they continue to bear the strain of balancing economic growth and carbon neutrality on their own, turning to short-term solutions will only become more enticing, which threatens to overturn the country's renowned environmental legacy. Instead of rewarding its sustainable pathway, international institutions are forcing the nation to pay the bill for a crisis that Costa Rica did not create. The world must reckon with this fundamentally unfair incentive structure. Wealthy nations should not only praise but reward green growth trajectories like Costa Rica's. If the international community cherishes Costa Rica's environmentalism as much as they claim, let us not punish Costa Ricans but uplift them instead.

Gender Ideology and the Catholic Church's Pro-Life Crusade

Jordan Halpern

In a stunning policy reversal, on January 14th 2021, President Alberto Fernandez of Argentina signed into law a controversial new abortion bill. The country, which previously limited abortion access to cases of rape or threats to women's health, now allows for elective abortion up to 14 weeks into pregnancy.

In the months and years preceding this change, legislators had been under mounting pressure from the increasingly influential feminist "Green Wave," or marea verde, which started as a pro-choice movement in Argentina. Although the grassroots movement initially gained momentum in Argentina, their push has expanded to a more widespread demand for reproductive rights across various Latin American countries. The Dominican Republic, for example, has begun to take the first steps towards the partial decriminalization of abortion after facing internal pressure and protests. The country's ruling party has a rare opportunity to overturn its ban on abortion under current president Luis Abinader. The Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) had maintained the presidency for five out of the past seven election cycles before Abinader's election in 2016. As founder of the Modern Revolutionary Party (PRM), a more left-leaning party, Abinader has recently come out in support of three exceptions to abortion: when a woman's life is in danger, when the pregnancy is not viable, and in cases of rape and incest. With the majority of the country supporting these measures, Congress is expected to legislate these exceptions in the coming months. Additional measures are on the horizon both in Mexico and Colombia, as Congress and constitutional courts review the existing reproductive policies in the respective countries.

Despite the successes of the Green Wave in recent years, the movement faces significant opposition from both conservative and Catholic advocates. For Argentina, Catholic and evangelical churches are a substantial political force in rural provinces. In the months following its passage, anti-abortion groups have filed legal challenges against the law in almost a dozen provinces, asserting its unconstitutionality. Outside of Argentina, Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro, in response to the ruling, reaffirmed "as far as it depends on me and my government, abortion will never be approved on our land." Honduras has buckled down and reinforced its abortion ban. In a highly partisan and drastic move, in January 2021, its legislature voted to amend the constitution to explicitly guarantee the "right to life at conception." In effect, the vote prevents further legislation that repeals or alters the severity of the total abortion ban.

Leveraged by the Papacy to expand its pro-life agenda, Latin America has long been a Catholic stronghold. Yet, the legalization in Argentina is a notable defeat for the Catholic Church. With widespread legalization of previously outlawed practices, including divorce, gay marriage, contraception, and prostitution, the region has been moving further from the Holy See and its policies. Latin America has become increasingly secular, and as a result, some progressive activists increasingly consider the Catholic Church as less of a threat to their pro-choice, pro-LGBTQ+ agenda. Despite this, the Papacy has managed to maintain its longstanding pro-life agenda — and the influence of religious fundamentalists and conservatives, despite the feminist wave that has swept the region, cannot be discounted.

Though Evangelical and Catholic churches clashed in the late twentieth century, their common interest in opposing the progressive agenda allowed for a new era of collaboration between the two. While Catholic influence may be decreasing, the formation of a loose, general Christian coalition has allowed the movement to gain momentum. Christianity more broadly, including both Evangelical Protestant and Catholic sects, holds considerable influence over legislative bodies and public opinion; thus, their propagation of gender ideology is highly impactful.

In conjunction with the Catholic Church, a number of conservative political leaders have adopted the ideology as well. Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, who depended heavily on votes from an evangelical Christian base when running for president, has made gender ideology a key part of his platform. His disdain for sexual rights within progressive agendas, particularly abortion, both draws from and fuels his religious base.

The Catholic Church has two notable methods when it comes to maintaining influence in Latin America: first, facilitating a so-called "gender ideology," in conjunction with evangelical and conservative groups. The term "gender ideology" within the Latin American context has come to refer to a culture war rising in opposition to LGBTQ+ and women's rights movements. The term has long been an importance piece of official Catholic policy — in a 2007 letter to the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean, Pope Benedict XVI writes, "Among the premises that weaken and undermine family life, we find the ideology of gender, according to which each everyone can choose his or her sexual orientation, without taking into account the differences set to them by human nature. This has led to legislative changes that gravely injure the dignity of marriage, respect for the right to life, and the identity of the family." In explicitly aligning LGBTQ+ rights with injuring the "right to life," the Church is successfully able to leverage prejudice to counter progressive abortion policies.

The second method the Catholic Church uses to maintain influence in Latin America includes adopting the language of human rights advocates. Manipulating human rights frameworks is a hallmark of the Catholic Church; opponents of pro-choice policies have increasingly been situating pro-life policies within the vernacular of human rights. Progressive human rights activists often frame their arguments using a rights-based argument: women's right to choose or right to bodily autonomy. The American Convention, which serves as the basis of the Inter-American Court and Commission on Human Rights, operates based on this language as well. For example, the Convention specifically enumerates "right to a fair trial" and "right to personal liberty." Although the Organization of American States (OAS) ruled it cannot viably and legally extend to a fetus, "the right to life" has become a talking point for church officials and conservative politicians to counter human rights activists.

El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic are the remaining countries in Latin America with complete and total abortion bans. Thus, for both church officials and feminist leaders, they are key battlegrounds for the centuries-long conflict between traditional, conservative Latin American Catholicism and progressive human rights movements. The direction lawmakers take will define the fight for reproductive rights in the region for decades to come.

The Venezuelan Migration Crisis Through the Lens of Host Country Colombia

Josephine Ness

Venezuela nce hosted thousands of refugees fleeing Colombia during the series of drug-related guerilla wars that ravaged the latter country in the 1980s and 1990s. In recent years, however, the tide has turned, and Venezuela now has the second-largest number of displaced citizens in the world. Since 2014, Venezuelan migrants have flooded neighboring countries, seeking relief from the socioeconomic and political crisis under Nicolas Maduro's rule. Colombia has taken in the largest number of migrants and has been a regional leader in the resettling of Venezuelans. Despite Colombia's mitigation efforts, the migration crisis continues unabated. Colombia's work to address the crisis is monumental, but its efforts must be supplemented by support from Venezuela's neighbors and monetary assistance from the international community.

Colombia has been working to address the crisis by taking in refugees and creating immigration and integration policies since people started to flee Venezuela in 2014. In 2018, Colombia created a program that allowed half a million undocumented Venezuelan immigrants to reside in Colombia for two years. Additionally, a 2019 policy granted Colombian citizenship to 30,000 children of Venezuelan refugees who were born in the country without a nationality. Recently, President Iván Duque announced groundbreaking legislation that allowed 1.7 million Venezuelan migrants to obtain renewable 10 year legal status if they register with authorities. He justified this legislation by saying that it would allow the government to count the number of migrants in the country, therefore aiding in the process of creating social policies to address the situation. This action was hailed by the U.N. Refugee Agency as "the most important humanitarian gesture" in South America in recent decades.

This policy is unpopular with many Colombians, but necessary for the health and safety of Venezuelan migrants. Duque's legislation was applauded by the international community, but the wave of migration also led to a rise in xenophobia. A Gallup Poll found that 69 percent of Colombians have an "unfavorable perception" of Venezuelan migrants. One migrant said that the locals saw him and the other Venezuelans as rats, and would choose to throw away leftover food from their bakery instead of giving it to the hungry people on the streets. Despite this, legal status in a host country is necessary for Venezuelan migrants because it protects them from being left without basic necessities like access to medical care and education.

While the Colombian government has largely ignored anti-immigration sentiments in relation to the creation of their immigration policy, other countries have implemented unfriendly immigration policies. Many South American countries are making it harder for Venezuelan immigrants to enter rather than expanding their immigration policies in the face of growing turmoil in Venezuela. Panama, a popular destination for migrants, imposed restrictive visa requirements. While Chile does offer a visa specifically for Venezuelans, it recently increased deportations to discourage Venezuelan immigration during the COVID-19 pandemic. Peru has received international backlash for their denial of Venezuelan migrants. Amnesty International accused the Peruvian government of unlawfully turning away Venezuelan asylum-seekers who should have qualified for international protection. Immigration policies of this nature put an already suffering population in an even more difficult situation. Without governmental protection and visas, migrants left without documentation are vulnerable to human rights abuses, like trafficking, discrimination, and labor exploitation.

When countries consider the implementation of restrictive immigration policies, the anticipated strain on money and resources is often a driving factor. Colombia and the other countries near Venezuela are still widely considered to be developing countries and do not have the resources to successfully accommodate the surge of incoming migrants. The Brookings Institution named the Venezuelan Refugee Crisis the "largest and most underfunded" migration issue in history. There are about 1.7 million Venezuelans living in Colombia as of 2021, and that number is growing. The funding from the international community is not nearly sufficient for the magnitude of the issue. The international community has only mobilized $580 million for this purpose, which translates to $125 per Venezuelan refugee. This may sound adequate, but when compared to the funding for Syrian refugees who received $1500 per person, it becomes clear that the crisis is severely underfunded. Funding is necessary for the implementation of humanitarian assistance programs and support of socio-economic inclusion initiatives.

If Venezuelan migrants are properly funded and provided resources to build a new life, they have the potential to greatly benefit host countries' economies. Right now, hundreds of Venezuelans in Colombia are currently living on the streets and more are suffering from poor quality of life. This ties back to the strain on resources but is also largely caused by a delayed effort to integrate Venezuelans into the Colombian economy. The legislation in 2020 allows Venezuelans easier access to work permits, which proves to be a crucial step toward empowering migrant workers to contribute to the Colombian economy. A migration report by Colombia's Central Bank found that Venezuelan migrants have an average of one year more of education than the typical Colombian citizen, and are also generally younger. Therefore, they have the potential to take on crucial jobs and boost economic growth. The International Monetary Fund found that if Venezuelan migrants find jobs, pay taxes and increase consumption, they would raise the gross domestic product of their host countries by between 0.1 percent and 0.3 percent between 2017 and 2030.

Colombia's efforts to address the migration crisis are historic and generous, but Colombia's actions alone are not enough. Colombia's new policies should be used as a framework for other countries in the region to expand their immigration policies for Venezuelan migrants. For this to be possible, as the situation in Venezuela escalates, the amount of international funding and governmental assistance must escalate as well. Venezuelan migrants need increased financial support in order to adequately adjust themselves to life in host countries and contribute to the economy. As President Duque stated, "Migration crises are by definition humanitarian crises." The Venezuelan migration crisis must be treated with the same urgency and generosity as other humanitarian crises.

Fishy Activity

Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing Operations a Threat to South American Environment, Economy, and Sovereignty

Kayleigh Crabb

Illegal fishing is one of the most lucrative crimes in the world, ranking as the third most profitable criminal activity according to Mongabay. Although it is a global problem, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, often perpetuated by Chinese ships, is particularly rampant along South America's Pacific coast. The affected countries should work with the international community to defend their environment, economies, and sovereignties by eliminating illegal fishing in and around their waters.

China, home of the largest fleet of fishing vessels in the world, fishes across the globe and facilitates much of the international fish trade. Chinese vessels are also among the most common in the Pacific Ocean around South America. One of the most appalling instances of illegal fishing occurred in 2017 when a Chinese vessel, the Fu Yuan Yu Leng 999, was stopped by Ecuadorian officials in the Galapagos Islands marine reserve with around 300 tons of sharks, including endangered hammerhead sharks, on board. The ship primarily served as a storage ship for seafood caught by other, smaller vessels. The crew members of the Fu Yuan Yu Leng 999 were jailed between one and four years, but the fishermen that dropped off their catches at the ship were not apprehended.

Representatives of the Chinese government claim that they oppose all illegal fishing, but no concrete action seems to have been taken to prevent illegal fishing since the Fu Yuan Yu Leng 999 crime. In the summer of 2020, a large fleet of more than 300 Chinese fishing vessels gathered at the edge of Ecuador's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) near the biodiverse waters of the Galapagos Islands. Although no fishermen were arrested and no boats were captured, suspicious activity occurred. Radio frequency and GPS automatic identification systems (AIS) data show that unidentified ships entered Ecuador's EEZ in the proximity of the mass of Chinese vessels. In fact, 87 percent of inconsistencies between radio frequency and AIS data could be traced to ships bearing a Chinese flag. Although AIS feeds can be interrupted if the ship enters a region not well-covered by satellite or for other reasons, willfully disabling the system is illegal. While this is not undeniable evidence of illegal fishing, it strongly suggests that Chinese ships attempted to hide activity in Ecuador's EEZ. In recent months, the fleet has moved south to Chilean and Peruvian waters. Evidence suggests that the fleet is using the similar tactic of disabling ships' AIS in these regions. Colombia has also struggled with Chinese vessels infiltrating its EEZ in large numbers near Malpelo Island marine protected area.

Although other illegal or suspicious fishing activities also occur along South America's Pacific coast, the sheer scale of suspicious Chinese fishing activities needs to be further addressed. These ships are causing severe environmental and economic damages in these Pacific coast countries, and in some cases are violating nations' sovereignties.

The environmental effects of IUU fishing are profound. While illegal fishing within a nation's EEZ without proper permitting is a huge aspect of IUU fishing, even unreported and unregulated fishing can have severe environmental consequences. Unreported and unregulated fishing can involve fishing for prohibited species, overfishing, using illegal equipment, and environmental damage. With the sheer number of ships present in and along these nations' waters, it is highly likely that illegal activity is occurring even outside of nations' EEZs. However, activity on the high seas is difficult to monitor and international regulations are difficult to enforce.

The economic damage to the countries affected is also staggering. In Ecuador, it cost millions of dollars to deploy the navy to the region. Chile and Peru also deploy their navies to monitor the ships, while Colombia has struggled to balance monitoring both illegal fishing and illegal drug activity. In Chile, illegal fishing causes $397 million in economic losses each year. Overall, IUU fishing by foreign countries is particularly damaging to local communities and fishermen, especially as fish stocks are depleted over time.

Chinese ships' participation in IUU fishing show disrespect for these nations' sovereignties and inflict huge costs by forcing them to mobilize their navies. Furthermore, it is not just Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Chile that suffer from the pervasive fishing being conducted by Chinese ships. Argentina is presently concerned with over 500 fishing vessels along its EEZ, an estimated half of which are Chinese-flagged. West Africa is also heavily affected, with six Chinese trawlers collectively able to trap more than twice Liberia's sustainable yearly catch appearing in its waters in the summer of 2020.

IUU fishing is clearly a widespread, international issue that is causing untold damage to the world environment and economy. Yearly losses from IUU fishing cost the global economy anywhere from 26 to 50 billion dollars. Yet, remarkably little action has been taken to combat it.

While IUU fishing is not exclusive to China, Chinese vessels do play a large role in IUU fishing worldwide. This seems to run counter to many of China's other recent actions and statements: for example, China is the largest investor in sustainable technologies. If China wants other countries to take its sustainability initiatives and other international commitments seriously, it should take responsibility for the IUU fishing of its large fleet and ensure that these activities are halted entirely. The international community should create incentives for China to enforce international agreements and its own policies as well. Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Chile are taking steps in the right direction, by publishing a joint statement against IUU fishing. While this statement did not mention China by name, it did specifically condemn the "large fleet of foreign-flagged vessels." It is in the best interest of the entire global economy to eliminate IUU fishing, and therefore more support should be given to actions like the joint statement. It is critical that South American countries on the Pacific work with the

Panama's Diplomatic Problem with Illicit Financial Activity

Noelle Seward

On one hand, Panama is the financial and commercial center of Central America. On the other, it is a historic safe haven for illicit financial activity. The Tax Justice Network is an independent organization which analyzes international tax and financial regulation. According to the Tax Justice Network's Financial Secrecy Index 2020, Panama was in the top 15 countries with the highest rates of financial secrecy and was the most secretive nation in Latin America and the Caribbean. This, in combination with its geographic position and well-developed maritime and transportation infrastructure, has made Panama a convenient logistics control and trans-shipment country for illegal drugs to the United States and Europe. This leads major Colombian and Mexican drug cartels and arms groups to leverage Panama's financial secrecy to launder money. While money laundering serves as a form of investment in Panama's business sector and helps to prop up the Panamanian economy, this practice is not conducive to the long-term stability of the region. Both the United States and Colombian governments have been pushing for significant financial reform and increased transparency in Panama. An effective policy response by Panama will allow Panama to retain its financial secrecy and associated economic benefits while also contributing to the long-term stability of the region. Panama should regulate its financial sector to curb money laundering, drug-related crimes, and arms-related crimes.

The extent of Panama's financial secrecy became evident in 2016 when a series of documents from Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca — known as the Panama Papers — were leaked, containing confidential financial information. The documents exposed a network of more than 214,000 tax havens – a place with very low statutory tax rates for foreign investors — involving people and entities from 200 different nations. This exposed the illegal activities of many wealthy individuals, public officials, and criminal groups, among other entities. This information affected firms around the world and caused a number of politicians to resign. Even within Panama, investigators have found evidence that drug money has funded political campaigns in Panama. President Ernesto Perez Balladares admitted that his 1994 election campaign received several million dollars from Colombia's Cali cocaine cartel. The country's regulations make it difficult to assess if this is commonplace, though this likely has continued in more recent elections.

The US Government's interest in the financial reform of Panama is rooted in the security of the region (i.e. the War on Drugs) and the desire to identify US entities hiding wealth in Panama and avoiding US law. While Panama has the 15th highest levels of financial secrecy across the globe, the US is ranked 2nd on the same scale. Many developed countries actually host or support jurisdictions where there is an absence of financial transparency. Panama is still in need of reform, but not as drastic as the US desires (i.e. complete financial transparency). The best policies will prioritize Panama's long-term economic growth and stability.

While Panama has a relationship with Colombian cartels, it does not have such a friendly relationship with the Colombian Government. The combination of financial secrecy and money laundering has strained relations between Panama and Colombia and prompted Colombia to retaliate. Beginning in 2012, Colombia imposed high import tariffs on Panamanian commodities to address the alleged money laundering. The Appellate Body of the World Trade Organization upheld an earlier ruling that Colombia's tariff was higher than allowed by WTO rules, and although "designed" to combat money laundering, it was not "necessary" to do so. While this reinforces Panama's autonomy to regulate their own economy, some compromise and targeted reforms are necessary for the long-term stability of the region.

The primary roadblock to reform is that Panama and its economy are currently benefiting from money laundering and financial secrecy. In maintaining the current system, Panama is both building relationships and avoiding potential conflicts with cartels. However, these activities are not conducive to the long-term economic growth and stability of the country, especially due to the volatile and high-risk nature of criminal groups. Money laundering and other cartel activity in Panama should be controlled now so that the economy and political system does not collapse and leave Panama unprepared for the aftermath. Panama should stimulate organic economic growth and business expansion rather than continuing to prop up its economy with dirty money. This does not mean Panama needs to become financially transparent, but rather implement reforms to better control the types of entities who are interacting with Panama's economy and institutions.

Targeted financial reform is beneficial for both the long-term stability of Panama and would help Panama establish a stronger mutualistic relationship with the US, Colombia, and other surrounding nations. Since the release of the Panama Papers in 2016, Panama has created an international panel to help begin reform in its offshore financial industry. If Panama wants to continue its tradition of financial secrecy and ascertain economic growth, it needs to legitimize itself in the developing world. Panama should enact targeted financial reforms that would abolish criminal money laundering and other high-risk activities. These reforms would help Panama mirror countries like Switzerland who have successfully maintained secrecy jurisdictions — despite similar scrutiny — while experiencing long term stable economic growth.

ASIA.

Addressing Deficiencies in Human Capital in Cambodia Through Anti-Corruption Measures

Anna Heiss

The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely impacted many economies, and Cambodia's is no exception. The World Bank reports that Cambodia's average annual Gross Domestic Product growth was approximately eight percent between 1998 and 2018. This number is expected to decline to a mere four percent in 2021. Without economically prosperous conditions, Cambodians lack access to goods and resources that are necessary for escaping poverty, including education and adequate healthcare. Oil extraction could provide a key source of revenue to address financial deficiencies that have been exacerbated by COVID-19, to bolster the country's human capital, and encourage long-term economic growth.

Companies have invested in oil extraction in Cambodia since its discovery off the coast of the Gulf of Thailand in 2004, but they did not begin the actual extraction process until late 2020. The discovery of oil in Cambodia has significant implications for its economy, citizens, and government officials. The government estimates that the oil industry could generate upwards of $500 million in total revenue over the duration of the project, or roughly two percent of the GDP. However, Cambodia lacks the highly skilled workers that are necessary for oil extraction. Initially, oil production companies could hire foreign workers on short-term contracts. The government could invest these funds to boost human capital and education. This would increase the quantity of high-skilled Cambodian workers, who could eventually replace the foreign workers, benefiting the oil industry and generating more revenue for the country.

Yet, Cambodia cannot invest in its oil sector without addressing structural corruption. Although Cambodia could use revenue from oil extraction to ameliorate deficiencies in sectors that develop human capital, corruption has plagued the authoritarian government, and the misuse of funds is common. Additionally, the consolidation of COVID-19 emergency powers made government funds substantially more accessible to Prime Minister Hun Sen and other high-ranking officials. Hun Sen allowed government and party officials to remain in their positions, and even promoted a select few, following their execution of various human rights abuses. These abuses included the facilitation of the murders of opposition figures and journalists, participation in the brutal Khmer Rouge regime, and the misuse of government funds for political and personal purposes.

The formation of an anti-corruption agency would allow Cambodia to address dishonesty among its government officials and wealthy elite and prevent current corrupt practices from spilling over into its developing oil industry. Transparency International finds that in 2020, thirty-seven percent of public service officials in Cambodia had paid a bribe, and the organization ranks the country as twentieth in corruption worldwide. They also report that extractive industries (such as oil) account for twenty percent of corruption cases. An anti-corruption agency would encourage reporting dishonest behavior, place limits on lobbying, and implement other policies to hold public officials accountable.

Timor-Leste, a Southeast Asian country that also recently began oil production, successfully implemented a similar program in 2009. Timor-Leste's Anti-Corruption Commission (CAC), in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, trains investigators on how to identify and address fraud. Working with an intergovernmental organization like the United Nations provides an opportunity to access resources to combat corruption and educate government workers about fraud that a country with a high poverty rate, like Timor-Leste, may not otherwise have access to.

A similar task force, if created in Cambodia, could include industry-specific guidelines for public officials working with oil firms to discourage and better expose fraud. The Cambodian government should release details about where the additional revenue from oil extraction will be spent and implement accountability measures. These measures could include establishing a system that tracks government expenditures that are available as public information, creating harsher penalties for misuse of government funds, and mandating civil service exams for public officials. In order to encourage compliance with such policies, incentives could be provided to officials who report corruption and to departments that publish annual budget reports. This should be done in tandem with efforts to address poverty and deficiencies in human capital. By introducing a multifaceted approach that fixates upon both anti-corruption and improvements to factors impacting the workforce, Cambodia can bolster its economic recovery from COVID-19 and render future growth more sustainable.

Measures that discourage and expose structural corruption will promote a higher level of transparency in transactions between the Cambodian government and oil companies. The aforementioned actions will reassure foreign investors that revenue is being allocated to sectors where it will be most advantageous. Furthermore, the development of transparency practices will confirm that funds are veritably being used for the purposes that they are earmarked for. Improvements in areas associated with human capital will lead to increases in productivity, demonstrating that Cambodia is moving toward a greater degree of internal economic capability and is well positioned for upward mobility within the oil industry. This will encourage current investors and could even attract new financial backers. Anti-corruption practices in tandem with contributions to sectors connected to human capital are paramount for the stabilization of capital inflows from foreign investors.

These steps should be accompanied by investment in education, healthcare (including but by no means limited to COVID-19 vaccinations), and manufacturing industries that have been negatively impacted by the pandemic. Intergovernmental organizations, such as the United Nations or World Bank, can provide guidance in drafting legislation and creating programs that address corruption, like in Timor-Leste. An approach that addresses corruption and discrepancies in human capital in Cambodia is the most urgent priority, given its current political and economic state. This would not only mitigate fiscal strain from the COVID-19 pandemic, but build a social infrastructure that's even stronger than the pre-pandemic era.

The Geopolitical Impact of Sino-Russian Relations in the Arctic

Brett Bolog

As the United States, China, and Russia compete for global influence, the Arctic has become a region of great importance. China and Russia have established a cooperative relationship to enhance their economic and security interests in the Arctic, threatening the national security of countries with Arctic territory. Russia has increased its naval presence and missile defense systems to dominate the region's security. While the rest of the world observes the dramatic effects of climate change melting the ice caps, Arctic nations, such as the United States, Nordic countries, Russia, and Canada, see this as an opportunity to obtain the energy, minerals, and fisheries that a newly accessible ocean can provide. China considers itself a "near-Arctic state," with the right to conduct scientific research, pursue economic resources, and play an active role in the region's governance. China's increased physical presence in the Arctic, combined with Russia's growing economic and military ambitions, underscore that both nations have long-term strategic designs to dominate the region. If the United States and other Arctic nations fail to take action, they will forfeit long-term interests in their military and economic security and development, making them increasingly susceptible to Sino-Russian military threats and losing out on the economic opportunity the Arctic provides. The remainder of the Arctic Council, a governing body of nations that possess Arctic territory, should take multilateral action in the near future to counter Sino-Russian dominance. Multilateral action between the United States and Nordic nations, achieved through redesigned trade and investment relationships, military collaboration, and increased Arctic governance will allow them to become major Arctic players by limiting Sino-Russian control of the region.

Of all the Arctic nations, the region has the greatest economic and military importance to Russia. It accounts for nearly 20 percent of Russia's GDP, 22 percent of its exports, and over 67 percent of Russian oil and natural gas. To develop infrastructure and extract the Arctic's natural and mineral resources, Russia is building out the Northern Sea Route (NSR), a shipping route that will connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans to increase trade between Europe and Asia. To support the NSR, Russia is engaged in several infrastructure projects, including icebreakers, ports, and military installations. Russia's increased military presence includes several bases, missile defense systems to protect Russia's vast Arctic coastline, and increased troop numbers, which will strengthen Russia's power projection and ability to deny NATO or U.S. forces access. Russia predicts that the region will continue to be of great strategic value, and they are reluctant to allow any nation, including China, to challenge their regional dominance. While Russia maintains a symbiotic relationship with China, they are willing to economically and politically ostracize other contenders.

Alternatively, China views the Arctic as part of its Belt and Road Initiative, an infrastructure development project to increase Chinese global influence, intended to expand their strategic trade and energy corridors. Not only does China wish to enhance its maritime access to improve its trading routes, it also seeks to engage in scientific research and energy extraction. China's economic goals may infringe on those of other nations in the Arctic Council, and their increasing participation in Arctic governance has made the United States and Russia wary. Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming has stated that its role in the Arctic is one of "respect, cooperation, and win-win activity." However, such cooperation with Russia threatens the interests of other Arctic nations by preventing them from accessing the Arctic's natural resources and trade routes. In addition, as they build up their military presence, they threaten the national security and exclusive economic zones of surrounding Arctic countries. As a result of Chinese financing of Russian infrastructure projects and establishing a China-Russia Arctic Research Center, China, at least temporarily, remains in good standing with Russia.

While it appears that Russia and China have similar long-term goals, China's increased economic and physical presence give them greater regional influence, which is perceived as an intolerable threat by Russia. Therefore, it would not be surprising for Russia to further increase its military presence and deny other nations access to the region. However, if Russia accepts China's increased naval presence, they could form an alliance to enhance military collaboration. This would allow them to control the region, hindering the United States and Nordic nations from advancing their economic and security interests.

As long as Sino-Russian economic development and scientific exploration interests align, it is reasonable to expect a collaborative long-term relationship. But this relationship may not last forever, especially if China oversteps its military and diplomatic presence. If China invests enough money and resources into Russian projects and they continue to engage in joint military exercises, then their alliance will dominate the region, preventing other Arctic nations from advancing their interests and gaining influence. Alternatively, it is difficult to predict how Sino-Russian relations will develop in the future, as China's growing diplomatic presence ultimately threatens both Russian and U.S. interests. China has increased its foreign direct investment in other Arctic nations, such as Iceland and Greenland. While China is working closely with Russia, they are simultaneously allying themselves with other Nordic nations, minimizing their dependence on Russian cooperation.

The United States has not taken the appropriate measures to adjust their military presence, budget, or diplomatic resources to reflect the geopolitical value of the Arctic. However, the United States is slowly awakening to the Arctic's importance, and they will need to act multilaterally to counter Sino-Russian dominanceThe United States should deploy additional resources to directly invest in the Arctic nations where China already invests. This will decrease Arctic nations' reliance on Chinese trade relationships, attenuating China's regional influence. Furthermore, the United States and Arctic nations must increase joint military exercises through NATO and expand their military presence in the region. Through aggressive but nonprovocatory military maneuvers, the United States and Nordic nations can deter Chinese investment in the region by signaling a higher chance of conflict, which poses dangerous political-economic risks for China. To counter Russia's growing presence, the United States must work with the Nordic nations to expand the role of the Arctic Council and the United Nations, making it more than just symbolic. These multilateral organizations can draw well-defined borders and exclusive economic zones, which will prevent Russia from increasing its economic and military foothold in the region.

If the United States and other Arctic nations strengthen ties with one another through NATO, the UN, and the Arctic Council to enforce security and development norms and borders, it can overcome Chinese coercive diplomacy and contain Sino-Russian dominance. This is the next region of great power competition. If other Arctic nations delay taking decisive action, they will fall victim to Sino-Russian economic exploitation, falter in scientific exploration, and face a new security threat from the north.

Creativity in the Midst of Chaos

What We Can Learn from how the Asia-Pacific used Creative Governance to Build Back Better

When the novel coronavirus began in Wuhan, China, global media attention targeted, villainized and conflated the Asia region. After taking a deeper look, however, many experts believe Asia managed the COVID-19 pandemic better than most Western regions. For example, only 20 citizens or less died from COVID-19 in countries like Taiwan and Vietnam. This effective response has opened the dialogue regarding other policy areas, prompting economic, social, and political change. We ask: what cultural or policy-related actions led the region to such success? And, how can dismantling systems lead to more effective ones? Out of necessity or resilience, Asia took risks, acted swiftly, and limited harm. Through creative governance, the region took a largely intersectional approach to problem-solving, addressing climate change, food insecurity, and industrial planning in the wake of one of the most consequential years of this century.

South Korea Brett Bolog

South Korean leader Moon Jae-in pursued technological innovation to spur economic growth and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Moon stated that the government will invest $86.5 billion dollars in large investment projects in both the public and private sectors, focusing on the system semiconductor, biohealth, and future car industries. Furthermore, the government hopes to develop and nurture its data, network, and artificial intelligence industries. In order to promote innovation within these industries, Moon is attempting to deregulate the economy by cutting red tape, lowering regulatory barriers, and significantly shortening the time required for new players to enter a given market. This is all a part of Moon's plan to revitalize the economy, which he hopes will spur innovation and foster an economic environment suitable for the introduction of new technologies. A combination of the pandemic and the U.S.-China trade war has damaged the South Korean economy the past year; Moon Jae-in's plan to improve innovation reflects his goal to improve its domestic economy. As a result, South Korea's financial ministry forecasts a 2.4 percent increase in real GDP this fiscal year, and increased investment in research and development will likely lead to continued long-term economic and technological growth.

Japan Ryan Woock

Last December, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga announced a new initiative designed to reduce the country's dependence on fossil fuels and jumpstart the economy, which has been hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Dubbed the "green growth strategy," the plan outlines steps to generate nearly $2 trillion in green investment, eliminate gasoline-powered vehicles by 2035, and fulfill Suga's pledge to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. To reach these targets, the plan identifies 14 key industries to undergo environmental-friendly reforms and calls for the country to triple its reliance on renewable energy and maximize the use of nuclear power. Although several industries have expressed concerns about the strategy's high cost to businesses, the government hopes to facilitate investment by providing tax incentives and other financial support. Ultimately, the Suga administration envisions the strategy will curb the effects of climate change, position the country for future economic growth, and restore Japan's reputation as an innovator.

Mongolia Jonas Gomes

The accession of Prime Minister, Oyun-Erdene Luvsannamsrai, ushers in a new age of leadership in Mongolia. In January, former Prime minister Khurelsukh Ukhnaa suddenly resigned amid rising protests regarding his mismanagement of COVID-19. Prime Minister Oyun-Erdene is now on a mission to revive Mongolia economically through the Vision 2050 plan. Approved on May 13, 2020, and partnered by the European Union, the plan looks to holistically improve eight parameters of Mongolian life by 2050: Human Development, Good Governance, Peaceful and Safe Society, Green Growth, Shared Values of the Nation, Life Quality and Middle Class, Regional Development and People-Centered Cities. Prime Minister Oyun-Erdene's plan rests on utilizing citizen-based government services programs, sustainable economic policies, and executing higher-level climate change programs, among other sector-specialized programs, to drive development. In addition to this plan, Prime Minister Oyun-Erdene has instituted an updated e-governance model dedicated to eliminating cyber-corruption, improving communications with the Mongolian public, and increasing government transparency. More specifically, the Mongolian government is working to expand and update Resolution No. 73, otherwise known as the "National Policy on E-governance," which attempts to use modern information technology to make government services more efficient, minimize potential backlogs, and streamline bureaucratic processes. Currently, the government is working to implement a Digital Development ministry to oversee its rising e-governance model, e-Mongolia. Such progressive political behavior is usually nonexistent in Mongolia. Oyun-Erdene, who is only forty years old and has a Masters of Public Policy from Harvard Kennedy School, represents the interests of a younger and more progressive generation in Mongolia. His current work shows an increasing focus on passing substantial policy over playing typical politics.

Singapore Juhui Oh

This year, Singapore's President Halima Yacob announced that Singapore will launch a nationwide Digital for Life movement. Yacob sees this movement as a breakthrough to overcome social and economic inactivity caused by COVID-19. This movement aims to encourage every Singaporean citizen to actively obtain digital tools and learn crucial skills and habits for digital life to engage in the ongoing Fourth Industrial Revolution, which requires an understanding of "smart" megatrends. Moreover, in order to ensure marginalized populations like low-income families, elders, and individuals with disabilities are included in this movement, the Singaporean government has initiated a plan to raise funds for 92 benefiting agencies to assist these people. Since no other country in the world has initiated such a nationwide digitalization plan, Singapore has become a role model to others in digital literacy and digital inclusion.

Indonesia — Anna Heiss

Joko Winodo, the president of Indonesia, constantly introduces and encourages policies that drive innovation in his country. Immediately following his election in 2014, President Widodo introduced a nine-point plan to address poverty. He committed to sending funds to each village to concentrate on healthcare, infrastructure, farming, employment, education, welfare for families living in poverty, and defense. In 2019, he revamped this plan during his reelection campaign, with new focuses on sustainability and economic inequality. These social and economic reforms have been largely successful thus far. Prior to the economic fallout associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesia's annual poverty rate consistently trended downward. At the beginning of this year, President Winodo reaffirmed his commitment to improvement with an optimistic message, and in February, encouraged and witnessed the approval of Digital Connectivity 2021. This program enhances Indonesia's digital networks, allowing for more efficient transmission and storing of information in the sectors targeted by his 2014 and 2019 plans. President Winodo's nine-point plan and Digital Connectivity 2021 program are indicative of his attunement to the people of Indonesia. This new technology-oriented response, in tandem with his previous policies, will address both the immediate and long-term needs of Indonesian society, economy, and its digital space.

Malaysia — Tanmay Arora

Muhyiddin Yassin, the prime minister of Malaysia, is in the process of implementing a new high-speed railroad system, called the East Coast Rail Link, a high-speed network that connects Malaysia's west and east coasts. This project has been a topic of discussion for a few years, although it was put on hold by previous leader Mahathir Mohamad. The length of the Rail Link was 640 kilometers when it was suspended. However, it was reinstated after Yassin assumed power in March 2020. He increased the length of the track to 665 kilometers. The increase in length takes the total costs from $10.63 billion to $12.08 billion. Currently, the project is about 20 percent complete, and is expected to be completed by the year 2027. A high-speed rail system, especially one that connects two distant parts of the country, will significantly reduce transportation costs within the country. The extension further integrates these benefits by reducing traffic congestion and increasing the ease at which goods and people are transported, and is a reflection of Yassin's forward-looking action.

India — Olivia Howard

India, the second most populous country in the world, took severe precautions to protect its dense population against the COVID-19 pandemic. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan immediately implemented universal social protections to improve food security in Kerala, one of the first states impacted by the pandemic. However, Kerala could not produce enough crops to support its large population. Vijayan decided to take matters into his own hands and government-owned land produced the greatest yields of crops. He claimed, "the titleholder can own the land, but either he has to farm the land or allow the local body to do so." In partnership with the formally-established Public Distribution systems and Civil Supplies Corporation, Kerala guaranteed free rations for families under the poverty line and delivered free midday meals to children in need, identified using the Integrated Child Development Services. Local bodies also provided meals to patients and their families in hospitals across the state. On April 8 2020, Vijayan, identifying a greater crisis, guaranteed $13 food kits for every household in the state. The state also created its first-ever initiative to provide cooked food for those in need and established locally-monitored community kitchens. Essentially, not only did Vijayan prioritize locally-oriented approaches, but he instituted timely policy. New Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Haryana, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh all adopted similar models. Above all else, however, perhaps Vijayan's most notable achievement is being the first to take pragmatic action.

Pakistan — Maheem Syed

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan has placed climate change at the forefront of his agenda, recognizing the need for immediate, direct action. Within four years, Pakistan planted over a billion trees in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, increasing forest cover by six percent — Khan is expanding this achievement through the 10 Billion Trees Tsunami initiative, which aims to establish one million hectares of forestry across the country to counter threats of deforestation. This project will not only improve environmental conditions across Pakistan, but also create thousands of new jobs and bring light to the economic benefits of green initiatives within the rural regions of Pakistan. Khan also established the Protected Areas Initiative meant to create nationally protected areas and increase Pakistan's list of national parks from 35 to 45. To add to his environmental agenda, Khan has promised to source 60% of the country's energy needs from clean sources. He aims to accomplish this partially through the Pakistan Electric Vehicles Policy 2020-2025, which will increase the presence of electric vehicles on Pakistani streets by 30 percent. These steps are meant to further his goal for "zero emissions," particularly in larger metropolitan cities like Karachi. In his speech to the United Nations, Khan promised to prioritize climate change and counter its effects; he has upheld this goal through his recent environmental policies, which have worked proactively — even through a pandemic — to reframe the regional and global conversation of climate change and prioritize immediate action.

Taiwan — Victoria Tan

President Tsai Ing-wen, Taiwan's first female leader, was not hesitant to act when news about the spread of the COVID-19 virus in Wuhan, China first came to light in December 2020. In contrast to most of the rest of the world, Taiwan's case count has remained in the single-digits for months. Despite its close proximity to the first outbreaks in China and the high level of traffic between the two regions, Taiwan has largely contained the virus. Under Tsai's leadership, the country swiftly instituted contact tracing measures, effective testing and isolation methods to control the spread. Before the pandemic, everyone had health cards with unique IDs that allowed for easy online access of medical records. These cards were then repurposed to include immmigration and customs information to alert healthcare workers of patients at risk to have contracted the virus. According to the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at John Hopkins University, over 2.85 million people have died during the pandemic worldwide. Currently, Taiwan only accounts for 10 of those deaths due to the immediate and effective actions taken by Ing-wen.

The Myanmar Crisis in Bangladesh's Hands

Jonas Gomes

Persecution is no foreign term to the Rohingya, an Indo-Aryan ethnic group that predominantly follows Islam and hails from Rakhine in western Myanmar. Since the 1970s, Myanmar's army and allied militias have tormented, raped, and slaughtered them. Myanmar recognizes the Rohingyas only as illegal immigrants, discounting them as 'stateless' aliens instead of acknowledging them as citizens. As a result, nearly three hundred Rohingya villages have been targeted. By 2017, 700,000 Rohingyas fled to neighboring Bangladesh, seeking asylum as the military began a genocide. Today, Bangladesh faces numerous internal conflicts: overcrowding populations, an unstable economy, and a challenge to face a testament to Bangladesh's strength to withstand the refugee crisis, which may significantly leave Bangladesh vulnerable beyond measure.

While the United Nations and non-governmental organizations abroad are working to manage the crisis, such as through the 2018 Joint Response Plan as well as the EU's 2017 humanitarian assistance plan, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed has called for international organizations and governments to explicitly help in the what seems to be a worsening crisis.

The Bangladeshi government, though proud of their efforts, must maintain an already overcrowded country of 165 million people. As of November 2020, nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees made their way to Bangladesh. Bangladeshi citizens living near the Cox's Bazar refugee camps, which houses about 700 thousand refugees, have voiced concerns over refugees fighting for food and resources as well as fears of COVID-19. To address this, in December 2020, nearly 2 thousand Rohingyas were moved to the remote Bangladeshi island Bhasan Char. The United Nations has opposed this decision, citing the island's susceptibility to floods and cyclones as the most pertinent reason. Without such assistance, Bangladesh will be forced to exhaust its resources caring for refugees, leaving them in an immensely vulnerable state.

Bangladesh's 2021 economic outlook after accommodating Rohingya refugees is bleak. It is expected that Bangladesh will accrue an extra $300 million USD in debt to maintain the refugee camps and secure the border surrounding Myanmar. As the 49th poorest country globally, Bangladesh is choosing to act on an international public good, which looks to use national and international laws to protect the Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar's civil war. However, with an increasing likelihood of more refugees, Dhaka should not take on this feat Doing so only draws further into an downward fiscal spiral of, which would have dire consequences for all sectors of Bangladesh's economy, ultimately straining the country's political strength and future.

Bangladesh can utilize existing models of expanded global support and responsibility-sharing, like Syria and Lebanon, by seeking global arrangements with other countries to protect the Bangladeshi and Rohingya people. Specifically, Bangladesh must implement a protection policy framework for the Rohingyas, allowing them the rights and opportunities they are entitled to under both international humanitarian law as well as national law. Furthermore, Bangladesh must pass a Solidarity Compact policy, which exercises an updated financing model to account for the potential consequences of the worsening Rohingya crisis. While the US, Canada, and the UK have donated an approximately combined $500 million in pledges for critical humanitarian assistance to Bangladesh, more funds are essential. Bangladesh needs global support, responsibility-sharing initiatives, and a Solidarity Compact to help with social service systems, economic and political development, and sustaining the Rohingya refugee crisis.

Why might more funding policies be necessary? An example — March 22, 2021 — a Cox's Bazar refugee camp fire that led to the demolition of more than 10,000 shelters, food distribution centers, as well as water and sanitation centers. The fire resulted in the displacement of approximately 45,000 refugees, a rising 15-person death toll among the camp, as well as approximately 560 refugees injured and an additional 400 refugees missing. Had there been a program initiative supported by more funding, supplementary resources could have been accessible to the Rohingyas, ensuring their protections and will to live another day. This underlying issue introduces the question of how much more can Bangladesh and the Rohingyas withstand.

How much longer can the Rohingyas survive without a 'true' home? To clarify, these questions operate under the assumption that the Rohingyas have no choice to return to Myanmar.

Ultimately, it comes down to who the Rohingyas see themselves as and where they genuinely call home. For them, calling Myanmar' home' is essentially no longer a viable option. Myanmar is a country that refuses to claim the Rohingyas as their own but where its military endorses themselves as the 'good guy,' justifying their actions as a religious duty to get rid of the existential threat of the Rohingyas. So why should the Rohingyas continue to call Myanmar their 'home'?

Currently, Bangladesh is looking at this refugee crisis as a short-term stint. Dhaka has strategically avoided public acknowledgement of sheltering the Rohingya refugees because they believe this will result in an influx of permanent refugees from an increasingly unstable Myanmar, and thus wants to put some pressure on the government there.

As a result, Dhaka is currently cutting aid from its partners, fencing in refugees, adding surveillance cameras, and relocating camps to other parts of the country. Dhaka is taking these measures to ensure that Myanmar is pressured to accept the Rohingyas back while Bangladesh only helps the Rohingyas survive their day-to-day lives. In doing so, however, this only sparks hostility among the refugees and paves the way for more extensive insecurity in Bangladesh in the future.

Instead, Bangladesh should prioritize a long-term initiative, working with other countries and organizations to facilitate safe and adequate housing, offer refugees a viable education, protect their livelihoods, and support the refugee camp communities. This includes designing shelters that can endure Bangladesh's heavy monsoons, creating programs to educate refugees, and applying protection-oriented law enforcement among camps for the refugees' safeties.

Working with other countries by acquiring combined funds, resources, and initiating programs coincide with Bangladesh's main goal: pressuring Myanmar to create the conditions for the Rohingyas' repatriation. Regardless of how Dhaka proceeds, however, the Rohingya refugees will be around for years to come, and Dhaka must consider both the political consequences of admitting this likelihood and the practical consequences of avoiding the reality of this refugee crisis. Therefore, it is in the best interest of both Bangladesh and the Rohingyas that Dhaka focuses on supporting the refugees in a long-term plan rather than using their help as a political pawn against Myanmar.

With over half of the Rohingya population pursuing asylum in Bangladesh, a country currently struggling to provide for its own people, it stands to reason that external assistance and long-term, sustainable policy initiatives are imperative. Perhaps the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will break silence and direct an initiative on refugee crisis management. Alternatively, the UN may execute long-term sustainable humanitarian aid initiatives to provide Rohingya refugees their rightful and appropriate aid. Though current assistance plans are uncertain, one thing is undeniable; the fate of Bangladesh, as well as the Rohingyas, is at stake.

The Myanmar Crisis and the Case for Southeast Asian Unity

Maheem Syed

On February 1, Myanmar's military junta marched the streets of the capital Nay Pyi Taw, staging a coup against the democratically-elected National League for Democracy Party (NLD) and its long-time leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. The civilian response was immediate, with large-scale protests erupting in the streets of Myanmar's major cities; the military — adamant on enforcing control — killed over 700 civilians and arrested 2,751 protesters within two months. In a country with an already fragile democracy, this aggression exemplifies how Myanmar's new military government mirrors Myanmar's former economically weakened and embattled military state. This has especially alarmed surrounding countries within the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) bloc, who are being tested by the international community as the first line of diplomatic defense against Myanmar's military. ASEAN countries — particularly Indonesia — must establish a united response toward Myanmar's new military government in order to prevent greater civilian deaths and contain rippling instability in the region.

ASEAN has often been a diplomatic grey zone. Great Powers like China and the United States maintain tentative alliances in the region as they evaluate if continued investment is worthwhile; these countries act as a proxy for competing foreign interests, making them a linchpin in the Great Powers' growing influence. This has led emerging market economies like Indonesia to prioritize building a strong South East Asian coalition to maintain their interests on the international stage. While neighboring ASEAN countries understand that this coup in Myanmar has resulted in brutal violations of its citizens' human rights, these countries are hesitant to respond because they know their reaction to this crisis will solidify their reputation at the international level.

After all, the ASEAN bloc has already been criticized for belittling human rights abuses, especially based on their divided response to the Rohingya Muslim genocide in Myanmar. The United Nations Security Council, European Union, United States, and China have all called upon ASEAN to handle the international reaction toward Myanmar's military government. ASEAN's response to these requests will impact its relationships with both Western and neighboring leaders — relationships that are imperative for ASEAN's global supply chains and political standing.

Indonesia has taken the initiative to address this crisis and promote diplomatic talks between ASEAN leadership and Myanmar's defense minister. In February, Indonesia's Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi met with Foreign Ministers from both Thailand and Myanmar, and visited Brunei — the current chair of ASEAN — to discuss a diplomatic compromise between Myanmar's military and its ousted democratic government. Initially, Indonesia suggested the release of the NLD's political leaders, like Suu Kyi, and a fresh election within the year. Western countries and Myanmar's own citizens, however, firmly disagreed, stating there was already a democratic election in November 2020 that Myanmar's military must honor. Seeing the civilian pushback to Indonesia's proposed compromises, and a lack of assistance from other ASEAN countries, Marsudi shifted her tone to outrightly declare support for the protesters.

Indonesia's attempt to take the lead has become a double-edged sword, however, with Indonesia alone facing the burden to resolve this regional power-grab. On March 19, in order to disperse this external pressure, Indonesian President Joko Widodo called for an emergency ASEAN meeting, forcing a response from most other ASEAN countries that have remained largely silent.

Without a united response, Indonesia and its neighbors cannot appease both Myanmar's new military government and its righly-angered civilians. Thailand — whose government similarly gained power through a coup in 2014 — has stayed silent, along with Cambodia, Vietnam, and the Philippines, calling the crisis an "internal matter" in an effort to shield their governments from criticism regarding their own authoritarian policies. The lack of involvement from other ASEAN countries has left Indonesia with support from only Malaysia and Singapore, leaving the countries exposed to retaliation and their proposal without a supportive coalition to leverage regional economic and political power.

This fractured regional response will only negatively impact trade relations and economic investment in the region. Even worse, neighboring superpower China continually fails to support Indonesia's appeal for collaboration. China is hesitant to disrupt its Belt and Road Initiative, which focuses on economic investments in Myanmar, or abandon its weapons deals with Myanmar's government by challenging its actions. Despite China's heavy economic influence over Myanmar, their neutral reaction to these civilian deaths angers Myanmar protesters, resulting in attacks on Chinese-led factories within Myanmar. This has caused China to push for a quicker ASEAN solution, but — fearful of economic and geopolitical fallout — has not pushed them to directly involve themselves. With a united ASEAN response to pressure Myanmar's government, China may face more incentives to become involved to strengthen its political and economic relationship with these countries.

The conflict between the NLD and Myanmar's military reinforces the complicated role Myanmar plays in the region. Though Myanmar's civilians have protested in favor of restoring Suu Kyi and the NLD to power, it is important to note that predominantly Muslim countries like Indonesia and Malaysia have been largely critical of Myanmar's Rohingya Muslim genocide. They have condemned the murders and resulting refugee crisis, as well as the role both Suu Kyi's government and the military played in the continuation of the genocide. Despite Indonesia currently backing Suu Kyi and the NLD over Myanmar's military government, it should not discount the atrocities that Suu Kyi and her party were complicit in either. Both options are rooted in Myanmar's lack of options, further reinforcing how a Suu Kyi government may have more public support, but is still not ideal. A more united ASEAN against Myanmar's military's actions and Suu Kyi's humanitarian abuses would promote further regional accountability to global powers and organizations.

While Indonesia has made efforts to create a diplomatic compromise, in order to take a stronger stance against Myanmar's military government, Indonesia will need the support and backing of neighboring ASEAN countries that have also been negatively affected by this sharp tilt toward militarism. With over 360,000 Myanmar citizens fleeing to India and Thailand in the wake of these protests, and the steadily rising death toll within Myanmar, there is an increasing urgency for a firmer ASEAN response that the rest of the international community can rally behind. Myanmar's crisis is a manifestation of the growing need for unity within the region.

Docile vs. Defiant: The Role of the Generation Gap in the Thai Protests

Juhui Oh

In early 2020, demonstrations against Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha soon transformed into demands to fundamentally reform the country's monarchy. A high unemployment rate for recent graduates, discontent with the military-written constitution, and the lese majeste laws that violate freedom of speech incited these protests. Currently, the government has not taken action to address issues raised by the protesters. Instead, they have suppressed and detained youth leaders with military force.

While recent graduates aged under 30 support the protests ardently, many older Thais refuse to support them. There is a significant generational gap between the youth, who demand independence from the military dictatorship, and the older generation, who are reluctant to revolt against the "revered" Thai King and Monarchy. While international support is necessary, Thai citizens must reconcile the growing gap between the older and younger generations in order to more effectively pressure the Thai government.

Historically, the Thai army has gained credibility with the public by taking advantage of its strong relationship with the King and traditionally, Thai citizens have respected and supported the King and Monarchy. Since the King acknowledges the legitimacy of the military government, which has a cozy relationship with wealthy business owners, it has been almost impossible for Thai citizens to eradicate these relationships and challenge the old monarchic system.

To make collective monarchic reforms that involve not only youth but also older people in Thailand, youth leaders should understand why the older generation support the Monarch before criticizing them for being "passive" and "blindly obedient."

The current ruling royal house in Thailand, the Chakri Dynasty, has reigned since the 18th century. While the youth harshly criticize the current King, Maha Vajiralongkorn, due to his promiscuous lifestyle and irrational decision-making, his father, Bhumibol Adulyadej, was greatly revered during his 70 years as king. At the end of his reign, he even earned the title "Father of the Nation."

Some of Adulyadej's major accomplishments include artificial rainmaking and road initiatives in remote villages. As a climate-sensitive country, Thailand has suffered severe droughts and air pollution. To address this issue, King Adulyadej studied artificial rainmaking for 14 years and brought it to trial so that it could be used nationwide. This technique has gained credibility and approval from the international community and there are currently 71 pilots and 39 rain-seeding planes in Thailand. Adulyadej also started "royal initiatives," which built 48,000 km of roads in small villages across the country. This activated commercial areas and played a part in alleviating poverty in the outskirts of large cities. Growing up experiencing the Chakri Dynasty's successful reforms, older people in Thailand tend to have a strong sense of loyalty toward the monarchy.

Similarly, older generations must learn why Thai youth tend to be less obedient and frustrated about the Monarchy. Globalization and industrialization have played a huge role in increasing access to higher education and information across the globe and encouraged Thai college graduates to question the legitimacy and effectiveness of the military government compared to a more democratic system of governance. A sharp rise in unemployment due to the COVID-19 outbreak and leadership failure by the monarch have also contributed to discontent with the existing economic system. Yet, rather than taking action or attempting to mitigate the economic downturn with additional

regulations, King Maha Vajiralongkorn left the country out of fear of contracting COVID-19. He stayed in a luxury hotel in Germany, where he enjoyed parties with his harem. He refused to leave Germany until the German Parliament warned him not to exert his political power from within German borders. This raised grievances among young Thais and catalyzed their protests arguing for economic reforms and greater social mobility.

Older generations must engage in public discourse because youth-led social media activism is not enough. Due to COVID-19, the number of in-person protests has decreased and protesters use social media platforms like Facebook and Snapchat to spread ideas and protest against the Monarchy. For instance, in April 2020, political scientist Pavin Chachavalpongpun created a Facebook group "Royalist marketplace," where users could add satirical sales ads related to the Royal family. This group gained huge popularity among users, and especially among the protesters. However, due to the lese majestes law, under which individuals can be imprisoned for up to 15 years for insulting the royal family, Facebook deactivated the group. This case shows that while the international community can help to put pressure on the Thai Monarch, it has limited impact due to censorship of social media in Thailand. Therefore, the support from older generations within the country is necessary to bring reforms to the Monarch. Yet, since many protests are based on social media, the older generation, which is less familiar with technology, find it relatively hard to stay informed and participate.

While there is no clear-cut resolution to this generational gap, the key is education-based communication. Both groups should learn where their stances come from and share their opinions freely. At the household-level and public level, youth leaders can teach their parents how to use social media to learn about protests -- integrating both their voice and perspective in the modern activism sphere. Ultimately, for Thailand to gain freedom of speech and boost their economy, mutual efforts to reconcile the political gap between generations are required.

Sri Lanka's Childcare Desert

Olivia Howard

Due to COVID-19, once-vibrant towns are now empty streets and vacant stores. Airlines, concert venues, and theaters have mobilized support to help mitigate their economic losses. However, the media and general public often neglect one of the most consequential business failures of the fiscal year: childcare centers. UNICEF reports that nearly 22 million children in South Asia have lost a critical pre-school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, seven in ten women in the Asia and Pacific region work in informal sectors, compounding their unreliable access to social protection and childcare benefits.

The situation in Sri Lanka is particularly complex: many Sri Lankans believe children under five are better-off in familial, unofficial childcare settings. Yet, the country has the fastest aging population in South Asia, leading grandparents and older caregivers to support the younger population and exacerbating COVID-19 concerns. Although Sri Lanka provides free universal education starting in primary school, the Early Childhood Care & Development (ECCD) program fails to adequately support children under six. If the Sri Lankan government seeks to foster a prosperous economy after the pandemic and mediate COVID-19's long-term impacts, it must prioritize expanding childcare opportunities for children between the ages of three and five.

Expanding childcare will shrink the developmental disparity between families who currently cannot afford critical-year childcare and families who can do so. Although one may consider childcare a necessity by definition, many families cannot afford such a luxury. Thirty-six percent of children in Sri Lanka lived on less than $1.50 a day in 2016, and 74 percent lived on less than $2.7. This striking statistic suggests food, shelter, protection, and education are no longer first-priority bills, but intersectional and generational trade-offs. Thus, improving access to childcare can leave more money for household groceries or improve food security at childcare centers themselves, which can catalyze a positive feedback loop of intergenerational physical and educational nourishment.

Sri Lankans experience a rural-urban divide; the government should focus on providing support and access for childcare deserts, which are municipalities without a sufficient number of childcare slots that are disproportionately in rural areas. Essentially, Sri Lankans not only lack administrative support for childcare, but the country lacks adequate physical infrastructure and plausible working hours. The rare childcare center oftentimes only operates within typical 9 to 5 working hours, making it essentially impossible for working parents to balance their career and familial responsibilities. There are also not enough childcare slots for enrollment demand. Because 78 percent of day care centers are privately operated and employ levy fees, the shortage of slots favors higher income families. The government cannot simply offer childcare services, but also target services in a digestible manner to families who cannot currently afford private centers.

If the government invests in more childcare slots, it will not only benefit children, but will incentivize Sri Lankan women to re-enter the workforce. Approximately 50 percent of three- to five-year-old children do not attend pre-school. This disproportionately limits mothers, who are typically called upon to tend to childcare needs, from entering the workforce. Increasing childcare availability can increase workplace gender diversity, improve recruiting retention, and increase productivity. In fact, the International Finance Corporation predicts that if Sri Lanka closes the gender workforce participation gap, the country could improve their long-run gross domestic product by 20 percent.

Particularly during the pandemic, the Sri Lankan government will lose money if they do not prevent a further decrease in female workforce participation; according to an ILO report, if women were to equally represented in the global labor market, GDP would increase 26 percent globally. In Sri Lanka, women's workforce participation in less than half that of men. For instance, Hemas Hospitals offers KidZones, or childcare options, to attract highly-qualified employees. This option has also increased the ratio of female to male employees three percent in one year. Not only does expanding child care benefit children, but it targets the implicit demand for childcare from women not yet in the workforce, leading to greater gender equity.

Currently, the State Ministry of Women and Child Development, Preschool and Primary Education, School Infrastructure and Education Services (SMWCDPPESIES) oversees efforts to protect women and children in Sri Lanka, including establishing infrastructure to prevent malnutrition, protect women from unregulated microfinancing, and "provide women with necessary knowledge, skills and time to look after their children with motherly care and to guide their children." Yet, this mandate fails to protect children under five years old and their mothers against more discrete, diffused complexities, such as childcare deserts.

In addition to expanding COVID-19 precautions in opening schools, the Ministry could more immediately (1) guarantee child care starting at the age of three, (2) re-assess the cost of living for a child under five to re-determine households that qualify for tax credits, (3) provide grants to rural communities to increase staff and hours, consequently increasing childcare slots, and (4) provide earned-paid family leave to compensate for the widely-established at-home care, particularly during the pandemic. Ultimately, without action, the childcare crisis could unravel into gendered turmoil, an aging population crisis, and long-term developmental gaps for Sri Lanka's youngest citizens.

How India's Farmers Started a Free Speech Conundrum

Ryan Woock

Is Twitter on its way out in India? Not quite, but recent farmer protests have unexpectedly sparked a new controversy between the social media company and the Indian government. The conflict unofficially began in November, when thousands of farmers arrived at the outskirts of New Delhi to protest recent farm laws that sought to reduce government involvement in agriculture. The Indian government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, claims the market-friendly laws — which eliminate guaranteed minimum prices for essential crops — would help to usher in a liberalized economy. The farmers contend that removing such protections would leave them at the behest of large corporations. To voice these concerns, many protesters turned to social media, particularly Twitter.

In February, after several months of demonstrations, the Indian government demanded Twitter delete more than 1,000 accounts, alleging the platform spread misinformation about the protests and incited violence. Twitter initially refused, citing its commitment to uphold international free speech. Yet once it received notice that, under Indian law, its local employees could face up to seven years in prison for failing to comply, Twitter gave in. Within a few days, the company censored an unspecified number of Indian accounts and blocked more than 500 users, though it was careful to not remove accounts of journalists, activists, politicians, and media organizations. Twitter claimed that orders to block such accounts were inconsistent with Indian law.

The conflict offers another striking example of how social media companies face growing challenges to both uphold freedom of speech and abide by the local laws of foreign countries. But because Twitter lacks the leverage to individually confront New Delhi, the company should refocus its long-run efforts on building international support to pressure the Indian government to respect internet freedoms.

For starters, Twitter needs the Indian market more than Indian government leaders need Twitter. With more than 700 million internet users and a rapidly expanding middle class, India offers a massive potential market for global technology companies. Yet Twitter's 17 million Indian users do not compare to WhatsApp — India's most popular messaging app — and Facebook's user bases, which collectively include more than 600 million accounts. This disparity is notable: In many recent international censorship disputes, such as in the Philippines, Cambodia, and Thailand, Facebook avoided severe penalties because it had significant user bases and was heavily employed as a government mouthpiece to disseminate propaganda.

To India, Twitter is neither of these, which leaves the company with few viable options if New Delhi decides to escalate the conflict by imposing additional restrictions. If Twitter decides to continue upholding its commitment to free speech, the company will likely face even harsher penalties or an outright ban, missing out on India's huge emerging market. And although it may seem morally admirable to stand up for free speech, doing so will eliminate an outlet for the Indian public to openly communicate about the protests and other pressing political issues.

Indian officials have also made efforts to exploit Twitter's tenuous market position. In response to the company's partial compliance with the account removal order, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology began posting on Koo, a competing micro-blog service that has amassed more than 4 million downloads since it was founded in March 2020. While Koo boasts features unavailable on Twitter, such as greater compatibility with Indian languages and the ability to forward "Koos" to WhatsApp, its governmental appeal goes beyond competitive advantages: Unlike Twitter, Koo does not moderate content. Rather, when the platform identifies a post that could be deemed unlawful, it defers to the Indian government for action — giving public officials de facto authority to censor online content. Faced with a rapidly growing competitor favored by the government, Twitter cannot afford to risk further conflict that jeopardizes its operations in India.

India's recent track record of stifling dissent online has also legitimized New Delhi's implicit threat to restrict or ban Twitter if the company does not comply with government directives. Last June, amid a border clash and rising tensions with China, the Indian government blocked a number of apps owned by Chinese companies, most notably TikTok and WeChat. More recently, in February, India finally restored 4G internet services in Jammu and Kashmir — a Muslim-majority region whose semi-autonomous status was controversially revoked in 2019 — following an 18-month communications blackout designed to curb public dissent. These instances demonstrate India's willingness to take drastic, politically-motivated action to target international media companies and quell domestic civic unrest, heightening the risks associated with Twitter's noncompliance.

Although the rift between Twitter and New Delhi causes tremendous uncertainty, it is increasingly evident that Modi has brought India closer to a kind of "digital authoritarianism" that seeks to silence online critics. This development is not unique to India: From Southeast Asia to the United States, there is a growing debate concerning the outsize role of social media in politics, and many countries continue to grapple with how to address it.

So, where does this leave Twitter? Ultimately, its options are limited. Standing up for free speech is admirable, but it is not sustainable. If Twitter wants to fight for free speech but still access the Indian market, it should focus its efforts on rallying international support to pressure the Indian government to respect internet freedoms. Building a coalition of both states and multinational companies that operate in India could persuade the Modi government to abandon its heavy-handed approach to online censorship or face severe international condemnation and potential economic and political ramifications. Although the government may not ostensibly care about internet freedoms, that may change when the country's core national interests are at stake. Twitter's actions have certainly been valiant, but the company should recognize its limited leverage and push for a collective response before it is too late.

Evaluating Singapore's Adaptability to COVID-19 and a Post Pandemic World

Tanmay Arora

Singapore's economy is one of the most developed and stable in the world, boasting the highest GDP per capita in Southeast Asia and the eighth-highest in the world. Singapore is considered a major regional business hub, with strong economic sectors in international trade, financial services, and tourism. After a spike in COVID-19 cases in April 2020, Singapore instituted a national lockdown in conjunction with extensive contact tracing measures, which included testing and mandatory symptom reporting. Singapore's government, which is known for its ability to take deliberate, precise action when necessary, successfully contained the virus and quickly reestablished a sense of normalcy. While the lockdown and other extensive measures have controlled cases after the initial spike, they also caused Singapore's GDP to contract by 5.8 percent in 2020. Moving forward, Singapore must invest in the business (focusing on how Singapore based businesses can benefit them) and technology sectors to minimize their losses from COVID-19 closures and its long-term economic impacts.

Singapore implemented the Travel Corridor Arrangement to tackle economic losses after the pandemic had started. This is a travel agreement, or "business bubble," formed between countries, in this case between Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia. For example, a Malaysian could travel to Singapore for business-related reasons without having to quarantine for a specific period of time, ensuring firms in Singapore could conduct cross-border business with ease. Considering the negative economic impact of COVID-19 restrictions, this arrangement is ideal for Singapore as it generates economic activity by promoting travel. This move likely benefits Malaysia and Indonesia as well, as citizens can engage in business with and travel to Singapore, an apparent benefit when one considers Singapore's GDP per capita.

However, with the recent spike in COVID-19 cases in the region, Singapore suspended this arrangement on April 1, which will likely have economic consequences in Singapore. Suspending this bubble is not ideal considering the 5.8 percent GDP contraction from the previous year. Singapore will have to revert to long-term adaptations, including reducing reliance on sectors like travel and tourism and increasing investment in pandemic-friendly sectors like technology, as well as increasing on agricultural raw materials internally while possibly decreasing imports and exports in that area. It is important for Singapore to adapt again, whether that is internally through its own industries or by introducing new measures that allow for international trade even with travel restrictions to minimize economic losses.

Although Singapore sacrificed economic productivity to control the spread of COVID-19, it should invest in innovative technologies to adapt to upcoming economic challenges from travel restrictions. The country has already implemented a new type of business "bubble." This specific bubble is a hotel near Singapore Changi Airport that allows people travelling from several different countries to arrive and conduct business. It contains rooms with individual air ducts, conference rooms with screens and a specific compartment that has UV light to sanitize any documents passed from one person to another. Anyone travelling into this bubble does not have to conduct a formal quarantine over a specific period of time, provided that they don't leave the bubble. There is also screening in conference rooms, allowing for in-person meetings, which reflects Singapore's innovation and adaptability to handle business even with an abundance of travel restrictions across the world. This new bubble facility is designed to hold 1,300 travelers, which should generate revenue for the travel and international trade sectors of the economy. Critics may argue that even if this is extremely innovative, the program cannot fully minimize pandemic-level economic losses. While this is true, Singapore has also already looked to other options beyond international trade to maintain a stable economy even after the pandemic.

As stated previously, Singapore needs to invest in sectors beyond international trade, which might not generate as much revenue as the sector had pre-pandemic. Considering an increasing global reliance on technology, which has only been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Singapore's businesses are prepared for this shift. Despite being only 0.1 percent of the Asia-Pacific population, 70 out of 500 businesses in Singapore were listed in the Asia-Pacific High Growth Companies rankings in 2020, many of which were in the technology industry. Considering this, Singapore's Ministry of Trade and Industry said that Singapore's GDP should recover by 4 to 6 percent in the year of 2020. This exemplifies the direction and type of investment Singapore should adopt moving forward, even with the shutdown of the Travel Corridor with Indonesia and Malaysia.

Overall, Singapore has positioned itself to not only recover from its recent GDP contraction, but to also prepare for a post-pandemic world with a potentially long-term decrease in incoming travel. It is important for Singapore to maintain and increase its presence in the technology industry to maintain its status as a regional business hub in Southeast Asia.

“Modern Slavery” in Southeast Asia

Victoria Tan

This February, Piang Ngaih Don, a live-in maid from Myanmar working in Singapore, died from oxygen deprivation after being choked repeatedly by her employer. She was regularly beaten and burned with a hot clothing iron. Before her death, she weighed approximately 24 kg (53 lbs) after being deprived of food and water.

Sadly, the abuse of foreign maids is not a problem unique to Singapore. Mostly women, these workers travel from impoverished areas in the Philippines, Indonesia and Myanmar to key economic hubs like Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong in search of work to support their families. Despite widespread knowledge of previous abuse cases, many have decided that the meager paychecks are worth the risk of abuse that the United Nations has referred to as “modern slavery.”

Host countries are aware of the physical, mental and sexual abuse these domestic workers face, but their governments do not have strong enough regulations to completely prevent these crimes from happening or to convict perpetrators when they do. There is no quick one-size-fits-all solution for the nations involved and it is clear that the foreign domestic workers are not protected under the law in most countries. Fundamentally, cultural reforms will more effectively compel employers to treat their foreign live-in maids as human beings and address this endemic exploitation.

The inability to define and justly measure domestic labor is an underlying cause of the exploitation. There are significant discrepancies in reported salaries since a large number of these women are undocumented and working illegally, but it is indisputable that their monthly pay usually falls significantly below the minimum wage of host countries. The Ministry of Manpower of Singapore reported that there were around 255,000 domestic helpers in Singapore in June of 2019. The mean wage was $439 USD per month for live-in maids, with food and housing included. To compare, cleaners in the local workforce on average make about $1000 USD a month, or over twice as much, according to K Jayaprema, President of the Association of Employment Agencies in Singapore.

Because exploitation begins during the recruitment process, it is imperative that employees be educated on their own rights. Many times, workers report being confined to a recruitment facility with their travel documents confiscated so they are unable to leave. They are also given false information about their wages, working conditions and terms of the contract.

It is common for workers to go into debt in order to find an employer and migrate. Only after working for a long period are they usually able to pay back what they owe through a reduced salary to their recruitment agency. Once their contract is up, the cycle begins again. A study published by the UN-ACT estimates that on average, four months of a two-year contract can be spent paying back debt, a fact many domestic workers are not aware of when they sign up.

Taking legal action against these exploitative actions would only jeopardize their livelihoods. In Hong Kong, if domestic workers choose to leave their jobs before the end of their two-year contract, they have 14 days to find another job or leave the country. However, even if they choose to come forward, seeing as many most live with their employers and rarely leave the house, they likely wouldn’t have enough evidence to warrant police protection. In the 2015 case of Indonesian worker Erwiana Sulistyaningsih, her employer’s children were the only potential witnesses to any abuse in the household and they testified on the side of their mother. Though cases like this are widely covered and lead to a spark in activist group activity, systemic and preventative changes are still necessary. .

Under Singaporean law, first-time employers and new workers are required to attend training sessions so that they are aware of their legal obligations while new workers must undergo a similar orientation. In addition, the 2012 Employment of Foreign Manpower Act mandates that employers grant workers rest days without pay for every 7-day period. Similarly, in 2006 Malaysia and Indonesia signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Recruitment and Placement of Indonesian Domestic Workers which has since been amended and extended. The agreement affirmed that it was the workers’ right to hold on to their own passports as well as communicate freely with their families. Monthly wages should also be paid into a bank account instead of by cash.

However, how often these regulations are followed is unclear, and employers are often not monitored nor held responsible for keeping up their end of the contract. The UN-ACT study reports that mistreatments in Singapore and Hong Kong have included excessive working hours or having to be on call 24/7, medical neglect, only being given bread and rice to eat, and restrictions on movement outside of the house,communication, and social life. To make matters worse, the pandemic has placed additional expectations on domestic workers, such as tutoring or cooking.

Despite various government efforts to protect domestic workers, there still exist many loopholes and enough vagueness in the laws that employers will exploit to bypass punishment. The Indonesian government, for example, continues to allow many recruitment and training agencies to operate without oversight.

There is no easy solution to this problem, seeing as these maids are being abused behind closed doors. A crackdown on recruitment agencies and requirements for a defined minimum wage or harsher punishments for abusers might begin to address this issue, but it is clear that a cultural reckoning is necessary in order to promote human rights protections for domestic workers.

EUROPE.

The Long-Term Effects of Europe's Bungled Vaccine Rollout

Aidan Woutas

Last summer, if asked where in the world the pandemic was being most skillfully handled, there's a good chance you'd point to the countries of the European Union. Case numbers were low, death rates were lower, and the United States was bungling its way to recording by far the largest case and death counts on the planet. Nearly a year later, as countries race to procure and distribute doses of the vaccines that offer the only route out of this crisis, the EU has fallen behind –– badly. Over three months since approval of the first vaccines, the EU has only given one dose or more to roughly 15 percent of its population, while the US and United Kingdom have doubled and tripled that progress, respectively. Despite the desperate need for more doses in Europe as countries fight the spread of new variants –– and fatigued citizens once again go into lockdown across the continent –– member states are not getting the doses they need to make meaningful progress toward herd immunity.

As the European Union sputters, Brexiteers are gloating and countries on its periphery are looking toward Russia and China for vaccines instead. The widespread frustration and outrage incited by these failures have poisoned the internal politics of member states, snarled cooperation between them, and severely undermined the bloc's fledgling partnership with the UK. The vaccine rollout is, in many ways, a test of the EU's ability to effectively and credibly function on a collective basis. If it fails, what effect will this have on its foreign affairs, and most importantly, the future of the European project?

Before now, the crisis brought about by this pandemic was seen by pro-Europeanists as a rare chance to foster more integration within the bloc. In December, it passed a record-size $2.2 trillion stimulus package backed by jointly-held debt –– a first in the bloc. This was particularly notable given the tensions that arose out of the debt crisis in Southern Europe after the Global Financial Crisis. The expectation, of course, is that the more fiscally intertwined member states become, the more widely economic benefits are distributed, minimizing incentives for another EU exit. However, the bumpy vaccine rollout has brought all of those questions back into the fold as countries — large and small — question whether they might have fared better on their own.

The contrasts in the approaches between the EU and the UK are hard to ignore. While the European Commission dramatically sparred with AstraZeneca after learning it would receive 50 million fewer doses than expected by March, the British government faced no such problem. It had inked a deal with the pharmaceutical company three months earlier with tighter provisions to prevent that outcome. More recently, concerns over exceedingly rare side effects from the AZ vaccine have prompted continental leaders to limit its use to the elderly while Britain forges ahead largely unperturbed with a more targeted approach to at-risk groups. The bloc faced similar delivery problems with Moderna and Pfizer –– in part the result of agreements that were negotiated later and less effectively than countries that operated more flexibly on their own.

Time and again, EU leaders have erred where a more reasonable solution was present. Among the most dramatic of these instances was in January when EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen threatened to stop the flow of vaccine exports from Ireland into the UK in order to protect supply. In doing so, she ignited a diplomatic crisis between Ireland, the UK, and the EU,reopening the Irish border can of worms that stalled Brexit negotiations for years. Though Brussels quickly backtracked under pressure, the Commission's credibility had already been undermined and some in London even used the episode as justification to overhaul the massive trade deal between the UK and the EU.

As Conservative Minister Michael Gove said 'Pandora's box' had been opened and outcry flowed from all sides, it is hard to imagine a worse start to the European Union's incredibly important relationship with the UK. What occurred is emblematic of the challenge facing leaders in Brussels, with leaders from across the continent lambasting their response and pressuring them for more clarity and supply. The bloc's largest and most powerful member, Germany, has six state elections and a federal election this year to decide its future, which some have complained is exerting particularly strong pressure on von der Leyen to act hastily.

While the impacts are clear and troubling for Europe's ability to beat back rising case numbers and bring the pandemic under control before the summer, these stumbles also damage the European Union's foreign policy and its ability to be a positive force in the region. Tired of waiting on European vaccines, neighboring Serbia's government decided to turn to Russia's Sputnik V and China's Sinopharm shots, springing ahead on vaccinations. Member state Hungary, led by Prime Minister Viktor Orban whose authoritarian policies have placed him at consistent odds with EU authorities, has ignored the lack of approval from EU regulators and likewise made impressive progress under this all-of-the-above approach that relies too on Russian and Chinese vaccines.

Both Russia and China know this vaccine fiasco presents a prime chance to sow disunity in the bloc and on the continent as a whole –– particularly in Central and Eastern Europe whose governments' relationships with Brussels are more tenuous –– and have adopted a form of "vaccine diplomacy." Even the EU's own members are feeling compelled: Italy, already one of the largest recipients of China's Belt and Road money on the continent, has expressed interest in Russian and Chinese vaccines, given the bloc's recurring supply issues. Slovakia's prime minister just resigned after revelations of a secret shipment of Sputnik vaccines. Across the continent, Brussels is sorely testing the patience of member states

Most urgent, of course, is for the European Union to pick up the pace of vaccinations quickly. Otherwise, it risks a far more protracted pandemic and more devastating economic consequences that the rest of the world might avoid. In the long term, however, there will have to be serious introspection about the failures of this rollout as well as an examination of von der Leyen's leadership. If countries large and small are frustrated by the problems their membership in the bloc is causing, what does that mean for the potential for further integration that had been viewed so optimistically not long ago? The EU as an institution is obviously not going away anytime soon, but tensions will only grow and the capacity for collective action curtail if its leadership continues to be so feckless.

French President Emmanuel Macron Faces A Tough Challenge To Convince The French People To Re-Elect Him

Benjamin Miller

Emmanuel Macron is something of an enigma. The French president burst onto the scene as a hopeful young face for a beleaguered France. In 2017, he defeated far-right National Front candidate Marine Le Pen and promised a new, reinvigorated era for French politics. At his victory speech in front of the Louvre with thousands of supporters, he proclaimed, "A new page has been turned." Four years later and one year from the next general election, Macron is in trouble. He has an approval rating of only 39 percent and a disapproval rating of 61 percent, according to a joint poll conducted by firms Ifop and Fiducial. This comes as France reels from a year of lockdowns and economic distress resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and Macron's bungled response. Since his election, Macron has transformed from an Obama-esque liberal figure to someone who appears more interested in appeal to the French right. As the election draws closer and polling appears close in a head-to-head matchup with his former electoral rival Le Pen, Macron must steer the ship effectively as the pandemic wanes if he wants to save his presidency and his legacy.

Macron rose to international prominence when he, along with his newly formed centrist party La République En Marche, defeated Le Pen. His win was viewed by both the French and outside observers as a win for liberal democracy, the European project, and the world order. Macron beat Le Pen and secured 66 percent of the vote in the runoff election, receiving a clear mandate from the French people. Despite his victory, like so many French presidents before him, Macron has found it difficult to maintain consistent popularity among the French citizenry. As a former investment banker and Minister of the Economy, Industry, and Digital Affairs, voters expected Macron to bring a managerial, results-driven approach to the presidency. However, Macron's persona has oftentimes overshadowed that hope. Macron has described himself as wanting to be Jupiterian, evoking the Roman god of the skies who removed himself from minute matters and hooplah. Between his pro-business stances and his somewhat egotistical view of himself, Macron has alienated many voters, who now view him as out-of-touch with the common people. Although his initial veneer has worn off, Macron has grown into the job and has brought a much-needed energy and loftiness to the Élysée that was missing under his predecessor François Hollande.

The 2022 election season chatter begins just as Macron is in the midst of confronting France's biggest challenge in decades: the COVID-19 pandemic. France has seen almost one-hundred thousand deaths and almost five million cases as of 12 April. Macron attempted to find Une troisième voie, or "a third way," in confronting the pandemic. This involved implementing common-sense public health measures while not completely closing the French economy. Although this strategy saw some success in 2020, France has seen a sharp spike in cases this spring. Macron also faces the distinct challenge of convincing a vaccine-hesitant nation that the vaccine is the key to ending the pandemic. In order for Macron to convince French voters he deserves another term, the pandemic will undoubtedly be the top priority.

Since 2017, Macron has also veered right on domestic cultural issues. During his presidential campaign, Macron said bluntly, "there is not a French culture. There is a culture in France, and it is diverse." He also said, "I am for an open society. I am for a progressive world. I do not propose to reform France; I propose to transform it at its deepest level." Despite this inclusive rhetoric, which served as a stark contrast to his Le Pen's,, Macron has not transformed France at its deepest level, but has instead embraced its deepest levels.

There is no doubt that Macron has been a force for good on many issues from climate change and European collaboration. However, Macron has two distinct faces: a progressive, liberal thinker on the world

stage, and a classical French politician who oftentimes caters to French cultural insecurites and xenophobic viewpoints. Macron's own Interior Minister in mid-March showed sympathy for Le Pen voters wary of Muslims when he argued, "When 47 per cent of people are ready to vote for [Le Pen], you have two solutions. Either you call them all idiots — but if you insult people, it's rare they end up voting for you — or you try to understand what they're going through." Macron has simultainiously raised the temperature on issues of secularism by vowing to fight perceived Islamist separatism, with increasingly hostile rhetoric toward French Muslims. While American standards of the value of diversity in origin, religion, and other identities cannot be directly applied to rigidly secular countries like France, targeting French Muslims is an affront to the core values of the French Republic. While Macron may not truly believe these views, he certainly should not capitalize on them.

In order for Macron to beat Le Pen in 2022 and secure re-election, he will need to remind voters why they supported him to begin with — re-channeling the triumphant candidate in front of the Louvre in 2017. He needs to first use his managerial instincts to control COVID-19 in a safe, logical way. He also should be true to himself and not attempt to mimic right-wing talking points because French voters will see through it, potentially causing him to lose support without capturing right-wing voters. He should not overcorrect in appealing to a broader base of voters given the low likelihood Le Pen defeats him. Macron ran his presidential campaign in 2017 on a new brand of French politics and he needs to re-embrace that rallying cry through concrete actions. Macron may be the favorite to win, but in a world where Donald Trump can win the presidency and the U.K. could vote to leave the E.U., underestimating the power of the far-right has proven to be a tragic mistake. Macron must take this threat seriously by leaning into his progressive instincts and stay true to his core, authentic beliefs.

The Emergence of Portugal's Conservative Moment

Grace Manella

When thinking of political strife in Europe, people concentrate on events like Brexit or rolling out vaccines. Yet, Portugal has taken over the spotlight. Its recent presidential election has uncovered a growing conservative movement that reflects Portugal's colonial past. This movement also carries populist values that reflect the modern rise of populism in Western Europe. Formerly known for not having a far right party, Portugal's political culture is shifting, and likely permanently. Chega!, Portugal's new far-right party, is quickly gaining followers and is only expected to grow as the country becomes increasingly divided.

Portugal's political climate has always been rocky. A popular revolution overthrew King Manuel II in 1910, ushering in a short-lived period of parliamentary democracy. By 1932, António de Oliveira Salazar had risen to become Prime Minister, and soon after created the Portugueuse dictatorship Estado Novo, meaning "New State." He began to censor the media and formed a political police force, the PVDE. The PVDE was meant to control immigration and emigration, but they were better known for violent secret policing activities to reduce political opposition. The Portuguese lived under this oppressive rule until 1974, when the Carnation Revolution overthrew the dictatorship and formed a constitutional government that shared power between a president and prime minister.

Historically, two political groups have dominated Portugal: the social democratic one (Partido Socialist) and Partido Social Democrata, which is more liberal-conservative. Both lean more towards social democracy. Portugal's current President, Rebelo de Sousa, is center-right, but by no means an extremist. Despite his moderate platform, an opposing force emerged in 2019: Chega! This translates to "enough!"in Portuguese; their platform focuses on reducing welfare, decreasing government regulations, and limiting immigration. André Ventura, a 38 year-old former sports pundit, started this party and gained fame after being elected to Portugal's Parliament as the party's first representative. His run in the 2021 presidential election was unsuccessful, and he only won 12 percent of the vote. This may sound insignificant, but it's eight times more votes than the farthest right-wing party received last election. Since only 39 percent of eligible voters voted, it's difficult to confirm how many more or less people would've voted for Ventura. Either way, it appears to confirm an underrepresented far-right desire in Portugal.

In the news, Portugal isn't associated with the right-wing rise in Europe, but recent protests have reflected intense political division. According to the London School of Economics, this political division was made clear in the summer of 2020 as protesters demanded justice for black citizens, with signs that said "Racism is colonial heritage.". This connects back to Portugal's colonialism before and during Estado Novo, which is viewed as its golden age. Despite its physical size, Portugal's colonial empire lasted for nearly six centuries, incorporating faraway lands like Brazil and parts of the west and east coasts of Africa. Additionally, it imposed its rule on parts of India, Malaysia, the Maluku Islands, China, and Japan. The more the empire grew, the stronger Portuguese nationalism became. Phrases like "Portugal is not a small country!" would be chanted in the early 1900s and are still referenced by citizens today, according to the IPS Journal. The decline of its empire was not a simple process though, and it impacted all of Portugal's regions at different times. However, since this was only a mere 50 years ago, Portugal's culture hasn't recognized the racism and harm that went along with colonialism. This left the nation divided; some were highly aware of the damage, while others believed once the empires were gone so was any oppression.

These nationalist tendencies were repressed for years, until André Ventura's extremist campaign began. He called for the physical fencing of poorer regions with high coronavirus case counts, opposed memorials for Portuguese slaves, and proposed targeting Roma peoples in policing. Furthermore, he was vocal about drastically reducing welfare, despite the economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. He was quoted in the New York Times saying he "will not be the President of all Portuguese — only of the good or decent Portuguese." He later specified that the "decent Portuguese" excludes criminals and people who rely on welfare.

These tactics seem polarizing, but Ventura strategically incorporated past political scandals into his campaign. Specifically, there were 15 allegations of Portuguese companies bribing foreign officials in other countries after the 2008 recession. He implied the current democratic system was not equipped to handle the situation, and accused current politicians of greed and fraud. Ana Salcedas, a Portuguese Finance Manager for Ernst and Young, found that 83 percent of Portuguese citizens believed that corruption and bribery were widespread in the country. In 2019, Portugal ranked below the European Union average in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. Ventura was well aware of this and targeted his campaign towards people likely to distrust the government. This didn't apply to only the quieter, conservative groups. Official demographic data about who voted for Ventura has yet to be released, but he earned strong support in regions that have historically voted for left-leaning parties.

This growing sense of distrust in Portugal parallels the general rise of European populism. Germany's Alternative for Germany and Austria's Freedom Party won 13 percent and 26 percent of votes in their respective country's most recent elections. Denmark and Switzerland's populist parties were not far behind. Still, the most relevant statistics are about Spain due to its historical ties with Portugal. Spain's far-right Vox, founded in 2013, became the third-largest party represented in Parliament and received 15 percent of the vote in its most recent election. All of these parties, including Chega!, have common core values: to reduce immigration and government size. The principles of these parties directly link to Chega!'s, and their rapid growth is a sign that Portugal could well follow the same path.

Despite Portugal's absence of a far-right party for the most recent decades, it was never less conservative than other European countries. It had a conservative base that Chega! now addresses. Between Portugal's moderate President, complex history, and increasing political division, it looks like Chega! is here to stay.

Shifting Winds of Power

Julian Florez

If you squint through the fog in the streets of Copenhagen you may be able to perceive twenty colossal 102-meter tall wind turbines merrily spinning away. Dubbed the "Middelgrunden Offshore Wind Farm", the mesmerizing structures constructed in 2000 were part of the first commercial official offshore wind farm in the world. Just two decades later, offshore wind has skyrocketed in growth due to technological innovation, economies of scale, and widespread political motivation, positioning Denmark as a key leader in the field. Presented recently as the first "energy island" in the North Sea, Denmark recently outlined a roadmap to start the construction of another offshore wind project that would dwarf prior projects. Consequently, the announcement of Denmark's metaphorical energy island, an offshore wind farm with storage capabilities, paves the way for Danish political and sustainability initiatives while inviting financial investment and technological growth in the offshore wind sector.

In order to understand how this project will impact Denmark and its neighbors, it is worth noting why Denmark has set its eyes on deeper waters. Summarized quickly, wind turbines are best utilized whenever they are spinning, making money for the developers or investors by providing energy to whoever is willing to pay. Translated into reality, companies attempt to find consistent and strong wind locations within current technology constraints. Up until now, locations offshore with little turbulence and high wind speeds have remained tantalizingly out of reach.

With an eye-watering cost of $34 billion and an expected initial generation of 3 GW, enough to power 3 million homes (Denmark only has 2.7 million homes), the attached label of a megaproject is an understatement. With this in mind, the construction contracts naturally suit Vestas, a Danish company that is the world's largest wind turbine manufacturer. This project is expected to deliver hundreds of well-paying jobs to the local workforce, an alluring prospect for any government. Also on the mind of the Danish government, industry leaders, and various other energy startups is the emergence of renewable to X technology.

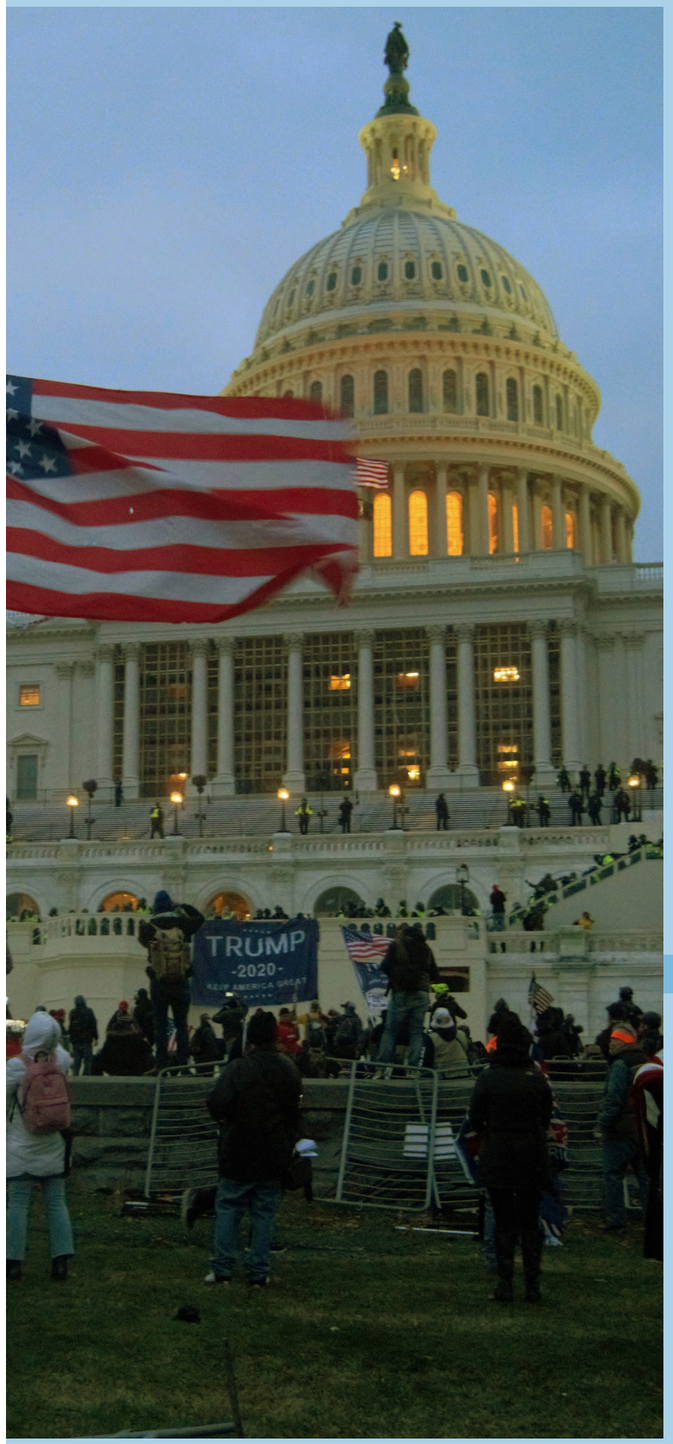
Fundamentally, renewable to X takes renewable energy, often wind or solar power, and converts that temporary energy into a more permanent source, such as hydrogen or green biofuels. This developing field holds tremendous potential to assist in decarbonizing historically entrenched polluting areas such as shipping, aviation, and heavy-duty trucking, which require stable and reliable sources of energy, attracting attention and funding from a host of financers. In Denmark, a recent pilot study supported by the government with around €17 million attempts to examine the feasibility of converting wind energy into hydrogen, to eventually transition the shipping industry into a sustainable future.

With the wind farm being strategically placed in high-wind resource areas and along the path of major shipping lanes, convenient refueling with eco-friendly fuels can cut logistical costs. This economic potential is coupled with the prospect of companies delivering on their sustainability promises, such as the Danish shipping container giant Maersk aiming to have net-zero emissions in ocean operations by 2050. All of these factors bolster the financial feasibility of the project while catering to current industries unable to be pollution-free. Succinctly put by Danish Minister of Climate Dan Jørgensen, "Denmark should assume a global leadership role and be a first mover in regards to storage and energy conversion technologies."

This groping for global leadership in an environment difficult to forecast even a year into the future may leave one wondering how the $34 billion was invested recently in technology that was still in its infancy two decades ago. In fact, one of the largest consumers and producers of energy, the United States, has virtually ignored this developing field in offshore wind largely due to political ineptitude. Denmark, however, tells a different story of financial and political willingness. Crowned as the largest public investment by the Danish government in its history, at a 51% stake of the $34 billion dollars put forward, the Climate Minister exhorts it as the "perfect compromise". Tied in with growing corporate responsibility for environmental sustainability and the announcement that Denmark would phase out all oil and gas extraction by 2050, the pivot to renewable resources is creating an energy revolution.

The jostling for energy supremacy paints a future of energy islands being utilized as both bridges and barriers. For a country like Denmark, with political deals to sell wind energy to countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium, the bridging of power infrastructure brings a welcome sign of cooperation off the back of COVID struggles. Coincidentally, due to the current inability to store large quantities of wind power for later consumption, this technological facet locks in country agreements and prevents countries such as Denmark from amassing huge quantities of energy deposits as many other competitive national relationships do with fossil fuels. With the European Union's announcement last November of plans for a 25-fold increase in offshore wind capacity, from a current level of 12 GW to 300 GW, the natural location of Denmark offers a goldmine of future development and political negotiation to Europe's energy system, one of the largest in the world with 400 million customers.

With tensions emerging from the impacts of climate change and no shortage of local disputes, will energy islands soon be utilized as geopolitical pieces in strategic conditions? It does not take long to envision the South China Sea, Arctic shipping routes, or other contested international waters being pursued with the vision of harnessing not only the energy in the wind but also control over vital supply chains. All of these factors point to a clear consensus that Denmark and humanity are at the dawn of a new energy era. The energy island initiative by Denmark reinforces not only their technological dominance in the offshore wind process, but also the financial viability of large scale wind projects. Ultimately, Denmark has developed itself politically as a leader in sustainability while foreshadowing a future of geopolitical cooperation and competition in energy.



Is Berlin the Next Washington?

Far-Right and Populist Sentiments in Germany

Justin Ballard

Just a day after the storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6th, the German government announced plans to strengthen security around its own legislative building, the Reichstag. While spurred on by the riots in the U.S., Germany's decision is rooted in recent events in its own backyard. From subduing far-right extremists that charged the Reichstag steps last August to escorting a group of rowdy anti-social distancing protesters out of the building that following November, German authorities fear that Berlin could become the next Washington.

Yet, in reacting to populist and far-right sentiments at home and across the Atlantic, Germany's determination to safeguard the Reichstag embodies a concern larger than the safety of the building itself. It confronts the German populace with a question of far greater proportions: if the world's longest-standing and most-admired democracy can be attacked, where does Germany's stand? While an alarming thought at first glance, considering this question from a trans-Atlantic and domestic perspective reveals the stability of German democracy.

To begin addressing this matter, the U.S.'s influence on German society must be noted. From molding West Germany's democracy out of the ashes of World War II to shaping pop culture in Germany today, the U.S.'s strong cultural presence in German affairs is undeniable. While normally harmless, former U.S. Ambassador to Germany John Kornblum alludes to this influence's sinister side in a statement regarding the Capitol riots, saying "Europeans, especially Germans, draw much of their [...] cultural energy from the United States." Given the U.S.'s cultural sway, many fear the Capitol insurrection itself will inspire far-right groups in Germany.

This idea that Germany tends to follow the U.S.'s lead is seemingly validated by the strong following QAnon enjoys in Germany. While this far-right conspiracy theory is a uniquely American concept, Germany now has the largest QAnon community outside of the English-speaking world. The situation is so bad that the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), Germany's domestic intelligence agency, is investigating the phenomenon as a national security risk.

The apparent threat posed by this American import lies with its diverse yet united following. On the one hand, it has been adopted and manipulated by various groups in Germany, from nonchalant anti-maskers to hardcore far-right extremists, to fit their own worldview. On the other hand, this apparent dichotomy is stabilized by the QAnon community's common enemy: the establishment. While not every adherent supports violence against the state, the BfV is concerned about moderate members being radicalized by QAnon's far-right and extremist sects. Thus, the conspiracy theory that motivated many to take part in the U.S. Capitol insurrection is now a recognized threat in Germany as well.

Yet, a closer analysis reveals that the right-wing extremist threat QAnon poses to German democracy is minimal. Rather than be the start of some major uprising against the German state inspired by "cultural energy from the United States," its German following must be put in context. As experts on far-right extremism note, many German QAnon adherents today are people that had little to do with the far-right pre-COVID. In other words, QAnon merely serves as an outlet for pandemic-related frustrations. As in other countries, German citizens have grown weary of social-distancing measures – a feeling that, while having inspired some to turn to American conspiracy theories for comfort, will not last forever as vaccines continue to be rolled out.

More importantly, this anti-government sentiment itself was weak in Germany in the wake of the Capitol riots. According to a report released by the Pew Research Center in February, 77 percent of Germans said that they approved of the government's pandemic measures, as compared to only 41 percent of Americans, and other polls suggest that only 9 percent of Germans support protests against government-imposed pandemic restrictions. The overwhelming trust Chancellor Angela Merkel's administration enjoyed while enacting inherently unpopular policies like lockdowns, especially in comparison to her American counterpart, signaled the limited influence far-right and anti-government activity in the U.S. had on Germany.

That being said, one could still argue that the inflammatory political rhetoric that inspired the Capitol insurrection is mirrored in the discourse of the Alternative for Germany (AfD). Currently the largest opposition party in the Bundestag, the AfD is notorious for its far-right and anti-establishment statements. From belittling the German state's culture of Holocaust remembrance and railing against Muslim immigrants to being labeled the "intellectual arsonists" of recent far-right domestic terrorist attacks, AfD leaders have instigated powerful reactions in segments of the German populace. As a result, drawing a comparison between their actions and President Trump's role in arousing the Washington riots appears warranted at first glance.

However, alarm over the possibility of AfD rhetoric instigating an attack on the Reichstag must be checked for a number of reasons. For one, the AfD has much less influence in Germany than President Trump did in the U.S. While Trump's former office granted his attacks on the U.S.'s electoral system – and thus democracy – publicity and even credibility, the AfD's platform receives no such assistance. Instead, Germany's mainstream parties have ostracized the AfD since its inception and recent polls show that only around 11 percent of Germans would vote for the AfD in a federal election. These figures not only demonstrate the AfD's limited voice in German politics, but also highlight the relatively small proportion of Germans that even care to listen.

Moreover, the potency of the AfD's inflammatory rhetoric is hampered by Germany's strong surveillance and censorship abilities. According to German media outlets, the BfV is prepared to place the AfD under nationwide surveillance for violating Germany's constitution. Because Germany is a "defensive democracy," or a country that actively safeguards its democracy, one of the BfV's core duties is to investigate parties that it believes undermine Germany's democratic order. In concrete terms, this means that the BfV has the ability to wiretap the AfD's communications because of the party's threatening far-right ideology, moving it one step closer to being banned if enough evidence of the AfD's unconstitutionality were to be discovered.

With these legal measures in mind and recalling the lack of pervasive anti-government sentiments among the German population, one begins to finally grasp the stability of German democracy. In having the constitutionally-sanctioned means to combat far-right movements domestically and in having demonstrated its resiliency to the radicalizing influence of far-right conspiracy theories and movements from the U.S., Germany can rest assured that Berlin will not become the next Washington.

Il, Elle, Iel, Ille: The Status of Inclusive Language in Europe

Derek Shan

As humans, one of the most foundational ways that we establish our identity is in the language we use to describe ourselves and our feelings: we use adjectives to describe when we are upset, nouns to explain what matters most to us, and pronouns to associate ourselves with gender identity. In English, a neutral-gendered language, pronouns such as "she/her" and "he/him" are commonplace to describe ourselves, but "they/them" pronouns have become more common lately. These pronouns are used to refer to the large population who identifies as non-binary, genderfluid, and more.

However, many European languages such as French, German, and Russian are gendered: both people and objects are described as either masculine or feminine. For example, in French, one refers to a tree by saying "Il est…" or a table as "Elle est…" as the two nouns are masculine and feminine, respectively. These languages' gendered grammatical rules have been upheld and enforced for centuries and are presented as organizationally integral to their communication systems. Moreover, they typically utilize male word forms formally, exemplified by sayings such as "All men are created equal" instead of "all people." As more people are coming forward with their identities that do not fit into the traditional "he or she" and "elle ou il" mold, it is important that their languages allow for them to express their respective identities. But what does this non-binary community do if their language doesn't technically allow for a non-traditional gender to be used in its pronouns? And what is the impact on non-male citizens when the majority of these gendered languages prioritize male forms of words?

This is the problem that LGBTQ+ and feminist activists across Europe are trying to address. Due to the gendered nature of many European languages, as well as the resistance from countries' linguists and the general public against progressive concepts, the use of gender-neutral and inclusive language on the continent is rare. Activists (and sometimes local governments) in these European countries have begun advocating for more inclusive language in their nations and pushing back against the exemption of pronouns that account for their large populations of non-binary and genderfluid citizens. Like these activists argue, it is integral that the governments of European countries with gendered languages continue to address and reform the inequalities within their languages.

In France, progressive activists who favor more gender-neutral pronouns have been fusing gendered pronouns for those who do not identify with either. For example, the combination of male and female pronouns "il" and "elle" are combined to make the non-binary "ille" and "iel." French feminist groups have also been popularizing the use of asterisks or parentheses to further include female and non-binary representation. In traditional French, the linguistic word for a plural group of male and female people always takes the masculine form, basically erasing the presence of any women within the group. To mend this erasure and neutralize plural conjugation, French activists have been adding parentheses with "e," the feminine addition to a word, to group conjugations ("les candidats" would become "les candidat(e)s").

These progressive alternatives are not yet widely used, but they continue to spread across the Francophone world-- much to the chagrin of French linguists. The Académie Française, the world's highest authority on the French language, has been a particularly outspoken opponent of these changes, consistently denying these new linguistic practices' legitimacy and arguing that they contribute to the deterioration of the language. Additionally, the French government has denied all proposed inclusive language changes, such as in 2017 when it struck down calls to rewrite governing documents' masculine language. This led to outrage from feminist groups, who highlighted that masculine language in the workplace perpetuates sexist environments.

The Russian language's gender system has masculine, feminine, and neutral grammatical genders, but the neutral only applies to inanimate objects. To gain representation, Russian non-binary and genderqueer citizens have to fight both the complexity of their language and the rigidity of their culture. In comparison to Western European countries like France, LGBTQ+ citizens are less accepted in Russia; in 2013, the government initiated the "gay propaganda law" that prohibits youth from learning about LGBT+ issues, experiences, and identities and receiving gender and sexual identity-related healthcare. To manage this strict culture, non-binary and genderqueer Russians tend to dress androgynously, use the masculine "on" and feminine "ona" pronouns interchangeably, or use the neutral, traditionally inanimate gender "ono," though they receive constant pushback from society for this.

Conversely, some states, such as Germany, have been slowly normalizing the use of the neutral gender for people. Over the last decade, German government institutions have converted to using gender-neutral language in their paperwork, a move mandated by the federal justice ministry. Also, individual cities such as Hanover have recently required all official town communications to use gender-neutral nouns. Outside of government actions, independent German activists have also started using asterisks in place of gender-signifying letter conjugations in verbs, on par with French LGBTQ+ advocates. These decisions by the German government and its receptivity to gender-related progress thus far in the 21st century represent a great starting point towards inclusivity; one that other European governments should model.

While the innovative tweaks to pronouns and gendered language that these Europeans have created are a great start to an inclusive future, these citizens should not be left by their governments to make these changes alone. It is essential that European governments, such as those of France, Russia, and many more, further account for their large populations of queer and female citizens by making their languages less rigid and more neutral. Legally defining pronouns similar to the English "they," creating feminine and neutral forms of words that have always been masculine, and neutralizing the language used in official governing documents would contribute to the validation of these peoples' identities and the start of more inclusive cultures.

Growing Islamophobia Exposes Value Contradictions in France

Maeve Skelly

What began in 1905 as a legal measure to keep religion out of state affairs has been transformed by French administrations—most recently Emmanuel Macron's—into a restriction of Muslim religious expression in France. Laïcité loosely translates to "secularism" in English, and is a constitutional principle establishing the French state's religious neutrality, legally defining a clear separation between the state and the church. This concept is deeply rooted within French culture. While laïcité proclaims state religious neutrality, its interpretation has been weaponized in recent years to discriminate against Muslims under the guise of secularism. The controversy regarding laïcité is long-standing, but after terrorist attacks last fall, Macron's administration has revitalized the debate, illuminating a deep contradiction between France's proclaimed values and actual policies. Macron's increasingly right-wing government is forging a growing anti-Muslim populism through its continued weaponization of the principle of laïcité.

In February 2021, the French National Assembly passed a bill titled "Respect for the Principles and Values of the Republic" for the official purpose of reinforcing "Republican principles." In reality, the bill directly targets Muslim religious practices that the French state suspects foster "Islamic radicalization." While it does not mention laïcité itself, the bill reinforces principles based on the concept of secularism. It bans "virginity certificates," traditionally provided by some doctors for certain religious marriages. It also requires associations that receive public funds to sign a contract committing to the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity – the French national motto.

Early this year, Marine Le Pen, the head of France's far-right party, National Rally (RN), proposed a ban on Muslim headscarves in all public places. At a press conference, Le Pen stated that she considers the headscarf an Islamist item of clothing. Her proposed law is intended to ban "Islamist ideologies" which she called "totalitarian and murderous." The French Senate most recently voted to approve a version of her proposal within the "Respect for the Principles and Values of the Republic" bill: an amendment banning Muslims under the age of 18 from wearing hijabs in public. A second amendment was passed as well, banning parents from participating in school trips and activities with their children if they are dressed in religious clothing. These amendments highlight the far-right shift of Macron's government.

France's fixation on a rigid form of secularism has led it to target specific Muslim religious practices in an effort to uproot anything deemed to be "undermining French national values." Right-wing MP Guillaume Peltier has announced his newest proposal for a bill to recognize France explicitly as a secular republic with a Judeo-Christian tradition. According to political analysts, "Judeo-Christian" is often used by European far-right and populist-right groups to imply that Islam is a threat to European values. MP Peltier's use of this term led to his explicit endorsement for laïcité to become the fourth value of the French republican motto – adding it to "liberty, equality, and fraternity." However, the clear mention of France's Judeo-Christian roots directly contradicts the principle of laïcité. Why is it acceptable to state these religious roots in the French constitution while proclaiming secularism?

Macron's once centrist government has also sharpened its rhetoric against "Islamo-leftism" – a concept first introduced by the French far-right. This coinage groups Islamic extremists with leftist intellectuals, attributing the rise of Islamic extremism to leftist and progressive ideas. Macron even claims that postcolonial and anticolonial discourses have infiltrated from the United States, and are responsible for the feelings of alienation within Arabic and African French communities. Ironically, what is more realistically alienating minorities in France is the latent racism throughout the supposedly "universalist" French society that infringes on their freedom of religion. The term and increased usage of "Islamo-leftism" aims at delegitimizing important thinking on race and the history of the French colonialist empire – in effect, silencing important intellectual research and infringing upon academic freedom. The French desperately want to avoid addressing the rampant racism in their country or the oppression that minority groups still face, deeming multiculturalism a threat to the national identity.

Macron's government is even launching an official investigation into academic research that "corrupts society."As a self-proclaimed centrist, Macron has swung between the left and right in accordance with his political strategy. With a tough re-election campaign coming up next year, he has increasingly shifted rightward in both policies and rhetoric. The "corrupt ideas" under investigation are primarily academic thought on critical race theory and colonialism that criticize France's delusions of a rigidly secular and institutionally race-blind society. Macron says the "republican principles" such as free speech and free thought are under threat because of the terrorist attacks last fall. The new bill was passed to uphold these same threatened republican principles. This justification is in direct contradiction with the fixation on "Islamo-leftism" that itself threatens academic freedom and thought.

The backlash within France regarding both the hijab ban and "Islamo-leftism" investigation has been harsh. After the bill was passed, the social media feeds of many French citizens and Muslims across the globe have been full of responses to the hijab ban. One French Muslim influencer said in an interview "If they're Muslim, under the age of 18 and want to observe the hijab, they'll be outlaws. They'll be committing a felony. This is going to shake their self-confidence and self-esteem." Further, the presidents of many French universities have declared that Islamo-leftism is a pseudo-notion popularized without any scientific backing and over 600 university professors called on the French higher education minister to resign after he announced a probe into "Islamo-leftism."

Macron, whose liberal candidacy saw success against the far-right candidate Marine Le Pen, now finds himself now integrating Le Pen's policies into his own legislation, catering to the same far-right demographic, and alienating France's Muslim population. France's Islamophobic attempts to uphold "Republican values" are actually jeopardizing these principles.

Belarus' Triumvirate and the "Women in White" Demand to be Heard

Rachael Merritt

The chants of "We're just walking" and "Your mother is here, aren't you ashamed" resounded through the streets of Minsk during the mass protests that ensued after Belarus' rigged presidential election on August 9th ushered in Alexander Lukashenko's, 6th term in office. The public reaction to the usurped victory of Svetlana Tikhanouskaya, the primary opposition candidate against Lukashenko, and to the violent police repression that followed was tremendous. In the following months, the upset election became the largest political scandal and social upheaval that Belarus has seen since it declared independence from the Soviet Union.

In many ways, the success, longevity, and true novelty of this political resistance can be attributed to the active political opposition of three women, known as the "Triumvirate," and to the "Women in White," a social movement that succeeded in bringing thousands of women to the streets in coordinated peaceful protests for months. These female-led protests allude to the changing gender dynamics in Belarus and have given rise to much debate around Belarusian "feminism" and the motivating agenda for recent solidarity; subjects this article will attempt to unravel. It has also demonstrated the unique effectiveness and future potential for female participation in political protests. Political advisor to Tikhanouskaya, Franak Viacorka, echoes this sentiment, writing that "Tikhanouskaya – and the many women alongside her – have set powerful examples in recent weeks and have already changed Belarus for the better."

This story began, inasmuch as a political insurrection of this scale can have a beginning, when the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) of Belarus barred Siarhei Tsikhanousky, a popular blogger and opposition candidate, from running in the presidential election based on bogus claims of "disturbing the peace" at an election picket. In turn, his wife, Svitlana Tsikhanouskaya, announced her candidacy. After more male opposition candidates, Viktor Barbaryko and Valery Tsapkalo, were cut out of the race, female political activists Veronika Tsepkalo, wife of Valery, and Maria Kolesnikova, Viktor's former campaign manager, joined forces with Tsikhanouskaya. The 'Triumvirate' was born.

Lukashenko mocked the efforts of the three women, saying in an interview before the election that Tsikhanouskaya "cooked a tasty cutlet, maybe fed the children." He wasn't laughing for long. Successfully rallying and holding demonstrations around the country earned Tsikhanouskaya unprecedented popular support, and won her, as some believe, the majority vote in the presidential election. Whether she and her female supporters were propelled forward by an obligation to stand in place the men, as a response to the boorish and provocative insults of Lukashenko, or from their own agency to foster democracy and safety in Belarus remains a matter of private opinion. What is clear is that these events gave rise to the courageous leadership of Tsikhanouskaya and "Women in White" marches. In political scientist Antonio Prokscha's recent article "We are not 'Poor Things' (бедные)," he posits that the "entrance of female leaders broadly empowered women through Belarus" and that many women took to the streets for the Sunday women's marches for the first time in their lives.

Examining female participation in the recent events in Belarus, much conversation has been centered around "feminist issues" and the "female" agenda of the protesters. From the standpoint of Western conceptions of feminism, female modes of resistance in Belarus have been harshly critiqued. One such complaint, levied by Irina Solomatina, Chairperson of the Council of the Belarusian Organization of Working Women, is that the women's protests are "promoted with an emphasis on their beauty," implying, that "women and girls in Belarus are still not being perceived as full-fledged citizens and subjects of political life." The images of women dressed in white, a metaphor or virginity and innocence, and holding flowers has enraged some Western feminists, to say the least.

However, thinking that this movement began as an issue of women's rights is a mistake that turns a blind eye to the historic

> "In any time of war, women take the reigns of power. They have learned that their weakness is also their strength."

intent and impact of female participation in protests in areas of the former Soviet Union. An apt comparison to the utility of female protesters in Belarus are the 2014 Maidan female protesters in Ukraine. According to University of Manchester professors, Dr. Onuch and Dr. Martsenyuk, women in Ukraine actually used the stereotypes of "women as 'mothers', 'weak' and 'beautiful objects,'" to their advantage, successfully promoting forms of nonviolent protest and preventing conflict escalations. Coming from a similar religious and traditional makeup, Prokscha's research concludes that Belarusian women may have chosen to participate en masse to "make protests safer, and change the narrative of violence that Lukashenko crafted around them." Recent interview-based studies show that male protesters feel like they have a "buffer" or "shield" with women around them, as beating women publicly would risk embarrassing the law enforcement apparatus and be seen as shameful for Belarusian men.

At the same time, we shouldn't completely understand the 'Triumvirate' and women's marches on the basis of gender relationships or patriarchal assumptions. Instead, as Cambridge professor Lisa Baldez suggests, we should recognize that "mobilizing as women frames their actions in a way that facilitates coordination among themselves."

Unfortunately, this traditionalist appeal for protection and respect is not always minded. The 2021 Human Rights Watch report details that "by mid-November, police had detained more than 25,000 people," many of whom were women who suffered abuses, torture, and cruel detainment. "Ocean Bed," a 2020 documentary-style film directed by Sasha Kulak, a young Belarusian woman, displays jarring scenes of violence against women. She writes, "these are scenes that make your heart bleed." Common are clips of women being dragged across the street by their hair, hit with batons, and shoved into unmarked vans. Kulak adds however, that "As in any time of war, women take the reigns of power. They have learned that their weakness is also their strength." Reaffirming this sentiment, "Ocean Bed" repeatedly captures images of women locked arm in arm, staring down a line of armed guards, waving the outlawed white-red-white flag of Belarusian liberation.

The Morava-Vardar Canal: New Connections, Old Problems

Samuel Rosenblum

For millennia, the Bosphorus Strait has been one of the most important chokepoints in global trade. A thin waterway through northern Turkey that connects the Mediterranean and Black Seas (and subsequently the Danube River), the strait creates a chokepoint that goods flowing from the interior of Europe must pass through in order to continue on to the rest of the world. However, if some engineers, planners, and entrepreneurs have their way, this will no longer be the case. The proposed Morava-Vardar Canal, which would connect the Danube in Serbia through North Macedonia to the port of Thessaloniki, could significantly cut the time it takes for goods from countries like Germany and Austria to make it to the Mediterranean and Suez Canal on their way to Asia. It would also transform the economies of Serbia and North Macedonia into potential trade hubs, with Belgrade and Skopje near the core of this canal project. However, despite all the talk of potential benefits and growth that are supposed to come from this construction and some potential winners, the social, political, and environmental costs of doing so are too great to justify such an exorbitant project. Despite what some may say, the canal is far from a "done deal."

Before diving into the reasons why the Morava-Vardar Canal is untenable, one should ask what the history of this project is and why its proponents support it. The idea to build a canal connecting the Aegean Sea to the Danube has been thrown around for centuries, but the technical difficulties involved with the project have kept it from being seriously considered. The project requires significant dredging and river expansion on the Morava and Vardar rivers, as well as an all-new canal across hilly terrain spanning the Serbia-North Macedonia border. With rumored interest from a number of Chinese state-backed banks, however, the necessary resources could be available for the first time. As a part of the Belt and Road Initiative's goal of building infrastructure which connects China to the world, Chinese capital has been put towards numerous projects in southern Europe, including port improvements in Piraeus, Greece, right on the Aegean Sea. With this in mind, it's easy to see how Chinese companies can benefit from a connected network of projects in the Mediterranean region built with their funding, such as the Morava-Vardar Canal, which could create a secure link to ship goods from the mouth of the Suez Canal all the way into the heart of Europe. For countries in the path of this new trade route, there are also potential economic benefits through transit fees which they could charge. However, if capital backed by the Chinese government is used for construction, it would be hard to imagine Beijing having to pay any significant fees for access. When former North Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov said in 2019 "That channel will forever change our region and improve the lives of our citizens," it seemed like the canal was a done deal. Taking his word, it would be more likely than ever now that this project is built, and with the potential for profit on both sides of the deal, there is clearly some motivation to break out the shovels.

With everything mentioned above, what makes this project ultimately untenable? With price estimates for the project ranging from $8-17 billion and an expected construction time of twelve years, it certainly may seem like the project is not all that expensive compared to other megaprojects, and the timeframe is not unrealistically long either. However, research by Kiril Arsovski Przo from the Skopje-based Institute of Communication Studies and professor of biology, in addition to research from the University of Belgrade, highlights many of the potential faults that come with megaprojects like the Morava-Vardar Canal. Environmental costs in particular are generally unseen or difficult to model, adding an element of risk to the project. On both the Serbian and North Macedonian side, there is the risk of losing valuable farmland that is key to both countries' food production, while the potential for drought is exacerbated due to reduced water flow. In North Macedonia, it's estimated that 99 percent of the land in the vicinity of the canal would be negatively impacted, a big blow to a relatively small nation. Farming could also be damaged by wastewater coming from ships that can then flow into irrigation systems, which could damage crops and land, spread communicable diseases like cholera to the population, or both. There is also the risk of displacing farmers in the narrow Presovo Valley that straddles the Serbian-North Macedonian border, where much of the construction would take place and which is very close to the borders of North Macedonia and Kosovo, which could present serious complications.

Notwithstanding the environmental problems, it's questionable whether the canal would ultimately be feasible economically. Firstly, the differences in elevation across the Presevo Valley necessitate the construction of a complex series of boat lifts and dams to make the movement of ships possible, which could become costly time-wise and money-wise to construct. Additionally, large differences in water flow across the Danube River and Vardar River mean that the latter "is considered unfavorable for organizing water transport," according to Przo. The canal's planned depth of four meters would prevent most container ships from crossing the canal and thus hurt its viability as a trade passage. Additionally, while the Bosphorus Strait is required to stay open to all nations' non-naval vessels according to the Montreux Convention of 1936, no such deal would exist for this new canal, meaning that passage could easily be restricted by those along its route (Serbia, North Macedonia, or Greece) or China, since they are the primary funders. It is for this reason, as well as the direct trade link the canal would provide, that Beijing seemed interested in backing the project, even though it would ultimately not even be useful and would make decision-makers elsewhere in Europe nervous about China's influence in Europe.

Taking all the factors above into consideration, it is clear that constructing the Morava-Vardar Canal, while seemingly productive, is in reality a fruitless endeavor. If the project were to be built, the environmental and economic risks would be high for countries in its path. While the project would help fulfill China's foreign policy ambitions, it would not actually benefit trade in a significant way and could put the countries of Serbia and North Macedonia in a worse place. All in all, the Morava-Vardar Canal has remained nothing more than a pipe dream for centuries for good reason.

MIDDLE EAST.

The Arab Spring
Ten Years On

January 2021 marks the 10-year anniversary of the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian vendor whose death sparked mass protests within and beyond Tunisia. The protests erupting throughout 2011, widely dubbed as the Arab Spring, took aim at elite crony capitalist politics entrenched throughout the Middle East. As we near the melancholic 10th anniversary of the Arab Spring, the writers of the Middle East section reflect on the profound legacies of the movement in various nation-state contexts. Did the protests yield greater political accountability and economic justice? Or are memories of the protests fading from view, gradually falling under state-imposed amnesia?

Syria

Abu Antar

The 10-year anniversary of the Arab Spring in Syria, March 15, 2021, is a deeply melancholic date. For Syrians of all shades, the protests that began on March 15th opened a Pandora's Box that resulted in years of escalating violence, complicated power dynamics, and a refugee crisis on a global scale. In 2011, economically and politically locked-out youth organized peaceful civil disobedience and protests against the Ba'ath regime's lack of political transparency, overwrought secret police security apparatus, and neoliberal economic policies. Soon after the Ba'ath regime's brutal crackdown and its intentional release of political prisoners to sectarianize the war, foreign powers ranging from the United States, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Lebanon's Hezbollah, Israel, and China all quickly became involved in different capacities and to different ends. Needless to say, increased foreign involvement on all fronts only further escalated the war and drove away more and more refugees, who remain scattered throughout the globe.

Today, ten years later, Syria is nowhere near the dreams of liberation that blossomed into grassroots protests in 2011. The only non-regime controlled areas in Syria, Idlib in the northwest and the Rojava region in the northeast, are in constant flux. Idlib, under the influence of the Turkish government, serves as a de-facto outpost for Turkey in its anti-Kurdish operations against Rojava. Meanwhile, Syrians within and beyond the country's borders undergo deep economic and political hardship only further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Refugees have particularly been struck hard almost everywhere they are in the world, facing ongoing xenophobia and debilitating currency depreciations and failing social services. Needless to say, the current state of affairs for most Syrians in the world could hardly live up to the dreams in 2011. Still, we as Syrians can only continue to dream of better futures in light of our past: dreams we can hope to see in our own lifetimes, one day.

Yemen

Will Kielm

After the 1990 reunification that put President Ali Abdullah Saleh and Vice President Ali Salem al Beidh in power, sectarian tensions remained a harsh reality in Yemeni politics that would manifest themselves in a series of revolutions and civil wars. Vice President al Beidh, upon trying to reclaim southern independence in the 1994 Civil War, was replaced by Vice President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. The Al-Qaeda insurgency arose in 1997 and Zaidiyyah Shia in North Yemen began an insurrection against the Sunni majority in Yemen over concerns of marginalization. Those insurgents declared themselves as Houthi rebels. By 2001 in Aden, the Southern Movement demanded independence from the Republic of Yemen, which was a protest against economic hardships, corruption, and a proposal to revise the constitution that would allow Saleh's son to inherit power. Saleh was replaced by Vice President Hadi, who failed to reconcile the sectarian tensions.

This resulted in a civil war that remains ongoing to this day. The Houthis, backed by Iran, allied themselves with former President Saleh and began the war, which led Hadi to flee to Saudi Arabia. An international coalition assembled by the latter formed in order to restore Hadi to power and began a lethal bombardment campaign on Houthi territory. As al-Qaeda (AQAP) acquired territory in the east, Hadi failed to amass support from locals in Aden, leading to the creation of the U.A.E.-backed Southern Transitional Council led by Aidarus al-Zoubaidi. In Sanaa, Saleh attempted to broker a peace treaty with Saudi Arabia only to be killed by the Houthis a few days later. Currently, the situation in Yemen has largely devolved into a humanitarian crisis with the Yemeni people being caught in the crossfire and suffering the consequences of war. The legacies of sectarian tensions and violence remain to this day in the form of a civil war with no end in sight.

Libya

Heba Malik

Spurred by peaceful revolts in Tunisia and Egypt, the Libyan people took to the streets in February 2011 to protest the authoritarian rule of Muammar Gaddafi, a man in power for 42 years. But what began as by-the-book peaceful protests quickly descended into armed conflict as pro-Gaddafi security forces transitioned from using water cannons to disperse crowds to deploying warplanes to bomb them. Reports estimate that by the second week, the civilian death toll topped 300. The United Nations passed a resolution designating Libyan airspace a no-fly zone and called for civilian protection by any means necessary. In response, NATO began an airstrike campaign to protect civilians, but after the operation, was found to have killed 60 civilians and wounded 55. Nonetheless, the fighting stopped, and eight months after the uprising, an internationally recognized National Transition Council announced Libya's "liberation." Unfortunately, the NTC promised a lot and delivered on little, marking the beginning of a protracted period of political instability, extreme violence, and economic stagnation.

But on March 10, 2021, a decade after the beginning of the revolution, Libya underwent an unprecedented breakthrough after years of political stalemate: the parliament ratified the Government of National Unity (GNU). This coalition government is the direct product of United Nations-led political negotiations under the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF). The seventy-five member LPDF is a purposefully diverse pool of Libyans selected by the UN and tasked with producing a roadmap to end the Libyan conflict. In November 2020, after extensive debate, the committee formally adopted the proposal in Tunis.

Foreign countries have welcomed the formation of Libya's first unified government, but a jaded Libyan citizenry finds itself caught between hope for elusive political stability and a cynicism fostered by the failure of similar processes in the past. Unresolved issues that could derail the process prevail and threaten unification. The nascent government will likely struggle for international recognition and legitimacy in some Libyan regions. If all goes south, the country could fall into partition, or worse, face a disastrous military solution. That being said, a Libyan-led, transparent government has formally taken shape with international support. Elections remain set for December. Foreign mercenaries are on their way out. Of course, one should not view the LPDF and Libya's future through perennial rose-colored glasses, but the shades can stay on for now.

Egypt

Mia Whitfield

Just over 10 years ago, in January 2011, mass protests and labor strikes erupted across Egypt, inspired by similar protests inTunisia Egyptian protesters took to the streets to show their disapproval of the authoritarian rule of then-President Hosni Mubarak and demand constitutional rights, political freedom, free speech, and to ultimately end government abuse of power, corruption and police brutality. Protesters wanted the opportunity to elect a new leader in a legitimate and free election and overcome economic and demographic hardships imposed by instability during Mubarak's nearly thirty-year hold over Egypt. Mass demonstrations raged on for over two weeks before Mubarak's resignation was finally announced on February 11 and leadership of the country was handed over to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces of Egypt. Finally, in May of 2012, a presidential election was held and the first round of voting occurred. In June, Mubarak was held responsible for civilian deaths in the early days of the revolution and sentenced to life in prison. Later that same month, Mohamed Morsi was declared the winner of the election and became Egypt's first democratically elected president.

The aftermath of the revolution was deemed to be a success, but the events that have unfolded in the years following the uprising tell a different story. Egypt's political crisis imploded once again in 2013 when Morsi was forcefully removed from the presidency in a coup d'état. Soon after, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi won a new presidential election imposed by the military. Since then, Egypt seems to have reverted to old ways, ignoring the human rights of some groups. Prisoners especially face inhumane conditions, tortured confessions, and grossly unfair trials under a repressive government. The Egyptian government has also committed mass executions of prisoners, with dozens carried out in a short period of time as recent as October 2020. The situation has escalated so much that many have called for the UN Human Rights Council to investigate Egypt and monitor the human rights situation. The central concerns for which Egyptians protested during the Arab Spring in 2011 have been largely overlooked and ignored as the country has sunk into a new era with a similar repressive state apparatus and a deteriorating human rights situation.

Sudan

Quentin Powers

Perhaps in no other country has the Arab Spring bloomed later than in Sudan. 2011 saw entrenched rulers in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt fall to the will of the people; however, the Sudanese dictatorship of Omar al-Bashir, which at that point had already been in charge for 22 years since its post-coup installation in 1989, faced no such resistance. Protests in the country during this initial protests period were relatively small, and crowds numbered in the hundreds, rather than the thousands. This was in part due to the timing of the movement — most of 2011 in Sudan was focused on the impending independence of South Sudan. Indeed, on January 30, 2011, during the heart of protests in Egypt, preliminary referendum results on South Sudanese independence were released, with 99 percent of the South voting in favor.

However, the years following the Arab Spring have proven to be much kinder to Sudanese democracy. As many of the countries who participated in the initial Arab Spring backslid into autocracy, Sudan took a more circuitous route to democracy. This resulted in the toppling of Omar al-Bashir's government in 2019 after popular unrest, and the beginning of a three year transitional period which will take Sudan back to civilian democracy. While this transition period is ongoing and has been marked by protests in its own right, Sudan appears to be on a challenging track towards democracy. The transitional council currently in power has made substantive efforts to ensure the voice of the people is heard and to mediate between the various groups whose interests constitute the country's byzantine politics. And so, while the country faces a long road marked with massive economic and social challenges, one can cautiously say that Sudan is on its way to proving itself to be a late Arab Spring success story.

Turkey

Ruchita Coomar

At the onset of the Arab Spring, Turkey assumed the role of regional arbitrator and a potential model for "secular democracy" within the Middle East region. Turkey's expansive and robust economy and "zero problems with neighbors" policy placed the region at the forefront of diplomatic issues. Erdogan's eagerness to usher in regional development in the form of free-trade agreements with countries such as Syria and Lebanon held promise. Similarly, Turkey displayed a keen ability to engage with a diverse range of actors embroiled in regional disputes. Within Lebanon, Turkey initiated conversations with Hezbollah, Christian, and Sunni leaderships. Such consensus-building was carried over into Iraq, where Erdogan maintained relations with Sunni, Shi'a, Kurdish and Turkmen parties.

However, Turkey's success in the region has gradually waned. Turkey's robust economy has faced staggering inflation rates and widening deficits, while its secular democracy has increasingly inched toward sectarian authoritarianism. The nation's "zero problems with neighbors" approach to foreign policy has now been popularized as "zero neighbors without problems." Free trade agreements established during the Arab Springs have fallen through the cracks, while Turkish-Syrian relations have further deteriorated into undeclared war. Post-Arab Spring, it is evident that Turkey's role as regional mediator resulted not from skilled diplomacy tactics, but instead, superficial relationships with transient leaders and a MENA region devoid of leadership. Similarly, the revolutionary reformist demands igniting from the Arab Springs lie at odds with Erdogan's current regime. Increasing repression against government protestors and the persecution of ethnic minorities has brought to question the legitimacy of Turkish democracy. Ultimately, Turkey, once heralding progressive developments at the onslaught of the Arab Springs, now finds itself confronting the same issues that ignited regional conflict ten years prior.

A Shift in Power: The 1979 Siege of al-Masjid al-Haram

Ethan Concannon

On November 20th, 1979 al-Masjid al-Haram, the holiest mosque in Islam, was seized by a group of insurgents just after the adhan was called for the morning prayer. The insurgents, led by Saudi-born Juhayman al-Otaybi, claimed that they were fulfilling the ahadith of the Prophet Muhammad and that they had come with Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Qahtani as the Mahdi, a figure in Islamic theology who will rally the Muslims against the evils of the world prior to the coming of Jesus. In this case, the primary evil was defined as the Saudi government. Al-Otaybi and his followers came armed with weapons smuggled in through caskets they brought into the mosque. After the adhan, they forced pilgrims to pledge their allegiance to al-Otaybi and to accept him as the Mahdi.

The Saudi government faced the immense challenge of handling the situation. The masjid is typically viewed as a sanctuary where one cannot even be arrested for crimes they are guilty of. The Saudi government clearly could not directly use military force against the insurgents, but al-Otaybi was not the Mahdi and he would need to be removed. The government was forced to remove the insurgents, but they knew they needed permission from the ‘ulema. The ‘ulema saw this as an opportunity to tip the delicate balance of power between the clergy and the royal family. This power-sharing agreement was agreed upon by Mohammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Ibn Saud in 1774. Ibn Saud was a political leader in the Arabian Peninsula who provided refuge to Abd al-Wahhab, who was expelled from territories in the Peninsula for his radical views. This protection was in exchange for Abd al-Wahhab’s recognition of Ibn Saud as the legitimate political leader of the territories under his control. This took place as Ibn Saudi was conquering regions across the Arabian Peninsula and Abd al-Wahhab was being expelled from neighboring regions for his strict interpretation of the meaning of idolatry. The ‘ulema gave the government permission, through the publishing of a fatwa, to use violence to drive the insurgents out of the mosque. However, given the unprecedented nature of such violence in the mosque and the fact that many of the insurgents were students of the highest ranking clergy in Mecca and Madina, the religious leaders were reculentent to give said legal ruling.

Just a month after the uprising in Mecca, Soviet troops began their advance into Afghanistan. For the Saudis, few ideologies were worse than the atheist communism, and the clergy saw Afghanistan as an essential state to keep out of the hands of the Red Army. With their newfound power, the ‘ulema was able to push massive amounts of money to the Afghan Mujahideen, in addition to the physical fighters it provided. Many of the ‘ulema preached of the necessity to join the jihad, and because of the large private donations from individuals in the kingdom, these Arab fighters were fully funded in their travels to South Asia. Among these Arabs in South Asia were Osama bin Laden, Abdullah Yusuf Azzam, and Ayman al-Zawahiri, all essential figures who helped develop al-Qa’ida.

Around the same time as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Saudi ‘ulema began a crackdown on the loosening of gender roles in the Kingdom. The clerics first removed women from their roles in the media, and then they proceeded to have women fired from their employment, even within Western companies operating in the Peninsula. These cultural crackdowns were not exclusively limited to women. The regime was also forced to become much stricter in its prohibition of alcohol, and the officers from the Committee to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice were given the ability to operate within Western-dominated areas in the country.

The education system was also given a religious reboot. In 1981 a new university, Umm al-Qura University, was founded in Mecca to give the Kingdom yet another place of Islamic higher learning. In addition to this, school curriculums were changed to include more religious material, and schools held summer and after school programs that focused on Islamic studies. The ‘ulema also attempted to restrict female education.

These policy changes made Saudi Arabia an exporter of Wahhabism across the globe which has had everlasting effects across all continents, primarily seen through the terror attacks of organizations such as al-Qa’ida and Daesh (also known as the Islamic State in the Levant). The Saudis funded mosques across the world and educated foreign imams for free in hopes that they would bring the ideology back to their home countries. The increased spread of Wahhabism has not only affected the nations outside of the Kingdom. The clergy utilized its bargaining power from its fatwa to maximize its control within the kingdom, and with this the Royal Family lost some of its power in the Wahabbi-Saudi agreement. However, the Saudi state became more authoritarian in nature giving it an increased ability to regulate not just the social issues that the ‘ulema demanded, but also any potential political dissent. Such repression is still prevalent as we have recently seen in the case of Jamal Khashoggi.

1979 was a fateful year in the Muslim world. Most people think of the Iranian Revolution or the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, but the siege of al-Masjid al-Haram is commonly not spoken about. However, its influence in global and Saudi affairs should by now be clear. In addition to the spread of Wahhabism, the event was critical in inspiring future religious extremists like Osama bin Laden who identified with al-Otaybi and his followers. Like al-Otaybi, bin Laden was born and raised in Saudi Arabia, taking pride in being in the land of the haramein, the two holy mosques and felt that his government was failing to uphold the strict tenants of the official state interpretation of Islam. Al-Otaybi gave a voice to young Saudis who felt they were growing up in a land that was Westernizing at the expense of its Islamic heritage. The importance of this siege cannot be overstated, and its moment in history should finally be given the attention it deserves.

Private Contractors and Regulating a New Age of War

Addison Egen

The glorified national soldier looks something like a brave, patriotic young citizen willing to die for their country. It’s the image passed down through generations to promulgate respect and admiration. It’s used to fire up morale and incite unwavering national support. Yet for many countries, it is simply a facade, nothing more than a smokescreen for the far less glamorous reality of modern warfare. Countless countries involved in military combat in the Middle East have replaced traditional soldiers with tens of thousands of private military contractors to fight on their behalf, including a majority of the U.S.’ Afghanistan forces, up to 70 percent of the UAE’s troops, and 85 percent percent of Qatar’s forces. This unparalleled spending occurs behind the backs of the general public, yet as shown through the recent “War on Terror,” is often rife with corruption, incompetence, and a general disregard for human rights.

Examples of catastrophic mercenary policy are too numerous to fully list. The mere tip of the iceberg would include the infamous Blackwater scandal where U.S. contractors openly shot at crowds of civillians, incidents of other U.S. contractors killing American soldiers while being high on opium, and a large number of contracting companies supposedly “fighting terrorism” but funneling up to 40 percent of their revenues back to the Taliban. Of course, such atrocities don’t solely harm strategic interests; the two-faced contractors perpetuate war leading to mass destabilization, as they sometimes fund the same side they fight. Meanwhile, the profit motive behind contracting also drives a wave of cheap labor and exploitation through “subcontractors,” local citizens hired temporarily on behalf of the companies to handle specific local affairs. In certain instances, they were paid a mere $700 a month in one installment and worked 12 hour shifts.

While human rights abuses are obviously perpetuated by national soldiers as well, the situation amongst contractors is likely worse because of the legal gray area surrounding them. First, an inability to monitor contractors results in few prosecutions for bad actors. As Tea Cimini reports, “Few individuals have been prosecuted to date due to inefficiencies, lack of oversight, and failure to effectively monitor contracts abroad.” Of course, companies are more incentivized to disregard the training and monitoring of their own personnel without proper threat of prosecution. Secondly, even if a company is hypothetically sued, it can simply vanish off the face of one country and emerge in another, as security company Sabre accomplished when they simply moved their assets to an Iraqi firm and transferred their assets. An employee of this new company, Near East Security Services, noted just that when he exclaimed, “They rented a company name, an Iraqi company, and shifted all the contracts to this”.

Effectively, there are three potential remedies to the problem. The first, and certainly most extreme, solution is to stop hiring private contractors altogether. This is obviously the most effective method of grappling with the profit motive in military recruitment and has been proposed in the name of Bernie Sanders’ “Stop Outsourcing Security Act” a little under a decade ago. A full ban on contractors would probably be most effective at alleviating the woes of local citizens. Nonetheless, it seems unrealistic to even begin to hypothesize such a sweeping change, as many nations lack the personnel necessary for their vast military endeavours and war in the Middle East will likely not miraculously cease to exist within the foreseeable future.

Perhaps a more realistic and tangible goal would be to increase the funding and resources necessary for governmental screening of contractors. The United States certainly seemed to lack such ability in 2012, when its special investigator of Afghanistan took on average 323 days to verify and act upon allegations that American dollars were flowing into the hands of the Taliban. And while these numbers have apparently decreased recently, that’s largely due to a reduction in US forces within the middle east, not legislative success.

Finally, a solution that could couple the previous option while covering the global scope of security companies would be enforcing existing international law through the use of a universal code for contracting companies. While of course no institution is perfect, an international approach would provide an extra layer of accountability necessary for inevitable future conflict. One such organization, known as the ICOCA, lays out basic guidelines for acceptable contractor conduct, alongside necessary steps companies must take in screening potential contractor employees. Currently, ICOCA certification is effectively nothing more than a badge of honor. However, larger, wealthier governments could make contract awards contingent on association certification, while also funding the organization more heavily and promoting it on an international stage. Since their often international status and vague legal complexities make contracting companies hard to prosecute, the world at large could benefit from universally-accepted, standardized processes for contractors everywhere.

While many claim contractors possess unique qualities in their flexibility, cost-effectiveness and sometimes localized knowledge, the industry’s market landscape is currently close to legal anarchy. Companies are able to exploit loopholes in national laws and relish in a vacuum of international regulation. Perhaps the future of these companies relies upon an ideological clash of the global public and their perceptions of a private, profit motive. Some argue such a motive simply has no place in a sphere as consequential to human wellbeing as the military. Others view such markets as untamed beasts, harmful in their rawest forms but able to be leashed and coupled with public institutions to provide unique advantages in their regulated states. Nonetheless, if contractor presence in the most recent war on terror has taught us anything, it’s that governments can no longer afford to hide the reality of their military operations; reform must be made regarding the private military contracting industry. Another uptick in global wars seems virtually inevitable sometime in the future. Without substantial legislation or regulation, it is only a matter of time before a vicious cycle of abuse occurs yet again.

Greed, God, and Glory: The Price of the Abraham Accords

Heba Malik

September 15, 2020 marked a landmark rapprochement between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. More potent than the normalization measures taken with Egypt and Jordan, in 1979 and 1994 respectively, the Abraham Accords signal a paradigm shift in the Middle East. However, they are not a dramatic tectonic change; rather, the Accords are a formalization of existing relationships between Israel and the Gulf. They reflect a strategic realignment against two non-Arab powers: Iran and Turkey. But what exactly do the Abraham Accords entail? Israel has never engaged in direct conflict with any Gulf countries, but it has also never held diplomatic relations with any of them — until now. The Accords will establish a formal diplomatic dialogue, as well as enable commercial relations such as trade, investment, and tourism. It is also, at its core, an arms deal.

This Gulf-Israeli normalization effort cements a dialogue shift from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to an Iranian/Shiite-Arab/Sunni axis. The Palestinians, whose leadership is heavily backed by Iran and Turkey, feel robbed of the political support they have historically garner their Muslim allies. When the Palestinian Authority moved to draft a written condemnation of the Accords, the Arab League refused to sign — allowing the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and other Arab countries to normalize their relationships with Israel. For an alliance that for 75 years has been rooted in unquestioned support for Palestinian statehood, the uniform refusal to sign came as a bombshell.

The Palestinian people have long fought to secure statehood on the foundation of the Arab Peace Initiative. The API is a pan-Arab policy calling for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories along the lines of the pre-1967 status quo and acceptance of Palestinian statehood in exchange for a normalization of relations with the Arab world. Eighteen years after the initiative's formal adoption in March 2002, the Abraham Accords have effectively handed normalization with Israel on a silver platter, obtaining nothing for the Palestinians in return. In the absence of progress, negotiation, and hope, the Palestinians have ceased to be a priority for Gulf monarchies. Our royal friends in the desert look at the Accords and see two avenues for success that supersede the Palestinian cause: trade and security. It is no secret that the Gulf has dipped its fingers into Israeli intelligence and received valuable information pertaining to clear threats from Iran and Sunni Islamist groups. It is also no secret that the region entered its second decade of corporate flirtation with Israel, with Israeli technology and Gulf capital proving an effective combination. Thus, it is nothing but a reflection of reality to state that for some of the Arab world, an alliance with the strongest military and economic power in the region is a sacrifice worth making.

The Palestinian Authority still has the support of Iran and, to a lesser extent, Turkey, but both of these countries have more pressing domestic and foreign policy issues. Neither has the deep pockets of the Gulf Arab states. While publicly Iran and Turkey continue to support the Palestinian Authority, from a practical standpoint, there is not a lot they are willing to do. The Palestinians have been abandoned and their leadership isolated. Allies play a paramount role in achieving Palestinian independence; without their support, the Palestinians lack the power and leverage to negotiate a solution that does not entail a complete absolution of their rights. However, the media rhetoric surrounding the Abraham Accords seems to view the agreement as a mechanism for peace. The Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi is emblematic of this attitude. Take it from his lips: at a regional security conference last year, he remarked, "I call on the Palestinians to change their minds and enter direct negotiation with us without preconditions. This is the only way to solve this conflict."

But while the Israeli government speaks of peace, it infringes upon Palestinian human rights. Authorities continue severe and discriminatory restrictions, limiting the movement of people and goods in and out of the Gaza Strip, and continuing to build settlements in the West Bank, a practice deemed illegal under international humanitarian law. Israel's twelve-year closure of Gaza limits Palestinian access to educational and economic opportunities, medical care, clean water, and electricity. However, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and its population are not without fault. Both the PA and Hamas authorities arrested and sometimes tortured opposition leaders and critics. Palestinian governing institutions are rife with allegations of corruption and continue to erode. Israeli-Palestinian economic and political inequalities, starkly evident in Gaza, only perpetuate the conflict and cement opposing views.

Neither side is without fault, but Gulf governments seem to disregard Israeli war crimes and focus on Palestinian rejectionism and obduracy. Moreover, the Gulf mistakenly attributes a cessation of Israeli annexation to the Accords, but according to Prime Minister Netanyahu himself, the government halted the plans rather than abandoning them completely. In fact, his campaign platform included the annexation of Palestinian land as recently as the elections in late March of 2021. The Arab world should not deceive itself. Netanyahu is a master politician.

Granted, normalization is not binary; the fight to counter Iran is mounting, and countries have a right to further the success of their economies and citizenries. However, the obligation to Palestine is a moral one. Left alone, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will only continue to fester. As Prince Turki al-Faisal, a Saudi former intelligence chief, stated recently, "You cannot treat an open wound with palliatives and painkillers. The Abraham Accords are not divine writ." Attitudes do not change overnight. The Israeli-Palestinian bilateral relationship is strained, which has undoubtedly been exacerbated by the lack of sufficient COVID-19 mitigation assistance from the Israeli government. The perceptions of Palestinian and Israeli youth have never been so far apart, according to the Palestinian-Israeli pulse. Each views its counterpart as violent and obstructive. The International Committee of the Red Cross found that millennials of both states are the "most pessimistic" about prospects for peace. Whether gradual and practical steps or grand visions will bring peace can be debated in Washington, Tel Aviv, and Ramallah. What remains clear is that these changes require concerted effort and attention. The world has put Palestine on the backburner for far too long. Now is the time to move the pot out front and crank up the heat.

Can Egypt Be Forgiven?

Maya Chamra

To my siblings, I have tried to find salvation and I failed, forgive me. To my friends, the journey was cruel and I am too weak to resist, forgive me. To the world, you were cruel to a great extent, but I forgive." These three sentences comprise the suicide note written by Sarah Hegazi before she tragically took her own life on June 14, 2020.

Hegazi was a prominent Egyptian LGBT rights activist, best known for waving the pride flag at a 2017 Mashrou' Leila concert. The band is perhaps the most popular Arab band with a gay lead singer and advocate for LGBTQ rights, Hamed Sinno. Following the viral circulation of Hegazi's flag waving, she and more than 40 other people in the LGBTQ community were arrested by Egyptian security forces. Hegazi was sentenced to three months in prison and subjected to electricution, assault, and other forms of psychological torture. Once she was released, Hejazi was exiled to Canada, where she lived until her death three years later.

Hejazi's death prompted an outpouring of condolences, outrage, and reflection from activists and supporters across the world. Vigils were held in Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, New York City, and other major cities worldwide to memorialize the acclaimed activist. Her friend and fellow activist, Aya Hijazi, explained, "A lot of people really loved her and came out in support of LGBTQ rights and this was the first time that I [have] seen Egypt people changing their profiles to the rainbow flag." Hijazi believed that the outspoken support after Hegazi's suicide symbolizes progress because people are more willing to freely express their opinion. Compared to the state of LGBTQ rights a decade ago, a significant number of people were more vocal about their advocacy of LGBTQ rights and the community in 2020, despite sexuality remaining very taboo in Egyptian culture.

For others in the LBGTQ community, Hegazi's death served as another reminder of the violence that they continually face. In a Facebook post about Hegazi, Sinno wrote, "Mental illness does not exist in a void. It is a product of structural violence. We are born into trauma, and we carry it with us wherever we go… That is what trauma does to the body. That is what hate does to the body." Oppression of the LGBTQ community not only carries a mental toll, but a physical toll as well. It is necessary to acknowledge that structural discrimination directly contributes to the mental illness that LGBTQ people disproportionately experience. Sinno's reflection points to the oppressive laws in Egypt that are used to arrest, jail, and constantly marginalize the LGBTQ communinty every day.

Although Egypt does not outright criminalize homosexuality, LGBTQ rights have been diminished since Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi rose to power as the president of Egypt in 2014. Egyptian security forces prosecute homosexual conduct under a 1950s laws that prohibits "debauchery." While that law was initially enacted to prosecute sex work, the law is now used to arrest those participating in "homosexual conduct." Moreover, Egypt stopped providing free access to gender affirming surgery under Al-Sisi in 2016. As a result, people in the LGBTQ community have been scapegoated by the Egyptian government under Al-Sisi and face relentless persecution. LGBTQ people who are arrested are often subjected to torture, similar to Hegazi's own experiences. The Egyptian government has also cracked down on protests, political activists, and websites that express dissenting opinions in order to further silence marginalized voices. Over tens of thousands of people have been arrested, forcibly disappeared, or tried in military courts since 2013. In addition to state-sanctioned violence, LGBTQ people experience social stigma and pressures to conform to heteronormative standards and remain silent about their sexuality and activism. Most LGBTQ people report not feeling comfortable to come out to family, friends, or publically.

Despite the detrimental effects of marginalization of LGBTQ people, the community remains firm in their position to resist the severe oppression of the Egyptian government. In Egypt, LGBTQ activism centers around providing security and safety for LGBTQ people. One initiative by local activists focuses on offering physical shelter for people rejected by their families. Another organization hosts a digital security workshop for transgender and other LBGTQ people on how to safely navigate social media, dating apps, and the internet in general under intense government surveillance and oppression. Following Hegazi's suicide, LGBTQ activists have reaffirmed their commitment to counter homophobia and transphobia as well as advocate for LGBTQ rights in Egypt. Rasha Younes, a researcher on LGBTQ rights, stated, "We, queer feminists, are the collective force etching at your oppression, raising our flags and voices and fists until you are held accountable for robbing Sarah and countless others of their bodily autonomy, their home, and their lives." In the face of tragedy, the LGBTQ community has made it clear that they will continue to fight for the freedom to live their lives fully and equally in Egyptian society.

Overall, the suicide of Sarah Hegazi sent shockwaves throughout Egypt, the Middle East, and the world. As we are reminded of the violence that the LGBTQ communnity experiences as a result of government oppression and social stigmatization, we must continue to support efforts to promote LBGTQ rights and equality in Egypt. Hegazi's final words posted online read, "The sky is more beautiful than the Earth. And I want the sky, not the Earth." Her death challenges us to consider how we can create a society that welcomes and supports the LGBTQ community. Not only must we be active allies, but the Egyptian government must repeal repressive laws and enact anti-discrimination laws to protect LGBTQ people. While Hegazi found the sky more beautiful, we are capable of creating an equally beautiful Earth.

Gulf Feminisms After Loujain

Christina Cincilla

In November 2019, I wrote an article expressing fear and frustration surrounding the imprisonment of Saudi activists Loujain Al-Hathloul and Fahad Albutairi. Al-Hathloul and Albutairi were both known in Saudi Arabia for their commitment to activism and advocacy surrounding women's rights, as well as a variety of different cultural and sociopolitical movements. At the time that I wrote my article, global calls for their release echoed through international media, from Amnesty International to Human Rights Watch. However, on February 10, 2021, Loujain's sister Lina Al-Hathloul tweeted out a picture of Loujain, announcing: "Loujain is at home!!! They have released Loujain." Loujain's release was greeted with great joy from her family, as well as a slew of other public figures who have been calling for her release for years. However, to celebrate Loujain's release is to ask: what should be the next biggest feminist imperative in Saudi Arabia? Rather than reinforcing the Saudi-US geopolitical agenda in light of Loujain's release, a rearticulation of Saudi feminist politics must urgently center the monarchy's most marginalized women, namely, exploited domestic workers on the monarchy's Kafala system and Yemeni women suffering the brunt of the U.S.-U.A.E.-Saudi-sponsored war.

To understand the significance of Loujain Al-Hathloul's release, her story bears repeating. In her younger years, Loujain was a staunch advocate for female mobility at a time where women could not drive cars in the Kingdom. Back in 2013, Loujain uploaded a video of herself driving recorded by her father, who remarked, "God willing, in ten years, we will be laughing at this video." Needless to say, Loujain's family would be very far from laughing. In March 2018, her and her social media celebrity (now ex-husband) Fahad Albutairi were both kidnapped and deported to Saudi Arabia from the U.A.E. and Jordan. There was no given explanation for their detention, although Human Rights Watch speculates that they were imprisoned for "expressing skepticism" about Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman's political agenda. For the next 3 years, there would be very little public information about Fahad and Loujain's whereabouts. Loujain's family publicly advocated on her behalf, publishing bleak information about her facing torture techniques including beating, electric shocks, waterboarding, and rape.

Shortly after Loujain's release in 2021, her sisters Lina and Alia tweeted sincere thanks to the newly elected President Joe Biden, who is understood to be the key factor in convincing the Saudi monarchy to release Loujain. Indeed, Loujain's release became "widely billed as a peace offering from Riyadh" to the Biden administration, reinforcing the countries' historic alliance. In a tweet, Loujain's sisters recognized the Biden administration's role as "affirming the importance [that] the U.S. places on universal human rights and the rule of law." Nevertheless, the Hathloul sisters did not retract their vehement pressure on Mohammad Bin Salman since their sister's release. If anything, they redoubled the vigor of their pushes for democratization and the release of political prisoners. Lina and Alia openly expressed support for the release of reformist religious cleric Shaykh Salman Al-Awdah specifically, who was also arbitrarily imprisoned by the Saudi regime. Furthermore, the recent release of an FBI report directly connecting MBS to the Jamal Khashoggi murder inspired a series of daring tweets from the Hathloul sisters. Needless to say, the release of Loujain may have amplified the sisters' praise of the U.S., but it certainly has not quelled their outspoken disdain for the young crown prince.

However, looking at the blind spots in the Hathloul sisters' activism reveals the need to articulate a new feminist agendain Saudi Arabia, one that has far greater urgency: a feminist politics focused on the state of migrant domestic workers in Saudi Arabia, who continue to face oppressive circumstances due to the Kafala system. Since the 1970s oil boom in the Gulf, the Kafala system gradually became a mainstay in the region's increasingly privatized political economy. In order to allow for greater profit margins and labor productivity, Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia created a system that brings in cheap foreign laborers from Africa and South Asia under the tutelage of a Saudi national. The Kafala system creates a deeply unbalanced power relationship between workers and Saudi citizens, resulting in minimal protections for workers, overcrowded and unsafe living conditions, and abysmal wages. There cannot be a union to speak of for Kafala-employed workers, who for all intents and purposes work as undocumented migrants at the behest of wealthy citizens.

Women receive a particularly vulnerable position in this system: many African and South Asian migrant laborers work in the domestic sphere, cleaning, cooking, and often raising children. The hidden nature of their work in the private sphere conceals horrific violence enacted upon their bodies, from overt instances of torture to less explicit forms of manipulation and exploitation. In February 2021, reports surfaced of a Bangladeshi domestic worker in Riyadh who was beaten to death until she became "unrecognizable." Surely these women, compelled to search for work away from their homelands due to the dire material conditions engendered by the globalized neoliberal political-economy, cannot be said to be represented by any feminist politics that reinforces the U.S.-Saudi socioeconomic alliance.

Furthermore, a new Saudi feminist politics must account for Yemeni women, who continue to bear the brunt of the U.A.E.-Saudi coalition's war on Yemen. The ongoing 6-year war on Yemen, justified in the name of a Saudi-Iranian geopolitical sectarian dispute, has disproportionately impacted the lives of Yemeni women. Whether in areas under Houthi militias' control or under the control of the Yemeni state sponsored by the U.A.E.-Saudi coalition, Yemeni women face ongoing violence as victims of heinous war crimes. While U.S. support for the war and blockade starving Yemeni women seems to waver slightly under the Biden administration, pressure needs to mount before the needless war can come to end.

One thing cannot be clearer: Yemeni women and Kafala-employed women cannot patiently wait for feminists to decide to fundamentally critique the Saudi state and both its enforcement of the Kafala system and the war on Yemen. As the Hathloul sisters heap praise upon President Biden and reinforce the geopolitical agenda of the U.S.-Saudi coalition, their rhetoric takes for granted invisible violence against women occurring in the name of the Saudi kingdom, even as they critique the powerful Crown Prince MBS. As feminists celebrate the release of Loujain Al-Hathloul, we must also recalibrate our feminist politics to be attuned to the unique circumstances of the gulf's most oppressed women. As long as Gulf feminisms remain tethered to the realm of elite politics, they actively betray the very women they claim to champion.

Old Wounds, Freshly Opened

Quentin Powers

Colonialism is oft relegated in the public consciousness to the realm of the distant past, an antiquated state of suppression and exploitation that humanity has long since cast to the dusty annals of history. Of course such a dialogue would prevail in the U.S., given that the country shed its imperial master almost 250 years ago (and subsequently made quick work of transitioning from colony to colonizer). In Algeria, however, the yoke of French colonialism is fresh in the memories of the Algerian people, as is the bloody war that was fought to throw off the control of Paris. Considering that French dominion over Algeria began in 1830 and did not end until 1962, one with a bit of a mathematical inclination can quickly conclude that Algeria has been independent for less than half the time that the country was a French colonial subject. Out of this long colonial era, it is the coda that has made the rounds in recent news cycles. From 1954 to 1962, the French colonial army fought Algerian resistance fighters in a brutal conflict that has been humorously described by travel writer Robert Young Pelton as "France's Vietnam, were it not for the fact that Vietnam was also France's Vietnam." Less humorous, however, are the gory details of the war — anywhere from hundreds of thousands to 1.5 million dead, depending on who you ask, with many civilians among the condemned. French forces employed various methods of torture, ranging from sexual abuse to electrocution to forced prisoner fights to the death, as they brutally imposed their will upon the Algerian people. The French government concealed much of this violence during the conflict and in the decades after, but skeletons can only remain in the closet for so long. In 2001, a retired French general named Paul Aussaresses almost gleefully exposed the extent of the crimes in Algeria, opening up a long-festering wound and causing a reckoning that is finally coming to light today. French president Emanuel Macron recently has taken steps to rectify the injustices committed by France during the colonial period. Macron announced that France will expedite the declassification of secret military files that pertain to the conflict, and admitted culpability for the killing of Algerian freedom fighter Ali Boumendjel; this death had long been claimed by the French government to be a suicide. The reasons for this long overdue cessation of information are many: for one, France is home to a massive Algerian immigrant population. Public pressure from this group in particular has ensured that the French government has been unable to quietly sweep their past sins under the rug. More than this, strengthening relations between the two countries is genuinely in the best interest of France, both economically and in geopolitical terms. As the years pass, France will continue to come to grips with its legacy and will be faced with complicated choices over how to reconcile with Algeria and its other former colonies; other colonial powers would be wise to take note of this process.

Reaction within Algeria to Macron's announcement has been mixed. Macron announced himself loudly to Algeria in 2017, when he stated on the campaign trail that colonization was "a crime against humanity." While Algerians were cautiously and pleasantly surprised by this remark, their initial enthusiasm was tempered by a later 2018 exchange that Macron had with an Algerian. Macron was told by an Algerian man that France "must come to terms with its colonial past in Algeria," to which Macron replied, "but you have never known colonization! Why are you bothering me with that?" With this interaction fresh in the mind, Algerians reacted to the Boumendjel announcement with a shrug of the shoulders. As journalist Maher Mezahi and countless Algerian intellectuals stated, there was no point in mentioning certain victims and leaving out thousands of others. It seems that Macron would like to merely pay lip service to the past, without trying to undo its injustices. There is a way to start fixing this, however. France must formally apologize to Algeria for its colonization. An advisor to Macron explicitly stated in a January 2021 speech that there will be no repentance or apologies for the colonial period, but the lasting impact of the physical and environmental warfare waged in the region will be felt for decades to come. The lack of a formal apology is inexplicable, as one may well argue that reparations are in order — but let's start with a baby step.

The two countries may only be separated by the width of the Mediterranean, but until France formally apologizes to Algeria for the injustices of the colonial experience, there will be a lot more keeping the countries separate. Speaking in broader terms, Western colonization greatly impacted the Middle East as a whole; the region is similar to any other non-European area in that regard. While the French and British bear the brunt of the focus on colonial activities in the region, the Spanish, Italians, and Americans have all had their own dalliances with occupation in the region. There is much to apologize for, from the creation of borders without indigenous input to overthrows of government and international occupations. There is a history of backhanded, international interference in the region; thus, the recent self-serving French announcements are a feeble attempt to placate the people. In a region where the scars of this interference run deep and public resentment still can run high, attempts like Macron's to reconcile the facts of the past can only begin to mend some of the fractures between the Middle East and the West. But Macron must go one step further: he must apologize. This is not to say in a universal manner that simple apologies can serve as magic band-aids to decades and centuries of exploitation. However, admitting to the mistakes of the past and re-examining historical actions could go a long way to reopening genuine dialogue towards a collaborative future.

The Future of Tunisia is in Flux

Ruchita Coomar

> “I want to speak to all the Tunisian people, I know the state of poverty and I also know who is exploiting your poverty. Don’t let anyone exploit your misery, don’t attack private or public property. We live today because of moral values and not because of theft or looting.”

The words of President Kais Saied provided a bleak synopsis of the sentiments of citizens on the streets of the Tunisian capital. Tunisia’s peaceful democratic transition has been defined by the centralization of power within the hands of a strong federal government. Yet, this centralization failed to stop the development of an unchecked and unaccountable government, bolstered by the threat of an emboldened police state. Military and police intervention is now continually being used to muffle the pleas of citizens desperate for an equitable economic reality. Consequently, the brutality of this impending police state is met with stones and Molotov cocktails from stifled citizens on the streets of Tunisia.

Saied’s success is rooted in a revolutionary populist approach, underscored by a deep-rooted skepticism of the very institutions now in contention with his base. As a parliamentary outsider, his defeat of the Ennahda signalled a general discontent for the status quo built by Western competitive parliamentary democracy. Ennahda, the Renaissance party of Tunisia, previously outlawed under the dictatorial government of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, took office after the 2011 revolution overthrew that dictatorship. Tunisia, the birthplace of the Arab Spring revolutions within the Middle East, has been under close scrutiny by international stakeholders. For the past decade, Tunisia’s stable democratic transition led by Ennahda, has been characterized as the trophy of the West. The centralization of a powerful federal government, accompanied by the monopolization of violence, served as a bargaining chip for peace. Yet, the fruits of the centralized democracy only seem to further spoil. As high unemployment, food inflation, corruption, a lack of political freedom, and poor living conditions riddle the country, citizens continue to become increasingly discontented with such a system. Enclosed by a collapsed Libyan state to the east and a restless Algerian military establishment to the west, Tunisia’s balancing act as the stronghold of the Maghreb faces serious existential threats.

President Saied teeters this fine line as a multifaceted leader, presenting as a dissonant blend of a populisist revolutionary, social conservative, and modern constitutionalist. The 61 year old former professor resonated with a youthful base catapulted him to success in the 2019 elections that saw him take power over the post-revolution Ennahda Party. An avid supporter of decentralization, Saied’s platform was built on dismantling Ennahda political systems to promote local and regional agency in the political processes. The proposed system would first elect small local councils who will then choose regional representatives. Ultimately, these representatives would determine national leaders. This plan to return agency to local leaders has been espoused to combat regional disparities in healthcare, education, poverty, and infrastructure.

Yet, returning self-determination to constituents is a lofty plan, and Saied has consistently failed to address the staggering obstacles to his utopian ideals. Such a plan requires a significant devolution of financial power to central and local authorities alike. The urgency of financial autonomy is encapsulated by the Kamour movement, which began in 2017. The movement, composed of residents from Tunisia’s most marginalized regions from the Southern governorate of Tatatouine, accused the central government of stealing natural resources without recompense. Tatatouine, despite being rich in natural resources, faces a staggering 30 percent unemployment rate, relative to a 14.8 percent national average. Discontented with an inequitable, self-serving system, protestors voiced demands for the fruits of labor to be placed in the hands of the people.

However, the protests ultimately climaxed in May of 2017 with the tragic death of Anwar Sokrafi at the hands of the police. Sokrafi was surrounded by the National guard in the El Kamour camp and hit by a car, dying instantly. Sokrafi’s unjust death forced authorities to come to an agreement with protestors, including a new commitment to creating 3000 jobs in ecological companies, 1500 jobs in oil companies, and allocating a budget of 80 million dinars for regional development. Sokrafi’s family, despite being used as political leverage to symbolically sign the agreement, have yet to receive justice and accountability from the Tunisian authorities responsible for his death. The apathy of the Tunisian government in relation to Sokrafi’s unjust death characterizes a larger disconnect of government from the plight of protestors. Governmental stagnancy has only been further perpetuated relative to the aforementioned promises, as the economic conditions agreed to by both parties have not been met with implementation. Consequently, appeals for justice are now echoed in the protests riddling Tunisia pleading for redress from an unbearable material reality. Even now, the monopolization of violence by police continues to be a worthy tool in suppressing the cries of a dissatisfied electorate.

Saied’s plans for a more equitable society are built on the idea of a decentralized government. However, this plan can only be brought into fruition by facing the economic unrest of citizens head on, without the shield of an obstinate military and police force. The president’s lukewarm approach and failure to repudiate police and military oversteps creates a system void of possible economic and social reform. If the President fails to significantly restructure a broken system marred by egregious social and economic inequities, Tunisia will face dire consequences. After all, the abuse of police power to prevent the betterment of the material conditions of Tunisians is all but too familiar. 2011 saw the sparks of the Arab Spring, after power-hungry Tunisian authorities uprooted a vendor’s small fruit stand and forced him to confront a starved economic reality. The smoke of Mohamed Bouazizi’s self-immolation continues to linger in the protests of burning Tunisian cities today.

Left High and Dry in Al-Ahwaz
The Rural Toll of Iran's Water Shortage

Sophie Clark

On February 15, 2021, in the rural southwest region of Ahwaz, two-year-old Daniel Nasseri fell into an open sewage drain, drowning in human waste and oil-polluted waters. Nasseri's tragic death comes as the Iranian government continues to run the region dry in the name of urban development, serving as a painful reminder that the Ahwazi people have been left to drown in the fetid waters of the Iranian regime.

Worsening environmental conditions and governmental negligence have pushed Iran—more specifically its rural communities—into a state of crisis. The country's water supply is dwindling to a dangerous low, leaving citizens under the extreme threat of total drought. Prior to the Islamic Revolution in 1979, per capita water availability in Iran was at a healthy 4,500 m3. By 2017, this amount had fallen to just below 1,600 m3, and it is estimated that by 2025, the per capita availability will be a mere 816 m3. For scale, the United States' per capita water availability in 2017 was a staggering 8,671 m3, and the global average was sitting comfortably at 7000 m3. Water scarcity is categorized as a severe threat to socio-economic development when annual internal renewable water resources dip below 1,000 m3 per capita which, considering the aforementioned estimates, leaves Iran with less than five years to generate a solution before the crisis becomes a danger to the state's survival. To make matters worse, the Iranian government continues to strain what little resources they have left; the country's current use of available water resources surpasses 70% — which is nearly double the maximum recommended capacity of 40% — as a direct result of governmental negligence. While clearly devastating for the entire country, the state's rural communities are being hit the hardest by this crisis.

Rural areas have seen the highest rates of drought in this crisis despite the fact that they have the lowest concentration and proportion of the country's population. This is due to their dependence on natural sources of water and their lack of adequate infrastructure, although the crisis cannot be explained by only passive causes. In the case of Al-Ahwaz, governmental policies have been particularly damaging. The Ahwaz region was home to some of the most fertile land in the country, supported by an abundance of rivers that comprised the largest source of freshwater in Iran. The region is also the richest in natural resources, containing over 95% of the country's total oil and gas reserves. Despite what seems like an oasis in a time of resource depletion, the Ahwaz region has markedly higher rates of drought than other regions within the state. Water mismanagement—more accurately described here as water hostage policies, where the Iranian government has actively hindered its citizens' access to water through redirection and damming—has devastated the rural communities in the region, causing periods of prolonged drought that have decimated the agriculture-dominated economy, pushing 50% of the population into absolute poverty and devastating the entire region.

Broadly, water shortages can result from physical (or absolute) water scarcity, where the country faces an inadequate natural supply proportionate to the region's demand, or from economic water scarcity, where the poor management of available resources places the region in jeopardy. For Al-Ahwaz, the shortage is most directly economic. For years, the Iranian government has been transferring water from the southwestern region to the central plateau with the goal of developing a single city: Isfahan. The government has been funneling water through tunnels and dams to provide water for the agricultural and industrial sectors in and around Isfahan with the hopes of developing it into an urban center, planning to utilize the water for the cultivation of cash crops, generation of hydroelectric power, and development of the city's industrial sector. Where farmers in Ahwaz are struggling to produce any crops, farmers around Isfahan are experiencing plentiful harvests. The once fertile and thriving area has been reduced to a semi-arid and borderline uninhabitable desert. Drinking water is not potable, polluted to an unrecognizable state that nearly outweighs the risk of dehydration. Villages have been all but wiped out through the spread of deep poverty, the rise of crop shortages, and the complete absence of safe sources of water. The people of Ahwaz are being forced to live on a dying piece of earth, collapsing under the weight of their failing infrastructure and negligent government.

In response to this horrifying and wretched situation, Ahwazis have taken to the streets on multiple occasions to protest the government's discrimination and intentional harm. For one such protest, which took in 2018, mass demonstrations broke out to protest against the government's redirection of water, drawing attention to the widespread devastation taking hold of the region. In retaliation, the Iranian government forbade the cultivation of rice, okra, and other critical crops necessary for the region's survival. As the Ahwazi people later rose up against the widespread poverty affecting their community, the government quickly dismissed the issue as a consequence of sanctions, despite the fact that every other region seems to be facing comparatively lower rates of poverty under the same economic restrictions. These incidents are far from isolated; as the Ahwazi people continued to speak out against their government, the regime responded with harsher policies and restrictions. Quite clearly, the Iranian government is not only cognizant of the effects of its actions but is willing to intentionally heighten and exacerbate the harms it has imposed on the Ahwazi people.

As the nationwide water crisis continues to impact the whole of the country, the Ahwaz region will be strained to point of complete breakdown. Not only will the Ahwazi people continue to suffer at the hands of their government, but they will also be torn apart by the climate-driven resource scarcity that plagues the whole of the nation. If the government stays on its current track, the country's water resources as a whole will be pushed beyond recovery, and the negligent policies imposed on Al-Ahwaz will be restrictive to a complete breaking point. These dual crises will continue running in parallel, with only time to tell who will win the race in the total destruction of Al-Ahwaz.

What does Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention mean for the feminist movement in Turkey?

Mia Whitfield

Pınar Gültekin was a bright and beautiful 27-year old Turkish university student from Muğla studying economics. She was nearing the end of her studies and had dreams of working as a public official. She was looking forward to returning to her family, according to a phone call with her father just days before her disappearance. Unfortunately, her family would never see or hear from her again after this call. She was reported missing just days after the phone call on July 16, 2020, and her body was found on July 21. She was murdered after refusing the advances of an ex-boyfriend who beat and strangled her to death in a jealous rage. He then attempted to burn her body and hide her remains in a nearby forest.

This is just one of many horrifying stories of femicide in Turkey. Almost every day, a new story surfaces, another picture of a different woman appears in the news and on social media. This violence has been a consistent theme in the past decade in Turkey. And with pandemic-induced government restrictions, curfews, and general social isolation, violence against women seems to only intensify. According to Gülsüm Kav, director of the Turkish feminist platform We Will Stop Femicide, the organization has received significantly more calls to their domestic violence hotlines during the pandemic. Women subject to domestic violence are stuck in their homes without escape. Pınar Gültekin's death produced a wave of protests in Turkey, with many people taking to the streets to demand government action against rising rates of femicide. Her death sparked a viral social media campaign, #ChallengeAccepted, to bring awareness to skyrocketing rates of gender-based violence in Turkey and elsewhere.

Violence against women is not an uncommon occurrence in Turkey. Countless Turkish women face domestic violence every day and nearly 500 women lost their lives to femicide, mostly at the hands of partners and relatives, in 2019 alone, according to We Will Stop Femicide.

The President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, took to Twitter on July 22 and stated that he will personally follow the case of Pınar Gültekin and "as the government of the Republic of Turkey, we will do whatever that is required to end the violence against women, which we do not want to ever happen again." Erdoğan's statement contains a troubling irony, given that less than a year after her death, on March 20, 2021, he officially withdrew Turkey from the Istanbul Convention, a major European treaty on stopping violence against women. The Istanbul Convention, more formally known as the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, was signed by Turkey in 2011 and seen as a major breakthrough in gender equality for Turkey and a huge win for the feminist movement. It was drafted by the Council of Europe and provides a legal framework to protect women and promote equality through legislation, education, and spreading awareness of different gender-based issues. Furthermore, it sets legal standards for punishing those committing violence and abuse against women. It was signed by 45 European countries and the European Union more generally. Turkey's withdrawal from the agreement ten years later is a disappointment and a major setback for Turkish women.

Since the Convention's signing, the feminist debate has shifted in Turkish politics, following Erdoğan's conservative Islamist-rooted AKP and the influence of his right-leaning senior officials. The withdrawal from the Convention stems from an unsubstantiated association of the treaty with the advocacy of LGBT ideology, which the AKP sees as a threat to Turkey's national and moral values, politics, the traditional Turkish family structure, and the focus of the feminist movement. At the core of the problem is the party's resistance to all ties with the LGBT movement. In the eyes of the AKP, the Istanbul Convention has been reduced to LGBT advocacy and thus must be discarded to prevent this ideology from becoming a universal legal norm within Turkey. Party officials even go as far as to say that the convention encourages "immoral lifestyles such as homosexuality." Although there is no evidence of this within the treaty, Erdoğan defended the party's position at a speech in Ankara last year:

"We will not be involved in any business that would weaken the family institution. No understanding, regulation, or ideology that puts dynamite on the basis of the family structure is humane."

The Turkish Minister of Family and Social Services Zehra Zümrüt Selçuk mirrors these sentiments towards the Convention, saying, "The guarantee of women's rights are the current regulations in our bylaws, primarily our Constitution. Our judicial system is dynamic and strong enough to implement new regulations as needed." Selçuk released a Twitter statement following Pınar Gültekin's murder at the hands of her ex-boyfriend, referring to Pınar as "our daughter." We can only hope that Turkey's "judicial system" can prevent what happened to Pınar from happening to other women, to other daughters, in the future.

However, cultural and sociopolitical issues within Turkey make this seem like a far-away aspiration. These flaws are demonstrated in the cases of Şule Çet, Ayten Kaya, and many others. The rape and murder of Şule Çet, a 23-year old university student in Ankara, was initially ruled a suicide. The defense team relied on victim-shaming arguments, claiming the encounter was consensual because she was drinking alcohol with men in an isolated place late at night. They even went as far as to say that she was not a "proper (pure) woman" in accordance with traditional Turkish values. These arguments are seen disturbingly often in femicide and rape cases in Turkey. Although the men received lengthy prison sentences in the end, the case that Turkish investigators originally tried to hush up could have had a very different final resolution had it not been for the many demonstrations that took place, widespread social media attention, and countless statements of solidarity from women across Turkey. However, a less reported case was that of Ayten Kaya, a 35-year-old woman from Diyarbakır who was found hanging in her home. Her death was ruled a suicide, but the autopsy report showed bruises all over her body and her time of death was consistent with her husband's last visit to the house. Despite these factors, police refused to reopen the case or investigate further. These examples, and countless others, show how flawed Turkey's system is for responding to and investigating cases of femicide and they highlight a deeper problem within Turkish society.

Given these factors, the sad reality is that femicide will likely continue at the same or increased rates. Furthermore, even when the Istanbul Convention was ratified and signed by Turkey, there was a large disconnect between the law and subsequent practical implementation. It's one thing to sign an agreement, it's another to effectively carry out the policies. Ultimately, the leading political party AKP's political and economic policies and Islamist conservatism reinforce a patriarchal society with socially constructed roles and a traditional "Turkish" family model. Within this model, the empowerment of women is a threat to family unity and these traditional values. If, according to Erdoğan, "the strength of a nation lies in the strength of families," it is easier to overlook the rights of individual women to maintain the ideal model. As long as this mentality is maintained, there is a very unsure future in store for women in Turkey.

ClubHouse: The suppression of free speech in Middle Eastern authoritarian states

Sumayah Basal

Earlier this year, Egyptian journalist Ahmed Anas was detained and questioned by Egyptian authorities for his use of the new and increasingly popular audio-chat app: Clubhouse. He was falsely accused of promoting the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, despite his history of written and vocal criticism of the very same organization. Thus, as this app rises in popularity and becomes a tool for activists, interesting nuances arise that highlight norms of free speech suppression and government monitoring. The app has quickly warped away from an open and free space of expression, towards another tool of control and persecution from authoritarian regimes.

Founded in March of 2020, the app has exploded worldwide — especially in the Middle East — growing from a modest 1,500 users to 10 million by the end of February 2021. The chat app is invite-only by nature, with four invites per user, which has made the app extremely coveted due to its exclusivity. By being exclusively audio-based and requiring identity verification to join, the app has differentiated itself. Clubhouse functions by having "rooms" hosted by individuals that can be either private or public, where there can be either open participation or podcast/panel type rooms. Consequently, this has allowed a flow of conversation and exchange not found anywhere else on social media. This open environment is amplified by the lack of an algorithm, further encouraging spontaneous organic involvement and a lack of a video function also makes the chats relatively anonymous.

The app's immense popularity in the Middle East is due to multiple reasons: it provides an outlet of unfiltered communication not found on other social media or even in day-to-day life, and it also begins to open up society by facilitating the exchange of dialogue and ideas. Users are drawn by a much-desired platform for discussions surrounding a plethora of topics, with rooms dedicated to the appreciation of shawarma, celebrity 'concert' rooms, rooms dedicated to discussing feminism, LGBT+ rights, and most notably, discussions of political reform. The app's newness has allowed it to pass under the radar of government thus, it has become a needed space for unregulated conversations and free expression on controversial topics that is otherwise absent in regions where oppressive leaderships reign over media and personal exchanges. Following in the footsteps of Chinese activists who used the platform to discuss Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and other controversial topics, Arab activists have attempted to use these platforms to discuss politics and social issues and to express criticisms towards the overbearing authoritarian regimes. Various individuals and journalists have gone so far as to suggest that this platform could catalyze the fulfillment of promises of democracy and free speech that were made in the Arab Spring, whose ten-year anniversary just passed.

However, this optimism of cultural exchange, the opening of dialogue, and the breaking of stigmas might be short-lived. Already, authorities in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and various Gulf states have begun the monitoring of activist and state criticisms. This attentive crackdown on any form of dissent, coupled with the app's loose user rights and generous terms and conditions, places doubt on the ambiguous future of the app in the realms of activism. These activists don't have the benefit of the app's previous underground nature that Chinese activists took advantage of; in fact, due to the app's rising to the forefront of social media, China inevitably banned it in February of 2021. However, this outright banning may not be the avenue taken by Middle Eastern governments. Historically speaking, these regimes have become skilled at controlling the media and discussions on social media while reaping the economic and social benefits of keeping certain apps and not compromising the grip they have on political discourse. They do this by planting government informants to track down dissidents.

Egyptian, Saudi, and Emirati states have begun to plant pro-government informants in the app who are tasked with surveilling the discussion of controversial topics. These same accounts have been connected to the campaigns of defamation and treason towards "opponents of the state" on other social media platforms. The groups are tasked with targeting and pinpointing individuals "violating" the norms or posing a "threat" to the state. In addition, despite the ban against recording the rooms, many citizens record anyways and post them to other platforms with the intent of 'exposing' or 'defaming' individuals talking about taboo topics, such as racism or discussions of the economy in Egypt after the pandemic. Due to the subjective nature of what is a "threat", the countries can target and examine any individual they feel threatened by. Already, multiple activists and journalists have been targeted for interrogation and have shared their experiences through interviews or social media. In turn, free speech and activism have begun to fade once more for fear of persecution.

Furthermore, the app itself collects an excessive amount of information and retains the right to use that information, including sharing it with a list of third-party apps, as well as advertisers. Thus, large amounts of data on participants may be retained and conveyed to the authorities of various regimes, creating even more extreme consequences. Clubhouse collects data about users' device information, contact list, location, IP address, audio recordings of what they say, which rooms they visit, and also uses cookies to track activity outside of the app. This means the app is a lot less safe than people had previously conceived. Perhaps the most notable portion of the privacy policy is the app's ability to share individuals' data and information to authorities without informing the user. This is especially problematic as the policies in given countries can be manipulated to fit the requirements of sharing. Though Club House is not obligated to share this info, the history of other social media apps information sharing indicates a strong likelihood that they will if asked.

Altogether, the future of social media and free speech is left on rocky footing. An uncertain future lies ahead, and the glamor of open exchange seems to be withering already. This suppression and monitoring comes in direct conflict with the eagerness of citizens to begin to confront societal stigmas and taboos. As repeated crackdowns ensue, one can only wonder how much longer Arab voices will be silenced.

Now is the Time For Women

Yemen's Feminist Movement

Tahani Almujahid

When Alaa Al-Eryani founded the Yemeni Feminist Movement (YFM) in 2013, an online platform raising awareness on women's issues in Yemen, she was not met with the same support she would receive years later: threatening messages and bullying caused her to shut down the platform. Despite threats to her life, Al-Eryani and a team of Yemeni feminists are now working to revive the Movement again, "rebranding" in 2019. YFM utilized Facebook as its original and main platform, but the Movement has also expanded to Instagram, Twitter, and their own website, available in both Arabic and English. With this new branding of YFM, the Movement opened to members all around the world, creating the Yemeni Feminist Movement Network.

However, afraid of similar backlash received in 2013, it is not surprising that the community of Yemeni feminists face the tangible fear of having their identities revealed and could be exposed to more harm. To counter this, Yemeni feminists have created fake accounts in order to lead their campaigns. As one of the Movement's main goals is to advocate for accountability and legal reform of the harsh discriminatory laws against women, this push is just the beginning for the women's movement in Yemen, but it is also a testament to the struggle for human rights – that we cannot advocate for Yemen without advocating against the oppression of Yemeni women.

In a recent post on YFM's Instagram, a drawing of a sign with the phrase "I want my rights!" in Arabic, followed with "Say no to Houthis controlling Yemeni women and their bodies," calls attention to the ways in which women have been used as a weapon in Yemen's civil war. The Sana'a Center for Strategic Violence has reported that as the war has exacerbated Yemen's economic crisis, more women and children become vulnerable to exploitation and violence. Another YFM post shows a political cartoon taking place in Ibb, a city in Northern Yemen currently under Houthi rule, depicting Houthi militants beating Khatam Al-Ashari to death in front of her four children, after raiding their home in search of their father, who had been put in prison on a fabricated charge. Al-Alshari is just an average citizen without direct ties to the Yemeni government or the Houthis, but she, like many other women, has been used as a weapon of war. This is only one example of how women have been brutally attacked under Houthi militias, sparking outrage across the region. Additionally, YFM is campaigning against honor killings, using the phrase, "There is no honor in killing!" Yemeni laws allow men to commit an "honor" crime, which are often met with little or no punishment. Through YFM's advocacy, members raise awareness of issues ranging from the war to other forms of gendered violence.

Domestic abuse is one of the largest issues that Yemeni women face, particularly because there are no specific laws that protect them from this form of gendered violence. When YFM posted about Al-Anoud, who suffered from an acid attack from her ex-husband, Abdullah Abdulrahman Ismail Adjat, the caption stated that they were waiting for the verdict but questioned the integrity of the government and if there will ever be "sufficient punishment especially with the absence of laws against gender-based violence." As of now, YFM has not made any recent posts about this crime, but it is not surprising there is doubt Adajat will face any repercussions or that these injustices will be remediated within the current legal framework. Their advocacy, thus, is crucial in spreading awareness of women's issues in the region, especially considering the current lack of information, where the media focuses mostly on covering the humanitarian crisis as a stand-alone issue and do not consider women's issues as part of the overall problem. This, in turn, has caused grass-roots organizations like YFM to fill in the void.

If there is going to be advocacy for Yemen, the women of the country should be one of the main priorities. The Movement often shows the many discriminatory laws that have allowed women to be forcibly married, protected gender-based domestic violence, and other forms of oppression. Yemeni women are forced into domestic labor, caring for the children and the home as they are being starved by the Saudi-led blockade which continues today. Yet, their homes are not safe for them and they are not protected within them. There is nowhere for them to go and they are expected to tolerate these conditions, that even their homes will not be a place of safety and security. Yemeni feminists are expected to advocate for a home in which they have no place.

YFM's advocacy is just the beginning to creating an environment that will allow women to flourish in Yemen. Though the Movement has enjoyed much support in recent years, there is still a community of those who resist the Movement's ideals, regardless of political ideologies. A commonality between those who don't support the movement is the belief that now is not the time. In a country that is suffering from other human rights violations from its own government and a U.S.-supported blockade by Saudia Arabia, women's rights have been cast to the side as a non-issue. In our advocacy for Yemen, ignoring the oppression of Yemeni women is counterproductive. This gendered experience is not unique to the humanitarian crisis, but it is another element of daily life for women in Yemen that perpetuates oppressive laws against them. Now is the time for women; it always has been.

Russia's Economic and Geopolitical Motives in the Syrian Civil War

Will Kielm

The history of sea power is largely, though by no means solely, a narrative of contests between nations, of mutual rivalries, of violence frequently culminating in war." — Alfred Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*. In his seminal and hugely influential work, Mahan argued that maritime capabilities would ultimately dictate a nation's military power. The book eventually laid the theoretical foundation for a build up of the U.S. Navy in the 1890s, which was deployed in the Spanish-American War, leading to American acquisition of overseas colonies in the aftermath. Since then, the importance of sea power has dominated military strategies for many great powers in international politics. But no event in modern history demonstrates this argument as well as Russian intervention in the Syrian Civil War, which is grounded on Putin's ambition to open Russia to maritime trade routes in the Mediterranean Sea and secure more access to Middle Eastern oil.

The Mediterranean Sea accounts for much of maritime trade and commercial activities in international trade. Provided that 80 percent of commercial trade overall is conducted on the high seas, it is in Russia's interest to gain access to the Mediterranean Sea, since access to it would mean access to the world's economy. While Russia enjoys an extensive coastline along the Black Sea, it is only connected to the Mediterranean through a set of two straits, both of which are controlled by Turkey. The Bosporus, otherwise known as the Strait of Istanbul, connects the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara, while the Dardanelles (also known as the Strait of Gallipoli) connects the Sea of Marmara to the Aegean Sea and subsequently the Mediterreneam. Despite these geopolitical complications, the Soviet Union maintained a naval presence with 5th Operational Squadron based in Syria during the Cold War but which remained limited after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, due to European oil trade relations with Russia, much of Russian oil exports have passed through the Turkish Straits.

However, Russian resurgence in military power and intervention in the Middle East, along with U.S. disengagement in its recent pivot to Asia, has rekindled Putin's maritime ambition to remain active in the Mediterranean Sea. Acquiring access to such a large body of water requires key port access in states that coastalize it. In the Levant, Syria serves as the perfect candidate for such a port-based partnership with Russia. The Russian naval facility in Tartus and the Khmeimim Air Base in Latakia serve as the two centerpieces towards Russian military influence in Syria and a gateway towards its access in the Mediterrenean Sea. Tartus, being the Russian Navy's only overseas base, repairs and replenishes warships and facilitates their travel back to the Black Sea through the Turkish Straits.

But why Syria in particular? One reason is that Syria is the only reliable Russian ally that coastalizes the Mediterrenean Sea. Libya is another candidate for reliable port access, leading to Putin's support for the Libyan National Army led by General Khalifa Haftar over the Government of National Accords (GNA) based in Tripoli, but this effort has been proven to be unsuccessful thus far with the outcome of the Second Libyan Civil War being inconclusive. The second reason is access to Syrian oil and its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the Eastern Mediterrenean Sea. Therefore, the Russian government seeks to legitimize Bashar al-Assad's regime, which currently controls approximately 60 percent of Syrian territory, including the urban strongholds of Aleppo and Damascus. Only with international recognition could Assad's Syria legitimately claim the 200 nautical miles that stretches from its coast to the sea as its EEZ. Syria also contains the Palmyra oil fields, an area recaptured from ISIS in 2017 by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-led, anti-Assad group. Currently, the SDF-controlled area produces 30,000 barrels of oil per day. While the United States and the SDF control most of Syrian oil, and has even secured an oil deal with Kurdish authorities that allows a US company to "modernize the oil fields," Assad maintains a steady stream of gas fields in the Mediterranean and controls all the major ports in coastal Syria that open up to the Mediterrennean trade routes.

Turkey also holds economic interests in the Mediterrenean Sea, as shown by its support for the GNA of Libya, who struck a deal with the Turks that provides large areas of oil drilling and mineral rights in the oil-rich Eastern Mediterrenean Sea. If Turkey wishes to block Russian access to the Mediterranean Sea and claim the rest of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea for itself, it would seek to secure the Latakia Governorate and Tartus Governorate from Russian control, the two governorates that border the Mediterranean. Currently, Turkey and the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army exclusively occupy landlocked regions with minimal strategic importance. Turkey and its allies currently occupy northern parts of Idlib Governorate, which was acquired through Operation Olive Branch, northern Aleppo Governorate, secured through Operation Euphrates Shield, and northern Raqqa Governorate and northwest Al-Hasakah Governorate which were recently annexed by Operation Peace Spring after the U.S. withdrew troops from the region.

With a threeway power struggle amongst the United States, Turkey, and Russia, the economic motivations over Syrian oil and port access are clear. Russia has long sought access to "warm water" (permanently icefree) ports since Peter the Great, and Russia fought with the Ottoman Empire for centuries over such a geostrategically vital area. The current proxy war in Syria over its oil and port access is a historical manifestation that was reignited after centuries of geopolitical conflict. Putin seeks to restore the former influence of the Russian and Soviet empires,similar to Erdogan's ambition to restore Turkey's former Ottoman glory through forms of cultural and military influence within the region. With such vital interests at hand, Syria has paid the heavy cost of war and inner turmoil, a consequence and legacy that would remain embedded in Middle East history for decades to come.

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