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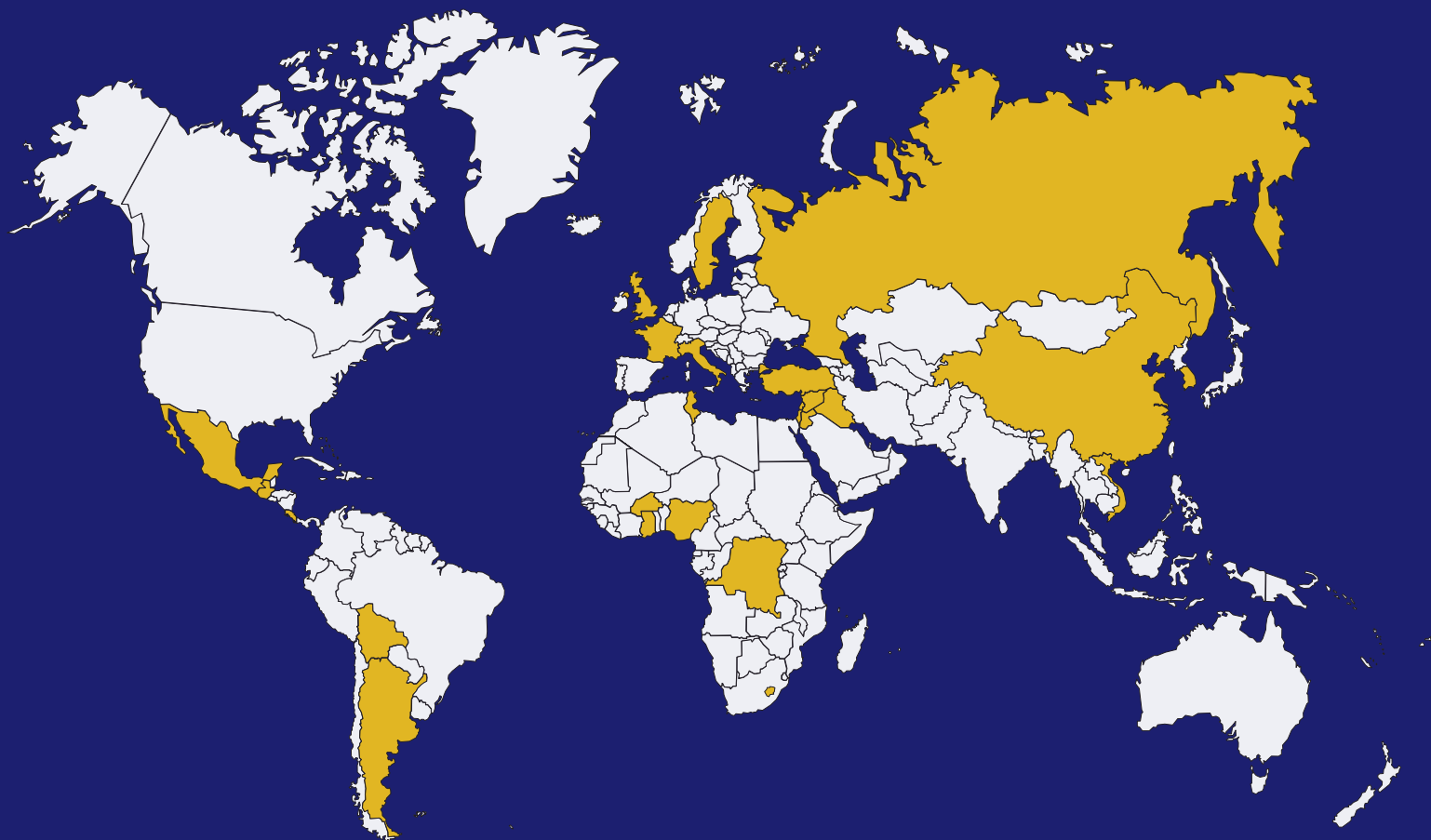
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GAME ONE



“Game On”

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD

The past few years have been a period of global restructuring. In this edition of the Michigan Journal of International Affairs, we take note of these changes, whether positive or negative, that collectively represent a fundamental shift in political structures across the world. As the pandemic, environmental disasters, and political instability of the past few years continue to erode morale, we have reached a turning point. Whether by coincidence, by policy, or by force, many of the long-standing structures are changing—and many of these changes present structural challenges to regional stability or traditional governing systems. In some cases, this rebalancing presents the opportunity to change these institutions themselves.

Middle East Regional Editor Anna Tuohey outlines an opportunity for sustainable development in her piece, “Crucial Collaboration: How Israel and Jordan Have a Unique Opportunity to Begin Addressing the Region’s Water Crisis.” By renegotiating the diplomatic structures that work towards addressing the water crisis in the Middle East, Anna outlines an opportunity for new high-level coordination between nations.

In the Americas, years of political and environmental turmoil have brought upon an immense period of restructuring. Regional contributors confront this range of issues, and Regional Editor Samantha Klos writes about the “Waxing and Waning of Guatemalan Democracy.” The ongoing changes in Guatemala, mirroring the paths of El Salvador and Nicaragua, represent an authoritarian push made visible by a crumbling justice system.

Alberto Della Torre, Regional Editor of Europe, details a physical restructuring of cities across Europe in his piece “Paris is changing drastically. Other European cities are taking note.” As Paris continues to add bike-friendly infrastructure, greenery, and food composting sites, the city is becoming a more accessible, people-friendly space. Cities across Europe are beginning to follow suit.

In Africa, Addison Egen describes how Ghana’s model for investing in electricity could “provide African people with dreams of modern technological convenience” and “economic diversification beyond resource extraction.” He argues that the Ghanaian example could serve as a model for Africa, and his article comes at a time when the method for energy investment and development on the continent is becoming an increasingly pertinent conversation.

Finally, Anna Heiss, writer for Asia, illustrates the consequences of climate change in the Maldives, and the necessity of adaptive infrastructure and formal legal protections for climate-related migrants. Teamwork between the wealthiest nations and those bearing the brunt of climate change is crucial to challenge these disproportionate impacts.

“Game On” is a commentary on the physical, environmental, political, and economic restructuring happening across the globe in this post-COVID era. Whether positive or negative, this period has the potential to shape the longstanding global landscape for years to come.

- Michigan Journal of International Affairs, Editorial Board

Table of Contents

AFRICA

1. **“The Future of Music is in Africa”** - Ethan Story
2. **“Ghana’s National Electrification Scheme: A Blueprint for Powering Africa”** - Addison Egen
3. **“The Democratic Republic of the Congo should invest in renewable energy”** - Aditya Kalahasti
4. **“Tunisia is Facing a Doomed Electoral Boycott”** - Michael Deeter
5. **“Burkina Faso: Caught Between Sankara’s Ghost and Islamist Insurgency”** - Simon Monke
6. **“Drought, famine, and al-Shabaab: Learning from the past in Somalia”** - Ayla Kaufman

AMERICAS

7. **“Perpetual Peronism: Why Argentina’s Crisis is Getting Worse”** - Miguel Calle
8. **“Mexico’s Double Tragedy: Mothers Risk their Lives Searching for their Disappeared”** - Emmanuel Orozco Castellanos
9. **“Export or Die: Bolivia’s Failure to Harness its Lithium Resources”** - Jack Marin
10. **“The Waxing and Waning of Guatemalan Democracy”** - Samantha Klos
11. **“Russian ransomware giant ‘Conti’ is dead—and that’s going to be everyone’s problem.”** - Jordan Halpern

ASIA

12. **“We Didn’t Start the Fire: The Burden of Financing Climate Adaptation”** - Anna Heiss
13. **“What a teetering housing market means for China”** - Ben Antonow
14. **“It’s Not How Big It Is, It’s How You Use It: How South Korea can adapt its military to a decreasing population”** - Ethan Wilmot
15. **“‘Art-Drain’ in Vietnam: A global dilemma of emerging art markets in the developing world”** - Joey Do
16. **“The New Space Race: Are China and the U.S. On a Collision Course?”** - Rick Walker
17. **“Hidden Behind The Rainbow: The Harsh Realities of Hawaii’s Tourism Industry”** - Tiffany Pham
18. **“Build, Build, Build, Then Build Some More”** - Oscar Soberg

EUROPE

19. **“Paris is changing drastically. Other European cities are taking note.”** - Alberto Della Torre
20. **“Stalemate at Stormont: Northern Ireland, powersharing, and a reconsideration of the sectarian formula ”** - Fiona Caughey
21. **“Estonia: A Digital Haven to Watch and Follow”** - Grace Manella
22. **“Awakening the Past: A Nordic Reckoning with the Sami People”** - Zeynep Koseoglu
23. **“Georgia Meloni: the new face of the alt-right or an addition to Europe’s growing right-wing political trends?”** - Alex Triandafillidis
23. **“Putin’s Blundering Pursuit of Global Glory”** - Ella Sieger

MIDDLE EAST

24. **“Crucial Collaboration: How Israel and Jordan Have a Unique Opportunity to Begin Addressing the Region’s Water Crisis”** - Anna Tuohey
25. **“The Lebanese Kafala System: What Must Be Done”** - Omar Malik
26. **“On The Discriminatory Dangers of Repatriation Processes”** - Sumayah Basal
27. **“Ukraine v. Palestine: Double Standards for Refugees ”** - Charlotte Dubin
28. **“A Grid Under Attack: The Islamic State & the Rise of Energy Terrorism in Iraq”** - Sophie Clark

AFRICA



The Future of Music is in Africa

Ethan Story

Afrobeats has had a hell of a last couple years.

The music genre, which originated in Nigeria before spreading to the rest of the continent, is now taking the international music world by storm. In the United States, Nigerian hitmaker Burna Boy's African Giant nabbed Afrobeats' first Grammy nomination in 2019; just a year later, his follow-up *Twice as Tall* became the first Afrobeats album to win the Grammys Best Global Music album award. Fellow Nigerian Wizkid has seen a similar rise to international success, featuring on Drake's inescapable hit single "One Dance" in 2015 before his album *Made in Lagos* was nominated for the Grammys this past awards cycle. Songs from Fireboy DML ("Peru," which was also remixed to feature global pop star Ed Sheeran), CKay ("Love Nwantiti"), and the aforementioned Wizkid ("Essence") have all charted on the Billboard Hot 100 recently, while Spotify's African Heat playlist tallies over one million subscribers. In the United Kingdom, Afrobeats artists regularly sell out headline shows and appear in the U.K. Official Charts. Afrobeats rising popularity across Britain has led to the diaspora getting in on the action, with artists such as NSG and J Hus crafting pop hits that are firmly rooted in their West African heritage.

Afrobeats did not become popular overnight, but rather traces its roots back decades through many of Africa's musical legends. The genre all but shares a name with Afrobeat—the genre popularized by Nigeria's Fela Kuti in the 1970s that combined jazz, funk, and traditional African rhythms with lyrics touting black liberation. Soukous, the Congolese genre known for its highly danceable and fast rhythms, became widespread in the clubs of London and Paris in the 1980s, while Beninese singer Angélique Kidjo reached global prominence with her 1991 breakthrough album *Logozo*, which fused a melting pot of traditional African music with hip-hop, jazz, and funk. Afropop evolved once again in the 21st century, turning into the Afrobeats genre of today through a combination of fast-moving and danceable drums and braggadocious lyrics about having a plain 'ol'e good time. The end result is sun-soaked music that is not only sure to elevate mood but also to turn any occasion into a party.

The genre's increased global popularity owes much of itself to the growing African diaspora in the United States and Europe. The foreign-born black population in the United States has nearly doubled since 2000, rising from 2.4 million to 4.6 million in 2019. The United Kingdom and France are also seeing significant growth in their diaspora populations, especially in the urban hubs of London and Paris. African culture is becoming increasingly commonplace in Western cultural hubs, because of not only the patronage of the diaspora but also increased Western exposure to artists and tastemakers of African origin, from comedian Trevor Noah to novelist Yaa Gyasi. This trend is resulting in outsized cultural significance—with record labels, radio stations, and

clubs all joining in on the Afrobeats party.

The heightened power of Afrobeats has led the music industry to invest heavily in the continent, further raising the profile of the genre and cementing Africa's staying power as a music epicenter. The streaming platform Audiomack opened a satellite office in Nigeria, while streaming giant Spotify expanded access to its platform from just a handful of countries to more than 40 countries last year. This expansion will be sure to help Afrobeats artists, who will now be able to receive more money for their work as fans no longer have to resort to pirating to hear their favorite songs. Record label Universal Music Group invested in Nigeria by opening a branch location in Lagos, while the big three labels—Universal Music Group, Sony Music, and Warner Music Group—have all struck licensing deals with the streamer Boomplay Music, founded in Lagos and which has over 70 million subscribers all across Africa. African nations themselves are joining in, with the Central Bank of Nigeria and the African Export-Import Bank launching hundred million dollar initiatives to fund the continent's growing creative industries.

While Afrobeats has largely been responsible for the meteoric rise of African music on the global pop culture stage, the future of music emanating from the continent promises to move beyond a single genre. Already, many African artists are rejecting the Afrobeats moniker: OkayAfrica writer Korede Atkinsete called the Afrobeats label a commodification of African culture that paints the continent in

monolithic terms, while Burna Boy has been outspoken about the fact that Afrobeat(s) means one thing and one thing only—the genre of Fela Kuti, not the African music of today. Indeed, it is a bit absurd to categorize the music that originates from Africa's 54 countries as belonging to just one single genre; Nigeria is by far the most prolific producer of Afrobeats hits, relegating other important musical styles such as Tanzania's Bongo Flava largely to the background. Likewise, it is important to note that many of the aforementioned Afrobeats hits only entered the charts due to Western artists featuring on remixes, a fact that bolsters the argument that Western audiences are interested more in the commodification and co-opting of African music than appreciating its rich sound and cultural tradition.

Still, it is undeniable that the catch-all term of Afrobeats—and the genre's subsequent popularity—has given rise to a new global awareness of African music at large, promising to elevate African culture on the global stage in the same way hip-hop has elevated black culture in the United States. It is not uncommon to now find listeners across the globe who have never been to Africa nor who grew up in its rich cultural traditions to be bumping the latest hit single from Wizkid or Burna Boy, a testament to music's power of lessening geographic distances and bringing people together. Hopefully, Afrobeats continues to expand and expose international audiences to even more of Africa's unique musical traditions. Regardless, if Afrobeats continues on its current trajectory and the popularity of African music grows to previously unaware listeners, then at least one thing is clear: the future of music is in Africa.



Rapper Wizkid performing in 2013.

Ghana's National Electrification Scheme: A Blueprint for Powering Africa

Addison Egen

Household electricity is one of the keys to modern economic development. With connection to a national grid, individuals gain access to crucial education and information through digital media, along with modern health conveniences like refrigeration and fans. With improved health and more available time, people are able to reinvest their efforts into generating additional income through the labor force and creating new businesses, diversifying economies away from resource extraction. Despite an obvious demand for electrification, it cannot be achieved by merely setting the private sector loose. Some of electrification's benefits, such as public security and information, partially exist outside of the market and thus cannot be properly integrated into the resource's market price. Furthermore, private suppliers fall into a sort of collective action problem and lack the necessary incentive to individually invest in infrastructure projects on their own. Instead, intelligent policies merging public and private incentives must be instituted. Those seeking to build or invest in African power sectors should carefully study Ghana's National Electrification Scheme (NES), a highly successful electrification plan on the continent, providing a unique framework to achieve greater prosperity in Africa.

After gaining independence in 1957, Ghana possessed a power sector that seems unrecognizable today. The market was fragmented, composed of self-serving industries and institutions. These institutions mostly utilized diesel generation plants only able to generate power on a highly localized basis. The nation had some technology capable of generating electricity, but without necessary public infrastructure investments, it was usually generated and consumed by individual entities in a self-sufficient manner. The government did begin to slowly involve itself in the power sector throughout the 1960s, creating the Volta River Authority (VRA), a governmental power monopoly, to construct dams on the nation's largest river for hydropower

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Ghanian electrification model may not be a stairway to heaven. However... it gives hope for a more prosperous way of life.

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production. However, the government rarely invested in the power line infrastructure needed to supply its citizenry with electricity. Instead, it sold electricity to neighboring countries and powered local schools and road construction projects.

Ghanaian citizens' fortunes wouldn't significantly change until 1989 when Jerry Rawlings, Ghana's first president following a 1981 coup, instituted the National Electrification Scheme (NES) as a component of his broader economic reform. The NES was a multi-phased, decades-long strategy intended to provide universal electricity access to Ghanaian households. While the program has not quite met its lofty goals, it is arguably Africa's most successful. Over the past 30 years, Ghana's electricity access rate has climbed from 23 percent to 85 percent, far outpacing regional growth rates. Even more impressively, rural electricity access has skyrocketed from 3 percent to 79 percent, cementing Ghana's rural electrification increase as the highest on the African continent over the time period.

The NES was an intricately assembled plan, laying out steps and phases towards achieving universal electricity access. Three central steps guided the Ghanaian government's success in implementation. First, the government achieved great success in its initiative through a combination of strategic debt financing and relative political stability. After ousting his predecessor in a coup, former Ghanaian president Jerry Rawlings sought economic revolution against what he saw as a corrupt ruling class by executing officials, jailing corporate leaders,

and instituting harsh price controls. His economic policy quickly backfired, however, as shortages became rampant and inflation rates jumped to 140 percent. Rawlings chose to significantly alter paths in 1983, opting instead for a relatively liberal Ghana which permitted foreign investment and promoted citizen welfare through public works projects and subsidies. Rawlings used foreign investment through the initiation stage of the NES, calling upon western donors to bankroll new projects to develop geothermal and fossil fuel resources. This funding helped Ghana to overcome the high costs of new resource development and end its dependency on hydroelectric energy, which proved unstable and incapable of providing long-term economic growth after several periods of drought. Risks associated with foreign debt financing were also better controlled after Rawlings chose to transition power peacefully in 1996, establishing a relatively democratic Ghana that could provide more consistent fiscal policy and reduce corruption.

Ghana's second step was to partially divest power from central, governing bodies to local authorities and the private sector. The government provided funding to regional capitals and partnered with municipalities to form regional bases they would branch from in pursuit of universal electrification. This likely provided the government with more information on the needs of individual communities and the cost structure of projects. Ghana also partially disbanded the Volta River Authority, allowing private firms to enter the production side of operations, while maintaining government control over distribution. These steps ensured the advantages of competition and investment in production while

maintaining a clear national directive in the distribution of power.

Finally, Ghana successfully revealed and capitalized on citizen demand through its Self-Help Electrification Programme, a subplan within the broader NES that prioritized the electrification of communities willing to provide low voltage poles for projects. Communities willing to pay for a portion of their area's financing were able to jump ahead in the queue for electrification plans, minimizing cost and permitting communities heavily demanding electricity to receive it first. The self-help electrification programme avoided issues common with private sector investment into what is effectively a public service, all while ensuring those able and willing to pay for their electricity did not purely free-ride off of the government's investment.

By increasing rural electrification at a faster rate than any other African country, Ghana made a significant stride towards alleviating poverty. Accessing the conveniences of electricity allowed countless Ghanaian households to drastically shift their consumption, labor, and time-spending habits. Ghanaian households supplied under the NES became 44 percent wealthier than previously financially equivalent households that were not supplied by the NES. School enrollment in NES-supplied zones increased by 26 percent, and non-agricultural business boomed as citizens gained access to the virtual tools of the knowledge economy. While the program still has its faults, it seems undeniable that Ghana's National Electrification Scheme has been a dramatic success in powering the nation, lifting thousands out of

extreme poverty and bringing Ghana closer to middle-income status.

Ghana's electrification journey wasn't an easy one. Nonetheless, the program's rewards seem to have more than compensated for the political will and cost to electrify. Whether they are foreign governments seeking to spread their influence or African officials seeking the support of their people, stakeholders need to further fund electrification on the African continent using the Ghanaian model as a template. The Ghanaian electrification model may not be a stairway to heaven. However, it can provide African people with dreams of modern technological convenience, granting them an escape from poverty and the prospect of economic diversification beyond resource extraction. Overall, it gives hope for a more prosperous way of life.



The Democratic Republic of the Congo should invest in renewable energy

Aditya Kalahasti

At its best, the area surrounding Africa's Congo River was the home of the Kingdom of Kongo and one of the continent's largest trade networks; at its worst, the region was the site of the Congo Wars, one of humanity's deadliest conflicts. Without a doubt, the Congo region—now home to the Democratic Republic of the Congo—has had a long and turbulent history. However, in the past few hundred years, through a combination of European colonization and neocolonialist attitudes, rumors of the DRC as a place rich in natural resources led to massive exploitation by European countries, and a disregard for the development of the Congolese people, as countries tried to extract resources for profit. However, if leveraged strategically, it's these same natural resources that can allow the DRC to become an economic powerhouse in the region, particularly through the growing energy sector. Though the DRC has long focused on non-renewable resources such as oil and natural gas, the volatility in recent decades has exposed the unsustainability of oil as the primary energy source in the country. As a result, it's critical that the DRC invest in alternative energy sources like green hydrogen that they can build up quickly and efficiently through the use of increasing their cobalt trade to global automobile companies, and decreasing their financial reliance on oil.

The DRC has, by no means, ignored their natural resources. An increased focus on oil and natural gas reserves has made the country a key location for petroleum companies throughout the world. But as a result of decreasing cash reserves, as recently as this month the government began to auction off parts of their greenforest in order to increase revenue. Financial dilemmas from trade imbalances and a lack of diversification in their economy has forced the DRC to focus more on oil and gas extraction for short-term revenue gains for the past 20 years. Yet in the long-term, this is extremely unsustainable. Reports from the Organization of Economically Developing Countries, or OECD, have found that oil price shocks, like the one during the COVID-19 pandemic, hit oil-exporting developing countries

particularly hard at a time when the fossil fuel industry is facing a process of structural decline. Most of these countries are highly dependent on oil revenue for their economy, which ultimately leads to economic and social fragility in the long term. One only has to look at the example of Venezuela to see how dependence on oil can harm the economy in the long-term. But by investing in renewable energy industries, particularly those with a high likelihood of expansion in the future, the DRC can get a large return that will help them gain better financial reserves while also creating more stability in the country. This is where green hydrogen comes in. Produced by splitting water into hydrogen and oxygen, green hydrogen has arisen as a more environmentally-friendly alternative to the norm of gray hydrogen, the common environmentally-damaging hydrogen made from the methane in natural gas.

In terms of building a foundation for their green hydrogen industry, the DRC is in the strongest position to do so. A report from Curtin University in Australia in 2021 that found that using minerals like cobalt dramatically increases the yield of hydrogen from electrolyzers (devices used in green hydrogen production). German consumer data firm Statista puts this in the context of the DRC, as in 2021 they had the largest reserves of cobalt in the world, at more than 3.5 million metric tons, more than three times that of their next largest competitor. It's clear that the DRC has a clear natural advantage when it comes to green hydrogen production because of their existing natural resources, making them the perfect candidate to make the most gains from green hydrogen more than any other country. As it does not have a comprehensive national energy system, investing in green hydrogen from scratch presents a way of integrating it as an energy source throughout the country.

However in order to do this, significant monetary investment is needed. The first step that the DRC can take to address this is to increase trade of cobalt. This is once again where the DRC's natural resources come into play. Due to the rising climate crisis, alternate

forms of transportation, such as electric vehicles, scooters, and trains become more popular. One of the most critical components of such vehicles is cobalt. By 2026, cobalt demand from EVs is expected to reach 110,218 tonnes, an increase of 74.5% from 63,167 tonnes in 2022. Because of the rising demand, cobalt prices have exceeded \$50,000/ton in 2021 and 2022, spiking to \$82,840/ton in March 2022. Through capitalizing on this growing demand, the DRC can make sure that they get a tremendous financial boost to invest in their green hydrogen sector as well as other parts of society, overall strengthening their economy in a long-term investment.

The second way that the DRC will be able to raise the capital necessary to implement this policy is offering tax breaks for foreign companies doing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), where international actors invest into an industry. In this highly environmentally conscious time with the climate change movement, activist investors and larger companies are looking to invest into areas that can be environmentally important to make a positive impact or for better public image. By investing into local companies to develop areas for green hydrogen, or directly building factories, these actors can provide the money necessary for initial investment. Much of the FDI going into the DRC for the past twenty years is focused on oil and natural gas extraction to turn quick profits, making it a challenge for the DRC to switch this attention to green hydrogen. As seen earlier however, oil is quickly rising in volatility, making the sustainability of it questionable for investors because of falling stocks in oil companies, or conflict in Middle Eastern countries. If the DRC can increase taxes on companies investing into oil while decreasing taxes on growing industries like green hydrogen, they can incentivize companies to put money into a growing area like green hydrogen which presents the chance for investors to start investment from the very beginning of the industry, paving the path for more sustainable long-term profit.

Finally, the DRC should engage in trade talks with the European Union with green hydrogen. The market for renewable energy in Europe has been steadily increasing in demand, particularly for products like green hydrogen, as demand for green hydrogen across the continent has been projected to reach up to 25 million tons per year by 2030. Currently, Europe is desperate to decrease their energy reliance on Russian oil and on the Middle East, while simultaneously trying to make the switch over to renewable energy. Furthermore, because of high demand in the international economy, it can grow its export-import balance by selling

byproducts of green hydrogen popular with climate change movements. One such product is green ammonia, made from green hydrogen, currently being tested as a possible replacement for fossil fuels in thermal power generation, which would greatly decrease the emissions of existing energy sources. By engaging in trade talks as green hydrogen development is ongoing, the DRC has powerful bargaining tools they can use to create a highly beneficial trade deal.

In terms of benefits, the DRC is a perfect candidate to utilize green hydrogen to increase its geostrategic position. Since environmentally-friendly products like green ammonia are in such demand, researchers believe that exportation of these goods can improve Africa-Europe relations, and with other countries throughout the globe, making this politically appealing for the DRC by improving their strategic allies in the international community. With the potential to strengthen partnerships with other countries, this can make the investment into green hydrogen more politically feasible for politicians by presenting a path to stronger trade. Political feasibility is especially an important obstacle, as the government is facing insurgencies in multiple areas throughout the country, and lacks critical civilian infrastructure & health care. Yet many of these crises are due to energy shortages in the country, and investment in these areas can lead to better energy efficiency for healthcare centers, infrastructure improvements, and better standards of living for citizens in dozens of areas.

The road to sustainability can be long and difficult. With climate change becoming an ever-increasing threat, both developed and developing countries are being forced to take serious action to create change in their energy policy. This is overall why the DRC is the best country to lead the green energy movement. Without a previously created national energy system, they have the opportunity to create a fully unified system without having to decrease their efforts in other energy policies. Additionally, by capitalizing on their natural resources in relation to foreign demand for products like electric vehicles, they can use demand for it to gain more financial capital. With a unified policy and a strong plan, the DRC can make this transition by capitalizing on one of the fastest growing energy industries in the world. By investing into green hydrogen, the DRC can break out of the short-term cycle that European nations put them in centuries ago. Becoming an energy-dominant figure in the region is a difficult task—but if there's one country that is in the best position to do so, it's the DRC.

Tunisia is Facing a Doomed Electoral Boycott

Michael Deeter

In early 2011, the sitting President of Tunisia, Ben Ali, was removed from power following mass protests across the country motivated by the actions of Mohammadd Bouazizi, a Tunisian man who sold fruit from a cart to support his family. Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of a municipal building protesting state corruption. This action resulted in the proliferation of mass protests throughout the Middle East known as the Arab Spring. Tunisia exists as the sole nation to have democratized following this string of popular uprisings. Today, Tunisia is again in the midst of popular protests, but this time the protests are in support of a president who is consolidating executive power and eroding democratic institutions. The country's collection of opposition parties, known as the National Salvation Front, have decided to boycott the upcoming parliamentary elections as a result. However, due to strong support for the current president, Kais Saied, and weakened democratic institutions, the likelihood of a successful boycott is slim with the political marginalization of the National Salvation Front and a firm victory for Saied being the most likely outcome.

Hybrid authoritarian regimes, or those which combine some democratic institutions—such as popular elections—with authoritarian practices, are growing more and more common in today's world. They typically emerge in countries with an incomplete transition from autocracy to democracy. Such regimes derive a sense of legitimacy from holding regular elections, yet this electoral playing field is rarely even. Incumbents wield massive power and influence in hybrid regimes and opposition groups have few tools at their disposal to fight against them. As a result, boycotts appear to be one of the best options to erode the legitimacy of the incumbent. However, the fact remains that boycotting elections creates a zero-sum game for the opposition where they either successfully erode the legitimacy of the incumbent and force reforms, or the boycott fails and the opposition is politically marginalized. Tunisia has now slipped into this category: as of this year, the country has been downgraded by Freedom House from a “free” state to a “partly free” state in 2021.

If the potential consequences of a failed electoral

boycott is so high, the question remains: why do opposition groups continue to utilize this strategy to fight against incumbent hybrid regimes?

By boycotting elections, opposition parties are able to signal to the country and the world that they do not view elections as either free or fair. With this signaling, opposition parties can seek international attention concerning the illegitimacy of an upcoming election. This strategy raises the profile of opposition parties and identifies them as a space for civilians to voice discontent with an incumbent regime. If a boycott is successful, then this can lead to building popular support for reform, weaken the incumbent, and lead to an eventual change in regime. However, a key and vital condition is required for this strategy to be effective: popular support. Without it, incumbents can invalidate the opposition and increase their control of the state.

Evidence of this failure can be seen in the 2020 elections in Cote d'Ivoire. Opposition parties organized an electoral boycott as they claim that the sitting president, Alassane Ouattara, is illegally seeking a third term. Despite the boycott, there was a reported 54 percent turnout rate and the president secured 94 percent of the vote, with each of the four standing opposition candidates securing less than 2 percent of the vote each. This occurred amid accusations of voter suppression and disenfranchisement, which the opposition parties cite as the main reason why President Ouattara was able to secure his third term. Regardless, the fact remains that the opposition was not unified and was not able to mobilize a widespread and effective boycott of the election, resulting in Ouattara remaining in power.

The current situation in Tunisia shares a number of similarities with the case of Cote d'Ivoire that signal that the boycott will fail. Popular support for the opposition is currently weak, and the country is marred with widespread political apathy. These two conditions spell disaster for the upcoming boycott. President Saied maintains a relatively high level of support as he is still seen as a reformer who has the best interest of the nation

at heart, rather than a man seeking to bolster his political power and remain in office. In October of this year, Saied held a rally in Tunis which drew supporters by the thousands. Many of the President's supporters are young people who view him as a powerful force of change following years of corruption and mismanagement by the central government. Tunisia has undergone successive years of economic stagnation as well as a particularly damaging COVID-19 lockdown, and citizens widely attribute that to a ruling political elite that is viewed as self-serving and separated from the needs of the people. Furthermore, Tunisia has long suffered from deep political apathy. The ousting of its dictator, Ben Ali, was a divergence from an overarching trend of indifference toward politics, especially outside of the country's capital. However, with the emergence of President Saied in 2019, the youth rallied around him in record numbers and has since served as the base of his power.

Popular support of the incumbent, rather than the opposition, indicates that the upcoming boycott by the National Salvation Front will fail, and this possibility is strengthened by the new powers possessed by the president as a result of the recent constitutional reforms imposed by Saied. Earlier this year, President Kais organized a national referendum to approve a new constitution for the country, which he wrote himself. Within the new constitution, the vast majority of state power is concentrated within the president who can unilaterally appoint the nation's Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the judiciary is restricted to an administrative role, weakening the nation's system of checks and balances.

So, with an eroded system of checks and balances, flagging support for the opposition, and political apathy outside of the Saied's base, there is little evidence that the upcoming boycott will result in anything apart from the president's reelection and the marginalization of the National Salvation Front. Rather than continue with this boycott, the Front should stand in the parliamentary elections because, even if they win few seats, they can remain in the political game and exist as persistent challengers to his rule. If however, they are effectively marginalized from power, President Saied will be able to cement his control of the government, and the nation which lit the fire of mass protest throughout the Middle East could slip back toward authoritarianism.



Burkina Faso: Caught Between Sankara's Ghost and Islamist Insurgency

Simon Monke

On September 30, 2022, dissatisfied military forces led by Ibrahim Traoré overthrew the former military junta of Burkina Faso. This was in reaction to the former government's inability to address the Islamist insurrection in the north. This was the second military coup of 2022 in Burkina Faso. The first, which occurred in January, removed the former democratically elected government due to similar concerns about the state's insufficient approach to the insurrection. This insurgency began in 2015 with the rising popularity of Ansarul Islam, an Islamist group originally conceived as responding to Burkina's prevailing social problems. The two coups of 2022 have indicated that contemporary Burkinabè politics are dominated by the treatment of this insurgency, and thus affirming of the military's rule and the foreclosure of popular solutions to the nation's ongoing social and economic conditions.

Although the current junta has maintained the former's commitment to returning to democracy by July 2024, the succession of these coups is a continuation of Burkina Faso's long-standing military rule: Upper Volta, the state's name before 1984, experienced its first military takeover in 1966 and for about a half-century, every head of state originated in the armed forces. Due to the fact that national politics have historically been dominated by military in-fighting, the Burkinabè state has tended to have limited legitimate authority—in a set of social contracts between state and citizenry—with limited popular participation. The two aberrations to this trend were under President Thomas Sankara's revolutionary government (1983-1987) and the aforementioned democratic government (2015-2022). Sankara, who remains Burkina's most popular political figure, created these social contracts through social and economic reform, and increased popular participation. However, when he was assassinated in 1987, many of these projects went unresolved and the following government abandoned the commitment to participation and popular legitimacy.

The Islamist insurgency in the north and the national military politics it has engendered are results of Sankara's unresolved projects and the failure to create legitimate authority.

Thomas Sankara rose to power in the former Upper Volta in 1983 after a military coup. The country that his revolutionary government inherited was subject to social and economic problems from the postcolonial era. Sankara, a Third-Worldist socialist who believed in wide-reaching social and economic reorganization, led a program of broad reform. These included land reform, bureaucratic reform, an anti-imperialist stance, and the creation of a national identity. Government attention was directed at the countryside, domestic food production was targeted, 2.5 million children were vaccinated, land held by traditional authorities was redistributed to the peasantry, literacy increased from 13% to 73%, and infrastructure was invested in. These

policies, compared to the state's former small guarantee to citizens, built social contracts between the state and people. While the revolutionary government was by no means democratic, as it was ruled by the military-dominated National Council of the Revolution, one of their central accomplishments was the mobilization of popular participation and the creation of a national identity. The renaming of Upper Volta to Burkina Faso ("land of the upright people") was a part of this project, but more important was the implantation of participatory bodies in all localities, known as Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs). While also functioning as a vehicle for the central state's control of local politics, CDRs increased the popular participation of citizens as well as tying citizens to the nation rather than former authorities. Although limited in certain ways, such interactions between the state and citizens allowed for a popular legitimacy to exist. These projects were cut short with Sankara's death, the former being replaced by his friend Blaise Compaoré, who would rule until 2014.

The period following Sankara's death under Compaoré, was characterized by popular demobilization. Although Compaoré's leadership did relieve some of Sankara's ills, particularly by reversing Sankara's ban of labor unions and political parties, his "rectification" of the Burkinabè state was primarily a denunciation of Sankara's popular projects. Participation in the CDRs mostly disappeared and were transitioned to Revolutionary Committees (CRs). Where before, the CDRs functioned both as a channel for the central state in local communities and as real places of participatory democracy, the CRs played strictly a top-down role. The new government additionally shifted its attention from the countryside back to the cities, reaffirmed the social elite, and approved corruption. The result was the reintroduction of traditional power in the countryside and rampant corruption in the central state. Even the revolutionary government's most ardent and suppressed critics, at a 1988 conference of CDRs and unions, praised the former popular programs, emphasis on food production and education, campaign against illiteracy, and corruption reform.

For the most part these projects were forgotten under the Compaoré government. With pressures for liberalization in the 1990s, the state attempted to implement reforms but military rule, with little of the participation seen during the revolutionary period, once again defined the state through coercive power and little legitimate authority for many citizens. The large presence of protestors carrying images of Sankara near the end of the Compaoré government is logical as a response to the early closure of the revolutionary government's projects. When Compaoré was deposed in 2014, the weight of the past decades meant the new democratic government could not completely tackle these problems. The economic and social problems to which the revolutionary government

responded, and the state's continued lack of legitimacy, remained an unfinished sentence. The popularity of Islamist groups in the 2010s and today is a response to this problem.

In Burkina Faso, today's Islamist insurrection has its roots in both the expansion of the wider Sahel insurrection led by groups related to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, and the native development of Ansarul Islam, founded in Burkina's northern Soum province. An important element of the Islamist insurgency is its origins in the north's social organization. Ansarul Islam's initial and continuing popularity, aside from ideological commitment, is its expressed antagonism toward Burkina's prevailing social order. Crisis Group has stated that it "expresses the grievances of the silent majority that hold neither political power nor religious authority." The founder Malam Ibrahim Dicko's rhetoric portrayed himself as a "liberator" and "defender of the poor." The group's initial wide audience, of primarily the young and socially disadvantaged, was constructed by appeals to the north's widespread discontent. Ansarul Islam initially focused on regional inequality, class and ethnic division, the continuing dominance of traditional chieftains and religious authorities, and the division between the state and citizenry in its rhetoric. Ansarul Islam's exploitation of discontent through these appeals however do reflect an actual reality in Burkinabè social order.

Soum was characterized by: the lack of infrastructure contrasted to its economic potential, an often-brutal security forces mainly sourced from other provinces, and the continuing dominance of finically exploitative marabouts—the religious class. Not only under Compaoré, but throughout the democratic era, corruption was also once more rampant and national politics were mostly ruled by an educated elite. Additionally, Malam responded to existing divides between the Fulani, Kurumba, and Mossi ethnic groups as well as continuing class divide. Fundamentally, the outsized and rejected roles of traditional and marabout authority, and inequality reflect the Burkinabè state's failure to construct a unified national identity; and the generalized, now violent, dissent of northern citizens reflects the inexistence of common narratives and social contracts between the state and citizenry allowing for a legitimate state authority.

The central political role of the northern Islamist insurrection is part and parcel with the dominant presence of Sankara's image, both being responses to the unresolved projects of legitimizing state authority under the revolutionary government. Once more under military rule, many Burkinabè are trapped between Sankara's ghost and the future of an Islamist threat, reduced to a politics of security and memory. This is a problem of two untenable futures: one, a recall to Sankara's anachronistic African socialism, the other, an Islamist organization incompatible with Burkina's diverse population. Presented with neither, contemporary Burkina Faso, the issues of past, future, and legitimate authority remain for military government and oncoming democratic state.

Drought, famine, and al-Shabaab: Learning from the past in Somalia

Ayla Kaufman

“We had no strength to bury her,” described Fatuma Omar, a Somali mother whose daughter died of malnutrition. Fatuma’s harrowing story is not uncommon; central and southern Somalia are experiencing their worst drought in 40 years. Today’s crisis is quickly mirroring Somalia’s famine of 2011, where drought induced a lethal food crisis for which international assistance was delayed. In hopes of spurring aid today, humanitarian organizations have—to no avail—called on the UN to declare a famine in the country. Absent a formal classification of famine, international food relief is unlikely and risks repeating the deadly mistakes of 2011.

More than 20 million people in the Horn of Africa are currently affected by drought. Rising temperatures exacerbate the naturally arid climate of the region, fomenting drought conditions as potential rainfall instead evaporates. In Somalia, the result has been an unprecedented failure of four rainy seasons, with predictions for the fifth season indicating rainfall is already 60 percent lower than average. More than 90 percent of the country is subsequently facing severe to extreme drought, jeopardizing agriculture irrigation, drinking water, and pastoralist’s water supplies. Somalia’s constraints on domestic food production are compounded by a limited capacity to import food. The country’s primary food suppliers are Russia and Ukraine, who collectively provide over 90 percent of Somalia’s wheat imports. The Russia-Ukraine war has stalled key grain deliveries, which has more than tripled the cost of staple goods such as wheat, rice,

flour, and sugar.

Somalia’s food crisis is further exacerbated by al-Shabaab’s influence. The Islamist militant group has capitalized on the drought to amplify their territorial control, which encompasses an estimated 800,000 Somalians affected by the drought. A key method that al-Shabaab uses to assert control is through taxing Somali residents’ crops, livestock, and proximate water sources, diverting harvest revenues from food scarce Somalians. By destroying and poisoning wells, al-Shabaab also establishes dependence on the group for water, punishes unloyal residents, and aggravates water scarcity. The group then precludes assistance from the federal government and international sources by attacking aid trucks and their recipients, thereby cementing al-Shabaab as the sole water and food service provider. Under a heightened state of dependence, Somalia’s drought has enabled al-Shabaab to increase their legitimacy, influence, and profits, while worsening the country’s food shortages.

Between domestic restrictions on food production, limitations on Russian and Ukrainian imports, and al-Shabaab restrictions on water availability, Somalia faces a food crisis. Part of Somalia’s Baidoa and Buurhakaba districts are already experiencing famine, and the UN Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs projects that the Bay Region will experience widespread famine by the end of the year. However, in order to formally classify that a country is experiencing famine—which has not yet happened in Somalia—the UN and Somalia must make a joint

famine declaration. Famine is a technical term defined by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization’s Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). According to the IPC, a phase five famine classification requires a country to meet three criteria, all of which are likely present in Somalia.

First, the IPC specifies that under a famine, more than 20 percent of households must experience an extreme lack of food. In Somalia, 7.8 million people are currently hungry and 7.1 million of those individuals face acute food insecurity, meaning that their lives are in immediate danger without assistance. Additionally, 300,000 Somalians are at risk of starvation, over a million individuals are internally displaced due to drought, and 40 percent of the population will require food aid to stave off hunger. As nearly half of Somalia’s total population are suffering from food insecurity, surely the country meets the household threshold for a famine declaration.

Somalia also meets the second IPC metric for famine, which requires that 30 percent of children experience acute malnutrition. In fact, the World Food Program estimates that 45 percent of Somali children, or 1.5 million children under the age of five, are acutely malnourished, but expected to be severely malnourished by the end of the year. According to UNICEF, one Somali child has been admitted to a health facility for severe to acute malnutrition every minute of every day since August. Lastly, famine classification requires that for every 10,000 individuals, two adults or four children die daily. Although exact figures are lacking, and all calculations underestimate deaths in unmonitored rural areas, thousands have already died in Somalia and hundreds of thousands more are at risk of death. A higher death rate than Somalia’s famine in 2011 is anticipated as twice as many Somalians are affected by today’s drought, which has already lasted longer than in 2011.

Despite clear famine conditions, concerns over al-Shabaab have deterred the UN and Somalia from formal declaration. On one hand, foreign governments critical to UN support of a famine classification are

wary that a declaration would increase pressure for humanitarian assistance which al-Shabaab could seize. Guaranteeing financial assistance reaches citizens rather than the extremists is virtually impossible since al-Shabaab taxes cash donations and food aid. Inadvertent international financing of the group would not only incur reputational damage, but is frequently barred by legal measures that prevent financial aid by countries, like the US, from benefitting designated terrorist groups. Al-Shabaab attacks on aid deliveries also deter foreign investors who are not certain that their donations will reach the intended recipients. Likewise, the Somali government has avoided declaring famine out of concerns that doing so would undermine confidence in the newly elected president and unintentionally facilitate leverage for al-Shabaab to delegitimize the central government.

Similar concerns over al-Shabaab resulted in a delayed famine declaration and insufficient international aid during Somalia’s 2011 famine; not declaring a famine today risks repeating the same mistake. In the absence of a famine declaration, investors faced inadequate pressure to provide food relief. Consequently, half of the total 260,000 deaths in 2011 occurred before famine was officially declared. Many experts and agencies believe that if the UN and Somalia had acted on warning signs earlier in 2011, deaths would have been averted. While no funding mechanism is triggered by famine declarations, aid from UN agencies and pressure on international donors historically surges once famine is identified. The same logic applies to today. Humanitarian assistance to Somalia has been sluggish in the absence of a famine declaration as only 45 percent of the UN’s requested \$2.26 billion in assistance has been funded. Aid workers argue that a formal famine declaration would shift donor attention to Somalia, thereby increasing life-saving assistance. Somalia cannot wait; the food crisis demands urgent attention and humanitarian assistance—regardless of famine classification—but formally declaring famine would go a long way to catalyze international action.



AMERICAS

Perpetual Peronism: Why Argentina's Crisis is Getting Worse

Miguel Calle

L'État, c'est moi ("I am the state"), said Louis XIV of France. Argentina's Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK) could make a similar pronouncement and few would dispute it. For the last 20 years, the Kirchner family has dominated Argentinian politics and eroded the country's economy in an admittedly democratic manner. As long as CFK is in power, Peronism, her preferred ideology, will endure. Unless the country discards Peronism once and for all, Argentina cannot be rescued. To comprehend the origins of this dilemma, one must understand Argentina's shatterproof bond with its past.

48 years ago, Juan Domingo Peron died in the middle of his third term as president. During his first term, his second wife, Eva ("Evita"), became the most beloved figure in Argentinian history. Her life was adapted into a Broadway musical and later turned into a film starring Madonna. Evita's mythos as a protector of the working class, martyr (she died of cancer at 33), and "Spiritual Leader of the Nation" – according to the Argentinian Congress – has endured. Without Evita, Juan Peron would be a distant memory. Her legacy as a female gladiator and political pioneer blazed the path for CFK to mirror Evita's image. Instead, "Peronism," a blend between socialism, nationalism, and populism created by Peron, continues to be Argentina's favorite political movement. Evita lent the program her popularity and legitimacy, and it has lasted half a century, enduring even after Stalinism and Maoism.

CFK, born Cristina Fernandez, added the "de Kirchner" part of her name ("de," in a Spanish context, means "married to") when she wed Nestor Kirchner in 1975. Kirchner became governor of Santa Cruz in 1991 and president in 2003. In the period between Kirchner's governorship and the beginning of his presidency, CFK was a deputy in the Argentinian Congress. When Kirchner was elected to the "Casa Rosada" (the presidential mansion), CFK adopted the title of first lady. She chose to return to Congress as a senator in 2005. Two years later, she ran for president and won.

One of CFK's first acts was to nationalize private pension funds. She also instituted the protectionist measures typical of "import substitution industrialization" (ISI). ISI, fostered by Juan Peron, is an attempt to promote the domestic production of previously imported goods. It has been proven not to work. Nevertheless, CFK was fortunate, for two reasons. First, her irresponsible economic measures were not enough to curtail growth after the Great Recession convulsed the world. Second, Nestor Kirchner died in 2010, which generated such an outpouring of support that she won reelection in a landslide in 2011. She claimed that her government

If Argentina chooses to elect Peronism again—especially in continuing CFK's revival of ISI—there is no saying what the extent of this country's tragedy might be.

reduced the poverty rate substantially, but the numbers (5.4 percent in 2012, down from 54 percent in 2001) have been challenged – with the real number being pinned at around 24 percent – by some experts. CFK instituted currency controls during her second term, which limited people's ability to buy or sell foreign currency. Her second term ended in 2015, a year after Argentina defaulted on its debt because of her policies.

There's a saying among economists: "throughout history there have been only four kinds of economies in the world: advanced, developing, Japan, and Argentina." This is not hyperbole. They even have a name for it – the Argentina Paradox. For every Japan, a once poor country that underwent an economic miracle to become rich, there is an Argentina, a once rich country that underwent economic catastrophe to become poor. This is not to say that Peron or CFK are totally responsible for this debacle. Argentina's undoing began before Peron, in the 1930s, after the Great Depression permanently stopped its economic expansion. But unlike other industrialized economies in the Western Hemisphere, including neighbor Chile, Argentina never recovered. The mismanagement of the country during the last 100 years is staggering – there were six coups d'état (1930, 1943, 1955, 1962, 1966, and 1976), innumerable corruption scandals, an unnecessary war with the United Kingdom, and a disastrous approach to macroeconomic policy in nearly every administration. It disconcerts experts how Argentina, now a full-fledged democracy, is at one of the lowest points in its history, both economically and institutionally.

In 2015, Mauricio Macri was elected – the first right-wing president in 12 years. Even though many expected an economic revolution, it never happened. GDP shrunk by 3.4 percent, inflation totaled 240 percent, and poverty increased by nearly four percent during his presidency. This led to the election of left-wing politician Alberto Fernandez in 2019, with CFK as his vice president. (Regrettably, the repetition of these names is almost monarchical). Somehow, Fernandez's presidency has been worse than Macri's. Experts say that by the end of 2022, inflation will hit 95 to 100 percent, partly because the government will not stop printing money. Fernandez has an approval rating of less than

20 percent. The poverty rate is 36.5 percent. There are new reports every couple of weeks about Fernandez and CFK's fights. A federal prosecutor is seeking a 12-year prison sentence for CFK – and a ban from holding public office again – on corruption charges, though it is unlikely she will ever see the inside of a cell. And to aggravate the institutional upheaval, on September 1, 2022, CFK miraculously survived an assassination attempt after the murderer's gun jammed.

This leads us to 2023, when Argentina's presidential elections will take place. Myriad candidates are vying for the office. At present, the candidates are unconfirmed, but "Juntos por el Cambio" ("Together for Change," Macri's movement) is favored to win. "Frente de todos" ("Everyone's Front," Fernandez and CFK's movement) is second. The libertarian party, "La Libertad Avanza" ("Liberty Advances"), led by an eccentric deputy named Javier Milei, has been rising in the polls and is third. Though unlikely, there have been talks between Macri and Milei on forming an alliance. Should it happen, Together for Change will most likely win the presidency. Conversely, CFK could run at the top of the ticket or as vice president to current finance minister Sergio Massa. Either way, CFK is here to stay, to Argentina's detriment. She is the 21st-century embodiment of Peronism, the failed, authoritarian legacy of a man long dead.

"Keeping books on social aid is capitalistic nonsense. I just use the money for the poor. I can't stop to count it," some claim Evita once said. CFK has a similar philosophy. Making a normative statement in support of Macri or Milei would be irresponsible; neither is capable of doing an adequate job as president. Should Macri not be the candidate, then perhaps one might reassess. Either way, if Argentina chooses to elect Peronism again – especially in continuing CFK's revival of ISI – there is no saying what the extent of this country's tragedy might be.

Mexico's Double Tragedy: Mothers Risk their Lives Searching for their Disappeared

Emmanuel Orozco Castellanos

“Those who threaten to kill me don't understand that I was killed when they took my children away.” This is one of many public statements Cecilia “Ceci” Patricia Flores has posted on Twitter. She is the President and co-founder of Madres Buscadoras de Sonora y de México, a collective of mothers dedicated to the search of disappeared persons that acts independently of the government. Ceci became involved her sons, Marco Antonio and Alejandro disappeared from their hometown of Mochis, in the Mexican state of Sinaloa. After becoming frustrated with the government's ineptitude to conduct an investigation into their disappearances, she took the matter into her own hands. She used her Twitter account to ask people for information that could help her locate clandestine mass graves. Many Mexicans cooperated, sending anonymous leads through WhatsApp.

Ceci is now searching for disappeared persons full-time, wandering alongside other searching mothers under the scorching sun of the Sonoran Desert and the arid landscape of Jalisco. Using sticks, shovels, and whatever other resources they have at their disposal, they dig in search of human remains, an arduous and horrific task that the Mexican government refuses to do. There is a perilous job. Ceci, as well as many of the mothers in the collective, constantly receive death threats from both government officials and drug cartels. However, Ceci Flores has not stopped searching. As she often explains using the hashtag #HastaEncontrarlos (until we find them), she “won't

stop searching or supporting the mothers who are going through the same torment.” Cecilia's struggle has not only exposed the appalling severity of the disappearance crisis in the country but has also shed light on the absurd performativity of the Mexican justice system.

The incidence of enforced disappearances in Mexico has reached catastrophic proportions. In May 2022, Mexico registered a staggering 100,000 people as disappeared. Although estimates are inconclusive, this landmark arguably makes Mexico the country with the largest disappeared population in the world. Yet, this scourge is anything but new. Since its formation in 2013, the United Nations Committee Against Enforced Disappearances (CED) had requested to visit Mexico, but the government consistently refused. It was not until August 2021, after a years-long advocacy campaign by civil society, that the government formally recognized the CED's competence and allowed them into the country. Notably, this visit was the first instance that the Mexican government allowed a UN Treaty Body to enter the country.

The most outstanding finding of the CED visit was that it documented how the government's almost absolute inaction has exacerbated the crisis of disappearances. For example, the Committee reported that between 2006 and 2021, the number incidents of enforced disappearances in Mexico rose by 98 percent. Yet, impunity is almost guaranteed. From January to November 2021 alone, only

between 2 and 6 percent of disappearance cases had been processed in the justice system, and out of those, only 36 verdicts were issued, according to the report. In addition, the CED expressed concern for the forensic crisis, estimating that it would take at least 120 years to identify all the bodies that have been found in mass graves. Although the CED attributed most of the disappearances to non-state actors such as criminal groups, the report highlighted that, more often than not, these actors frequently committed crimes with “the acquiescence of government officials.” In a sense, the CED's visit only confirmed what civil society organizations like Madres Buscadoras de Sonora already knew: the rise in enforced disappearances has come about not only because the government has failed to do enough, but because the government has been complicit in the crisis.

Nevertheless, the Mexican President has set out to deny the barbaric proportions of this humanitarian crisis. When confronted by journalists about the findings of the CED, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) wasted no time and mocked the Committee publicly, “no international body is going to put us in the dock. What can they do about it? Nothing. Fabricate facts, that is,” he said in a press conference. In fact, AMLO has deliberately doubled down on his contempt for the CED by blatantly contravening its recommendations. In September, the Mexican president transferred the National Guard, a civilian-led security agency, to the military. Besides proving highly controversial, this measure directly clashes with the recommendation of avoiding military presence in civilian spaces issued by the CED. These changes in security policy take place as new evidence highlighting the role of the military in the torture and disappearance of the victims of the so-called Ayotzinapa case comes to light. Although AMLO has claimed that no other Mexican administration had been as concerned for the disappeared as he has, his rhetoric and actions show otherwise.

Nothing illustrates the government's frivolous response to this crisis better than its be-

trayal of the victims' relatives. When Ceci Flores denounced the government's failure to protect her from criminal organizations, the President lied and claimed that the Ministry of the Interior had issued precautionary measures on her behalf when no such measures had actually been taken. In fact, Ceci accused AMLO's cabinet of asking her to halt her searches in exchange for protection. She categorically refused. “I am more afraid of the government than the cartels,” Ceci explained on Twitter. “They think we are more dangerous than the criminal groups made up of kidnappers and murderers that threaten us.” Ceci is aware that searching for their children without government protection is so dangerous it can become a death sentence.

The murder of Esmeralda Gallardo, a mother who searched for her disappeared daughter in the state of Puebla, is a grim reminder of the imminent danger these mothers face in their search for justice. Her death, which took place in October 2022, is a painful symbol of the double tragedy of enforced disappearances in Mexico. The relatives of the disappeared, who have already endured untold suffering, are actively re-victimized by a government that does not deliver justice, mocks victims and their relatives, and fails to guarantee their safety.

Despite being left to their own devices, these mothers refuse to forget about those missing. They have lost so much that risking their finances, mental well-being, and even their lives seems insignificant. They no longer celebrate Mother's Day. They continue digging with fury and grief, hoping to find “even a handful of bones” that will allow their souls to find some semblance of what their lives once were. And while the Mexican government turns their inconceivable pain into a circus, mothers like Cecilia continue their cumbersome task of unburying Mexico's disappeared, in their hope to create a future in which “not a single mother, father, or anyone goes to bed crying for their son, daughter, or disappeared relative”—a world where “the kind of love that heals wounds embraces us all.”

Mothers of disappeared sons and daughters march on Mother's Day to demand information on the whereabouts of their children.



UNA MADRE NO
SE CANSA DE
BUSCAR

¿Hasvisto a.?
Leonardo Daniel Rodríguez Morales
Sexo: Masculino
Edad Actual: 27 años
Estatura: 1.65 mts.
Etnia: Mexicana clara
Cabello: Largo, castaño oscuro
Frente de nacimiento: 07/07/1991
Salida matutina:
Luzera en su momento.
Cronograma:
Desaparecido en el Municipio de Monterrey, Nuevo
Léon a 03 de abril de 2011.

Export or Die: Bolivia's Failure to Harness its Lithium Resources

Jack Marin

"We are always asking for development. We have minerals, we have lithium, and people here should get something."

This sentiment from Karina Quispe, a resident of Julaca, Bolivia, is echoed across the impoverished communities surrounding southwestern Bolivia's Salar de Uyuni. In addition to being the world's largest salt flat, Salar de Uyuni is home to the world's largest reserves of lithium, the mineral vital to battery production for both grid storage and electric vehicles. In Quispe's community of Julaca on the edge of Salar de Uyuni, most men have relocated abroad for work in lithium-extraction—a glaring irony of life in a town that lies on the outskirts of the largest reserve of the metal in the world.

South America's lithium reserves aren't just in Bolivia. The continent's so-called "lithium-triangle" between Bolivia, Argentina, and Chile is home to an estimated combined reserves total of 49.9 million metric tons of the metal. At an approximate 430,000 square kilometers, the triangle is comparable in land area to California, yet its staggering density of lithium has endowed the region with 58 percent of world reserves. On a national scale, Bolivia holds 24.4 percent of these global reserves, Argentina 22.4 percent, and Chile 11.2 percent. October 2022's lithium prices were 14 times those of October 2020. As the poorest of these three nations, it is apparent that Bolivia's lithium reserves, if properly exploited, have the ability to propel the nation's economy to new heights.

In contrast to its neighbors, only a fraction of Bolivia's reserves are mined. In 2021, Chile was the world's second-largest lithium producer

at 26,000 metric tons, while Argentina placed fourth at 6,200 metric tons. Bolivia, in the very same year, produced just 540 metric tons—a quantity smaller than every other lithium-producing nation on the planet. This marked the first time the nation produced commercially viable—albeit very small—quantities of the metal. Bolivia first nationalized the resource nearly a decade and a half ago; with the nation producing such tiny quantities of commercially viable lithium, it has become exceedingly apparent that Bolivia's resource nationalism has failed.

Bolivia's challenges in properly exploiting its lithium reserves are unique. Just three years ago, former President Evo Morales fled the nation after three weeks of widespread social unrest and civil protests following the 2019 general election—an election fraught with suspicions of fraud and accusations of an authoritarian refusal to relinquish power. Further exacerbating the outrage was a lack of royalties to local communities from a lithium mining deal between Morales and a German firm made just a week prior to the President's exile.

Morales' Movement for Socialism came back to power shortly after his exile, with party-member Luis Arce elected as President in 2020. The nation's return to form under its governing party of the last two decades, however, cannot erase the effects of such publicized political turmoil in investors' minds. As such, prospects for foreign investment in Bolivian lithium extraction infrastructure have all but vanished. Previous deals with Chinese and German prospective development partners had met dead ends prior to the 2019 unrest—deals these international partners are un-

likely to reconsider in light of the nation's recent past. Without foreign investment, Bolivia lacks the technical knowledge, human capital, infrastructure, and economic capacity to expand its lithium mining sector to even begin to compete with its neighbors in the triangle.

In addition to political challenges, the extraction of lithium from Salar de Uyuni presents its own distinct physical challenges. Salar de Uyuni is generally cooler and rainier than similar salt flats in the lithium-triangle. The region receives an average annual rainfall of about 140 millimeters, compared to Salar de Atacama's two millimeters, the location of the majority of Chile's lithium extraction facilities. While Uyuni's annual precipitation is low enough to qualify the region as a desert, the thick layer of salt covering the flat's terrain proves difficult to penetrate for rainwater—resulting in significant pooling across the flat. This slows the process of evaporation vital to separate lithium from other mined minerals, thus slowing the entire extraction process compared to facilities using the very same techniques just 340 kilometers to the south in Chile. A lack of technology only worsens these issues. Bolivia recovers about 9 percent of extracted lithium from its brines, while Chile's largest mines recover over 50 percent. In perhaps the worst blow to Bolivia's lithium development, between 2008 and 2020 the nation invested over 703.6 million USD in developing extraction capabilities that became outdated in light of new technologies shortly after they became operational.

In spite of these challenges, sitting President Luis Arce renewed the country's commitment to developing its lithium resources in April 2021 through a new process known as Direct Lithium Extraction (DLE)—a significantly less costly, more efficient, and non-weather dependent method of extraction, allowing Bolivia to generate revenues in excess of costs despite unique geographical challenges. Arce has called for proposals from companies to launch pilot programs using the new technology, with contenders from China, Russia, and the U.S. vying for contracts. An American development partner would be an especially large shift following Bolivia's 2013 banning of the U.S. Agency for International Development, 2008 expulsion of the U.S. ambassa-

dor to the nation amid claims of "foreign conspiracy", and accusations of American plots against Bolivia's state-run oil and gas company. In reality, it remains unclear whether this resurgence of foreign investment will come to fruition. Fourteen years have passed since Morales' 2008 nationalization of Bolivian lithium resources and subsequent promises to vitalize the economy as global mining and battery construction power. Nine years have now passed since the opening of Bolivia's first lithium extraction facility in Salar de Uyuni, costing upwards of US\$700 million. It was eight years before the project extracted any economically viable lithium.

With lithium prices up over 200 percent year to date in the last quarter of 2022, Bolivia may finally be able to generate substantial profits from its vast lithium reserves. Arce seems to think so, with his 2021-25 agenda aiming to pursue further development. Despite physical challenges, record high prices make Uyuni's lithium increasingly attractive and economically viable. In the Potosí Department, the poorest of Bolivia's nine geographic regions, Arce's rhetoric is seen by local communities as a mere continuation of Morales' mostly empty promises of grandiose improvements in the lithium mining and battery manufacturing industries.

"Export or die" long reigned as the slogan of Bolivia's neoliberal elite—and it seems the nation has narrowly avoided death for now. While Salar de Uyuni's lithium presents unprecedented opportunity for economic development, Bolivia must work to avoid the trappings of the resource curse associated with so many mineral and oil-rich nations. With nearly two decades of resource nationalism and protectionism seemingly behind it, Bolivia must reenter negotiations with technologically advanced developers of the world. Equitable royalty deals with foreign developers, job training programs for local communities, infrastructural development and revitalization, and environmental justice concerns are just a few of the considerations that must enter dialogues going forward to rectify the South American nation's rocky past with the mineral vital to our global transition away from fossil fuels.

The Waxing and Waning of Guatemalan Democracy

Samantha Klos

"If there is no justice for the people, let there be no peace for the government," read one protester's sign in Guatemala City. Anti-corruption messages are becoming increasingly common as Guatemala's government continues down a path of significant democratic decline. In the past four years alone, the country has witnessed numerous protests, arrests of journalists, the resignation and fleeing of a top judge, and attacks on anti-corruption investigations. The rapid pace of democratic backsliding, and the reversing of a separation of powers, mirrors other authoritarian regimes in Latin America, especially in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Over the last two presidencies of Jimmy Morales and Alejandro Giammattei, the suppression of an independent justice system and journalism signal a full-fledged return to authoritarianism.

Since gaining independence from Spain in the 1820s, Guatemala has faced cycles of authoritarian and military regimes. Ideological struggles plagued the country and bred near-constant conflict. In the 1940s, some democratic reform led to the improvement of education, labor unions, and agrarian law. However, the CIA orchestrated a coup d'état in 1954, which overthrew Jacobo Arbenz, the democratically elected president. This violently reversed earlier progress under the guise of containing communism. The ramifications from the coup and political instability led to a 36-year long civil war. It is reported that "the civil war, which erupted as a result of American intervention, stifled Guatemala's economic growth, put an end to its political independence, and allowed a corrupt ruling class to dominate the country for its own political and economic gain." Democratic rule returned in 1985 and peace accords were signed in 1996. With the re-establishment of a representative democracy, regular elections, and modest political and economic recovery, it seemed that Guatemala's trajectory was improving.

Today, the outlook for Guatemala is bleak. There are two trends that best explain this: the crumbling of the Guatemalan justice system and the frequent prosecutions of anti-corruption voices. These are not just mere trends of authoritarian reemergence, but they carry continuities from years of colonial conflict, political violence, and ideological strife that perpetuates social inequalities. These parallel Nicaragua under President Daniel Ortega, whose crackdown on freedom of speech forces independent journalists to go into exile, and where the judicial system is a subordinate to the highly centralized regime.

To start, former Guatemalan president Jimmy Morales, of the right-wing National Convergence Front party, effectively terminated investigations under the mandate of the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). CICIG was an anti-graft organization backed by the United Nations which sought to investigate high-level corruption, crime, and illicit security networks. In January 2019, Morales ordered investigators to leave the country, accusing



Protesters in front of the Congress of the Republic of Guatemala in November 2020.

them of their own corruption and putting both the public and the government at risk through incomplete and partial justice. In this sense, he positioned the organization as a political enemy. Additionally, the Court has blocked several government attempts to obstruct CICIG's investigations, but the government ignored these decisions. In fact, the inspector general's office has impeached multiple constitutional court justices, and fired national police officers who have aided CICIG. This is because CICIG has exposed illegal donations to Morales, launched investigations into his family, and exposed 60 organized crime networks. It has also imprisoned some 300 people including senior members of Morales' administration.

This March, Judge Erika Aifán, a top judge of Guatemala's high-risk court, fled to the United States due to increasing threats of her immunity from prosecution being revoked. In a public announcement, she admitted, "I faced accusations, threats and pressure... I have decided to resign from my post because I do not have sufficient guarantees of protection for my life and my integrity, nor the possibility of defending myself with due process." Judge Aifán was a staunch advocate for CICIG and an integral part of their mission and, if her immunity was revoked, she could have faced prosecution and jail time. While the cases of CICIG and Judge Aifán are the most recent and high-profile, they stand as only a few examples of the collapsing independent judiciary in Guatemala. Current President Giammattei, of the conservative political party Vamos, is following in Morales' footsteps with a coalition of elites. He has orchestrated a takeover of the judiciary with Congress, now able to fully control

corruption investigations, judiciary and electoral tribunals, and organized crime networks.

This collapse, however, is not limited to the justice system: threats from the government have permeated civil society through crackdowns on journalists. In July 2022, El Periódico newspaper director José Rubén Zamora was arrested. Zamora was a "die-hard centrist" and consistently reported on high-level corruption scandals, criticizing the government's actions. He has even previously faced multiple lawsuits and physical attacks initiated by his opponents. However, this specific arrest was the government's response to civil pushback after CICIG was expelled, in an attempt to eliminate public dissent. The government justified the arrest and jailing through unfounded claims of "possible money laundering, blackmail and influence peddling." In addition, indigenous journalists who were working and protesting outside of the capital have been jailed and threatened, and former El Periódico director Juan Luis Font was unlawfully exiled due to his association with Judge Aifán.

Amidst this authoritarian steer, the people of Guatemala are standing their ground. In response to Morales' decision to end the CICIG mandate, indigenous Maya Kaqchikel and Tzutujil communities protested by blocking the Pan-American highway. In the highlands, 48 counties of Totonicapán followed suit across other major highways. Marches were held in the capital over multiple days led by students, farmers, religious organizations and more. In November 2020, protestors set fire to the building of Congress after Giammattei and Congress approved cuts to judicial, educational, and health spending while the country was trying to recover from the pandemic and natural disasters. This August, many Guatemalans, including hundreds affiliated with San Carlos University, protested Giammattei's corrupt government, high costs of living, and violations of their freedom of expression. And in comparison, it is reported that Giammattei is even more unpopular among the citizens of Guatemala than Daniel Ortega is in Nicaragua or Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela. The magnitude of their discontent will influence the actions of the civil society for years to come.

While ideological cycles are too complex to assume any one outcome, one thing is clear: now is a tumultuous time for Guatemala. Without an impartial and independent justice system, free press, or a full confrontation of their violent past, Guatemalans cannot be completely free. A continuation of democratic regression in the country would further cement a dangerous shift toward authoritarianism in the region, right behind El Salvador and Nicaragua. But unlike its neighbors, Guatemala is uniquely "re-coopting institutions and re-[concentrating] power by elites and illicit networks through criminalization, persecution and attacks." The country has escaped authoritarian regimes and political violence before, so they must use these lessons to do so again.

Russian ransomware giant ‘Conti’ is dead—and that’s going to be everyone’s problem.

Jordan Halpern

Between April and June 2022, Costa Rica suffered a historic hit to its digital infrastructure. The Conti ransomware group, beginning on April 11th 2022, launched an attack against the Costa Rican government. Exploiting a compromised entry point in a system at the Costa Rican Ministry of Finance, hackers were able to gain local network domain administrator access—eventually, this allowed them to connect to every host on Costa Rica’s network. The group then demanded a \$10 million USD ransom to regain access, then raised the ransom to \$20 million when the Costa Rican government refused to pay. In response, Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves Robles declared a state of emergency—the first ever declared in response to a ransomware attack. According to INTERPOL, this attack spanned 27 ministries and crippled the country’s digital infrastructure for months. This opened the door for another attack a few months later, carried out by the Hive ransomware group against Costa Rica’s public health service, the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS), and took down at least 30 of the 1,500 active servers.

Conti is one of the largest, most prolific, and most aggressive ransomware groups to date. The Russian group, although once considered indestructible, recently revealed its Achilles’ heel. In February 2022, it released a controversial statement: “The Conti Team is officially announcing a full support of Russian government.” Soon, its internal chats were leaked by a pro-Ukraine member. Within the over 14 megabytes of chat logs, scattered across nearly 400 JSON files, this member leaked usernames, passwords, internal leadership structure, design processes, and screenshots of the group’s hacking toolkits.

By pledging allegiance to the Russian state, Conti’s leadership not

only alienated its pro-Ukraine operatives, but it also surrendered one of the key benefits of cybercrime: unclear jurisdiction. Lack of affiliation with one nation or geographic group is often the main way these criminal hacking enterprises evade prosecution. In this case, aligning itself so closely with Russia, a state facing historic sanctions, meant that every ransom payment to Conti carried the risk of paying an individual under sanction. In essence, this means paying a ransom to Conti could become a violation of U.S. sanction policies against Russia. This is the main reason why Costa Rica didn’t pay ransom to get its systems back, keeping them offline for even longer.

Within the cyber community, experts argue over exactly *how* dead Conti is. Its prognosis ranges from only suffering a “schism” to having reached its “official date of death.” Some even suggest it “faked its own death” and is set to re-emerge at any time. Regardless, one thing is clear: given the increasing collaboration and decentralization of cyberoperatives and their activities, Latin American and Caribbean states must implement cooperative measures to combat their influence.

When the Conti brand dissipated, its operatives didn’t give up work—they scattered. When the Conti brand went under, the group simply adopted a less centralized structure, forming a network of Conti-loyal, semi-to-fully autonomous groups. This is a major departure from the strict hierarchy and structure the Conti group operated with for years. Under its network of hacking collectives sits Hive, which experts believe now sits under the Conti, along with Karakurt, BlackBasta, BlackByte, AlphV/BlackCat, HelloKitty/FiveHands, and AvosLocker. The ‘Hive’ group in particular, which launched its first ransomware attack in June 2021, has rapidly gained notoriety across Latin America and the Caribbean for a series of high-profile, massive hacks in 2022, including copy-cat attacks in Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and El Salvador, attacking energy firms, healthcare institutions, govern-

ment, and manufacturing plants.

Though not directly attributable to the Conti leadership change, 2022 has been a landmark year for cyberattacks in the Latin American and Caribbean region. It’s estimated that one out of every three ransomware attacks targets a Latin American country, the majority carried out by Conti, ALPHV/BlackCat, LockBit 2.0, and BlackByte—all Russian-based ransomware groups that have consistently targeted government infrastructure in the region, many of which are Conti-affiliated. According to Microsoft, “cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructure jumped from comprising 20% of all nation-state attacks Microsoft detected to 40%.” This increase in cybercrime, however, was not symmetrical; where North America and Europe saw a decrease in the number of ransomware cases reported between 2022 and 2021, the number of cases reported in Latin America increased.

Without the necessary preparation, as Conti operatives scatter across less Russia-specific groups, Latin America in particular stands to suffer. In terms of internet usage, Latin America and the Caribbean are hotspots. The region has the highest rate of internet user growth, expecting 68.8 percent by 2023, compared to 57 percent in 2017. Yet, its cybersecurity posture is, on average, less developed than other regions. This creates a sort of perfect storm—as experts explain, “threat actors may view [Latin American] entities as easy targets for harvesting sensitive and financially lucrative accounts via info-stealer infections.”

Additionally, as the number of ransomware groups skyrockets and alliances and networks begin to form between them, Latin American countries stand to face increasingly diverse, innovative, and high-quality ransomware, designed and carried out with significant coordination between former Conti members. Post-Conti, these malicious actors

now operate within complex transnational networks. Cyberoperatives enjoy the benefits of increased regional diversity and expertise, knowledge-sharing across groups, changes in programming language, coordination, and collaboration on attacks. In this type of environment, the nation-to-nation, individualized approach to cybersecurity most Latin American and Caribbean countries have taken will not be sufficient.

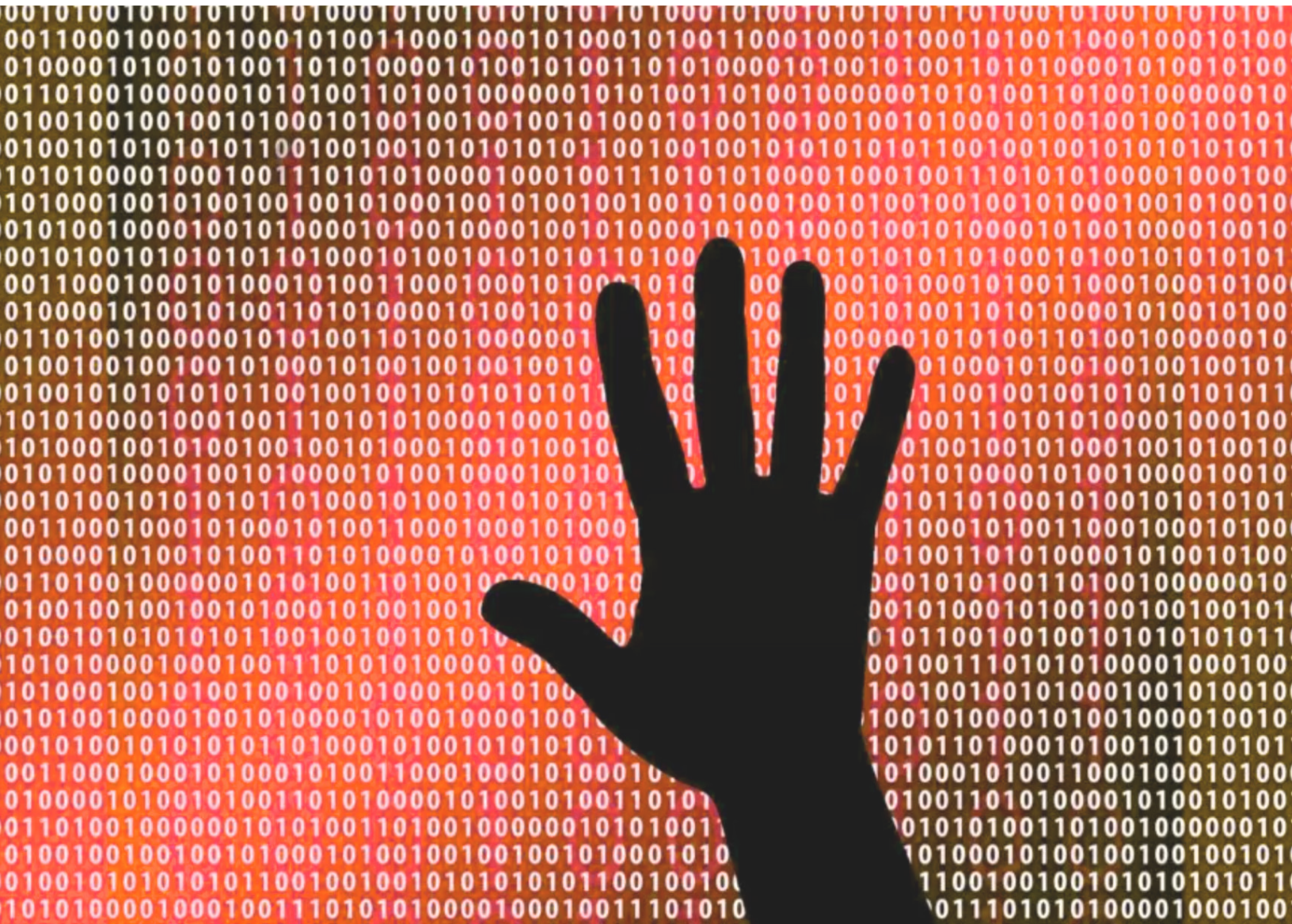
Governments, which naturally still operate with narrow, strict, top-down hierarchical structures, are already at a disadvantage when up against these horizontal networks of malicious actors. However, the region can begin to address these disadvantages by increasing collaboration efforts. The International Telecommunications Union's Cybersecurity Index has five criteria for cybersecurity: legal measures, technical measures, organizational measures, capacity development, and finally, cooperative measures. These cooperative measures can take the form of cross-regional,

cross-national, or cross-sectoral collaboration on cybersecurity issues. Latin American and Caribbean states receive consistently low scores on their cooperation; 11 received scores of 0, and the majority of other American and Caribbean states scored below average. While some organizations aim to address this gap, including the Organization of American States (OAS) Cybersecurity Program, INTERPOL's Americas Working Group on Cybercrime, and various other non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations, lack of funding and lack of engagement from member states often complicate the execution of their mandates.

To overcome these challenges, it is key to find ways to collaborate—and generally, there's a vacuum for who is going to fill spearhead this movement. A coordination role, if not filled by Latin American and Caribbean leadership, will be filled by

outsider actors. In a 2021 statement, Marcelo Motta, Chief Cybersecurity Officer for Latin America and the Caribbean at Chinese firm Huawei Technologies, called for more global collaboration on cybersecurity issues: "The best practices begin at the country level," he explained. "And that opens possibilities for collaboration between different countries."

Whether Conti is *truly* dead, Latin American cybersecurity professionals must not become complacent. The core of their security, national identities, and independence hinges on their ability to defend themselves against hegemonic powers preying on their vulnerabilities. The Latin America and Caribbean cyberspace has become a sort of battlefield for a Russo-Ukrainian proxy war. As hybrid warfare continues to dominate, these nations must band together and prepare themselves for the cyberstorm to come.





ASIA

We Didn't Start the Fire:

The Burden of Financing Climate Adaptation

Anna Heiss

Of the nearly 35 billion tons of CO₂ emitted worldwide in 2020, the Maldives emitted less than 2 million tons, less than a percent of a percent of global emissions. In contrast, the G20 members collectively contribute 75 percent of emissions. The Maldives has repeatedly called upon the wealthiest countries to adhere to frameworks created at conferences like the annual United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) to mitigate climate-related damage. Countries with negligible contributions to total global emissions, such as Small Island Developing States (SIDS) like the Maldives, are often those most affected by climate change. Many of these countries lack the finances to address the climate's impact on their citizens and are left vulnerable to its consequences. Climatic events serve as threat multipliers for existing problems, such as poverty, conflict, inequality, and health issues. Climate change is an international security issue that disproportionately impacts marginalized groups and those living in low to middle-income countries. High emitters, including the United States and China, must fulfill existing commitments they made to reduce their emissions and give financial support to countries in the global South. However, the focus on emissions reduction detracts from other vital mitigation efforts. At COP27, states more vulnerable to climate change, particularly SIDS, promoted strategies of adaptation and migration policy, but G20 countries focused on the transition to clean energy and emission reductions. It is imperative that these wealthy countries provide funding to climate related projects and infrastructure in low to middle-income countries, adhere to current and future commitments, and contribute

to the development of frameworks to address people displaced by climate change.

With 80 percent of its land below sea level, the Maldives' prioritization of the fight against climate change is necessary for its survival. Rising sea levels and freshwater contamination threaten the possibility of clean water shortages, sanitation accessibility issues, beach and coral reef erosion, and total land loss by the end of the century. Many essential services are on coastal land, including medical and educational facilities. Additionally, the Maldives' economy is dependent on their fishing and tourism industries, both of which are threatened by reef and beach loss spurred on by climate change. Residents of the Maldives and other SIDS have discussed mass migration to countries better equipped to address extreme weather events, like Sri Lanka or Australia, and the Maldives has started a relocation fund for its citizens. Currently, over 20 million people are displaced by climate-related events each year, with a total number of climate migrants expected to reach 1.2 billion people by 2050. The creation of a framework for these climate migrants is imperative not only for the security of the migrants themselves, but also the security of the receiving countries and cities due to the pressure migration places on resources and current inhabitants.

Without comprehensive guidelines, climate migrants crossing national borders will face difficulties in finding legal channels to relocate, and countries may not be prepared to accept them. Most climate migrants do so intranationally, eliminating some legal obstacles, but cities may lack the resources to support them.

An international framework with country-specific guidelines and national compacts must be formed with additional guidance for cities and accompanied by designated funding to offset resettlement costs.

While funding and frameworks for migration are necessary, the majority of people whose livelihoods are put at risk by climate change want to remain in their place of origin. Displacement from home countries can lead to loss of cultural identities and traditions, which could be difficult to preserve in a new location, especially if members of a group are separated. Fiji's relocation policy is an example of a program that provides options for adaptation and migration. Communities that vote to move to a less vulnerable area are given the resources to do so, while preserving cultural sites, like burial grounds. Villages that choose to stay, given that human lives are not in immediate danger, are provided with adaptation options, legal and emotional support, and options for future generations to move. Those living in areas at risk for climate-related deterioration need to be at the center of discussions regarding migration and the mitigation of climate effects in order to preserve their autonomy to the greatest extent possible.

To reduce the number of people forced to migrate as a result of climate change, adaptive infrastructure is necessary to mitigate the effects of current and future climatic events. These projects can be costly, making it difficult for low and middle-income countries to finance them. The drawback of climate agreements and the position of international governing bodies, like the UN, is their lack of enforcement mechanisms, meaning wealthy countries must hold themselves accountable in adhering to their financial commitments. At COP15 in 2009, the world's wealthiest countries pledged \$100 billion per year from 2020 to 2025 to fund climate action and \$40 billion per year to climate adaptation in "developing" countries. Neither pledge has been fulfilled, and money allocated to climate adaptation in particular has made up less than a third of climate action funding. Infrastructure

like water storage facilities, seawalls, and underground power lines serve as buffers for extreme weather events and reduce harm to communities after a disaster. The Maldives' environment industry estimates that nearly \$9 billion must be allocated to protect its islands, but with a Gross Domestic Product of less than \$5 billion in 2021, it is impossible to accomplish this without contributions from outside sources. As of 2022, \$52.4 million has been earmarked for the Maldives by the Green Climate Fund, but only \$3.8 million in project financing has been approved, and a mere \$419,900 disbursed. In Palau, a Pacific island country facing similar climate-related challenges, over \$600 million is needed for climate adaptation, with estimated maintenance costs of roughly \$6 million per annum. With a 2020 GDP of \$257.7 million, the \$10 million allocated to Palau by the Green Climate Fund and \$388,000 actually distributed are insufficient. The reluctance to fulfill these pledges indicates that SIDS and other countries facing severe climatic events will need to rely on migration as a primary means of adaptation to climate change, further illustrating the need for climate migration policy.

The need to reduce carbon emissions cannot be overstated, but its dominance in climate-related discussion draws attention away from the formulation of infrastructure projects and migration frameworks. Even if emissions sufficiently drop, these actions must still be taken to address current and future effects of climate change. Moving forward, the G20 and countries with comparable wealth must be responsive to the needs of the more vulnerable countries who have been outspoken about the need for adaptation to climate change. The creation of migration and infrastructure plans must be raised at climate conferences by countries with historically more influence and wealth. These countries must fulfill their existing promises, but migration frameworks and adaptive infrastructure are the most proactive means of addressing the consequences of climate change and the disproportionate impact it has on low emitters.

What a teetering housing market means for China

Ben Antonow

A few hours outside of Beijing and Shanghai, China's largest cities, the sprawl of urbanization continues. In parts of Tianjin, for example, there are brand new skyscrapers, highways, and commercial areas, but they lack a key component: people. These "ghost cities" are a fixture that is unique to China, and directly caused by an unstable housing market.

These ghost cities aren't dilapidated, instead they stand pristine, as no one has ever lived in them before. This overdevelopment is simply a result of the housing market functioning as the primary way Chinese people invest their money, a relatively unique phenomenon. There are a few main reasons for this. Chinese people tend to view owning property as a means to ensure generational wealth, as well as an important prerequisite for marriage and a family. China's stock market, the Shanghai Stock Exchange (SSE), is also not very popular because of its perceived volatility. Also, there is a widespread belief throughout China that the communist government would not let house prices crash when so much of the population has their wealth dependent on the value of their property. Finally, there are also no property taxes in China, making it an even more attractive investment.

As a result, individual investors capitalize on the fact that 90% of home purchases in China are pre-sold.^{1,4} Pre-buying homes is significantly cheaper than buying a home after it's built, so many everyday people will pre-buy a second or third home as an investment, and when it's finished, sell it for a profit to a family that will actually live in it. However, due to misplaced supply and demand (and more recently, COVID policies making it impossible to tour homes), investors are having trouble selling the empty homes that they bought years before, resulting in eerie ghost cities.

This poses a new problem: now that investors are stuck with empty second homes and no one to buy them, they've been less eager to invest. Often, this results in developments being delayed or abandoned partway through construction because buyers will stop paying their mortgages. More commonly it goes the other way around, where buyers will stop paying their mortgages when they see construction slowing or stopping. As a result, only 60% of developments that were pre-sold between 2013 and 2020 have been fully delivered.

A notable example of the dangers of this pre-buying is Evergrande, a real estate firm based in China. The firm had a 14-tower housing development that was pre-sold in 2021, two years before its expected completion date. However, construction slowed fairly quickly, and before long, hardly any work was being done on the project. Homeowners complained, and collectively threatened to stop paying mortgages unless construction sped up. This

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A major shift will have to be the way people invest their money, as property has proven itself to be unreliable.

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led to wide social media protest throughout China, leading to three arrests of protesters.

This is not the only example of such a phenomenon within the Evergrande Group. From 2020 to 2021, Evergrande's property sales decreased 39%. As a result, last December, Evergrande defaulted on its loan payments, some in the form of US bonds. The firm, with \$300 billion in liabilities, has grown as large as it is because of its risky pre-selling practices, which have massive consequences when they fail.³ It's a dangerous business model, and it's very common among real estate firms in China.

Although Evergrande is the only firm that has shown signs of collapse, data suggests that these problems are consistent throughout the industry. When comparing July 2022 to July 2021, new project starts have fallen by 45%, the value of new home sales by 29%, and property investment by 12%. For an industry that makes up about a fifth of China's GDP, these are very concerning figures.

As one might expect, the instability of this market is eroding trust among Chinese civilians towards the government and the general Chinese economic model. The government has entertained some efforts to reinvigorate demand and to help relieve debt, but most haven't had a major effect on restoring confidence. Much of the actual policymaking has been left up to municipal governments, but there have been inconsistencies between the national and local levels of the government, leading to even more confusion. Xi himself has discouraged buying multiple homes, but cities across China are loosening property rules and seem to be encouraging property investment. This is becoming increasingly risky, as local governments have been giving out purchase permits for developments that are only 25% built.

All signs are pointing to the fact that the Chinese property market is on the brink of collapse. If ignored, it may lead to a massive, cascading financial crisis in China. However, it's unrealistic to expect it to cause a complete dissolution of the Chinese state. What's more likely is extreme bailouts and major shifts in the way the Chinese economy operates. China

will almost certainly find a way to stop this from becoming a complete and total disaster, but not without major consequences.

One major effect of this incoming crisis would be a diversion of government funds from military and investment spending. China dedicates lots of time and energy to their long-term, multi-trillion dollar Belt and Road (BRI) initiative, a plan to invest in developing countries' infrastructure to increase trade, Chinese influence, and military power. It's also known for using predatory interest rates with desperate countries to advance Chinese interests. However, if the property crisis spirals out of control, China will most likely have to turn its focus domestically for the short term, and the housing market may soak up much of the government funding that would usually be used for international projects like the BRI, which is already slowing down due to funding issues.

Additionally, in order to avoid such a crisis in the future, China will likely have to make some changes in the way its economy operates. A major shift will have to be the way people invest their money, as property has proven itself to be unreliable. The CCP may have to allow new investment opportunities, like cryptocurrency trading (which is currently banned in China) or increasing access to foreign stock markets. If this new investment manifests itself as a greater reliance on the NYSE, for example, the health of the U.S. economy will become more directly correlated with Chinese interests. Regardless of the form this shift takes, China will face domestic pressure to further intertwine its economy with the West. It also means that China will probably experience a long-term shift towards a more outward-looking economy that is intertwined with western markets, a system that would require more communication and mutual interest with the rest of the world, and possibly a more open and free political system as well. In order to prosper, China needs to shift away from authoritarianism and dreams of global domination, and start focusing on cooperating with the rest of the world.

It's Not How Big It Is, It's How You Use It:

How South Korea can adapt its military to a decreasing population

Ethan Wilmot



Over the last decade, alarm bells have been sounding in governments and think tanks worldwide regarding the South Korean birth rate. The country has one of the lowest birth rates in the developed world, causing panicked and desperate debate between policymakers, sociologists, economists, and the general public. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the South Korean total fertility rate has fallen to .81 children, the lowest among OECD members and the only rate below 1. This development has been blamed on many factors ranging from economic difficulties and high real estate prices to video game addictions and social isolation. Regardless of the cause, there is a consensus among experts that there is no apparent solution to this problem; at least none that could realistically be pursued in the short term. This development has drastically changed how Koreans should approach the future of their country. One important question is posed by this issue: how does this affect the future of the national security of the country?

The Armed Forces of the Republic of Korea must adapt in order to survive the coming population crisis. Currently,

nearly half of the Armed Forces are conscripted personnel. With a shrinking pool of potential conscripts, it becomes increasingly difficult to rely on conscription to meet recruitment needs. It is estimated that within the next decade, there will be a deficit between conscription eligible males and the number of conscripts that the military requires under its current organization. This presents a major issue for defense policymakers. South Korea's major security threats are North Korea and China, both of which have enormous militaries. A large number of soldiers is needed to ensure deterrence against North Korea is maintained, as South Korea currently has 590,000 active duty military personnel, compared to North Korea's 1.2 million. Although South Korea has already taken steps to address this gap through former President Moon Jae-In's "Defense Reform 2.0", which seeks to slowly decrease the number of conscripted personnel, the reforms are not enough to properly provide for the defense needs of the country. South Korea should seek to abandon conscription entirely and rely on a volunteer force, expand its usage of force multiplying technologies, and work to bury the hatchet with Japan in order to form a multilateral alli-

ance structure.

With the looming population crisis, it is increasingly important for the Armed Forces to consider alternative methods of finding soldiers. Currently, South Korea requires all qualified male citizens to serve in the armed forces for a period of 18-24 months before they turn 30 years old. Conscription is not a beneficial program for South Korea in the long run for several reasons. Not only will the numbers continue to decrease, but the program as it exists currently helps contribute to a sense of complacency within the military. Although they are counted within the numbers of the Armed Forces, they often do not receive the same training as their volunteer counterparts and remain underequipped. Conscripts frequently report a lack of purpose during their service. In fact, nearly half of conscripts report running personal errands for military officers. Conscription does not provide the Armed Forces with effective soldiers and resources could be better allocated in order to maximize the effectiveness of the military. Defense Reform 2.0, while partially addressing the issue, does not go far enough in providing a long term solution. By permanently removing conscription, albeit with a gradual transition process, South Korea has the opportunity to enhance its defense in the long term.

Although manpower remains an important part of a modern military, a smaller manpower presence can remain effective, if provided with the right equipment. This could be accomplished by investment in force multiplication technologies. These technologies allow small forces to fight with the capabilities of a much larger force. Force multiplication factors include training, intelligence, and technology like aircraft carriers, superior armored vehicles, and advanced reconnaissance and intelligence gathering capabilities. By expanding the Navy to include a capable aircraft carrier, South Korea would be able to conduct airstrikes with near impunity since North Korea lacks weapons that could combat the effect of an aircraft carrier. South Korea has a very capable and rapidly growing defense industry that is producing highly desired tanks like the K2 Black Panther for countries like Poland. South Korea should invest further in its armor corps and produce more K2 tanks, considered to be some of the best in the world, to replace their stocks

of ancient M48 tanks provided by the United States decades ago. This would enhance the capabilities of South Korea's armor corps and help modernize the force. Finally, through the adoption of advanced reconnaissance capabilities like widespread use of night-vision goggles, quadcopter drones, and major investments into cyberwarfare and signals intelligence, South Korea can dominate the information battlefield. As a result, these information warfare technologies would allow South Korea to act with the upperhand in any potential conflict. These realistic improvements in capabilities would allow a much smaller South Korea military to operate with a much higher effectiveness than their size would suggest. This is a crucial factor to pursue if South Korea seeks to decrease its military manpower but maintain capabilities in an economical way.

While technology is an important force multiplier, the best way to enhance the effectiveness of the South Korean military is through its allies. The country has long enjoyed a bilateral relationship with the United States, hosting 26,414 soldiers within its borders and working closely with the most powerful military in the world. South Korea has a very nuanced and often difficult relationship with Japan, another country heavily aligned with the United States. This largely stems from the memory of the decades of Imperial Japanese occupation of the Korean Peninsula. As Carnegie Endowment Senior Research Analyst, Kathryn Botto describes, "While the United States has achieved a high level of bilateral interoperability with Japan and South Korea individually in all three dimensions, true trilateral interoperability remains elusive." Both countries face increasing threats from China, and should seek to resolve disputes. To increase the effectiveness of their combined defense, increased partnership is necessary. By creating a multilateral alliance structure with the United States, these two countries would be much better situated for their common defense in the long run, especially considering the potential reduction of South Korea's military manpower. This could be accomplished through joint military drills and the sharing of information between militaries. Through these force design and management strategies, South Korea would be well positioned for the long term security of the country in the face of drastic population decline.

“Art-Drain” in Vietnam:

A global dilemma of emerging art markets in the developing world

Joey Do

On April 18th, 2021, the oil painting “Mademoiselle Phuong”, also known as “Chân dung cô Phương”, by painter Mai Trung Thứ fetched for 3.1 million USD at the auction “Beyond Legends: Modern Art Evening Sale” by Sotheby’s Hong Kong. This auction made “Mademoiselle Phuong” the most expensive Vietnamese art piece ever sold, at an amount that far surpassed the previous record at 1.9 million USD by painter Lê Phổ. Vietnamese art has never been more popular than it is now. Prior to the twenty-first century, “Vietnamese” or “Indochine arts” was in fact obscure, receiving little attention and acknowledgement for its true value.

In recent years, there has been a collective movement from the most prestigious auction floors in the world such as Sotheby’s, Christie’s, Phillips, or Aguttes, etc. to acquire Asian art, especially Vietnamese arts. As this region becomes increasingly relevant on the world stage, so does the world’s aptitude for Asian arts. Primarily, auction floors are interested in a diverse range of Vietnamese arts genres including Lacquer arts, Silk, Vietnam War propaganda arts, Nostalgie post-war arts, etc. Recently, the demand for Vietnamese arts has grown to the point that there are occasional dupes or fakes in the market. According to the New York Times, there are incidents of prominent auction houses promoting a dupe on their website despite the original art still being displayed at the Vietnam National Arts Museum.

Undoubtedly, Vietnamese arts has grown dramatically in recent years. Consequently,

what does this newfound popularity mean for the Vietnamese art community and Vietnamese youth? From an optimistic perspective, this newfound popularity has shed light on the long obscure genre of Vietnamese art. In an arena that was long dominated by Western standards, the rise of Vietnamese arts belongs to a greater global movement of shifting the art centric to the East. Aisi Wang, an art expert from the prominent auction house Christie’s, remarked: “The market for Southeast Asian artists is growing rapidly, and shows immense potential. Many of these artists have established careers and long sale histories in their own countries, but until recently their market has been very regional. Thanks to Biennales, art fairs and international exhibitions, they’re becoming more accessible to collectors across the world”.

Through art pieces, these long concealed Vietnamese values, thoughts, and symbols are now receiving their deserved limelight. According to Ace Le, a Sotheby’s independent curator in Indochine Arts, most of the Vietnamese arts sold abroad are scouted by affluent Việt Kiều (overseas Vietnamese) and foreigner art-enthusiast. For the Việt Kiều collectors, specific art genres such as Nostalgie are enthralling for their encapsulations of the emotions of those who are separated from their homeland. To foreign collectors, Vietnamese art is attractive because of its unique texture and standing in history. By moving arts abroad, this minority of affluent Viet Kieu and foreign collectors are contributing substantially to

promote Vietnamese values to the world. In the domestic art market, where public galleries are underfunded and art education is limited, such feats would be nearly impossible to achieve. Using their own resources and agencies, many Viet Kieus and foreign collectors who resided in Vietnam have initiated a variety of art education programs and free public displays to improve art education.

However, this newfound popularity also presented inevitable dangers to the survival of Vietnamese arts for future generations. By moving Vietnamese masterpieces abroad from local museums and independent domestic collectors, Vietnam becomes subject to a procedural “art-drain”. Thus, the concept of art-drain originates from the term “brain-drain”, a common phenomenon in developing countries describing the departure of educated people to more developed countries for highly skilled works. Similarly, the art-drain describes the departure of domestic arts to foreign spaces of extreme privilege and capital. If this trend persists, many fear that in the near future, there will be a significant displacement of Vietnamese arts in the domestic market itself. Once these works leave Vietnam for sophisticated museums or private rooms in the United States, France, or Germany, will they ever return home? And, in the high possibility that they won’t, what will be there for Vietnamese youth of future generations to see?

These difficult questions pose great challenges to art regulations and the practice of art ownership in Vietnam. According to Mai An, a columnist for the Sai Gon Giai Phong, such problems inevitably exist due to the lack of funding in domestic institutions and the sporadic operations of domestic galleries. She claims that up until recent years, there has not been a legitimate, well-rounded art market in Vietnam. Insufficient fundings in public institutions often lead to art pieces being mishandled and undervalued. Museum curators with insufficient skills and art education often make

false judgements on the actual value of art pieces. In addition, the sporadic operations of domestic galleries and exhibitions also creates a disconnection between art owners and collectors. Thus, the unprecedented popularity and lucrativeness of Vietnamese art in recent years only serves as a catalyst for these deep-rooted problems. As the demand for Vietnamese arts increased significantly, many domestic art curators are left with little guidance on how to approach these changing times. Thus, it creates noticeable discrepancies within the domestic art market.

However, it is also important to note that this issue is a global dilemma, beyond Vietnam’s geographical borders. In many other emerging art markets across Asia and Africa, curators, domestic arts are also beginning to experience unprecedented popularity. Similar to Vietnamese domestic curators and art enthusiasts, they too, are concerned with the movement of the art-drain. Undoubtedly, it would take substantial and direct actions from the central government and public policy specialists to preserve Vietnamese masterpieces in the domestic market. One potential solution is to raise public awareness and improve public art education. As people’s appreciation of domestic art increases, it is easier to wage grass-root, sustainable movements to preserve and protect these art pieces. In addition, the increased funding in the development of domestic art preservation could also create similar benefits for cultural promotion. Similar to the government’s recent efforts to promote cultural heritages and tourism in the last decade, the promotion of art could also fall under that caveat. Recently, increased coverage and recognition of Vietnamese UNESCO cultural heritages on social media has increased the nation’s soft-power and reaped considerable economical benefits to the growing tourism industry. With strategic developments, Vietnamese domestic art’s recent popularity could serve as a new promising avenue for the nation to achieve similar goals.



MAY
THU



The New Space Race: Are China and the U.S. On a Collision Course?

Rick Walker

On October 31, 2022, the People's Republic of China (PRC) launched Mengtian, the final installment to their soon-to-be completed space station. Mengtian, which means "Celestial Dream," joined its predecessors Wentian and Tianhe to form the finished station, Tiangong, or "Celestial Palace." Tiangong is meant to last for 10-15 years and could outlast the International Space Station (ISS) if it sticks to NASA's 30-year projection. With the completion of its first permanent station, China realizes a more than decade-long goal to maintain a permanent population in space. China's conspicuous absence from the ISS and their impending Tiangong station heralds a new point of contention in the already strained relationship between Beijing and Washington.

China's absence from the multinational orbital laboratory is in large part due to a law created by the United States. The 2011 Department of Defense and Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act, which sets the budgets and rules for the military and other government affiliated organizations, states in section 1340, entitled the Wolf Amendment, that NASA can not use funds from that division to collaborate in any way with China unless a law specifically authorizes it. The ban is due primarily to human rights issues and national security concerns, as well as China National Space Administration's (CNSA) affiliation with the PRC's military branch, the People's Liberation Army (PLA). These military ties incited fears of technological espionage and theft of intellectual property that may have arisen on the station. Beijing has since tried to allay these fears, with spokesperson for the Ministry of Defense, Wang Jin, stating, "The Chinese government has always advocated the peaceful use of outer space." However, these statements fell on deaf ears within the U.S. Congress, so China took matters into its own hands.

The first aspect of this new space race is the invigoration of private sector and commercial space companies for both nations. Already, companies like SpaceX, Virgin Galactic, and Origin Blue have become driving factors in the U.S. space economy. In 2021 alone, private sector funding topped \$10 billion, a record high and almost a tenfold increase from the past decade. The most prolific example of U.S. government investment in commercial space flight is SpaceX's \$2.89 billion contract with NASA in April 2021. The contract came as part of NASA's ambitious Artemis program, with SpaceX being tasked with the creation of the Human Landing System to transfer astronauts from Moon-orbit to the lunar surface. On the other side of the coin, China's private-sector space industry is much more nascent. 2018 was the first launch by a private Chinese firm, compared to 1990 in the U.S., and it wasn't until last year that they were able to put satellites into orbit. However, China's growth rate of investments is increasing exponentially. It has only been eight years since the country opened for social capital to invest in the construction of civil aviation infrastructure, but already the market size increased from 376.4 billion yuan (\$59.09bn) to 1.02 trillion yuan



Launch of the Tianhe Core Module

(\$160.13bn) at a compound growth rate of 22%. The heavy investment by both countries in non-governmental space firms belays their dawning understanding that the winner of this race won't be determined by the public sector, but by the private sector.

The other facet of this new race is the economic benefits that come from control of the Moon. Both the U.S. and China are looking to establish a permanent base on the Moon in the next decade, with China's ambitious version of the habitat being manned entirely robotically. The reward that the U.S. or China will receive upon control of the Moon doesn't come so much from the lunar surface as what's under it. The Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies of 1979 says that the Moon should not be commercially exploited, but to this date US, China, and Russia have refused to sign. After a study published by NASA in 2020 found that the Moon may be richer in metals than previously thought, it can be reasonably inferred that a base on the moon by any of these countries could be made with the purpose of extracting Earth metals from the lunar subsurface. Beyond the financial benefit of these materials, it's these ores that will propel both countries' efforts to reach Mars and beyond.

The increased competitiveness between the U.S. and China has led some to fears of conflict. Tensions between the two nations are already at an all time high, and with the litany of disagreements facing both sides on the ground, an issue in space could be the spark that sets a fire. Despite amicable expressions from both parties, like China's

Zhao Lijian's declaration that China's space program was guided by peaceful ideas, the threat of engagement still looms. With this global concern, it becomes necessary to ask how the parties involved intend to avoid outright conflict. In an effort to make the division of the moon as peaceful as possible, the U.S. penned the Artemis Accords, named for NASA's eponymous Artemis program. A continuation of the UN Outer Space Treaty of 1967, the Accords enumerate a variety of space and lunar related stipulations, such as space resources and resolution of space conflicts. Furthermore, the Accords aren't ratified under a true international legal framework, and are instead understood as a sort of status quo amongst the participating nations. As such, it's imperative that the U.S., China, or a non-biased third party creates a more concrete, inclusive agreement that arbitrates the division of the Moon amongst its participants. Likely to spearhead this effort is the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA). As the creators of the UN Outer Space Treaty of 1967 and the UN Moon Agreement of 1979, they are in the best position and the most well equipped to create this new set of rules. Unfortunately, the UN in general lacks many enforcement mechanisms, and as such, this new treaty relies on cooperation by the U.S. and China. To foster this partnership, both countries should be heavily involved in its creation. But, with a willingness to sit down at the table and come to a reasonable conclusion by both parties, it's possible that this race launches humanity into an era of unprecedented economic growth, diplomatic cooperation, and technological advancement.

Hidden Behind The Rainbow: The Harsh Realities of Hawaii's Tourism Industry

Tiffany Pham

In recent years, Hawai'i has been visited by an excessive number of tourists. According to the Hawai'i Visitor Authority, in 2019, 10.4 million visitors came to Hawai'i, an increase of about 5.4% from 2018; this has caused frustration among Hawaiians. About 40 years ago, the ratio of Hawai'i residents to tourists was 2 to 1 on average. Now, tourists outnumber Hawaiian residents by a ratio of 6 to 1 and Native Hawaiians 30 to 1. The massive influx of tourists results in the exploitation of resources, environmental degradation, and increasing costs of living that have burdened the quality of life for Hawai'i. Underneath the propagated advertisement of a perfect paradise lies a harsh reality where the people and land of Hawai'i are harmed.

The influx of tourism has caused an increase in limited resources in Hawai'i. The tourism industry consumes 44.7% of water in Hawai'i, the largest contributors being hotels and resorts. To compensate, nearly all the islands forced their residents to follow mandated water restrictions. Islands such as Maui faced a water shortage where residents had to restrict water usage for non-essential activities or pay a \$500 fine, beginning June 30, 2022. Residents are forced to reduce their water usage while the tourist industry, hotels, and resorts are not required to limit their consumption. Through these mandates, it is clear the tourism industry takes advantage of Hawaii's natural resources, and Hawaiians are disproportionately burdened by the consequences of environmental degradation.

The high demand for environmental resources created by overtourism drives up the costs of living for residents. The movement of wealthy investors from the mainland to Hawai'i causes the prices of surrounding properties to increase, affecting property taxes for Hawaiians. According to the O'ahu Continuum of Care,

Native Hawaiians are 265% more likely to be homeless, and the two main causes of this are job loss and difficulty affording rent. The advertisement of this perfect "aloha island" has led to wealthy out-of-state buyers turning housing units into vacation rentals, and due to Hawaii's poor job market, residents have limited access to high-paying, white collar jobs. Purchasing land to resell and rent to tourists increases the prices for locals who have resided in these houses for years, to the extent they can't afford it. Furthermore, the average income of Native Hawaiians is \$36,989 while the median price of a home is above \$1,000,000. This situation is even more difficult as those who take charge of their tourism industry and its policies are mainly American and Japanese business interests who exclude Native Hawaiians from decision making as well as the distribution of wealth generated by tourism. As a result, Native Hawaiians are not given the opportunity to create more equitable policies that represent their interests.

The advertised myth is that tourism boosts the economy by providing income for local businesses and employing many Native Hawaiians, but they are typically employed in the lowest-paying service sector jobs. According to an article by Drew Pagaduan, "with tourists outnumbering Native Hawaiians many times over, this creates a local indigenous minority who work the service industry jobs and power the tourism industry with labor, but who are scarcely able to afford rent on their traditional land." The tourism industry also generates billions of dollars annually for the Hawaiian economy, which allows American-Japanese shareholders to invest the money in constructing more resorts and tourist sites. This leads to even more exploitation among Hawaiian land and resources, and as a whole, the money will not trickle down to Native Hawaiians as people would suspect. According to Hawaii Business Magazine, "when adjusted for inflation, total visitor spending has declined over the last 30 years. In 2018, 9.8 million people visited the Islands and spent \$17.6 billion. In 1989, 6.5 million visitors spent \$18 billion in 2018 dollars." Thus, even with the increasing number of visitors, there is no extra money for improvements towards the state of Hawai'i. In addition with the billions of dollars made by the hotel, resort, and tourism industries in Hawai'i, it becomes less achievable for Native Hawaiians to afford living on their homeland.

The tourism industry also benefits from the commodification of Native Hawaiian culture.

Areas once sacred to Native Hawaiians are now sites of housing units, tourist sites, or watered down versions of their traditional native configurations. The commodification of their culture is again exemplified through cultural shows, and while many of the performers are Native Hawaiian, the owners of the shows are not Native. According to an article by Trask Mililani and Trask Haunani Kay on the Cultural Survival, "Hula dancers wear clown-like makeup, don costumes from a mix of Polynesian cultures, and behave in a smutty manner, rather than in a powerfully erotic manner... In the hotel version of the hula, the sacredness of the dance has disappeared and been replaced with an ornamental hoax." Moreover, the incorrect execution of Native Hawaiian practices showcase an altered and culturally offensive presentation that deforms their culture. While marketing Native Hawaiian culture is a crucial contribution to attracting tourists to Hawai'i, these attractions disempower Native Hawaiians while appealing to the culturally appropriated narrative.

Clearly, then, masked under Hawaii's perfect "Aloha, welcome tourists" image is the exploitation of the island along with their resources, culture, and environment. Furthermore, the tourism industry functions as a form of wealth extraction without positively impacting Native Hawaiians, given that their land is what the industry profits from. Altogether, the myth that tourism is entirely a benefit to Hawai'i is a misrepresentation of the situation and an insult to their people and culture.



Tourists on a Hawaiian beach.

Build, Build, Build, Then Build Some More

Oscar Soberg

Ranked among some of the best Asian economic performers in recent years, the Philippines is on track for serious large-scale economic growth. The nation has not been a historically wealthy one, but easy access to abundant natural resources and a large labor pool have helped get the economy on its feet. However, the archipelago's development is severely constrained by its own crumbling infrastructure. The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness report from 2019 placed the Philippines number 96 out of 141 countries, highlighting the need for a strong, competitive economy in the Philippines, predicated on equally strong national infrastructure. With roughly 18 percent of the population living under the poverty line in 2021, the national government desperately needs to improve the infrastructure in the country as a means of improving the quality of life. Lifting the Philippine population out of their current conditions, building a thriving economy, and turning the Philippines into a prosperous nation requires serious revitalization and upgrades of infrastructure. Focusing specifically on public transportation, maritime infrastructure, ground transportation, aviation, and environmental needs is the key to building effective and beneficial infrastructure in the Philippines.

The Philippine's broad infrastructure needs have been documented widely by academics and industry experts, with the Philippine gov-

ernment finally appearing to take notice. One recent study published in the Asian Development Review lists immediate priorities as including "implementing a transport system in Manila and improving airports, road connectivity, and seaports across the country." The 2021 national budget for the country boldly allocates \$6.5 billion to transportation network development, flood management, asset preservation, and bridges. An additional \$1.3 billion is given for rail transport, land public transportation, and maritime infrastructure. The allotments for infrastructure projects total over 5 percent of the Philippines GDP, on par with most European countries and well above other developing nations. Such investment allows for the country to ease urban congestion, reduce pollution by increasing the efficiency and capacity of public transit, reduce transportation costs for firms, improve connectivity between islands, and lay the groundwork for business to skyrocket. In Manila, for example, traffic congestion has become a serious issue, with residents spending roughly 98 hours in traffic (or four days) each year. Traffic congestion in the Philippines also assumes an economic role, as a 2018 study by the Japan International Cooperation Agency pinned lost opportunity costs due to traffic at roughly \$61 million daily—a number that is only expected to increase.

Furthermore, the current climate crisis compounds the Philippines' dire situation for solid infrastructure. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the nation is among one of the most vulnerable to global warming, facing serious risks from "climate

change and natural hazards—typhoons, landslides, earthquakes, floods, droughts, and volcanic eruptions." The ravaging impacts of climate change, which brings higher sea levels, more frequent natural disasters, and higher temperatures, means the current administration has a daunting task on their hands. They must build infrastructure that is designed to not only withstand these changes, but actively mitigate their detrimental effects. Systems that reduce the negative impacts of these events, such as flood management infrastructure and efficient irrigation systems, would also serve the dual purposes of increasing output while reducing costs across the board.

Rodrigo Duterte, the previous president of the Philippines, made infrastructure development a key policy initiative. Through his program "Build! Build! Build!" the president pledged between 8 and 9 trillion Philippine pesos (roughly \$140-157 billion USD) to build new bridges, expand airports, reduce traffic congestion, and other general infrastructure improvements. However, the program received mixed reviews from critics who praised the benefits it brought to particularly underserved communities, but also exposed the failures of the project to realize any legitimate systemic change. Flawed execution and improper spending prevented "Build! Build! Build!" from becoming the life-altering economic pivot that it was marketed as. As of June 2022, only 10% of the 112 transport and mobility projects launched under Duterte in 2017 were completed. Given the historical issues with infrastructure improvement in the Philippines, many people are skeptical about the new president's plans. The son of the former dictator, current President Marcos Jr. comes from a family rich in kleptocracy and a strong track record of cronyism. His commitment to the development needs of the Philippines will be a crucial aspect of his presidency, and could potentially alter the long-run trajectory of the archipelago nation.

A unique development in the story of Philippine infrastructure im-

Focusing specifically on public transportation, maritime infrastructure, ground transportation, aviation, and environmental needs is the key to building effective and beneficial infrastructure in the Philippines.

provement has been the frequent involvement of Japan in recent years. Known for some of the most impressive infrastructure feats in the world, Japan has been heavily investing in the Philippine economy since the Duterte administration. In 2021, the Japanese government committed \$10.2 billion in loans and grants for development assistance, or nearly 31.8 percent of the official development assistance received by the Philippines. Some of the larger projects financed by Japan include the Metro Manila Subway, North-South Commuter Railway project, Dalton Pass East Alignment Alternative Road Project, and Central Mindanao Highway Project. Even China, known for its investment in developing countries through its Belt and Road Initiative, cannot match Japan's \$367 billion investment in Southeast Asia, with the Philippines receiving a comparatively large portion of this spending. By directly helping the Philippines build a strong transportation network, improve international commerce, reduce pollution and

energy consumption, and develop high-capacity communications systems, Japan is one of the only countries helping make substantial progress on the Philippines' infrastructure needs.

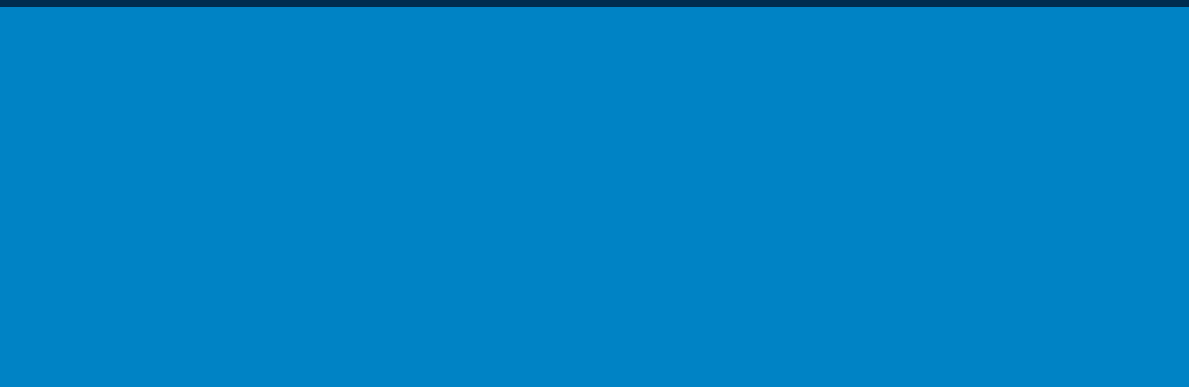
Thankfully, in the current administration, we do see a continuation of Duterte's "Build! Build! Build!" initiative as Marcos Jr. has pledged to maintain a productive level of investment in infrastructure. Specifically, the new government "is targeting to allocate five to six percent of gross domestic product every year for infrastructure programs." However, a question proposed by many analysts and critics is how the government revenue will be raised to support this high level of spending. Preventing a debt crisis must be a priority for Marcos Jr., who must actively work to finance these projects sustainably, or else he risks deteriorating the economic condition in the country further. One proposed solution is a comprehensive tax reform, which would reduce the amount of debt

financing while increasing the amount of tax financing for these government spending projects. Making the current tax system "simpler, fairer, and more efficient" would help ensure the longevity of the infrastructure development programs. Increasing certain taxes, or possibly levying new taxes through a congestion pricing system, would help to raise government revenue while also making the tax system more fair.

It seems that the Philippines is on track to continue infrastructure programs with the intent of improving the quality of life for thousands of citizens, as well as boosting economic performance. However, with the many flaws of past efforts fresh in people's minds, the actual effectiveness of these programs is yet to be known. Ultimately, the national government will need to act quickly, and effectively, if they want a chance to organize a legitimate effort to improve the country's infrastructure. Not only that, but the types of projects must be diverse, relevant, and with future sustainability in mind.



EUROPE



Paris is changing drastically. Other European cities are taking note.

Alberto Della Torre

Rue de Rivoli is one of Paris's most vital thoroughfares. Running parallel to the Seine from Place de la Bastille to Place de la Concorde, the street is home to world renowned attractions such as the Louvre and the Jardin des Tuileries, as well as an assortment of restaurants, boutiques, and residences. Prior to the pandemic, Rue de Rivoli was almost constantly inundated with automobile traffic. The street's central location and breadth of businesses subjected it to constant car congestion. Today, Rue de Rivoli is car free. In the place of the deluge of car traffic is a two abreast bike lane going both ways next to an express lane for public transport. The Rue de Rivoli is far from the only street in Paris that is changing; another iconic Parisian boulevard, the Champs-Élysées, will be transformed into a verdant pedestrian mall in anticipation for the 2024 Olympic Games. The main tenets of this plan are to increase pedestrian space at the Place d'Étoile, and to add 15,000 square meters of vegetation to the rest of the boulevard. The transformations of Rue de Rivoli and the Champs-Élysées are emblematic of the changes Paris has begun since the onset of the pandemic. The city is enacting policies that make it a champion of sustainable urban environments that welcome everyone. Paris' brazen implementation of urbanist policies have made it a model city for other European cities for how to enact tangible policy that improves urban life.

The renovation of Parisian Streets goes far beyond the main attractions of the City of Light. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Paris has capitalized on its vacant streets to alter how Parisians move through the city. Over the last 3 years, the French capital has added 650 kilometers of pop-up bicycle lanes, or corona pistes, throughout the city to encourage Parisians to move outside and maintain social distance during the pandemic. Many of these pop-up lanes have since become permanent as Anne Hidalgo, the Mayor of Paris, pushes to actualize her Plan Vélo—Bike Plan in English. The Plan Vélo calls for every Parisian street to be accessible by bike and to create "15-minute cities" where you can find everything you need 15 minutes from your home via walking, biking, or public transit. While projects such as the Rue de Rivoli transformation and the Champs-Élysées facelift are receiving international attention, it is the Plan Vélo and the corona pistes that are truly altering Paris' urban landscape into one that disincentives driving and nudges denizens to take more sustainable forms of transportation.

Paris is also working to provide more greenery to all of its arrondissements. Another core tenet of the Plan Vélo is to remove 70,000 parking spaces. Many of these parking spaces will be reserved for the aforementioned bike lanes necessary to create a connected bicycle network. However, others will be repurposed



Rue de Rivoli after its transformation.

for different functions, namely green space. Parklets, playgrounds, bicycle parking, vegetable gardens, and food composting sites are options that local officials are considering using feedback from residents. Each of these renovations provide ample opportunities to grow trees, bushes, and other vegetation in the city and make its streets more pleasant to traverse.

While the actions of Mayor Hidalgo's government are unconventional and headstrong, by and large, she has the support of the Parisian community. After arriving in the Mayor's office in 2014, she began to implement urbanist policies such as converting a highway on the Seine into a pedestrian mall. She handily won her reelection in 2020, earning 15 percent more of the vote than her closest rival, after campaigning on a promise to reduce car dependency and improve bicycle infrastructure. Nevertheless, she has accumulated a variety of criticism for her urbanist policies. Online, the hashtag #SaccageParis, or "pillage Paris," circulated widely as dissidents posted pictures of the streets of Paris in squalor conditions. Parisian car owners are also furious with Hidalgo, as

her alterations to the Parisian streets have reduced the efficiency of moving through the city in a car. These grievances with the Parisian mayor have gained international attention via their promotion by notable international news outlets such as Politico and the Guardian. Despite the virality of these frustrations, they have been dismissed by the Hidalgo administration as annoyed Parisians blowing off steam. Hidalgo still maintains high favorability among the Parisian population.

Although Hidalgo has not garnered mass popularity throughout France, the transformation of Paris has caught the attention of other European metropolises. As urban areas transition into hosting the majority of the world's population, cities are becoming increasingly important in areas such as fighting climate change and creating livable environments. Paris is offering an example for other cities. Initiatives such as the Plan Vélo are accelerating Paris' goal to reach carbon neutrality by 2050. The city also consistently ranks among the best cities in the world. The groundwork set by the Parisian government makes Paris a blueprint on how to implement drastic changes to the urban environment as a feasible and attractive option that can make Europe a bastion of sustainable urbanism for years to come. Other cities are beginning to follow in Paris' footsteps. In November 2021, Milan, Italy's second-largest city by population, adopted the Cambio Plan, their version of the Plan Vélo. The Cambio Plan calls for 750 kilometers of paths dedicated to cycling—more than the 680 kilometers Paris plans to build. In 2019, Vienna began a "Cool Streets" pilot project to make the Austrian capital's streets more resistant to climate change, similar to Paris' policy of parking spot conversion. "Cool Streets" has continued to transform Viennese streets, with pictures of the changes proliferating the internet.

It is evident that there is a shift in the Parisian culture to prioritize pedestrians, cyclists, and green infrastructure over car dependency. A consistent cycling culture has been established, as shown by the 60% increase in bike traffic from 2019 to 2021. However, for most cities, the changes needed to complete the shift are mired in the municipal bureaucracy established in the last century. The actions of the Parisian government under Hidalgo's leadership have done away with the lethargic status quo of slow-moving projects in favor of initiatives that immediately address pressing issues of car dependency, unhealthy urban environments, and the effects of climate change. It is an approach that other European cities have begun to utilize, and should be the standard for all European municipal governments who are serious about improving their urban environments.

Stalemate at Stormont:

Northern Ireland, powersharing, and a reconsideration of the sectarian formula

Fiona Caughey

For the first time in its 101-year history, there are more Catholics than Protestants living in modern Northern Ireland. In more religiously diverse countries like the United States, the variance holds minimal weight; census analyses often simply place the two denominations under the branch “Christian” and focus on other disparities. After all, both churches share most of the same doctrine: the principle of the Trinity, the Bible as the authoritative text, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, to name a few. However, history paradoxically shows us that groups with many similarities also tend to disagree the most. It is perhaps too conspicuous, then, that in Northern Ireland Christian religious affiliation is the furthest thing from a uniting cultural facet; it is instead a metonymy for political persuasion. The age-long formula is as follows: Catholics are nationalist and wish to see a united island of Ireland, and the Protestants are unionists, and unyieldingly identify as British. The tiny UK constituent country—less than one fifth the size of Scotland—has endured centuries of violence over this distinction. At face value, these census results, coupled with May 2022’s election historically placing nationalist party Sinn Féin as the majority in government, should indicate that prospects are high for a Catholic, united Ireland. Think again: the “infallible” sectarian formula is painfully outdated, and the decisions based on it disregard the actual needs of the region.

Since the last count in 2011, the Northern Ireland census has included the “national identity question,” in which citizens are asked whether they identify as British, Irish,

or even Northern Irish, a recent category added outside of the traditional dichotomy. Despite the Catholic upswing, the number of those who identify as “British only” still remain the largest plurality with 31.9 percent. Those of the “Irish only” camp, though a close second, hold 29.1 percent. The remaining 19.8 percent constitutes those that identify only as Northern Irish. From the numbers and inclusion of a “Northern Irish” designation free from the British-Irish polarity, it is clear that conflating religion with political alignment is an obsolete practice. Upon the release of the census in September, Irish Taoiseach Micheál Martin also warned against following the formula, saying, “We need to be very careful about demographics as [the] central issue in terms of the evolution of relationships on the island of Ireland and between Britain and our identities.”

Nonetheless, it goes without saying that Sinn Féin’s victory is significant and that it does reflect shifting political tides, but it is unlikely that they are for the ideological reasons that the formula would indicate: their unionist opponents have simply not been doing their jobs. Stormont, the castle that houses the Northern Ireland Assembly, has been vacant since February, and today, Sinn Féin has yet to experience a day of governing as a majority. A physically absent legislature is nothing new for Northern Ireland, and it is a reminder of decades of unreconciled divisions caused by the Troubles, or the infamous decades of violence caused by the sectarian formula at the end of the 20th century. The Assembly is a devolved legislative system

born out of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement—the treaty that effectively ended the Troubles—that holds powers autonomous of Great Britain. Before the powersharing system between nationalists and unionists was successfully established, Northern Ireland had largely remained under the direct rule of the Westminster government since the 1970s due to increasing violence. The impetus of such growth in paramilitary activity was the introduction of internment of political prisoners that disproportionately affected Catholics, and the Bloody Sunday massacre, in which British soldiers shot dead 13 unarmed demonstrators protesting the new policy. Even post Good Friday, the powersharing government has remained largely unproductive. Ideological assumptions that arise from the sectarian formula make it easy for the Northern Ireland Assembly to implode on itself. From 2002-2007, Stormont was suspended; the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the largest unionist party, accused Sinn Féin of colluding in a nationalist paramilitary spying campaign. From arguments in semantics to alleged spy ring operations, direct rule by Westminster is employed whenever Stormont is dormant, which has been a woefully common occurrence.

This time, it was DUP Brexit ultimatums that led to the current stalemate: that of the Northern Ireland Protocol. The Protocol was implemented as a special trading agreement that monitors imports bound for the Republic of Ireland, a country in the European Union, before it reaches its land border with the North. Before Brexit, procedures like the Protocol were unnecessary as both parties carried the same EU trade rules. Now, goods coming in from the rest of the United Kingdom are checked at Belfast Harbor before finishing transport to the Republic. The main reason for the Protocol is, as everything in Northern Ireland, to avoid upsetting the fragile terms of the Good Friday Agreement, and more specifically, the mandate for the removal of all security installations and a soft land

border between the North and Irish Republic. Unionists, however, claim that the new checks of these goods in Belfast have effectively created another border: one in the Irish Sea, between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. The checks are perceived as an exclusion of Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom; posters and graffiti with slogans such as “Ulster is British: No Internal UK Border” have circulated through the country. Identity politics remain at the paradoxical heart of the crisis: the 2016 Brexit vote was largely a referendum for national identity, for an upholding of Britishness, for which Northern Ireland unionists voted in favor of preserving. It is interesting that the Protocol, a direct repercussion of Brexit, is construed as an existential threat to the very Britishness unionists were seeking to protect seven years earlier. The DUP’s call for checks on goods at Ireland’s northern border instead of in Belfast would defy one of the most crucial deals made in 1998 and almost certainly threaten two decades of nonviolence, something the party continues to brush aside. And despite the fact that Protocol-accepting Sinn Féin won the majority in May’s election, the DUP refuses to participate at Stormont until their unrealistic, ideological demand is met.

There are more Catholics than Protestants in Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin has won the majority at Stormont, and the DUP continues to dig in its heels. The centuries-old sectarian formula should clearly show us that Irish nationalism has increased and a united island is on the horizon. But perhaps Sinn Féin’s victory has much less to do with ideology than one would suspect. Today, there is no majority for or against a united Ireland. It may come as a surprise, but it is likely that people in Northern Ireland are more concerned about being able to afford to heat their homes this winter—prices have increased by over 30 percent due to Europe’s energy crisis—than the adjectives they use to describe themselves or an imaginary line drawn at the bottom of the

Irish Sea. Perhaps Sinn Féin's victory is just a reflection of an electorate tired of a party that is, simply put, unwilling to govern. Whatever the case, the stalemate at Stormont will continue—unless, of course, the DUP lets go of an old-fashioned sectarian formula that is widely out of touch with realities of the present day.

For the first time in its 101-year history, there are more Catholics than Protestants living in modern Northern Ireland. In more religiously diverse countries like the United States, the variance holds minimal weight; census analyses often simply place the two denominations under the branch "Christian" and focus on other disparities. After all, both churches share most of the same doctrine: the principle of the Trinity, the Bible as the authoritative text, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, to name a few. However, history paradoxically shows us that groups with many similarities also tend to disagree the most. It is perhaps too conspicuous, then, that in Northern Ireland Christian religious affiliation is the furthest thing from a uniting cultural facet; it is instead a metonymy for political persuasion. The age-long formula is as follows: Catholics are nationalist and wish to see a united island of Ireland, and the Protestants are unionists, and unyieldingly identify as British. The tiny UK constituent country—less than one fifth the size of Scotland—has endured centuries of violence over this distinction. At face value, these census results, coupled with May 2022's election historically placing nationalist party Sinn Féin as the majority in government, should indicate that prospects are high for a Catholic, united Ireland. Think again: the "infallible" sectarian formula is painfully outdated, and the decisions based on it disregard the actual needs of the region.

Since the last count in 2011, the Northern Ireland census has included the "national identity question," in which citizens are asked whether they identify as British, Irish, or even Northern Irish, a recent category added outside of the traditional dichotomy. Despite the Catholic upswing, the number of those who

identify as "British only" still remain the largest plurality with 31.9 percent. Those of the "Irish only" camp, though a close second, hold 29.1 percent. The remaining 19.8 percent constitutes those that identify only as Northern Irish. From the numbers and inclusion of a "Northern Irish" designation free from the British-Irish polarity, it is clear that conflating religion with political alignment is an obsolete practice. Upon the release of the census in September, Irish Taoiseach Micheál Martin also warned against following the formula, saying, "We need to be very careful about demographics as [the] central issue in terms of the evolution of relationships on the island of Ireland and between Britain and our identities."

Nonetheless, it goes without saying that Sinn Féin's victory is significant and that it does reflect shifting political tides, but it is unlikely that they are for the ideological reasons that the formula would indicate: their unionist opponents have simply not been doing their jobs. Stormont, the castle that houses the Northern Ireland Assembly, has been vacant since February, and today, Sinn Féin has yet to experience a day of governing as a majority. A physically absent legislature is nothing new for Northern Ireland, and it is a reminder of decades of unreconciled divisions caused by the Troubles, or the infamous decades of violence caused by the sectarian formula at the end of the 20th century. The Assembly is a devolved legislative system born out of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement—the treaty that effectively ended the Troubles—that holds powers autonomous of Great Britain. Before the powersharing system between nationalists and unionists was successfully established, Northern Ireland had largely remained under the direct rule of the Westminster government since the 1970s due to increasing violence. The impetus of such growth

in paramilitary activity was the introduction of internment of political prisoners that disproportionately affected Catholics, and the Bloody Sunday massacre, in which British soldiers shot dead 13 unarmed demonstrators protesting the new policy. Even post Good Friday, the powersharing government has remained largely unproductive. Ideological assumptions that arise from the sectarian formula make it easy for the Northern Ireland Assembly to implode on itself. From 2002-2007, Stormont was suspended; the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the largest unionist party, accused Sinn Féin of colluding in a nationalist paramilitary spying campaign. From arguments in semantics to alleged spying operations, direct rule by Westminster is employed whenever Stormont is dormant, which has been a woefully common occurrence.

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Estonia: A Digital Haven to Watch and Follow

Grace Manella

As the world continues to grow increasingly digital, being able to live life online has become more of an everyday expectation. For countries who are not as economically powerful, digitization creates opportunities to expand their economic reach. Estonia has taken advantage of this by offering an e-residency program that promotes entrepreneurship in its country, as well as visas for start-ups to begin in Estonia. Through these initiatives, Estonia has been able to boost its economic standing and increase involvement in the European economy.

Estonia has been tech-savvy since gaining its independence in 1991 from the Soviet Union. Since the Soviet Cybernetics Institute was based in Estonia's Capital, Tallinn, thousands of computer scientists that remained in the country were left unemployed during that time. This led to the country investing in digital infrastructure and offering over 90 percent of its public services available online to its citizens. Therefore, Estonians are frustrated if an action can't be completed online—in person appointments are a last resort. This set up Estonia for success in digital initiatives.

Already having digital capabilities with its citizens helped ease Estonia with introducing the world's first e-residency program in 2014. E-residency gave Estonia the opportunity to allow citizens of other countries to register for an Estonian ID for about 200 euros annually, buying them access into the European market. Eight years later, the program has attracted well over 90,000 members, and 94 percent of expats in Estonia emphasize they were impressed with the government's capacity to ad-

minister its services online—compared with 55 percent globally. Services include setting up a business portal to help organize administration, raising invoices, and logging accounting information. It makes digital signage and identification verification easy with a Smart ID, to help entrepreneurs focus on their business. Additionally, nearly all e-residency participants choose to have access to an e-resident business service provider. This person walks them through the process of setting up a business and are experts at local tax compliance, to help ensure the business has the tools to reach its goals.

While e-residents can't physically reside in Estonia, it allows them to start companies based there and benefit from government start-up money and an easier transition into selling in Europe. Additionally, e-residents can be granted temporary residence permits when important for the business. Although, it's not just businesses that take advantage of Estonia's e-residency. E-residents include Former Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel, American comedian Trevor Noah, senior editor of *The Economist* Edward Lucas, and various venture capitalists. Following the growth of people interested in the program, Ukraine and Lithuania also implemented successful e-residency programs. Moreover, their success has resulted in Portugal, Thailand, and Japan planning to adopt the model in the next year.

This digitalization set the pathway for Estonia to slowly align itself with foreign entrepreneurs and customers through its start-up visa. Its start-up visa has put it on the map as a way to promote businesses, and goes a step further than being an e-resident. It allows foreign entre-

preneurs to settle in Estonia for up to 18 months to establish their start-up. It can be used for up to 5 years, and allows the business to operate in the EU. In 2021, Estonian startups signed 61 funding deals for over 870 million euros. Last year, the employee count of Estonian-based startups rose 36 percent. For a country with a population of only 1.33 million, these metrics exemplify the success of the system. Estonia is creating valuable businesses.

Start-up visas are primarily used for companies interested in FinTech, transportation and logistics, and business softwares. Its biggest success stories include companies such as Wise, Bolt, and Pipedrive. Wise is a payment-transfer app that easily switches currencies, with few fees; it has over 4 thousand employees and 13 million customers. Bolt is a ride-share service that is currently valued at 7.4 billion euros and widely used across Europe with 100 million customers. Pipedrive has less of an everyday consumer, as a software-as-a-service platform with over 1,000 employees sprawled out across its 8 European and 2 American offices. These are just a few of the success stories of Estonian companies, and the fact that venture capitalists apply for e-residency shows that Estonian companies are getting global investment recognition. Still, the companies starting in Estonia have only gotten more successful in the past five years, as the country learns more about integrating into larger economies.

Due to the fact that Estonia's e-residents and start-up visas have contributed over a billion euros into the European economy, Estonia has gained economic credibility for its implementation success with digital infrastructure. Estonia has also used its business foundations to strengthen its alignment with Western countries. It's been a part of the Three Seas Initiative, where 12 EU countries and the United States work together to invest in infrastructure, digitization, and energy products. Recently, Estonia has been actively working with these countries and will be investing up to 20 million euros into its investment fund, to stimulate European capital markets. Without Estonia's increasing economic presence in Europe, it's unknown if its involvement in programs like this would have occurred.

Estonia's digital transformation has enabled it to enter the global economy. Its availability of services for people outside of the country has allowed it to be an integral part in creating successful businesses. While it does not have the largest population, the strength of its digital infrastructure will continue to contribute more to the economy through its attractive resident and visa opportunities.



Downtown aerial view of Tallinn, Estonia

Awakening the Past:

A Nordic Reckoning with the Sami People

Zeynep Koseoglu

As this year's Venice Biennale, Venice's annual cultural exhibition, comes to a close it is useful to analyze look to the national and international narratives that it has offered its audience. Including the work of 213 artists from 58 different countries, the Biennale is arguably the most important international contemporary art exhibition in the world. Participation in the Biennale is by country, with each nation that wishes to participate possessing their own pavilion through which they are able to express a chosen national story. This year, the Nordic Pavilion, representing the countries of Norway, Sweden, and Finland transformed itself, instead, into the Sami Pavillion, reserving the exhibition space to represent Sami artists and their experience of Sapmi, the Sami homeland. Through this, the artists, Pauliina Feodoroff, Máret Anne Sara, and Anders Sunna, explored their relationship with the Nordic colonial past and the lasting legacy of oppression on the Sami people, especially the damage done to their connection and interaction with ancestral lands. This shift in the Nordic art scene comes at a particularly important time for the search of historical reckoning for the region. Both Finland and Sweden have recently launched a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in order to investigate the discrimination and forced assimilation that the Sami People were subjected to throughout the countries' history. The commissions, initiated in 2021, are set to hand in their final report during the last stretch of 2023. Similarly, Norway has been working on its own Truth and Reconciliation commission

for the Sami people, with the official end extended from its original deadline of 1st of September 2022 date to the 1st of June 2023. The commissions and the exhibition both highlight an upcoming reckoning that the Nordic countries face when it comes to their colonial history as they attempt to forge a new Nordic future and identity.

The Sami People are indigenous to the regions of northern Scandinavia and the Kola Peninsula. Their population is spread across the countries of Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Russia. Although the exact population of the Sami people is based on an estimate, there are approximately up to 100,000 Sami individuals in the world. While this makes up very small proportions of the overall population of the countries in which they live, the Sami people are governed by three distinct parliaments in the Nordic countries of Norway, Sweden, and Finland.

Despite their seeming political autonomy, however, in 2016 the then-UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, suggested after a visit to these countries that the cultural and environmental rights of Sami people were not being adequately protected by their respective governments. In an accompanying report, Tauli-Corpuz specifically noted the lack of efforts undertaken to ensure the survival of the Sami language, with further remarks that the mining efforts undertaken by the Nordic governments had breached Sami land across all the Nordic countries and created an atmosphere ready

for social conflict. Similarly, Enni Similä, chair of the Sami Finnish Youth Association, has claimed that the "Sami are threatened with losing their land due to renewable energy production such as windmill parks, mines and new infrastructure. Reindeer herding and industrial projects in traditional lands cannot coexist." The Sami struggle for land is now often fought in long legal battles after centuries of unchecked land grabs accompanied by disruptions to the old ways of maintaining livelihood, the most notable of which is reindeer herding. Thus, Sami rights to ancestral lands are stuck between the Nordic push for sustainable industrial growth and a general disregard for the importance and suffering of the Sami community.

Moreover, modern struggles of the Sami people combine with the brutal memories of having been subjected to decades of fierce forced assimilation programs. These programs have involved involuntary conversions to Christianity, and unjustifiable maltreatment at boarding schools, as well as racist biological intervention such as forced sterilization. The Sami experience of violence, aggression and derogatory remarks has coerced many to hide their indigenous identity. This repression has amounted to significant cultural erasure with a lasting legacy on new generations.

Today, there seems to be no consensus or awareness on the experience of the Sami people, and many have found their experiences to be unspeakable and unheard. Indeed, a report on Sami integration in Sweden claimed that the "Swedes seem to know more about Native Americans than they do about their own indigenous population."

The Nordic Truth and Reconciliation Commissions may be the sign that this is beginning to change. In 2021, just as the Swedish Truth and Reconciliation Commission began its first preparations, the Church of Sweden issued a formal apology for their treatment of the Sami people in an emotional address: "Our

backs are bent by the guilt we carry. We have placed unjust burdens on you. We have burdened your ancestors with shame and pain that has been inherited by new generations." Alongside their apology, the Swedish Church has also allocated about 4 million dollars for a decade-long plan for reconciliation, which includes steps such as revitalizing the Sami language and publicly facing the historical truths of the church's role in the abuse of Sami individuals. Further apologies from the Churches of Norway and Finland are expected to be underway.

This seems to fit the Nordic ethos of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. In all the countries, the shared aims of the commission include identifying and analyzing historical oppression, how such oppression has transformed itself into discrimination today, and begin to heal the wounds of the past by looking to future improvements. The Commissions also include a psychosocial support component for those who are willing to testify.

Despite the seeming dedication of the Nordic governments to this process, however, many Sami individuals are understandably skeptical, as they feel they are not thoroughly included in processes which concern them and feel their expectations will not be met. Although some feel the ability to talk about the past and the painful events which has occurred in it will be a closure to deep wounds, so that they are not passed down to other generations, others are cautiously participating. Characteristically, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have more often than not fallen somewhat short of their highly idealistic goals, and the Nordic Truth and Reconciliation Commissions leave much up to question and critique. However, even their existence points towards greater visibility for Sami experiences which is capable of offering incredibly valuable stories and healing for all the inhabitants of the Nordic Pavilion.

Georgia Meloni: the new face of the alt-right or an addition to Europe's growing right-wing political trends?

Alex Triandafillidis

Georgia Meloni, leader of the far-right “Brothers of Italy” party in coalition with Matteo Salvini’s “Lega Nord” and Silvio Berlusconi’s “Forza Italia”, claimed a combined total of 43.8 percent of the vote in Italy’s elections held on the 25th of September 2022. These electoral results have sent a clear message to the world: right-wing politics in Europe are ascending. In Italy’s political landscape, Georgia Meloni seemed to be a minor political force, only garnering 4.3 percent of the vote in 2018. However, she now finds herself the leader of a G7 nation with 80 million inhabitants, a country with significant commitments to the European Union, NATO, and an ongoing refugee crisis. Critics worry that

her victory will lead to an increasingly authoritarian Italy, one to mirror Victor Orbán’s Hungary or even follow patterns that Donald Trump’s form of conservatism introduced to global politics— that is, rising right-wing pandering, xenophobia, and pro-corporation economic models. However, the facts point to a different form of leader, one which can be labeled as a “crypto-authoritarian,” a new form of conservative leader that can appear more moderate, enough to work within the strict political boundaries of the EU while still keeping the core of her conservative values stable. Georgia Meloni isn’t more of the same—she is a new type of conservative leader, and is potentially far more dangerous than what has preceded it.

Meloni is a political descendant of

the Italian Social movement (MSI), founded in 1946 by the sympathizers of the fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. Meloni joined its youth groups in 1992 the party remained on the fringe of Italian politics. The party was rebranded as the National Alliance (AN), but maintained its original logo. Meloni would enter parliament with the AN party until she joined Berlusconi and his “People of Freedom” party in 2009. Meloni has tried her hardest to break this connection between her and a fascist sympathizing party by emphasizing at every given opportunity that “We fiercely oppose any anti-democratic drift”.

Unfortunately, her fascist ties aren’t the only thing that worry her critics; her rhetoric has garnered



criticism across the political spectrum. Meloni campaigned on the simple yet effective rallying cry of “God, Family, and Italy”, selecting the same logo as her original MSI party: the tricolor burning flame. Meloni is opposed to what she calls the “woke” agenda of the left, specifically targeting gender, sexuality and immigration. Meloni supports what she calls the “natural” family, exclaiming “Yes to sexual identity, no to gender ideology,” a clear stab at the LGBTQI+ community whose sexual and gender preferences she considers a threat to conservative family values. Similarly to Matteo Salvini and Berlusconi, she has expressed deep Islamophobia affirming, “No to the violence of Islam, yes to safer borders.” The violent murder of Alika Ogorchukwu, a Nigerian immigrant, on the 29th of July 2022 was videotaped by onlookers who watched him be beaten to death, who never attempted to intervene, a testament to Italy’s xenophobia. She has also backed Viktor Orbán by voting against a European Union condemnation of his blatant trampling of political rights in Hungary. Additionally, she supported the Polish far-right ruling party, Law and Justice in Poland when they were faced with attempts from the EU to condemn their agenda. She continued to engage with the European right by speaking in favor of right-wing politics alongside Trump, Orbán and Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki at a far right Spanish rally. Meloni fits the stereotype of a European conservative, anti-immigrant, pro-traditional family, receiving praise from American Republicans like Kari Lake and Ted Cruz. However, her political strategy points to a more complex type of conservative leader, vastly different from her European and American counterparts.

Since starting her term as Prime Minister, Meloni made a complete reversal in her foreign policy views—indicating her willingness to drastically shift her convictions for political gain. Meloni, much like Orbán, was in the minority of EU leaders that supported Vladimir Putin’s illegitimate and fraudulent annexation of Crimea in 2014, requesting Italy’s withdrawal from the sanctions imposed on Russia at the time. It is safe to assume that Putin’s social

agenda aligned with Meloni’s at that time. Yet following the invasion of Ukraine, Meloni has taken a hard stance against Putin and rushed to condemn the invasion and support sanctions, arms shipments to Ukraine, and most importantly place a cap on the price of natural gas, Europe’s only way to combat the looming energy crisis from Russia. This is contrary to her fellow coalition members, who are ardent admirers of Putin despite their attempts to hide that fact. Salvini, much like Putin, stated that sanctions were harming Italy and the EU more than they were harming Russia. Vehemently anti-immigrant Salvini, called for a “mass cleansing, street by street,” referring to the immigrant population of Italy in 2018, has also been a staunch Eurosceptic, similar to when Meloni called for Italy’s exit from the Eurozone in 2014. As Meloni crept towards the higher echelons of power, her stance became one about maintaining Italy’s course as a member of the EU. Even within her coalition, more conventional examples of a right-wing leader exist, chiefly Salvini, yet Meloni is different.

Meloni can be considered a “crypto-authoritarian” publicly able to placate the EU where it matters most, especially in matters of foreign policy but able to maintain conservative domestic policies. She has deliberately altered her public image to conform to the restraints placed upon her by domestic politics and the foreign economic constraints stemming from the EU. Italy is in dire need of EU funds; they were hit the hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the meager economic growth of 0.7 percent in 2023 is almost wholly dependent on a 200 billion euro aid package from the EU. Any attempts to deviate from the democratic path or even exit the EU, if extreme eurosceptics had their way, would lead to the complete collapse of the Italian economy. Italy would risk losing billions, since the EU would certainly withdraw any funds not yet sent. Meloni has cleverly toned down all her brash and inflammatory rhetoric without diluting her core values of “Christianity, Family, Italy.” Unlike many right-wing predecessors, Meloni

seemingly has the tact to adapt her message as serves her best, maintaining her conservative appeal within the limits afforded to her by the EU.

Italy, Europe, and populists around the globe are faced with a new type of conservative alt-right leader. Donald Trump revolutionized what it means to be a populist conservative and many followed in his tracks, with fiery speeches and constant attacks on the liberal “woke” status quo becoming a must for any self-respecting conservative leader around the world. However, his defeat has ushered in a new conservative role model—one that has been filled by the more moderate, tactful leaders. Meloni embodies this shift. The 2024 U.S. election will serve as a useful litmus test—Trump’s recent announcement announcing his re-election bid, and the expected entry of Ron Desantis into the race, will put the divisions in the conservative movement on trial. Whether the moderate or extreme conservative reigns supreme—in the U.S., in Italy, and across Europe—remains to be seen.

From Italy’s perspective, Meloni demonstrates that the right is shifting to a more “marketable” politician, one who tones down his or her rhetoric just enough to not be perceived as “too extreme” and plays within the system. Women have also become the faces of such movements due to the perception that they can present themselves as softer and more relatable by leaning into images of motherhood, such as that which Meloni projected towards the average voter. Her rallying cry, “I am Georgia, I am a woman, I am a mother,” illustrates this shift—portrayed as a caring mother, also being able to mask memories of cruel male dictators while maintaining dangerously similar views. The question that Europeans and Italians should ask themselves is what happens when there aren’t political restraints similar to those of Meloni. The world is moving away from outspoken, brash populist far-right leaders—Meloni’s victory over Salvini demonstrates that. What any worried voter should be wary about are “clean cut” conservatives, champions of the family, faith, and nation who are extreme yet conservative enough to appeal to the most moderate of voters. Meloni set a precedent, the world awaits those who will follow in her footsteps.

Putin's Blundering Pursuit of Global Glory

Ella Sieger

Russia has been grappling for a superpower position on the world stage since the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. Power plays—such as the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, the 2014 annexation of Crimea, and the recent 2022 invasion of Ukraine—have all been attempts by President Vladimir Putin to restore the country to its “former glory.” However, while Russia was successful in 2014, the unfolding situation in Ukraine points to a very different outcome for the Kremlin. Lack of morale amongst Russian troops and citizens, a deeply flawed strategy, a weak military, and the increasing distance between Russia and its allies all point to the same conclusion: Russia’s dreams of creating a multipolar order with itself positioned as a global leader have been crushed. There is a clear discrepancy between the country’s monumental geopolitical plans and its capacity to land at the helm of a post-liberal international order.

There is a lack of support for the war amongst Russian troops, ordinary citizens, and elite members of society. In phone calls intercepted by the Ukrainian government, soldiers describe battlefield failures and disparage Putin and his government. The lack of proper training and preparation of Russia’s military for the war has contributed to extremely low morale amongst the troops and heavy battlefield losses. In a call to his mother, a soldier named Sergey reported that “there were 400 paratroopers...and only 38 of them survived...because our commanders sent soldiers to the slaughter.” An autocracy such as Putin’s has faced pressure before—but a rare group has spoken out about the war in Ukraine at the cost of their livelihoods. Some Russian elites, such as Mikhail Fridman, Alexei Mordashov, Oleg Deripaska, and Ravil Maganov have called for peace in Ukraine. Maganov, a top oil executive condemned the war in Ukraine and extended condolences to all victims of the “tragedy.” On September 1st, 2022, he died after falling from a sixth-floor window at a Moscow hospital under circumstances that much Western media considers highly suspicious. In all, fifteen high-profile Russian businessmen have died in mysterious circumstances since the beginning of 2022. The lack of conviction and support for Putin’s war in Ukraine is bad news for the Kremlin. A successful war campaign requires an enormous amount of pride and nationalism amongst troops, as well as immense public support from ordinary and elite citizens alike.

Amongst ordinary citizens, support for Moscow’s alleged “special military operation” appeared to be overwhelming—more than 70 percent of citizens say that they either “definitely support” or “mostly support” Russia’s actions. However, those who voted that they “mostly support” the war were twice as likely as the group expressing unwavering support to express feelings of

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anxiety, fear, and horror about the events taking place. For many, though not ideal, the least uncomfortable option is to join the constituency in support of the war, whether due to pressure from authorities or simply due to automatic deference to the knowledge of the government and military. State-sponsored propaganda putting the blame on Russia’s Western adversaries contributes to much of the support expressed by Russian citizens. Those who are against the war are more likely to be young, from urban areas, and consumers of Internet media. Rather than unifying Russian society in favor of the conflict, the war has exacerbated existing divisions on various issues—including general support for the regime. When Putin announced a partial mobilization order seven months after the initial invasion—intended to supplement the Russian military with conscripted—fighting-age men, chaos ensued. Hundreds of thousands of men fled the country for neighboring Turkey and Georgia and protests erupted across Russia, notably in ethnic minority regions such as Dagestan, resulting in more than 16,500 detentions for anti-war activity since the start of the war.

Putin expected to seize Kyiv with only 150,000 soldiers, compared to Ukraine’s 250,000 troops. This is far less than the manpower ratio typically needed to launch a successful campaign, which is 3:1. There was an erroneous expectation from Putin and his inner circle that Ukrainian citizens would give up and flee, disregarding pre-existing data that showed that most Ukrainian citizens would be ready to take up arms and fight for their country. Inadequate training and competence of Russian soldiers and commanders led to massive territorial losses in the Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy regions. Abandoned tanks and equipment are strewn across Ukraine due to a lack of fuel and supplies on the Russian end. Military objectives have been superseded by political goals, much to the detriment of the Russian campaign; the Pentagon reports that the Russians have lost 80,000 troops already—more than the Soviets lost in over ten years of fighting in Afghanistan. The expectation that the invasion of Ukraine would be quick, easy, and extremely profitable was

highly off base, and this miscalculation will have massive ramifications on the Kremlin.

Russia’s foreign ties also have not held up as Putin had hoped. Russia lacks the backing of its most powerful international partner, Beijing, following humiliating defeats in Ukraine. China and India have called for a negotiated end to the war, isolating Russia at the most recent United Nations General Assembly. At the Assembly, not a single major power rallied behind Russia’s condemnation of the West in provoking the war over security concerns. In response to major territorial losses, Putin has made thinly veiled threats of utilizing nuclear weapons, which poses a danger of separating himself even further from China, who has a strict “no first use” of nuclear weapons policy. The invasion of Ukraine was widely condemned by the international community from the outset of the war, but Russia runs the risk of becoming an international pariah in continuing its aggravated and unprovoked campaign against Ukraine.

The Kremlin does hold one thing over the world—its position as the largest exporter of oil and natural gas to the European Union. An energy crisis has already gripped the country as it is starved of the Russian imports that have long provided its livelihood. European nations decided to rapidly shift to clean energy just before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, leaving them susceptible to supply shock when Russia cut off natural gas supplies. This leverage is not to be underestimated, but European survival without Russian gas is not impossible. The EU’s 210 billion euro plan to completely phase out Russian gas and oil by 2027 threatens to push Russia out of its largest market for its largest export.

Unprepared soldiers, an uninformed citizenry, a hasty strategy, and international isolation do not bode well for the Kremlin’s desperately desired victory. Regardless of Putin’s desire for national greatness and a restructured global order, Russia’s blundering approach to the conflict in Ukraine has put it in a precariously weak and isolated position.



MIDDLE EAST

Crucial Collaboration: How Israel and Jordan Have a Unique Opportunity to Begin Addressing the Region's Water Crisis

Anna Tuohey

Jordan is one of the most water-scarce countries in the world, with its population having access to an average of 16 gallons per person a day, as compared to 92.5 gallons per person in the U.S. As climate change projections indicate growing water scarcity around the globe, the Middle East and North Africa region is predicted to be especially hard hit with flash floods and droughts, exacerbating the already dire water crisis. Domestic and international political factors, specifically government mismanagement of water systems and recent rapid population growth due to the influx of refugees, place an additional strain on Jordan's limited resources. Jordan's impending water crisis is more than a humanitarian concern; as a historical pillar of regional stability and host to scores of refugees from conflict-ridden neighbors, the water crisis also poses a geopolitical threat to the region. In an effort to mitigate the worsening effects of climate change on a particularly vulnerable region, MENA nations must prioritize diplomatic cooperation and set aside political tensions in an effort to create mutually beneficial solutions to pressing climate related issues.

Water scarcity has long been an issue for Jordan's growing population in the desert region. Largely due to influxes of refugees fleeing conflict in neighboring countries, Jordan's population has rapidly grown in recent decades: from roughly 2.5 million in 1980 up to more than 10 million in 2021. Jordan is one of the largest host countries of refugees per capita of any nation in the world, and most recent data indicates that at least 700,000 registered Syrian refugees currently reside in the country with 19.5 percent in refugee camps. A combination of climate change, government mismanagement, and the drilling of wells and pumping of water away from aquifers reduces available water sources and leaves refugee populations especially vulnerable.

The complexity of Jordan's water crisis requires expansive projects with cross regional cooperation. As neighbors with mutual interest in mitigating the potentially destabilizing impacts of climate change, Israel and Jordan in particular must better work together to promote sustainable and preventative solutions to the water crisis despite their historically tense relations. The 1994

Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty, which formally ended the war between the two countries, began productive yet skeptical diplomatic relations that fall far short of friendship but have laid the foundation for collaboration. The two governments have recently begun working together to address the dire threat of climate change facing the region.

Israel is in a unique position to leverage its abundance of vital resources and advanced technological capabilities (specifically its desalination capacity) with its tense political relations with neighboring countries. Recent and ongoing attempts at targeting the water crisis include the 2013 Red Sea-Dead Sea Conveyance Project and the trilateral water-for-energy deal involving Israel, Jordan, and the UAE. The strategy of the former, which was just recently canceled due to logistical complications and alleged lack of Israeli interest, aimed to link the Red Sea to the Dead Sea. This would have provided an additional water resource and mitigated the rapid shrinking of the Dead Sea, which has dropped an average of three feet of water per year for the past two decades due primarily to loss of the Jordan River as a water source. This failure was particularly disappointing due to Israel's annual diversion of 440 Mm³ /yr from Lake Tiberias, which virtually blocks inflow from the Upper Jordan and being a primary factor in lowering water levels. One of the natural wonders of the world, the Dead Sea is more than a major tourist attraction; its shrinking threatens agriculture in Southern Jordan with the rise of sinkholes threatening crops, and farmers losing an important water source due to the withering of nearby oases which also threatens over 300 species of plants, fish, and birds.

The recent water-for-energy agreement appears more promising because it is an exchange agreement where both Israel and Jordan will receive a necessary resource and the UAE stands to make a profit. The deal promises an exchange between Israel and Jordan, in which Jordan will receive 200 million cubic meters of desalinated water from Israel in exchange for providing solar energy from a farm in eastern Jordan that is slated to be built by a UAE government-owned renewable energy company.

Brokered by the UAE and signed in Dubai shortly after the normalization of relations between Israel and the UAE, the deal is a further example of the importance of regional diplomatic cooperation in efforts to mitigate the complexity of climate issues, and indicates the promising nature of mutually beneficial agreements.

While encouraging, this deal has not yet been put in motion and faces significant political and logistical obstacles. Domestic distractions such as Jordan's growing economic crisis that worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic pose a challenge to the deal's execution. Furthermore, any form of cooperation between Jordan and Israel is threatened by public disapproval from Jordan's primarily Palestinian population. Past cooperation with Israel has been condemned by those who view such agreements as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. Furthermore, in order to ensure long term success, the Jordanian government must also reevaluate its water management strategy to reduce losses and misuse of limited supply that has greatly contributed to the dire situation now confronting the country which will require internal government reforms. Despite these potential obstacles, the gravity of Jordan's water crisis warrants the attention and compromise necessary for the deal to come to fruition.

Without comprehensive action that addresses government mismanagement of water systems, the worsening impacts of climate change, and rising demand corresponding with population increases, Jordan's impending water crisis could have a dire impact on domestic and regional stability. In an effort to mitigate the effects of both climate change and human-caused strains on the water supply, Israel must ensure that the trilateral water-for-energy deal comes to fruition, reduce its diversion of the Jordan River, and provide additional support to the Jordanian effort to conserve resources. If successful, this agreement can be a launching point for future regional agreements that will be necessary for other vulnerable nations to prepare for the potentially devastating impacts of climate change on an already fragile region.



The Lebanese Kafala System: What Must Be Done

Omar Malik

Meseret Hailu Deneke left Ethiopia for Lebanon in 2011 full of hope—hope for a future filled with opportunity, opportunities that would uplift not only herself but also her family back home. Instead of a better future, she was met with seven years of abuse working under May Saadeh, a Lebanese woman. Deneke spent these seven years working tirelessly without pay, enduring this injustice while being beaten and so isolated from the outside world that her family thought she was dead. In 2018, her family took action and contacted the migrant activist group This Is Lebanon. This group fights for victims of the nation's kafala system, a system of migrant labor pursued through private sponsorships. In September 2019, Saadeh released Deneke as a result of external pressure. Deneke returned to Ethiopia stripped of hope, with her pockets empty and her dignity stolen. What they did not steal, however, was her resolve to fight the exploitative system and bring herself and others justice. Her case—regarded as the first of its kind—was brought against her employer by the non-profit Legal Action Worldwide. In the case, Deneke alleges that the Lebanese kafala system enabled her enslavement. However, unfortunately for Deneke, justice for migrant workers, in the case that allegations are brought forth, is rare.

Alem Dechassa, another migrant worker from Ethiopia who was filmed being brutally beaten by an employee named Ali Mahfouz at her recruitment agency, committed suicide in 2012 months after the event. Charges were brought against Mahfouz—yet he served no time. Faustina Tay, a Ghanaian domestic worker, died under suspicious circumstances after months of being beaten by her employer, Hussein Dia. Instead of legal action, Dia was simply banned from hiring domestic workers. Tay's death was ruled a suicide and a coroner made no note of the injuries that had been documented by This Is Lebanon just two days prior. This was not justice. Often no serious investigations are carried out in response to the deaths of domestic workers unless external pressure is applied, as was the case with Faustina Tay, where the case was only revisited after attention was generated by Al Jazeera and supermodel, Naomi Campbell.

The kafala system under which these

women suffered is not exclusive to Lebanon; it is rampant in Jordan and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, excluding Qatar. It allows individuals and companies to sponsor foreign laborers, a majority of whom are women from the Philippines, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and various other African and Southeast Asian countries. The sponsors, called kafeels, pay for travel expenses and provide housing in dorm-like facilities (or within homes for domestic workers) and often use private recruitment agencies to find migrant workers in their countries. But, despite being what seems like a by-the-book labor exchange, a sponsor's control of a worker's legal status—as employment and residency visas are connected—creates a sinister power imbalance.

In some countries, sponsors can even control a worker's ability to enter or exit the country, end employment, or transfer jobs. Specifically in Lebanon, labor law excludes domestic workers and thus denies them the protections awarded to a Lebanese worker, such as the ability to form labor unions. While the unified standard contract, which frames the relationship between kafeels and workers, provides some basic rights, workers still remain vulnerable to abuse—and such abuse is rampant. Amnesty International found that a majority of workers were forced to work more than their contracted ten-hour days and were denied their weekly day off. Others were denied their required monthly payments in spite of completing their allotted work. Female domestic workers under the kafala system find themselves especially vulnerable to abuse—particularly sexual abuse—by male employers who enjoy a monopoly on their livelihoods. From inadequate food to dehumanizing treatment, the list of grievances held by foreign domestic workers in Lebanon goes on. As a result, the plight of the domestic worker sometimes ends in death, with a majority of deaths among domestic workers found to be a result of suicide or attempted escape.

These migrant workers are slaves, and the kafeels are their slavers. The system is one of modern slavery that disproportionately affects ethnic migrant women and removes them of their agency. These women are

suffocated under the systemic weight of racism, colorism, and misogyny. The worst of the kafeels see them not as humans but as tools for them to use freely. This is the dark reality of Meseret Hailu Deneke, Alem Dechassa, Faustina Tay, and every other woman like them. Their abusers operate with no consequence as the legal systems of kafala countries turn a blind eye to the plight of migrant workers. Governments sponsor the system unabashedly and reap the benefits as if they are not soaked in the blood and sweat of those they deem inferior. And the rest of the world silently stands by and watches their exploitation of the developing world without consequence.

This is not to say that there are no efforts to abolish the system. This was proven in Qatar, which abolished the system in 2016 in response to international pressure. However, this pressure came as a result of attention brought to the issue by the use of migrant workers in the Qatari construction of World Cup facilities and infrastructure. When the kafala system was thrust into the spotlight the world condemned it, widespread criticism of the conditions of two million migrant workers in Qatar pushed the Qatari government to enter a partnership with the United Nations' International Labour Organization (ILO) to reform their labor system. Along with the abolition of the system, the Qatari minimum wage was raised to 1,000 riyals (about 275 US dollars) a month from 700. While progress is important, exploitation in Qatar continues, and the new minimum wage still falls short of what is necessary to ensure that workers do not experience financial and food insecurity. A similar solution in Lebanon would create better conditions for migrant workers; this may be achieved through the inclusion of foreign workers under Lebanese labor law. Abolition in Qatar makes clear that it is time the world decries modern slavery in every form and mounts pressure on countries utilizing and abusing the system. In addition to global criticism and pressure, it is vital that the UN and the ILO partner with kafala countries in search of effective solutions to rampant abuse and economic alternatives to the benefits provided by kafala labor.

On The Discriminatory Dangers of Repatriation Processes

Sumayah Basal

Since the rise of ISIS, women from the West of many ethnicities traveled to Syria to join the terrorist organization. After the U.S. military dismantled the ISIS Caliphate, many of these women were detained in camps such as al-Hol and al-Roj, while men were sent to prisons. Although the camp populations are predominantly Syrian and Iraqi, an estimated 11,000 foreign nationals are in Al-Hol. Many of these individuals are in limbo waiting for their countries to repatriate them— yet this repatriation is not done uniformly. When

citizenship and repatriation come into question, a country abdicates its responsibility to its people on dubious and often discriminatory grounds. This results in an additional abdication of a country's responsibility to administer justice for crimes committed by its nationals abroad as repatriation is the only means to judicially try and prosecute detainees for any involvement in ISIS activities. The discriminatory and politicized approaches emphasize the need for the repatriation of all citizens. Repatriation holds importance for justice and

due process but it is also essential for removing citizens from the life-threatening conditions in the camp that have amounted to a human rights crisis. These two responsibilities, justice and citizen safety are state's international obligations. The two women presented in this article come from the United States but are different in ethnic background. The treatment by the media and citizens' consumption of this media is impacted by racial and ethnic biases which have translated into unprecedented actions by governments in the

legislative, judicial, and policy decisions.

Huda Muthana demonstrates the potential for discrimination on domestic justice processes and repatriation. In this case, the United States, a country usually consistent in repatriating citizens, maneuvered around its responsibility to repatriate Muthana. Had Muthana never joined ISIS, her citizenship and American identity would have not been questioned, as she had previously been issued two U.S. passports. The child of



a former Yemeni diplomat to the U.S., Muthana was not automatically eligible for birthright citizenship. However, since her father was given notice of leave from the Yemeni Government in June 1994, several months before Muthana's birth, she was able to attain citizenship upon birth. Yet, when she attempted to get repatriated, the U.S. government argued that since her father's official diplomatic resignation was processed by the UN 3 months after her birth she was not a U.S. citizen. In 2019, Donald Trump tweeted that he had instructed Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to not let her back into the U.S. after a failed court case appeal. Muthana is now stuck in indefinite detention with her two-year-old son as the U.S. urges other countries around the world to repatriate their citizens.

Since Muthana joined ISIS, the media obsessively covered her disappearance. Articles began in 2015, four years before the U.S. pursued legal action. Articles preyed on the danger of Muslim women from the U.S. and the lurking danger of ISIS sympathists. One such article was posted to Facebook by Al news in 2015 and the comment section exploded in a flurry of Islamophobic generalizations, with one commenter saying, "She's not a Hoover woman people. She was a foreigner residing in Hoover. Big difference. They tried to make it sound as though an Alabama woman joined ISIS. I truly believe it is in their blood". Further, multiple variations of "She's a Muslim! Who is surprised?" highlight the ethnic and racial components. A total of 2150 articles under her name exist and continue to be written. Here, clearly, Muthana's Brown Muslim background became the forefront of discussions of repatriation and the perception of the threat she posed. Given that repatriation is an inherently political process and the public image and beratement of Muthana as a Muslim who couldn't possibly be a U.S. citizen before her citizenship was even stripped highlights the possible influences of public scrutiny and pressure

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It is imperative that countries remedy the discriminatory gap that has already begun to develop in the repatriation of ISIS women and help reduce the strain of Syria's camp detention systems.

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on court decisions and repatriation.

In contrast, Alison Fluke-Eren was the leader of the Khatiba Nusaybah battalion of ISIS where she trained members to use "AK-47 assault rifles, grenades and suicide belts," and was "planning and recruiting operatives for a potential future attack on a college campus inside the United States." Press coverage of Muthana and other brown women led to outcries over the safety of having someone like "them" repatriated, while Alison, who actively trained and planned mass-scale terrorist attacks was allowed to return, demonstrates how political will and ethnic assumptions can be weaponized against ISIS women. It is notable that the scale of each of these women's involvement in ISIS is vastly different. While Fluke-Ekren held a more senior role in ISIS, the reaction to her repatriation and her presence in the media did not stir the same reactions to those who appeared more "ethnic." Fluke-Ekren was repatriated in silence and coverage only began after the announcement of her court process. When the news did break, articles attempted to understand her background and how a white Kansas woman could have ended up as a battalion leader for ISIS. Comment sections poked fun at her and made several parallels with her and forms of white terrorism: one commenter under a Washington Post article said, "If she waited a few years, she could have joined the Trump coup and attacked the Capital."

Another joked that she was also "guilty of wearing black in the Summer," while one mused that she looked like "she could be the woman in the painting American Gothic transposed to a terrorist scene." These reactions had humor to them that did not exist with the first two, the horror of her actions was not magnified by her race. Instead, she became associated with more familiar forms of white extremism, despite their ideologies being the complete opposite and also became the butt of everyone's jokes. No one questioned the safety of having her within the United States: she was treated as a proper, and rather familiar criminal.

Ethnic muslim women are often robbed of their autonomy. She is cast as holding her beliefs because she does not know any better— she is a victim of the whims of the men of her society. These tropes characterize how the West views and consumes the ethnic Muslim woman-agencyless. These beliefs are extended to the women to the ethnic women who join ISIS. Even the Carter Center released a report examining how perceptions of ISIS brides as brainwashed, lured, and overpowered into joining ISIS dominant public imagination and discourse. These brown women have come to be viewed as merely props/puppets for the Islamic State, destined to become mindless ISIS brides (in their brainwashing or pursuit of lust). But why

does this matter? It matters because these beliefs then assume that these women cannot be repatriated or dealt civil justice. If they are blind followers, then they do not have the agency or cognizance to remedy their ways, feel remorse, or face accountability for their actions. Thus, a country excuses its lack of repatriation and accountability. In the case of Muthana, the press and governments came to view them as mindless victims of the Islamic State. Muthana's narratives were dominated by her quick radicalization and grooming, while Begum's narratives were that of her quick brainwashing over the internet.

White women such as Allison Fluke-Ekren occupies the imagination differently, "seen as deadlier and almost mystical in their rarity." These white terrorists are viewed as acting in accordance with their individual fanaticism rather than as a symptom of the religion as a whole or because of others—they are autonomous.

Thus, press coverage, media, and population outcries seem to impact the course of repatriation and justice for countries as seen with misalignment in the treatment of these four women. It is imperative that countries remedy the discriminatory gap that has already begun to develop in the repatriation of ISIS women and help reduce the strain of Syria's camp detention systems. Repatriation is the only way for countries to claim responsibility for their citizens, their crimes, and absolve the human rights occurring in the crowded camps.

Ukraine v. Palestine: Double Standards for Refugees

Charlotte Dubin

In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, 40,000 Russian migrants arrived in Israel between February and October of 2022, setting up Israel to receive the largest wave of Russian immigrants it has experienced in twenty years. The majority of these migrants are expected to qualify for Israeli citizenship under Israel's Law of Return, which gives individuals with at least one Jewish grandparent and their spouses the right to Israeli citizenship. In preparation, Israeli authorities have reportedly authorized the Jewish Agency for Israel (an international non-profit overseeing Jewish migration to Israel) to set up temporary camps in Finland and Azerbaijan for Russian Jews to live in between leaving Russia and immigrating to Israel. Plans have been suggested in coordination with the Jewish Agency to ease absorption of these Russian immigrants through employment and social programs staffed by Israeli volunteers. Israel has also accepted thousands of Ukrainian refugees under the Law of Return, in addition to accepting a number of non-Jewish Ukrainian refugees, intending for them to return to Ukraine once it is safe to do so. Funding has been allocated to expedite the Law of Return process for both Russian Jewish migrants and Ukrainian Jewish refugees. However, nowhere near the

same effort is put forth by the Israeli government to help Palestinian refugees, despite a seemingly obvious moral imperative and Israel's historical role in Palestinian displacement.

Five million Palestinians, as of 2019, remain registered as refugees under international law. More than 1.5 million live in 58 recognized Palestine refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, and the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The majority of Palestinians in Gaza are considered refugees. Palestinians are allowed to take up residence in camps, but cannot own their land there. Camps typically have cramped populations and lack sufficient infrastructure like roads and sewers. Residents lack basic security and freedom, subject to midnight Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) raids and frequent checkpoint shootings. Just recently, in the East Jerusalem refugee camp Shuafat—the only Palestinian refugee camp left inside Israel's 1967 Jerusalem borders—an attack at the camp's military checkpoint left one Israeli soldier dead and another wounded. In response, the IDF used stun grenades and tear gas against residents in a search for the suspect. Authorities cracked down on movement within and in and out of the camp: for

example, one man, Atallah Ismail, was not permitted to travel into the city to visit his mother, who died soon after, at the hospital. Experiences like these are all too common for Palestinians—denying the right to such aspects of basic dignity as the right to movement and the right to be with their families.

The right of return (the notion that Palestinian refugees have a right to return to the property that they or their ancestors previously inhabited) is a critical part of the Palestinian story and Palestinian demands. This principle is distinctly established in international law. UN General Assembly Resolution 194, from 1948, states that “refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date” and “instructs the Conciliation Commission to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation.” The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reaffirms this principle and recognizes the right of return as a customary norm of international law established in many seminal international legal statutes. The right of return is one of the principal issues on which Israeli and Palestinian authorities have been unable to agree over the years, and sits at the crux of the situation as a whole—as Israeli authorities like Eliahu Elath, former Israeli ambassador to the US, have clearly communicated, if Palestinians were to be included in the Israeli voting bloc, “Israel would commit suicide.” In other words, Palestinians would outnumber and politically overpower Jews. Agreements between Israeli and Palestinian authorities have largely skirted the conversation of the right of return by speaking of it as symbolic or by giving Palestinians the right of return only to a future Palestinian state, such as in the Clinton Parameters

of 2000. Such provisions serve as nothing more than a smokescreen, keeping Palestinians in unnecessary limbo.

Of course, it is a good thing to receive Ukrainian refugees, as well as Russian migrants who feel unsafe in Russia. But the Israeli government's response to Ukraine represents an inherent double standard and reveals deep-seated hypocrisy. Especially given the rationale of Israel as a state for Jews fleeing persecution, Israeli authorities should recognize and abide by the moral imperative to treat refugees with dignity, no matter where they come from. The lack of recognition of the right of return stands in violent contrast with the Israeli Law of Return's embrace of Jewish immigrants. If Israel wants to be a Jewish state, it should abide by the principle of tikkun olam—Hebrew for “world repair,” the principle of human responsibility to right social wrongs and pursue social justice—regardless of what dilution of the political majority might happen if Palestinians were to be made full and equal citizens of Israel. Whether Israeli authorities want to pursue in good faith a two-state solution, a one-state solution, or any kind of solution, they must recognize the basic right of return and coordinate with Palestinians to start this process. At the very least, the Israeli government needs to immediately begin reforming its policies toward Palestinian refugees, especially those residing in camps within Israeli borders. A process towards establishing permanent, dignified residences for Palestinians living in camps must be initiated. Palestinian people living as refugees are not political pawns, and the Israeli government, surrounding country governments, and the international community must stop overlooking them and treating them as such.

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...the Israeli government's response to Ukraine represents an inherent double standard and reveals deep-seated hypocrisy.

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A Grid Under Attack: The Islamic State and the Rise of Energy Terrorism in Iraq

Sophie Clark

After the Islamic State (ISIL) was ousted from the last of its territorial holds in Iraq and Syria in 2019, its fantasies of a global caliphate collapsed, and along with them fell the magnitude of the threat ISIL posed to Iraq. Attacks dramatically declined, territory was reclaimed, and the organization's reign of terror was effectually over. That was, at least, until 2021, when an uptick in attacks delivered a stark reminder that the ideology and socioeconomic fault lines born of ISIL's rule never left the country. This worrying trend has continued, and after a pair of major attacks in January 2022 in Iraq and Syria took the lives of hundreds, Iraq's fear of an ISIL resurgence became reality, confirmed by an October 2022 interview with the country's Minister of Foreign Affairs. The resurgence of ISIL poses a major threat to Iraq, and if the organization's past is any indication of what is to come, the Iraqi energy sector is in for a harrowing future.

Terrorist groups across the globe have targeted the energy sector for years. These critical sections of infrastructure have countless access points, are often poorly secured, and can be easily disrupted. An attack with a small point of impact can cause widespread damage, immediately halting government and commercial activity, disrupting the economy, and leaving civilians vulnerable while placing the attackers at the helm of one of the most powerful industries in the world; this makes the energy sector an ideal target. The first attacks of this nature in Iraq occurred in 1994 when an unknown group bombed a pair of oil tanker trucks in the central Iraqi city of Ramadi; these were the first of hundreds of attacks that would contin-

ue to target the Iraqi grid over the next three decades.

For nearly twenty years, these attacks went largely unclaimed, with only eight percent of attacks on the energy sector ever being publicly tied to a named terrorist organization. Motives were seldom made public, with the few that came out almost entirely being tied to religious disputes, political statements, or ongoing protests. Very few attacks committed by non-ISIL or ISIL-affiliated groups aimed solely to take control of the affected region or directly punish the Iraqi government. The vast majority of attacks in this period targeted gas and oil infrastructure, including pipelines, tankers, and fuel stations, rather than transmission and distribution systems.

The game changed when the Islamic State rose to prominence in 2013. No longer were attacks on the grid just another way to provoke fear and gain influence. To ISIL, oil, gas, and electricity were key instruments of its strategy critical to the survival of its uprising; the sector composed a central pillar of the organization's vision. These attacks had four main goals: to use and expand existing oil and gas fields, to increase and exploit energy production to fund the organization, to take control of new fields while damaging fuel transport infrastructure to punish and economically damage enemies of the Islamic State (including the West), and to gain power over civilians and territory. The centrality of the energy sector to ISIL's survival is echoed in the delegation of responsibility for mineral resources and electricity in the organization's leadership, where energy strategy remains one of only four areas to be directly and solely controlled by the high command,

alongside military, religious, and social media operations.

ISIL was responsible for nearly half of all attacks on the Iraqi energy sector from its rise in 2013 until 2020; only two of the other 240 attacks in that time frame were ever claimed, suggesting that the true proportion could be significantly higher. Though heavily focused on oil markets, ISIL also carried out major attacks on transmission lines and hydropower dams, with the organization seizing multiple hydroelectric dams early in its campaign. The energy-focused segment of ISIL's strategy severely threatened Iraq's ability to provide electricity and transport fuels to its citizens. As a country that barely relies on foreign oil, any disruptions in domestic oil production creates an almost certain disruption of the same or greater magnitude in domestic electricity generation or fuel distribution. And, as one of the world's top oil producers lost its foothold in the market, the security implications of ISIL's focus on Iraqi energy began to extend well beyond the borders of Iraq, threatening international energy security in Asia and Europe.

These attacks were even more detrimental to the country's economy. The government of Iraq derives a tremendous proportion of its revenue from crude oil sales, totaling around 92 percent in the years leading up to ISIL's rise. In 2011, two years before the organization began targeting the Iraqi energy sector, Iraq's annual output of petroleum products totaled 613,000 barrels per day (bpd); this plummeted to 449,000 bpd when energy-focused attacks by ISIL peaked in Iraq in 2016, nearly halving annual net oil export revenues from \$83 billion to just \$44 billion. The financial resource strain triggered by ISIL's targeting of the grid left the government of Iraq increasingly vulnerable and without agency—a testament to the capacity of ISIL.

As the resurgence of ISIL inches closer, the threat posed to energy markets and security in Iraq and abroad cannot be ignored, particularly as global energy markets are strained beneath the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The organization has maintained its strategy of targeting and damaging energy infrastructure in countries where its power is more salient, including Egypt and Libya, indicating that its return to power in Iraq will again be structured on a pillar of energy terrorism. For Iraq, ISIL's second coming evokes vestiges of an era meant to be transient, and unless the country takes steps to fortify its infrastructure and fuel sources, Iraq may end up trapped beneath a parallel to their past.



Ruins of Sinjar, a town in Northern Iraq, following war with ISIL in 2019

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