

2026

VOLUME 10

MIDDLEBURY
JOURNAL
of Global Affairs





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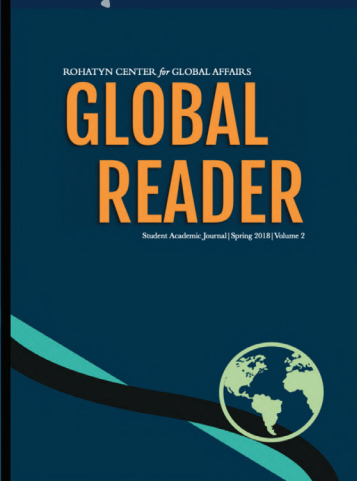
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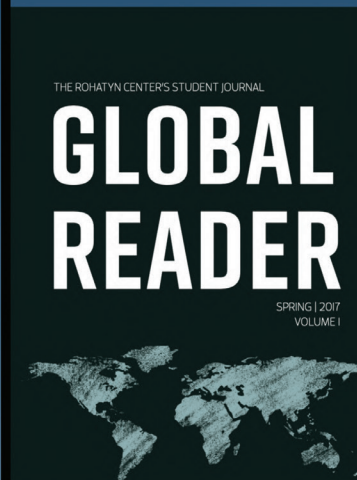
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Letter from the Editors

In this edition, we commemorate a decade of publishing incisive work in global affairs. Since its inception, this journal has operated on the belief that ideas have consequences, and that undergraduate scholarship bears a responsibility to amplify issues of profound international relevance.

While we live together in the quiet of Vermont, we are far from isolated. The intimacy of our campus is our strength. It is this very closeness that challenges us to engage in the conversations that shape our global landscape with a level of focus, intention, and empathy that is increasingly rare. Supported by our strong network of Schools Abroad, our Language Schools, and an intercultural academic community, Middlebury's student body is uniquely positioned to investigate and scrutinize lines of questioning overlooked by mainstream media. The articles presented before you are a testament to this effort, embodying our values of nuanced, evidence-based, and persuasive thinking.

This year's edition is our most extensive and ambitious to date, covering sixteen articles, four languages, over twenty countries, and offering a platform for our Rohatyn Global Fellows. Yet, what makes this edition particularly remarkable is its interdisciplinary breadth. By interweaving stellar work from fields as varied as economics, environmental science, decolonial studies, political science, and history, this collection is a reminder that no global issue exists in a vacuum. It was a tremendous effort on the Board's part to judiciously curate pieces that not only reflect the skill and intellect of the Middlebury community, but also respond to the complexities of the present moment.

To the authors, thank you for entrusting your wisdom and passion to our Journal. To our entire Editorial Board, thank you for your patience with sitting through countless meetings and manuscripts, and your unending dedication to the mission of this journal. To Emina, Valerie, and the entire Printing Services Team at Middlebury College, we wholeheartedly appreciate your care and patience with every draft we send. Lastly, thank you to all our beloved staff and faculty at the Rohatyn Center for Global Affairs, including Associate Director Charlotte Tate, Operations Manager Margaret DeFoor, Professor Nadia Horning, Professor Amit Prakash, and Director Mark Williams, for all of your encouragement and support in this big undertaking.

For many of us on the Editorial Board, curating this issue carries a special weight. As seniors preparing to graduate, we hope this journal remains as a small but enduring piece of our Middlebury legacy; a reflection of our time here that felt so intimately grounded in Vermont, yet expansive enough to open the world to us.

As you read, allow yourself to be challenged and inspired to engage with the world more critically and thoughtfully.

Sincerely,

ROBERT EDWARD JACOB AMBAT

Editor-in-Chief, Middlebury Journal of Global Affairs
Rohatyn Center for Global Affairs

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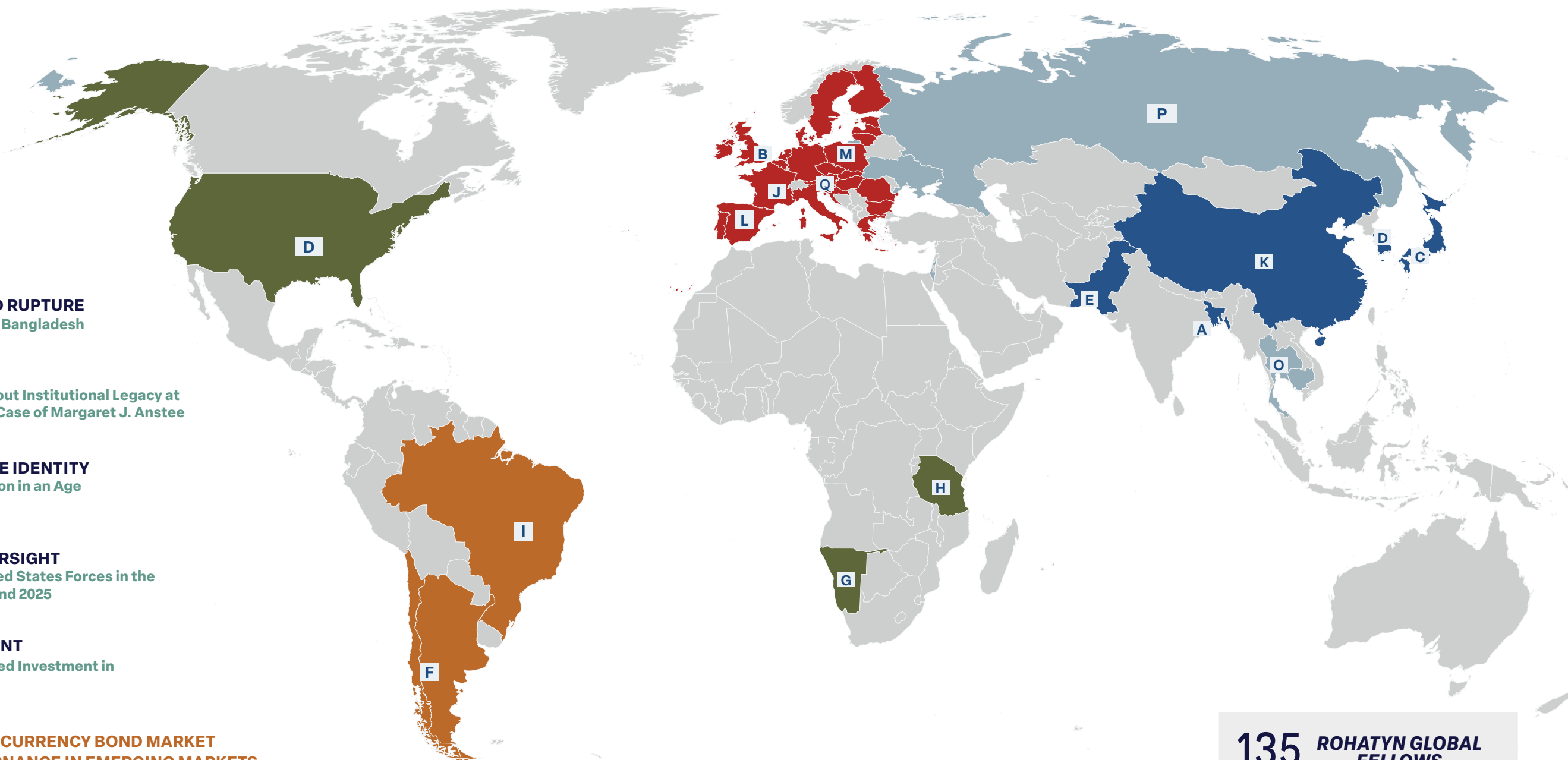
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Power, Protest and Rupture

The 2024 Political Crisis in Bangladesh

SRIVATS RAMASWAMY

This article examines the rapid collapse of Sheikh Hasina's regime in Bangladesh in August 2024, following more than a decade of entrenched political dominance. Drawing on interviews, media analysis, and process tracing, it argues that Bangladesh functioned as a competitive authoritarian regime – one that preserved formal democratic institutions while structurally eliminating meaningful political competition. The article contends that the same mechanisms that produced regime durability — electoral management, coercive enforcement, and narrative control — ultimately generated systemic fragility. When student protests emerged in July 2024, repression failed to contain them, instead producing moral shock, broadening participation, and exposing division within the elite. The article demonstrates how repression, once routine, became counterproductive, contributing to a rapid loss of legitimacy and culminating in elite defection and regime collapse.

From Sealed Stability to Sudden Rupture

In the hot, sweltering summer of 2024, families throughout Bangladesh lived through something profound — a revolution. Spearheaded by tens of thousands of students in Dhaka, they chanted beneath banners and braved tear gas, rubber bullets, and eventually live fire. What began as protests against a seemingly narrow bureaucratic decision — whether or not to reinstate the decades-old government job quota — exploded into a wider rebellion against a regime associated with corruption, disenfranchisement, and years of political closure. By August 5th, a once seemingly unshakable regime had fallen, and Sheikh Hasina herself had fled to India. Hasina, Bangladesh's longest tenured prime minister and the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was toppled by a swift protest movement that many spectators had initially dismissed. The speed of that unraveling, despite more than a decade of systemic consolidation, poses the central political puzzle of this article.

What was different this time? Why did this moment succeed where so many others had failed? This article argues that the 2024 uprising is best understood not as a sudden rupture produced by a single grievance, but as the culmination of a longer arc of competitive authoritarian consolidation that ultimately undermined the regime's own resilience. By 2024, Bangladesh under Sheikh Hasina functioned as a competitive authoritarian order — one where democratic institutions formally existed and continued to matter, yet were violated so consistently, and bent so structurally, that genuine political competition became impossible without fracture. The regime's durability was not simply the product of popularity, development projects, or opposition disarray. It was the outcome of a governing architecture — built through legal amendments, partisan appointments, and coercive enforcement — that gradually transformed competition into spectacle, dissent into criminality, and democratic procedures into instruments of control.¹

1 Larry Diamond, "Elections Without Democracy: Thinking About Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 21–35; Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "Elections Without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51–65; Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Andreas Schedler, "The Menu of Manipulation," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 36–50; Andreas Schedler, *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of*

The paradox at the center of 2024 is straightforward: how did a government that had mastered the machinery of institutional control lose power so quickly? The answer offered here is that the same strategies that produced Hasina's durability also produced a sealed political environment with a diminished capacity to absorb criticism.² By mid-2024, the outward calm masked what former US Ambassador Peter Haas described as a country "filled with dry kindling and tinder." His point was not simply institutional weakness, but institutional brittleness. Under these conditions, a youth-led grievance did not remain a narrow policy dispute. Once mobilization escaped its initial boundaries, the crisis shifted from a fight about discrimination to a fight about legitimacy.

This article traces an integrated causal chain. First, the Hasina regime steadily narrowed constitutional and institutional pathways for contestation, most consequentially through the abolition of the non-partisan caretaker government system in 2011. Second, the July 2024 protest wave opened through a sequence of political opportunity mechanisms: a symbolic opening after Hasina's "Razakar" remark backfired, an organizational opening after students broke the regime's campus choke points, and a coalitional opening as private-university and middle-class participants entered the streets. Third, repression backfired. Lethal force, visible killings, and a communications blackout generated moral shock and outrage rather than deterrence. Finally, the crisis became terminal when elite cohesion fractured, especially within the coercive apparatus. As one interviewee described the regime, it stood like "a table" on four legs; once one leg began to wobble, the system's apparent solidity collapsed quickly.⁴

The article's central contribution is not only to integrate competitive authoritarianism, political opportunity structure theory, and repression-backfire

Unfree Competition (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006).

2 Nancy Bermeo, "On Democratic Backsliding," *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 1 (2016): 5–19; Ali Riaz, "Democratic Backsliding in Bangladesh," in *The Oxford Handbook of Bangladeshi Politics*, ed. Ali Riaz et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Ali Riaz, *Pathways of Autocratization: The Tumultuous Journey of Bangladeshi Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2024); Ali Riaz and Md. Sohel Rana, *How Autocrats Rise: Sequences of Democratic Backsliding* (New York: Routledge, 2024).

3 Peter Haas, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025.

4 Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

theory in sequence, but to show something more specific about how entrenched hybrid regimes misread crises. By 2024, repression under Hasina had become

Repression had become informationally unhelpful: it no longer generated reliable feedback about protest, grievance, or legitimacy. It generated only false confidence that familiar tactics would continue to work.

not only severe but routine to the point of strategic dullness. Interviewees repeatedly described a familiar script — arrest the opposition, intimidate organizers, project force, and wait for the streets to empty. One interviewee captured this bluntly: the state "immediately arrest[s] everyone from the BNP (Bangladesh National Party)," and because "they've done it so many times," it had become "second nature." But in July 2024, the script failed. The movement did not behave like earlier opposition mobilizations. Repression had become informationally unhelpful: it no longer generated reliable feedback about protest, grievance, or legitimacy. It generated only false confidence that familiar tactics would continue to work.⁵

This argument is built through qualitative process tracing, drawing on semi-structured interviews with diplomats, journalists, civil society actors, political analysts, and Bangladesh-linked observers, alongside triangulation with reporting and documentary sources.⁶ The aim is not to reconstruct every episode of the uprising exhaustively, but to trace the sequence and mechanisms through which a seemingly durable competitive authoritarian regime lost its capacity to manage dissent. As with any interview-based study, access constraints and retrospective recall impose limits, especially around internal elite deliberations,

5 Ehteshamul Haque, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025; Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*; Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*.

6 Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013; repr., 2019); Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, eds., *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40.

but the core claims here rest on recurring patterns corroborated across interviews and public reporting.

The Architecture of Durable Rule

To understand why that mattered, it is important to begin with how strong the regime looked by early 2024. The Hasina order did not rest on elections alone. It rested on a wider system of electoral management, coercive infrastructure, media control, and campus governance. The 2008 election serves as a key baseline because interviewees and former officials still describe it as a moment when elections could plausibly function as elections. US Ambassador Jim Moriarty, who was involved in evaluating the process, recalled: "We were able to report that the election was clean and it was. I don't care what anybody tells you, it was a genuinely clean election." The significance of 2008 is not that it was perfect. It is that outcomes were still broadly legible as fair and verifiable rather than predetermined.⁷

What followed was the gradual removal of electoral uncertainty. The hinge move was the abolition of the caretaker system through the 15th Amendment in 2011. Across interviews, this appears as the institutional shift that transformed the electoral arena. Bangladeshi Academic Ehteshamul Haque described the caretaker mechanism as the minimal guarantor of electoral trust and argued that "our democracy is sustained only by a caretaker government. And after [they got rid of] the caretaker government after 2011, the country became authoritarian. And it's sustained and it's sustained constitutionally." Political Scientist Islamul Haque made the same point through a simple analogy: "if we are playing basketball, we have to agree on the rules of the game... and we have to agree that the referee is unbiased. That is the bare minimum to have a democracy." Once the ruling party could change the referee while keeping constitutional form, elections remained on paper but ceased to function as credible exit ramps.⁸

The three national elections held after the caretaker

7 Jim Moriarty, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025.

8 Ehteshamul Haque, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025; Islamul Haque, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025; Ali Riaz, *Pathways of Autocratization: The Tumultuous Journey of Bangladeshi Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2024); Ali Riaz and Md. Sohel Rana, *How Autocrats Rise: Sequences of Democratic Backsliding* (New York: Routledge, 2024).

system's abolition show a tightening spiral. In 2014, the BNP and allies boycotted, and large numbers of seats were effectively decided before ballots were cast.⁹ In 2018, the system moved toward tighter coercive control over the act of voting itself. Ehteshamul Haque's phrasing captures how the election is remembered: "The 2018 election was basically... what they call the midnight election... it was done with full force, you know, no one can vote." Saif Shah Mohammed described seeing "armed hooligans" lined up near polling centers and people arriving only to find "somebody else had voted for them." By 2024, the language of non-competition had become even more open. Ehteshamul called it a "dummy election." Across these cycles, the point is not only rigging, but normalization: elections became performance, and turnout itself became something to manage.¹⁰

This electoral transformation was reinforced by a wider coercive architecture. Major Shafayat Ahmad offered the clearest metaphor for how the regime endured, calling it "a table standing firmly on four legs": "partisan bureaucracy," "an ever loyal police force," "a corrupt judiciary," and "a yes man military."¹¹ That framing matters because it treats backsliding as systemic rather than merely electoral. It also helps explain how opposition was weakened long before election day. Ahmad described legal attrition through "6 million" "false court cases" and individuals forced to navigate "300 to 400 cases" across multiple districts, not only to punish but to exhaust. Across reporting and interviews, coercion also took darker forms: enforced disappearances, "pick-ups," pressured family statements, and the shadow infrastructure associated with the shadow prison, Aynagar. In Ahmad's words, practices like "extrajudicial killing" and "enforced disappearances" had become "almost like normal." The point is not only severity, but routinization. Coercion became part of governance.¹²

9 The Guardian, "Bangladesh Elections: Tensions High in Face of Opposition Boycott," January 3, 2014; The Guardian, "Bangladeshi Opposition Parties Vow to Continue Protests as Violence Mars Polls," January 6, 2014.

10 Ehteshamul Haque, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025; Saif Shah Mohammed, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025; The Guardian, "Bangladesh Election: Sheikh Hasina Heads for Tainted Victory," December 27, 2018; Al Jazeera, "Bangladesh Elections 2018: What You Need to Know," December 29, 2018; Ali Riaz, *Voting in a Hybrid Regime: Explaining the 2018 Bangladeshi Election* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

11 Major Shafayat Ahmad, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025.

12 Netra News, "How to Empty Bangladesh's Secret Detention Cells," September 10, 2021; Netra News, "Police Pressure Families of the Disappeared," January 13, 2022; Netra News, "Whereabouts Unknown: Bangladesh's 86 Disappeared Men," February 3, 2022; Netra News, "Secret Prisoners of Dhaka," August 14, 2022; Human Rights Watch,

Media control and narrative management were equally central. Journalist Aaqib Shatil described writing in an environment where publishing under one's own name was risky because Netra News openly challenged the regime and was blocked in Bangladesh. His account shows how repression often worked through ambient fear, not just visible arrests. Islamul Haque added the structural layer, arguing that "most of the media houses... the owners... were either members of parliaments or... within the core group of oligarchs of [Sheikh] Hasina." Major Ahmad described a hierarchy of speech in which criticism could target lower-level officials "up to a level," but criticism of Hasina and the regime's symbolic core was effectively off limits. Media plurality, in other words, survived in form while collapsing in substance.¹³

Universities were another pillar of this sealed order. They were not neutral spaces, but central sites of regime management. Academic Anupam Roy described a system in which students were forced into party programs, intimidated, and beaten. In his words, [the] Chhatra League "instituted... a reign of terror," and "guest room[s] and public rooms... were used as torture cells." The analytical point is not just that the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) was violent. It is that campuses functioned as micro-sites of political containment. Students learned quickly what kinds of dissent were permitted and what kinds carried cost.¹⁴

By early 2024, then, the Hasina regime had built a system capable of producing stability without legitimacy, development without accountability, and elections without genuine competition. That is why the regime looked strong. But the same evidence that demonstrates durability also reveals brittleness. As institutional pathways closed, the state's capacity to absorb criticism thinned. As coercion became routine, it produced compliance but less accurate political feedback. As narrative control intensified, the regime became more dependent on denial and

"Bangladesh Government Shuts Down Critics," January 27, 2016; Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2016: Bangladesh* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2016).

13 Aaqib Shatil, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025; Islamul Haque, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025; Netra News, "Lies, Damn Lies, and Bangladesh's Washington Embassy's Statement," July 23, 2024; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2024: Bangladesh* Country Report (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2024); Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Country Report: Bangladesh* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024).

14 Anupam Roy, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025; Talukder Maniruzzaman, "The Bangladesh Student Movement: Its Role in Restoring Democracy," *Asian Survey* 34, no. 10 (1994): 904–917.

bounded speech. The system could produce quiet, but not settlement.

Opening the Crisis

That is the condition in which the quota protests began. At first, the protests were still politically legible to the regime as a familiar, containable disturbance. Interviewees are clear that the quota issue itself was real and widely felt. Islamul Haque stressed that "it is true that the initial protest started because of [the] job quota," tying it directly to youth unemployment and the scarcity of secure public-sector jobs. The students' early demands were procedural and institutional: cancellation of the quota system, restoration of merit-based recruitment, and formal government action. Their tactics — marches, memoranda, ultimatums, and blockades — reflected that. The movement had not yet become a direct challenge to regime survival.¹⁵

But the state misread this early phase. Ehteshamul Haque described the regime's response as automatic: "Hasina and her police and her security services do what they know best. They immediately arrest everyone from the BNP." He added that they had done this so many times it was "second nature," and that the expectation was simple: arrest the opposition, and the streets return to normal. This time, however, "that really... throws them for a loop," because the movement was not built around the BNP, and the students "wanted to go the exact opposite way." This was the first sign that routine repression was failing as political perception.¹⁶

The first major opening came on July 14 through rhetoric. Returning from abroad, Hasina responded to the quota protests by invoking one of the most charged categories in Bangladeshi political life: Razakar. The term, rooted in the 1971 Liberation War, refers to collaborators and functions as a powerful moral stigma. Major Ahmad explained plainly that "razakar means the collaborators who actually fought against our war of independence," while Islamul Haque noted that "razakar is... like a curse word. In Bangladesh, it's

15 Islamul Haque, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025; Prothom Alo, "Anti-Quota Movement: Procession Begins from Dhaka University," July 10, 2024; Dhaka Tribune, "Key Events During Five-Day Internet Outage," July 24, 2024.

16 Ehteshamul Haque, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025; Ruma Paul, "Bangladesh Opposition Holds Protests to Demand Resignation of Prime Minister," *Reuters*, July 28, 2023.

considered a curse word." What made the moment explosive was not the term itself, but its target. Hasina deployed it against students who were still pursuing a narrow institutional demand. Islamul framed the mechanism clearly: "Razakar was a tool to dehumanize... to take away their human rights," and when "she decided to put that tag on the general students because of their legitimate demand, that really was the trigger."¹⁷

The students' response transformed the crisis. They did not merely reject the label; they inverted it. A chant emerged that became the movement's defining counterframe: "Who am I? Who are you? Razakar. Razakar. Says who? The autocrat. The autocrat!" Islamul described this as "the first time they openly challenged the Prime Minister and her regime." In political opportunity terms, this was the symbolic opening. The regime's delegitimizing tool misfired and instead gave the protesters a unifying language of dignity and anti-autocratic confrontation.

The next opening was organizational, and it came through the collapse of the regime's campus control mechanisms. As earlier sections established, the AL had long governed student politics through the BCL, which acted as a campus enforcement arm. On July 15, BCL activists launched violent attacks on protesters. But this time, the violence produced a unified student response that broke the regime's local choke points. Anupam Roy recalled that after BCL attacks, "general students combined all their forces to expel all the Chatra League activists from the campus." He emphasized the historical significance: "There has never been a single instance in our history where the student wing of the ruling party was expelled... while the party was in power. This was the first time."¹⁸ Islamul Haque underscored the structural importance of this, noting that since mass uprisings often start from campuses, once the regime lost its campus "stronghold," "anything can happen." This was the organizational opening: universities shifted from regime-managed spaces into movement hubs.

17 Islamul Haque, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025; Major Shafayat Ahmad, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025.

18 Anupam Roy, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025; Islamul Haque, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025; Prothom Alo, "Quota Reform Protesters Gathering at TSC Area," July 15, 2024; Prothom Alo, "Quota Reform Protesters Gathering at Shaheed Minar," July 16, 2024; Prothom Alo, "Chhatra League Men Allegedly Attack Quota Reform Protesters in Jessore," July 15, 2024.

A third opening followed quickly as the protest widened socially. Saif Shah Mohammed described how the regime initially treated the protests as “a small group... in the Dhaka University halls” that could be “nipped in the bud,” and assumed branding them as “Razakar” would “just shut these people up.” Instead, “two things happened... so unexpected,” and the first was that “the Dhaka private university students, BRAC [and] East West University... came out on the streets and started protesting.” Saif stressed the class-coded significance, noting that “historically middle class” students often stayed away from high-risk student politics. Major Ahmad made the same point bluntly: “the very next day, all the private university students, they took to the streets. Now this is something Hasina never imagined.” This was the coalitional opening. Once the “unexpected” middle entered the streets, the regime’s old delegitimizing scripts became less effective, and the cost of repression rose sharply.¹⁹

These three openings — symbolic, organizational, and coalitional — explain why the crisis escalated so quickly. They also explain why repression failed in the next phase. By July 16, the regime was no longer confronting a narrow quota movement. It was confronting a widening public that had already reinterpreted the conflict as a legitimacy struggle.

Repression and Backfire

The turning point in repression backfire came with the killing of Abu Said on July 16. Police opened fire in several places, and Abu Said — a 23-year-old student — was killed in an incident whose imagery spread rapidly. Islamul Haque’s account captures why this mattered politically: Abu Said stood “bare armed, standing in front of the police,” and “the visuals were so powerful” that they “incensed, angered the entire country.” The significance of the killing was not only the death itself, but its visual and moral structure. It condensed the uprising into a stark, transferable image of unarmed youth facing armed state power.²⁰

19 Saif Shah Mohammed, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025; Major Shafayat Ahmad, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025; Prothom Alo, “Quota Reform Protesters Gathering at TSC Area,” July 15, 2024.

20 Reuters, “Five Killed in Violent Anti-Quota Protests in Bangladesh,” July 16, 2024; Reuters, “Thirteen Killed in Bangladesh Protests Over Job Quotas,” July 18, 2024; Reuters, “At Least 26 Killed in a Single Day of Student Protests in Bangladesh,” July 18, 2024; Islamul Haque, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025.

After Abu Said’s killing, the movement widened further. Interviewees describe the streets filling not only with students but with “parents... children... elderly women, everybody.” The state’s violence no longer looked like the disciplining of a narrow opposition bloc. It looked like force against the public. Major Ahmad’s broader phrasing helps explain the resulting perception: “the police will beat you up because they know they will be protected.” Repression increasingly appeared predatory, protected, and partisan rather than rule-bound.²¹

At the same time, the movement’s decentralized structure made it hard to crush through familiar decapitation tactics. Islamul Haque’s recounting of Nahid

Information moved through “phone calls and connections,” while television news remained “very pro-Awami League” and “not at all covering” what people were hearing and witnessing privately.

Islam’s later testimony is especially revealing. Nahid explained that when abducted and tortured, he “had nothing to tell them” because he had “willingly... distanced [himself] from this important information,” so that “if I’m tortured... I have nothing to tell them.” Leadership, in this movement, was treated as a vulnerability. The state could still abduct and brutalize visible figures, but it could not easily collapse the network because it was not organized as a single hierarchy. As Islamul later put it, “the leadership was decentralized to the extent that now every community became a leader.” This is a central reason repression failed: the regime applied a playbook designed for centralized opposition structures to a distributed movement.²²

The episode of forced “withdrawal” statements

21 Major Shafayat Ahmad, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025.

22 Islamul Haque, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025; Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*.

illustrates this failure at the level of coercive theater. Detained student leaders were lined up and forced to read statements calling off the movement. Islamul described the scene directly: they were “lined up on a sofa” and compelled to read a declaration “calling off the countrywide protest,” but it “had no result whatsoever because we knew what was happening.” That final clause is key. By this point, the public already understood the coercive context. A forced “withdrawal” no longer generated confusion; it confirmed repression. Coercive messaging had lost credibility.²³

The internet blackout deepened, rather than solved, this problem. Officially framed as a public-order measure, the shutdown created an information vacuum that intensified fear while delaying visibility.²⁴ Namrita Ghani, who grew up between Bangladesh and the UK and now studies in the United States, arrived in Bangladesh on the first day of the blackout. She described the atmosphere as one of claustrophobic uncertainty: “there was no way of knowing what was going on.” Information moved through “phone calls and connections,” while television news remained “very pro-Awami League” and “not at all covering” what people were hearing and witnessing privately. The blackout did not stop recording. It stopped circulation. Videos and photos accumulated on phones while the country moved through days of fear, rumor, and controlled narrative.²⁵

This is why the blackout operated as a delayed detonation. It delayed the public release of evidence, but it concentrated its later impact. During the blackout, protests also adapted rather than disappeared. Namrita’s account of local gatherings is analytically useful because it shows decentralization in practice: neighborhood- and campus-based events that were “very peaceful,” with repeatable formats, speakers, and support systems. The movement localized while national communications were severed.²⁶

When internet access returned, the result was

23 Islamul Haque, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025; Prothom Alo, “Detaining Six Coordinators: Why This Negligence of Law and Constitution?” August 1, 2024.

24 Dhaka Tribune, “Key Events During Five-Day Internet Outage,” July 24, 2024; Netra News, “Bangladesh Disconnected and Unreachable from the World,” July 18, 2024; Reuters, “Bangladesh’s Internet Shutdown Isolates Citizens, Disrupts Business,” July 26, 2024; Reuters, “Bangladesh Shuts Offices, Imposes Curfew to Curb Deadly Job-Quota Protests,” July 20, 2024.

25 Namrita Ghani, interview by author, in person, winter 2026.

26 Ibid.

cumulative shock. Evidence of shootings, beatings, and other state violence flooded public space almost all at once. The blackout period had created suspended dread; the return of connectivity synchronized grief, anger, and recognition. Repression no longer functioned as deterrence. It became evidence. The state’s strategy had backfired not only morally, but politically and informationally.

By late July, the Hasina regime had not lost coercive capacity in a raw sense. It was still armed, still repressive, and still deploying curfews and force. What it had lost was yield. Violence produced outrage; outrage produced participation; participation made further violence more politically costly. In that environment, repression became a liability not only in the streets, but inside the regime’s own coalition.

Elite Fracture and Regime Collapse

Elite fracture becomes decisive when it is questionable as to whether the coercive apparatus remains cohesive and willing to bear the cost of repression.²⁷ In Bangladesh, the crisis reached its terminal stage when that assumption no longer held. Major Ahmad’s “table on four legs” metaphor becomes especially useful here. The regime did not need every leg to collapse at once. It needed one key leg to stop carrying the table at the moment of maximum strain.²⁸

The military was that leg. Major Ahmad, drawing on his military background and ties to serving officers, emphasized that the blackout itself distorted information inside the coercive system. When “she shut down [the] Internet,” he noted, “even the military people... were also kept in [the] dark,” even as they were being deployed to “control everything.” The blackout was meant to insulate the regime, but it also weakened the ability of security institutions to share a clear picture of events.

Ahmad also stressed kinship proximity. The crowds were not abstract enemies. They were “not strangers,” and officers could reasonably think “my younger brother, my younger sister, some of my cousins are in

27 Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*; Dan Slater, *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

28 Major Shafayat Ahmad, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025.

the street.” This mattered because the movement had widened into the very social strata the regime had assumed would remain quiet. Once repression targets those socially proximate to the enforcers, compliance becomes more fragile.²⁹

A further layer was reputational risk. As violence intensified and evidence spread, military officers increasingly had to weigh not only domestic obedience but institutional and professional costs, including international exposure and peacekeeping implications. In this setting, coercive commands began to look less like temporary crowd control and more like political risk transfer from the regime to the military itself.³⁰

Interviews converge on August 3rd as the inflection point. Major Ahmad described an internal “officer’s address” in which officers “poured out their heart,” and the result, in his account, was explicit: “no more shooting from now on. The army will not open fire.” He further emphasized that this was about institutional survival as much as conscience, warning that absent restraint “there would be a mutiny within the army.” This was the terminal mechanism in plain terms. Once the military would not reliably fire, the regime’s coercive guarantee of control became uncertain.³¹

The final collapse followed quickly. On August 4th, the state effectively began losing control of the streets. Mobilization remained decentralized and difficult to negotiate with. On August 5th, tens of thousands advanced toward Dhaka in the “March for Dhaka.” Police attempted to block movement, including with rooftop fire in some areas, but the decisive change was the military’s posture. The army intervened but did not fully repress the crowds. Once it refused to prevent protesters from approaching the Prime Minister’s residence, the regime’s end became imminent. Sheikh Hasina fled to India by helicopter.³²

Civilian accounts of the final hours underscore how deeply the regime’s coercive logic had overtaken its

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Netra News, “A ‘Death Squad’ in Blue Helmets,” May 24, 2024; United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “UN Experts, Human Rights Chief Condemn Bangladesh Crackdown,” July 26, 2024.

³¹ Major Shafayat Ahmad, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025.

³² Prothom Alo, “Army Chief to Sit with Representatives of Students, Teachers,” August 5, 2024; The Guardian, “Why Has Bangladesh’s Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Resigned and Fled,” August 5, 2024; Human Rights Watch, “Bangladesh: Prime Minister Hasina Resigns amid Mass Protests,” August 6, 2024.

political judgment. Namrita Ghani recalled hearing of a leaked recording in which Hasina, when warned that crowds were approaching and that she needed to leave, responded: “kill them all, I don’t care, I am not leaving this house.” Ghani also recounted that senior officers contacted Hasina’s son and insisted she had to leave or she would die. As interview evidence about the regime’s final hours, this account captures the final logic of the crisis: the regime’s instinct remained maximal coercion, but its own coercive coalition was no longer willing to carry that command through.³³ As Major Ahmad put it plainly, “Hasina’s fate was sealed on that very day.”³⁴

What the Case Explains

What makes the Bangladesh case analytically important is not simply that repression occurred, or even that repression backfired. It is the sequence. A sealed competitive authoritarian system narrowed institutional exits and produced quiet without settlement. A narrow protest issue then triggered symbolic, organizational, and coalitional openings because the regime’s own instruments of control misfired. Repression followed, but by then the conditions that once made coercion politically effective had changed. Violence generated evidence, evidence generated outrage, and outrage broadened participation. The blackout delayed visibility but intensified eventual shock. Finally, elite cohesion fractured when one of the regime’s coercive legs — the military — no longer accepted the cost of carrying the system.

This sequence also helps explain why single-cause explanations are insufficient.³⁵ Economic grievance was central, but economic grievance alone cannot explain why the quota dispute became a legitimacy crisis, why lethal force widened participation rather than deterring it, or why elite fracture emerged when it did. Youth mobilization was indispensable, but “spontaneity” alone cannot explain why the regime’s campus control mechanisms broke in July 2024 and not earlier, or why decapitation tactics failed. External scrutiny and diaspora amplification mattered, but they acted primarily as accelerants and reputational

³³ Namrita Ghani, interview by author, in person, winter 2026.

³⁴ Major Shafayat Ahmad, interview by author, Zoom, summer 2025.

³⁵ Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*; Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*; Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*.

pressures, not as the primary engine of collapse. The causal engine was domestic and sequential: institutional closure, opportunity openings, repression backfire, and elite fracture.

Taken together, this article contributes to the study of competitive authoritarian regimes in three ways.³⁶ First, it shows how the same institutional sealing that produces durability can also produce brittleness. The Hasina regime appeared stable for years, but that stability was purchased by hollowing out the very institutions that might have absorbed criticism and de-escalated conflict. Second, it integrates competitive authoritarianism, political opportunity structure theory, and repression-backfire theory into a single chronological account. The Bangladesh uprising is not well explained by any one framework alone; it becomes clearer when those frameworks are traced in sequence. Third, the case suggests a more specific analytic refinement: routine repression can become politically blinding. A regime can become highly effective at suppressing visible dissent while becoming less capable of reading the political field. In Bangladesh, the state’s reliance on familiar coercive scripts degraded its ability to perceive that the movement had changed — socially, organizationally, and symbolically — until it was too late.

Bangladesh’s 2024 uprising also fits into a longer historical pattern.³⁷ Since independence, Bangladeshi politics has oscillated between democratic openings and authoritarian consolidations, a cycle often sustained by elite mistrust, competitive clientelism, and weak institutional learning. Hasina’s post-2008 project was, in many ways, an attempt to end that oscillation not by reforming the system but by becoming the system — by fusing party, state, and national memory into one durable order. For more than a decade, that strategy appeared successful. Elections were held but neutralized. Opposition persisted but was fragmented and harassed. Civil society survived but under narrowing space. Campuses remained

³⁶ Diamond, “Elections Without Democracy”; Levitsky and Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism”; Schedler, *Electoral Authoritarianism*; Riaz, *Pathways of Autocratization*.

³⁷ Ali Riaz, *Bangladesh: A Political History since Independence* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016); Talukder Maniruzzaman, “The Bangladesh Student Movement: Its Role in Restoring Democracy,” *Asian Survey* 34, no. 10 (1994): 904–917; Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

political but often under fear and surveillance.

Yet the events of 2024 reveal the central paradox of that strategy. The mechanisms designed to stabilize rule ultimately made it fragile. By hollowing out institutions rather than reforming them, the regime eliminated peaceful channels for contestation. By normalizing repression as an administrative routine, it eroded legitimacy while blinding itself to the depth of social frustration. By conflating silence with stability, it mistook the absence of visible opposition for political settlement.

This is the illusion of control. Hybrid regimes can appear strongest precisely when they have become least flexible. They can produce quiet, but not resolution. They can suppress contestation, but not eliminate the conditions that generate it. When a trigger finally arrives — even one that initially appears narrow — the accumulated weight of closure, humiliation, and coercive habit can turn that trigger into a system-wide crisis.

In that sense, Bangladesh’s 2024 uprising is not simply a national story of protest and collapse. It is a warning about the limits of authoritarian learning in competitive authoritarian systems. The question is not only whether such regimes can endure. It is how long they can mistake enforced quiet for political settlement before the very tools that sustained them begin to produce their undoing. And for Bangladesh specifically, the implication is as urgent as the explanation: if post-2024 politics rebuilds the state without rebuilding credible channels for contestation, the country risks reproducing the same cycle under new actors, with the same illusion of control and the same underlying fragility.

Note on Interviews

All interviews cited in this thesis were conducted by the author between June and August 2025. In accordance with Chicago Notes and Bibliography guidelines, interviews are cited in footnotes only and are not included in the bibliography.

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Invisible Firsts

Women's Leadership Without Institutional Legacy at the United Nations

The Case of Margaret J. Anstee

LILY CHARKEY

Margaret Joan Anstee became the first woman to serve as an Under-Secretary-General at the United Nations and the first woman to lead a UN peacekeeping mission, yet her breakthrough produced little durable institutional change. This paper argues that her rise depended on a rare convergence of conditions: emotional intelligence compensating for limited formal authority, and crisis-driven "glass cliff" appointments that temporarily expanded access to unconventional leaders. Against alternative explanations, including individual exceptionalism, slow institutional learning, and member-state constraints, the analysis shows that none fully accounts for the UN's failure to document or replicate her leadership methods, a failure rooted in the persistent gap between formal gender-equality commitments and informal power structures. The result is leadership without legacy.

Introduction

Despite her modest rural background, Margaret Joan Anstee rose to unprecedented leadership positions within the United Nations, becoming the first woman to serve as an Under-Secretary-General and the first woman to lead a UN peacekeeping mission. Although other women have since led peacekeeping operations, no woman has attained the rank of Under-Secretary-General. Her career thus reveals a central paradox: extraordinary individual achievement without lasting institutional transformation, a case of leadership without legacy.

This paradox is especially striking given the persistent global underrepresentation of women in political leadership. According to the Council on Foreign Relations' Women's Power Index, which tracks political representation across 193 countries, only 26 currently have female heads of state or government, just nine have achieved gender parity in national cabinets, and only six have reached parity in national legislatures.¹

Anstee's autobiography highlights formative influences that shaped her leadership style. She described childhoods where "entertainment was geared to the seasons and rural pursuits," from collecting mushrooms at dawn to making jam from wild fruit.² More significantly, she emphasized the role of formidable women in her development, describing her grandmother as a "personality to be reckoned with" and her mother as "full of energy and initiative, determined to overcome all obstacles."³ These early experiences cultivated traits of adaptability and resilience that later characterized her leadership within the United Nations.

Understanding why such an exceptional woman left so minimal an institutional mark raises central questions about gender, power, and authority within international organizations. How did she navigate barriers that continue to constrain women's advancement? Why did the pathways she carved fail to remain open? What does her institutional invisibility reveal about who is recognized as belonging in UN leadership?

This paper examines why Anstee's unprecedented rise failed to produce lasting institutional change. It argues that her success resulted from a rare convergence: exceptional emotional intelligence compensating for limited formal authority, crisis-driven opportunities elevating unconventional leadership profiles, and persistent gaps between the UN's formal gender equality commitments and its informal power structures. Together, these conditions enabled significant influence at critical moments while ensuring that her authority remained personal rather than institutional.

Testing Alternative Explanations for the Absence of Legacy

Several alternative explanations might account for why Margaret Anstee's unprecedented leadership failed to generate lasting institutional change within the United Nations. Examining these alternatives reveals the complexity of institutional learning while ultimately supporting the argument that her lack of legacy resulted from systematic rather than circumstantial factors.

One explanation suggests that Anstee's effectiveness reflected rare personal traits rather than transferable skills, marking her as an outlier whose success could not easily be replicated. This interpretation rests on a static view of leadership capacity. Skills develop through exposure, practice, and institutional support. More importantly, this explanation fails to account for why the UN did not attempt to identify or cultivate similar capacities in other leaders. When the organization recognized effective crisis leadership in male leaders like Brian Urquhart or Sergio Vieira de Mello, it institutionalized their approaches. Urquhart's peacekeeping innovations, developed during the Suez Crisis, became foundational to UN peacekeeping doctrine and are still taught today.⁴ The organization named an entire center for peace operations after him, ensuring his methods would be preserved and transmitted.⁵ Similarly, Vieira de Mello's negotiation techniques and approaches to civilian protection have been documented and incorporated into UN training

programs.⁶ By contrast, Anstee's methods were celebrated symbolically but not analyzed systematically for replication.

A stronger alternative argues that institutional learning occurs gradually, making Anstee's influence less visible but still real. This explanation deserves serious consideration, given that her career ended in 1993, potentially insufficient time to observe lasting change. However, comparison with other UN reform challenges this timeline argument. The organization demonstrated capacity for institutional learning in preventive diplomacy, originally developed by Dag Hammarskjöld in the 1950s. While this took four decades to formalize through 'An Agenda for Peace' (1992), the concept did eventually become embedded UN doctrine and continues to guide UN diplomatic practice today.⁷ The organization has institutionalized Hammarskjöld's preventive diplomacy approach through dedicated departments, training programs, and operational frameworks that persist across decades.

Moreover, examining post-1993 leadership appointments reveals limited evidence of learning from Anstee's approach. Senior peacekeeping hiring decisions continued to prioritize military command experience and formal diplomatic credentials over the adaptability, emotional intelligence, and relationship-building skills that defined her effectiveness. Paradoxically, the organization's 2017 leadership framework emphasizes many qualities she exemplified: adaptability, cultural sensitivity, relationship-building, yet makes no reference to her pioneering use of these approaches, illustrating the gap between stated values and institutional memory.⁸

A third explanation locates the problem in structural constraints beyond UN control, particularly member state politics that limit leadership diversity. This argument has merit: senior UN appointments require Security Council approval, reflecting geopolitical rather than competence-based considerations.

6 Samantha Power, *Chasing the Flame: Sergio Vieira de Mello and the Fight to Save the World* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008).

7 Bertrand G. Ramcharan, *Preventive Diplomacy at the UN* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

8 United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, *United Nations System Leadership Framework* (2017), <https://unsceb.org/united-nations-system-leadership-framework>.

However, this explanation cannot account for missed opportunities within the UN's own institutional discretion. The organization failed to document Anstee's crisis leadership methods, incorporate her relationship-building approaches into peacekeeping training, or cite her experience in developing new operational guidelines—all areas of internal training and documentation that fall under Secretariat rather than member state authority.

This pattern suggests that the absence of institutional learning from Anstee's career reflects not neutral organizational limitations but systematic differences in how the UN processes and preserves knowledge from different types of leaders. Her experience was considered exceptional rather than institutional, limiting the organization's capacity to benefit from the very innovations that made her effective under extreme constraints.

How Do Institutions Produce Leadership Without Legacy?

Understanding why Anstee's achievements remained exceptional rather than transformative requires examining the leadership theories and institutional structures that shaped the United Nations from its founding. The United Nations was established in 1945 during a period when leadership theory was transitioning away from earlier models. Great Man and trait-based theories were giving way to behavioral approaches that emphasized observable actions, standardized roles, and procedural coordination while giving less attention to environmental impact and situational adaptability.⁹ This shift reflected broader organizational thinking that favored systematic procedures over individual charisma or contextual responsiveness.¹⁰

The United Nations' institutional design reflects this behavioral logic. The Charter prioritizes the harmonization of multilateral action and defines success in terms of collective, universal outcomes rather than contextual or situational responsiveness.¹¹ Authority

9 Tammy Hunt and Lori C. Fedynich, "Leadership: Past, Present, and Future—An Evolution of an Idea," *Journal of Arts & Humanities* 8, no. 2 (2018): 20–26, <https://doi.org/10.18533/journal.v8i2.158>.

10 Roger King, *The State in Modern Society: New Directions in Political Sociology* (London: Macmillan, 1990).

11 United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, October 24, 1945, Article 1.

1 Lauren Robinson and Natalie James, "Women's Power Index," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/tracker/womens-power-index>.

2 Margaret J. Anstee, *Never Learn to Type: A Woman at the United Nations* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 15.

3 Ibid, 7.

4 Jodi Sherman, "Legacy of Sir Brian Urquhart Offers Lessons for Challenges Facing UN," *IPI Global Observatory*, February 28, 2019, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2019/02/legacy-sir-brian-urquhart-offers-lessons-un/>.

5 International Peace Institute, "IPI Hails Sir Brian Urquhart at 100," February 28, 2019, <https://www.ipinst.org/2019/02/celebrating-centennial-sir-brian-urquhart>.

is further centralized through the structure of the Security Council, which concentrates decision-making power in five permanent members while limiting ten additional members to rotating, two-year terms.¹² Although all member states may participate in deliberation and express dissent, only Security Council members possess formal decision-making authority, and binding outcomes ultimately reflect the preferences of those with voting power.¹³ This structure reflects managerial assumptions analogous to McGregor's Theory X: a distrust of autonomous action and a belief that collective actors require hierarchical oversight and enforcement mechanisms in order to cooperate effectively.¹⁴

Margaret Anstee's leadership operated in direct opposition to this institutional logic. Her effectiveness was driven by close attention to context and environment, relying on adaptability, credibility, and relationship-building rather than formal authority or standardized procedures. This approach aligns with what Hunt and Fedynich describe as contingency leadership theory, which emphasizes situational responsiveness over fixed roles.¹⁵ While the UN permitted the emergence of Anstee's leadership, its fixed institutional framework did not support the reproduction or institutionalization of this style, ensuring that her success remained individual rather than systemic.

The UN formally embeds inclusion as a core leadership principle, defining inclusive leadership as rejecting discrimination, embracing diversity, and practicing cultural and gender sensitivity.¹⁶ These commitments are reinforced rhetorically through the organization's endorsement of Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which promotes women's participation in leadership and the recognition of unpaid care work. However, Goal 5 is framed as an external, state-level mandate rather than an internal organizational obligation, and the Sustainable Development Goals themselves are not legally binding.¹⁷

12 Ibid, Art. 24–25.

13 Ibid, Art. 31–32.

14 Peter G. Northouse, *Introduction to Leadership: Concepts and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2015).

15 Hunt and Fedynich, "Leadership: Past, Present, and Future," 22.

16 United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, *United Nations System Leadership Framework*.

17 United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015), <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.

The UN attempted to address this internal gap through the creation of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP 2.0), yet the framework largely reproduces the same emphasis on future-oriented commitments and procedural compliance. Under its leadership indicators, organizations are required only to articulate a vision for gender equality through advocacy and support rather than meet quantifiable requirements.¹⁸ Similarly, the equal representation indicator allows organizations to ap-

Margaret Anstee's rise cannot be explained by formal authority, institutional sponsorship, or access to established leadership pipelines. Instead, her trajectory reflects a form of leadership grounded in emotional intelligence rather than position.

proach compliance by maintaining a plan to achieve gender parity by 2028, without clear benchmarks, interim accountability, or consequences for failure.¹⁹

Viewed through the lens of managerial competencies, the UN's approach reveals a clear structural imbalance across the four domains of managerial work identified by Hogan and Kaiser: intrapersonal, interpersonal, leadership, and business competencies. Intrapersonal competencies concern self-regulation, ethical responsibility, and accountability for outcomes; interpersonal competencies involve social skills, communication, and the management of relationships; leadership competencies focus on building and developing teams, shaping organizational culture, and directing collective effort; and business competencies relate to planning, monitoring, and the allocation of resources.²⁰

18 UN Women, *UN-SWAP 2.0: Accountability Framework for Mainstreaming Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in United Nations Entities* (2023), 76, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/How%20We%20Work/UNSystemCoordination/UN-SWAP/UN-SWAP-2-TN-en.pdf>.

19 Ibid, 103.

20 Robert Hogan and Robert B. Kaiser, "What We Know About Leadership," *Review of*

In practice, the UN's leadership frameworks and accountability mechanisms emphasize interpersonal and business competencies such as consensus-building, reputation management, planning, and reporting. However, they fail to embed institutional mechanisms that systematically cultivate, evaluate, or reward intrapersonal and leadership competencies. As a result, leadership that depends on ethical resolve, responsibility for outcomes, and the active redistribution of authority can only emerge through individual actors rather than being reproduced as a durable organizational practice.²¹

Becoming Exceptional in an Inflexible System

Margaret Anstee's rise cannot be explained by formal authority, institutional sponsorship, or access to established leadership pipelines. Instead, her trajectory reflects a form of leadership grounded in emotional intelligence rather than position. Emotionally intelligent leaders distinguish themselves through self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill—capacities that enable influence in complex, politically constrained environments.²² McClelland's study of a global food distribution company found that emotionally intelligent managers created exceptional results, with their divisions outperforming others' earnings targets by 20 percent.²³ Anstee's career offers a concrete institutional case of this dynamic operating inside the United Nations.

Born on June 25, 1926, in Oxney Green, a rural village in Essex, Great Britain, Anstee grew up without the social capital or professional networks typically associated with elite international careers. Her high school headmistress's assessment, "not very bright but works very hard," reveals less about intellectual ability than about Anstee's early reliance on persistence in the absence of advantage. Facing limited opportunity, she approached education not as a test of innate talent but as a challenge to be met through sustained effort. This motivational orientation is evident in her path to Cambridge. Without guidance, she taught herself

General Psychology 9, no. 2 (2005): 169–180, <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.9.2.169>.

21 Hogan and Kaiser, "What We Know About Leadership," 169.

22 Daniel Goleman, "What Makes a Leader?" *Harvard Business Review* 76, no. 6 (1998): 93–102.

23 Ibid, citing David McClelland's study.

Spanish in a matter of months to improve her entrance exam performance. After graduating, she was one of just four people selected from a mixed-gender pool to join the British Foreign Office in 1949, only one year after women were formally permitted to enter the service.²⁴

Anstee's upbringing also cultivated a capacity for empathy that later became central to her effectiveness in the field. Raised in a rural environment marked by wartime scarcity and early responsibility, she developed an ease with marginality rather than entitlement. This orientation shaped how she navigated international assignments. Prior to her first UN mission in Bogotá, she was repeatedly reminded that she was the first woman to represent the organization in such a role and that her performance would be scrutinized accordingly. Upon arrival, however, she deliberately sought common ground, noting that "the rainy climate was not unlike that of England... and there was the same store of jokes about the weather," adding that she was "made to feel completely at home."²⁵ Rather than asserting authority, she used cultural attunement and relational credibility to establish trust—an expression of empathy that allowed her to operate effectively without formal power.

As her career advanced, Anstee increasingly relied on social skills and influence across institutional boundaries rather than hierarchical control. She resisted efforts by headquarters to confine resident representatives within fixed regional compartments, declining a transfer to Chile in 1965 because she "did not like the tendency to keep resident representatives in the same regional compartments and wanted to widen my experience."²⁶ This decision reflects both self-awareness and strategic judgment. She recognized that breadth of experience, rather than positional stability, enhanced her capacity to navigate the UN's fragmented system.

This approach culminated in her involvement in a major review of the UN development system in the late 1960s, a moment that nearly pulled her out of the organization entirely. Faced with a choice between

24 Anstee, *Never Learn to Type*, 39.

25 Ibid, 130.

26 Anstee, *Never Learn to Type*, 203.

entering British domestic politics or remaining at the UN, Anstee stayed after learning that her partner, Jacko, had been asked to lead a comprehensive reform study. She joined the effort having already been "one of the system's most vociferous critics," with a record of proposing "a more integrated approach, putting the countries' interests first." The study argued that the UN system had been flawed from its inception by piecemeal institutional creation. Specialized agencies had drifted into operational roles at the expense of their core functions, while UNDP resource allocation followed agency interests rather than developing-country priorities. Agencies, reliant on UNDP overhead payments, engaged in what Anstee described as "self-interested salesmanship," prioritizing organizational survival over substantive effectiveness. Although the reform plan was, in her words, "supremely logical," it ultimately failed because "the United Nations does not operate logically but through political compromises that usually conspire against rational and effective solutions."²⁷

This episode reveals both the strength and the limits of Anstee's emotionally intelligent leadership. She demonstrated motivation oriented toward institutional improvement rather than personal advancement, empathy for recipient countries sidelined by bureaucratic incentives, and social skill in attempting to coordinate reform across entrenched organizational interests. Yet the failure of the reform effort underscores a central tension of her career. Emotional intelligence enabled her to diagnose and navigate institutional dysfunction, but the system itself resisted learning from such leadership. Anstee's excellence emerged not because the UN was designed to develop leaders like her, but because her capacities allowed her to excel despite its structural constraints.

Leadership on the Glass Cliff

The Angola assignment exemplified how crisis-driven appointments can enable breakthrough access without producing long-term institutional change. The glass cliff phenomenon argues that women are particularly likely to receive leadership appointments when organizations face precarious circumstances.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid, 241-242.

²⁸ Michelle K. Ryan and S. Alexander Haslam, "The Glass Cliff: Evidence That Women

When Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali offered Anstee the United Nations Angola Verification Mission II (UNAVEM II) position in February 1992, the mission faced seemingly impossible constraints: a sixteen-year civil war, minimal infrastructure, only 350 military observers for a population of nearly ten million, a compressed timeline, and an ambiguous mandate. Close advisors warned against accepting what they considered an "impossible mission," yet precisely because failure seemed likely, the institution became open to unprecedented female leadership.²⁹

Under these conditions, Anstee oversaw the organization of the 1992 elections with minimal resources and a limited UN observer presence. Despite severe logistical constraints, voter registration and polling proceeded, and turnout reached approximately 92 percent. When the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) rejected the election results and violence resumed, Anstee remained in Angola and continued engaging both sides, even as she became a public target. Demonstrations were organized demanding her removal, and she faced direct personal attacks, yet she continued diplomatic efforts in an attempt to limit escalation and preserve what remained of the peace process.

Despite these operational achievements, her appointment was consistently framed as a "first woman" experiment rather than as a selection based on proven competence. This framing shaped how both successes and failures were interpreted. Even supportive colleagues emphasized symbolic rather than operational significance, with Security Council members focusing on gender dynamics rather than her demonstrated effectiveness in managing complex diplomatic negotiations. More critically, the UN failed to extract institutional lessons from her crisis leadership. Rather than developing new selection criteria that valued adaptability and relationship-building in high-risk environments, or creating protocols that could replicate her contextual approach to peacekeeping, the organization treated her success as situational rather than methodological. Contemporary memorial tributes continue this pattern, celebrating Anstee as a

Are Over-Represented in Precarious Leadership Positions," *British Journal of Management* 16, no. 2 (2005): 81–90, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2005.00433.x>.

²⁹ Anstee, *Never Learn to Type*, 466.

"true pioneer" who "broke new ground for women in international peacekeeping," rather than analyzing her leadership as a model for institutional learning.³⁰ The glass cliff thus enabled individual breakthrough while insulating the institution from pressure to adapt its leadership norms once the crisis passed.

The Cost of Leadership Without Legacy

Margaret Anstee's career demonstrated that alternative forms of leadership, grounded in adaptability, relational credibility, and informal authority, can succeed—even under extreme institutional constraints. Rather than using her experience as a blueprint for reform, however, the UN has systematically dismantled the conditions that enabled her rise while erasing the institutional knowledge her methods generated.

When Anstee joined the UN in 1952, institutional entry reflected a postwar employment philosophy that treated early career positions as public investment in diverse talent. She entered through paid technical assistance work, accepting a position in Manila that enabled her to gain international experience while financing her career development. The underlying assumption was that institutions should absorb the costs of training young professionals from varied backgrounds, who would later contribute as skilled public servants. This approach allowed individuals without independent wealth or elite connections, like Anstee, to access international careers based on merit and persistence rather than privilege.

Contemporary hiring practices have systematically reversed this logic. The organization replaced its paid internship model with an unpaid system that expanded significantly in the 1990s. By 2017, approximately 85 percent of UN interns received no financial compensation, while over half came from just five wealthy countries.³¹ Participation costs of \$6,000–\$13,000 effectively restrict access to candidates with independent financial support, screening out precisely the type of resourceful professionals who might replicate

³⁰ Margaret J. Anstee, "The United Nations at 70—A Veteran's View," *UN Chronicle* 52, no. 1–2 (2015), <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/strong-un-better-world>.

³¹ Fair Internship Initiative, *75 Years of UN Fair Internships?! (2020)*, <https://www.fairinternshipinitiative.org/75-years-of-unfair-internships>.

Anstee's trajectory.³²

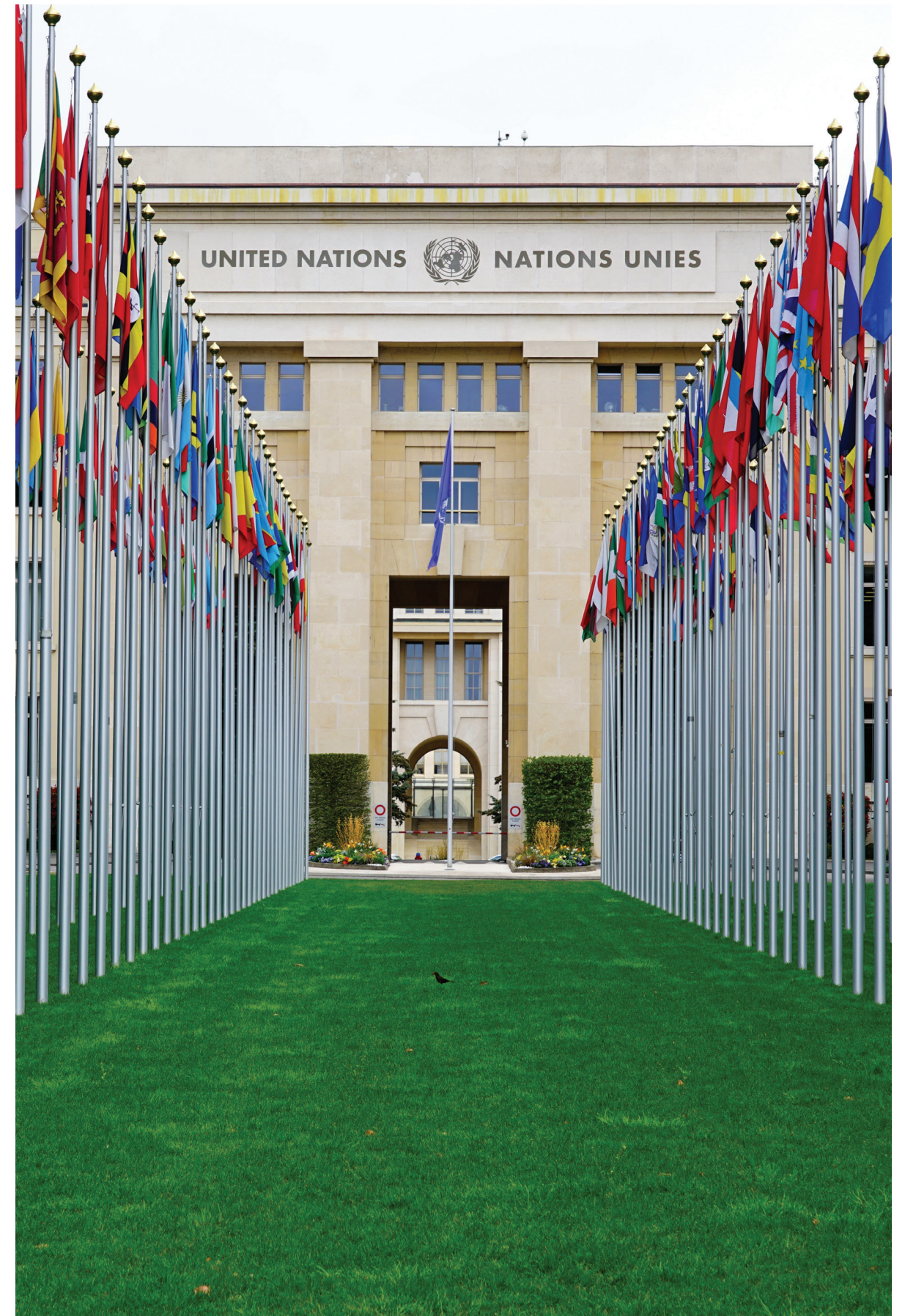
More fundamentally, the UN has failed to codify Anstee's innovations in leading without formal power. Her methods for building credibility through cultural attunement, establishing trust across hierarchies, and coordinating stakeholders through relationships rather than rank have never been systematized into institutional practice. These approaches remain invisible to UN leadership development, even as the organization has institutionalized the crisis management techniques of her male contemporaries. Instead, Anstee's legacy has been reduced to symbolic "firsts", achievements that celebrate breakthroughs while obscuring the operational innovations that made her successful.

The result is dual erasure: the UN has eliminated both the pathways that produced leaders like Anstee and the knowledge of how such leaders operate effectively. Her career appears not anomalous but made exceptional, evidence of alternative approaches to authority that the organization celebrated individually rather than systematized institutionally. The failure lies not in the UN's inability to develop exceptional leaders, but in its systematic choice to forget how.

³² P. Aana, "Society Pays for Unpaid Internships," *Rapport Center for Human Rights and Justice*, 2017, <https://law.utexas.edu/rapport-center/>.

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Rethinking Japanese Identity

Human Rights and Migration in an Age of Demographic Crisis

ANNA MATSUZAWA

Abstract

Japan is facing an acute demographic crisis that necessitates a fundamental reassessment of national identity and migration policy. With a low fertility rate and a rapidly aging population, the country's economic sustainability increasingly depends on foreign labor. Yet, recent political developments signal a turn toward securitization rather than global integration. Under Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, the establishment of the Office for a Society of Well-Ordered and Harmonious Coexistence with Foreign Nationals in the Cabinet Secretariat and heightened rhetoric surrounding migrant "illegality" reflect a policy framework centered on control despite limited evidence of migrant-related threats. I argue that the surge of ethnic nationalism in Japan undermines both its human rights commitments and long-term demographic strategy, and that sustainable reform will require a transition toward civic inclusion, enforceable labor protections, transparent pathways to citizenship, and a migration framework grounded in universal rights.

Introduction: What Does It Mean to Be Japanese Today?

Across the globe, migration has intensified debates over national identity, belonging, and what it means to be a citizen. When a state's native population is in decline, it starts to depend increasingly on foreign labor. However, political discourse often frames migration as a threat to social cohesion and cultural integrity. This tension between economic needs and identity-based exclusion is particularly pronounced in Japan today. Long characterized by narratives of ethnic homogeneity, Japan now faces one of the most severe demographic crises among advanced economies. As local labor forces shrink and immigration pathways expand, several important questions emerge: What does it mean to be Japanese today? Can a state historically rooted in *jus sanguinis*—the idea that individuals inherit citizenship from their parents, regardless of their place of birth—resolve its aging crisis by adopting stronger human rights commitments? Although heavily scrutinized, Japan's current approach to migration reflects an unresolved conflict between ethnic nationalism and civic inclusion. While policy reforms have acknowledged that immigrant labor is an economic necessity, political discourse continues to frame migrants as conditional outsiders. Sustainable demographic strategy, therefore, requires not only labor reform but a transformation of the meaning of Japanese identity itself. Similar patterns of securitized migration governance have emerged across Europe and North America, where economic and demographic reliance on foreign labor clashes with nationalism. In these contexts, economic interdependence has not eliminated identity-based exclusion; rather, it has intensified political contestation over belonging. Japan's trajectory reflects this broader global paradox, illustrating how a nation's dependence on foreign demographic integration alone does not guarantee civic inclusion.

Japan is historically known as an ethnically homogeneous nation rooted in *Nihonjin* discourse—a framework that celebrates its unique cultural and racial characteristics. This narrative continues to define who gets to be “Japanese” and who will remain perpetually a foreigner, even across generations. Recent political dynamics have brought these tensions to

the forefront. Prime Minister Takaichi, Japan's new prime minister as of October 2025, represents one of Japan's conservative stances on immigration. Takaichi's policy address discourse on October 24 of 2025 emphasized strengthening responses to illegal activities by foreigners by stationing the Office for a Society of Well-Ordered and Harmonious Coexistence with Foreign Nationals in the Cabinet Secretariat as the central administrative body for policies and foreign nationals.¹ During meetings with both left-leaning *Asahi Shimbun* and right-leaning *Yomiuri Shimbun* in 2025, Takaichi discussed “coexistence with foreigners” and preventing “stray harm” to citizens, advising that they proceed slowly while acknowledging Japan's dependence on foreign labor.² Although Takaichi's statements seemed to frame immigration in terms of coexistence and economic necessity, this rhetoric contrasted with the broader political climate following the July 2025 elections, when highly conservative parties like the *Sanseito* party (参政党) amplified anti-immigration sentiments through a “Japanese First” movement. The rise of these populist groups pushed the Liberal Democratic Party out of the political majority for the first time in years. As immigration becomes central to Japan's economic future, maintaining an ethnically bounded conception of nationhood risks constraining long-term stability. A sustainable response to demographic transformation requires a civic framework that integrates newcomers as members of society rather than as temporary labor inputs.

The Policy Problem: Demographic Crisis Meets Securitized Migration

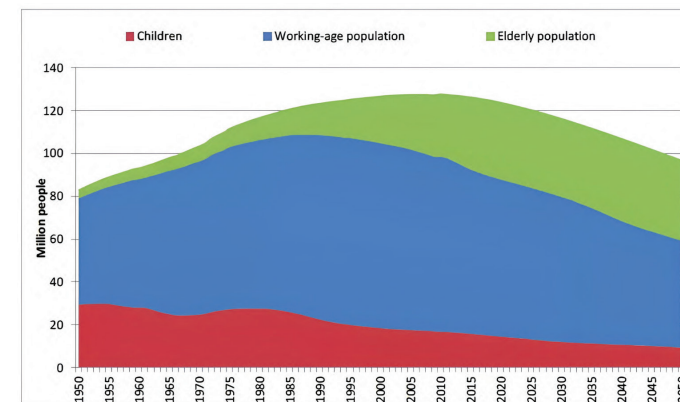
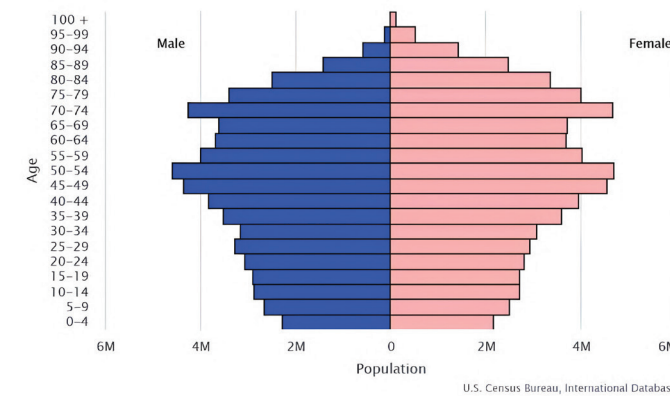
Japan's Demographic Emergency

Japan faces one of the world's most severe demographic crises. In 2024, The fertility rate fell to **1.15**, which is well below the replacement rate of 2.1, and the nation's working-age population has seen a steady decline for the past three decades.³

1 Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. 2024 Overview of Annual Population Statistics <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/saikin/hw/jinkou/geppo/nengai24/dl/gaikyouR6.pdf>, 2025.

2 Central Intelligence Agency. “Japan - the World Factbook.” 29 April. 2025. www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/japan/.

3 Fleming, Sean. “Japan's Workforce Will Be 20% Smaller by 2040.” *World Economic Forum*, 12 February. 2019. www.weforum.org/stories/2019/02/japan-s-workforce-will-shrink-20-by-2040/.



Source: OECD Historical Population Data and Projections (1950-2050).

Today, immigrants comprise just over 3% of Japan's population. While immigration has increased over the past decade, it remains the lowest among advanced economies.⁴ Japan recorded 3.95 million foreign people in the labor force in 2025, and the presence of foreigners increases in the daily lives of people.⁵ In a 2025 survey, 80% of economists responded that they believe the increase in foreign residents would improve the average living standard in Japan.⁶ Without significant immigration, Japan's labor force will continue shrinking, threatening economic viability and the sustainability of its social safety net.

In response to the demand for immigrant labor for economic growth, Japan implemented ambitious 2024 immigration reforms aimed at admitting and

4 Immigration Services Agency. “Number of Foreign Residents as of the End of June 2025 | Immigration Services Agency.” *Moj.go.jp*, 2025. www.moj.go.jp/isa/publications/press/13_00057.html.

5 *Asahi Shinbun*, “(Editorial) House of Representatives Election: Foreigner Policy—Inclusiveness That Transcends Differences | *Asahi Weekly DIGITAL: An English-Language Newspaper You Can Read and Listen to with Japanese Explanations*,” *Asahi Weekly Digital*, 2026. <https://www.asahi.com/awd/editorial/33287>.

6 Japan Center for Economic Research. “Increase in Foreign Residents: 80% Say They ‘Contribute to Improving Japanese Living Standards’” *Jcer.or.jp*, 2025. www.jcer.or.jp/policy-proposals/20250730.html. Accessed 12 December. 2025.

training nearly one million foreign workers in manual and service sectors by 2030.⁷ This new “training-based immigration” model selects workers based on aptitude and motivation rather than existing qualifications, then provides skills training. In this reformation, the Employment for Skill Development Program (ESDP) will replace the controversial Technical Intern Training Program (TITR) by 2027, while the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) visa system plans for 820,000 admissions by 2030, which is double the 2019-2023 total.⁸ Under the ESDP, workers receive three-year training aligned with SSW job categories like farming, construction, and food processing, and can switch employers after 1-2 years, unlike the previous system. Upon successful completion of the training, workers can obtain SSW visas allowing five-year residency with the potential for indefinite renewals, family reunification, and pathways to permanent residency.⁹ These reforms represent Japan's recognition that foreign workers are economically essential.

The Contradiction: Economic Need Versus Security Discourse

However, even as Japan expands immigration pathways, politicians continue to frame migration as a security threat. Prime Minister Takaichi's October 2025 policy address emphasized “strengthening responses to illegal activities by foreigners,” despite offering no concrete proof of a rise in criminal activity by migrants.¹⁰ This statement, which generalizes all foreigners as criminals, suggests foreign residents require special management and surveillance rather than equal participation in society.¹¹

Prime Minister Takaichi's securitization efforts intensified following the summer of 2025, when false claims about migrant crime, welfare abuse, and cultural threats fueled anti-immigrant political sentiments. As a coalition of eight organizations noted in their November 26, 2025 statement, including Solidarity

7 Gracia Liu-Farrer, Takeshi Miyai, and Yu Korekawa, “Japan's Stalled Immigration Experiment,” *Foreign Affairs*, November 18, 2025. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/japan/japans-stalled-immigration-experiment>.

8 Liu-Farrer, Gracia, Miyai, and Korekawa, “Japan's Stalled Immigration Experiment.”

9 Immigration Services Agency, and Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare. *Overview of the Employment for Skill Development Program*. 2024. www.mhlw.go.jp/content/11601000/001301676.pdf.

10 *Sankei Shimbun*: *Sankei News*, “Prime Minister Takaichi's Policy Address”

11 Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan. “NO to Xenophobia! Toward a Society Where Everyone Is Respected as Human Beings and Lives Together without Discrimination.” 27 November. 2025. migrants.jp/news/voice/20251126.html.

Network with Migrants Japan (SMJ), the shift from previous discourse around "multicultural coexistence society" (*tabunka kyōsei shakai*) and "mutually respecting each other" represents a fundamental retreat from inclusive values.¹² A cabinet meeting on November 4th of 2025 reformed the relevant ministerial conference and introduced proposals to tighten visa screening for tax delinquency, with plans to provide tax payment information to immigration authorities that conflate administrative violations with criminality and treat foreign residents as requiring heightened surveillance.¹³

Securitization theory explains how political actors frame issues as immediate or existential threats in order to legitimize the use of emergency measures.¹⁴ This helps explain this phenomenon: political actors frame migration as an existential threat that requires extraordinary measures outside normal politics. Policymakers invoke vague threats to "social cohesion," despite data showing no correlation between immigration and crime rates.¹⁵ Takaichi's references to preventing "stray harm" to Japanese citizens exemplify how cultural anxiety about Japan's "unique" identity enables politicians to present routine administrative matters as security emergencies, justifying enhanced control over foreign residents.

Human Costs of Securitization

Japan's security-first approach has had devastating human consequences. As the civil society coalition reported, Japan's immigration system has led to deaths in detention facilities, impoverishment of provisional release visa holders, and family separations.¹⁶ The coalition specifically referenced the death of Wishma Sandamali, an immigrant worker from Sri Lanka who died due to lack of care at a detention facility. In August 2020, Wishma was arrested by immigration authorities because she had overstayed her visa.

12 Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan, "NO to Xenophobia!"

13 Prime Minister's Office of Japan. "November 4, 2025 Interministerial Meeting on Accepting Foreign Nationals and Realizing an Orderly Coexistence Society" *Prime Minister's Office Website*, 4 November, 2025, www.kantei.go.jp/jp/104/acc-tions/202511/04gaikokujin.html. Accessed 12 December, 2025.

14 Mikkel Flohr, "Key Concept: Securitization (Copenhagen School)," *Critical Legal Thinking*, March 31, 2025, <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2025/03/31/key-concept-securitization-copenhagen-school/>.

15 Foreign Worker Employment Consultation Office. "Is 'Foreign Workers = Criminals' Just a Preconception? The Facts Revealed by Statistical Data - Foreign Worker Employment Consultation Office." *Foreign Worker Employment Consultation Office*, 14 May 2024, [ghrlab.com/article/foreign-workers-crime](https://www.ghrfab.com/article/foreign-workers-crime). Accessed 12 December, 2025.

16 Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan, "NO to Xenophobia!"

She began complaining about her health in January 2021. She passed away two months later in March. Although the official report from the Immigration Services Agency acknowledged her declining health and lack of appropriate medical care, they concluded that Wishma had died of "natural causes."¹⁷ This is just one of many cases of issues within the immigration detention system in Japan.¹⁸ The United Nations and human rights organizations have repeatedly condemned Japan's indefinite detention practices, lack of independent oversight, and inadequate protections for asylum seekers.¹⁹

Japan's approach to citizenship and belonging raises fundamental questions about who counts as Japanese.

Beyond detention, the securitization framework treats migrants as temporary labor inputs rather than potentially permanent residents. Thousands of "provisional release" visa holders live in legal limbo, unable to work legally or access social services.²⁰ Children born in Japan to undocumented parents may grow up without legal status and are denied access to education and healthcare.²¹ Families are separated when one member loses immigration status, with little consideration for children's rights or family security.

17 Tsukamoto, Kohei, "5 Years after Sister's Death in Japan Immigration Custody, a Woman Still Seeks the Truth," *Mainichi.jp*, March 5, 2026, <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20260305/p2a/00m/0na/007000c>.

18 Takahashi, Toshinari. "Videos Show Callous Treatment of Detained Sri Lankan Woman | the Asahi Shimbun: Breaking News, Japan News and Analysis." *The Asahi Shimbun*, 2023, www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14853685.

19 Tannai, Atsuko. "U.N. Body Voices 'Concern' about Detainees Held by Immigration | the Asahi Shimbun: Breaking News, Japan News and Analysis." *The Asahi Shimbun*, 2022, www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14760945. Accessed 12 December, 2025.

20 Amnesty International. "Japan: 'Endless Detention': Migrants Speak out as Government Proposes Harsh Immigration Bill." *Amnesty International*, 14 March, 2023, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/japan-endless-detention-migrants-speak-out-as-government-proposes-harsh-immigration-bill/.

21 Tauchi, Kosuke. "Special Resident Status for Foreign Children with No Visa in the Cards | the Asahi Shimbun: Breaking News, Japan News and Analysis." *The Asahi Shimbun*, 2023, www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14893613. Accessed 12 December, 2025.

Who Gets Human Rights? Identity, Exclusion, and Belonging in Japan

According to a report by Amnesty International, the Japanese government proposed an amendment to its Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act that would continue to allow arbitrary and indefinite detention of migrants and asylum seekers with few rights or judicial safeguards, rather than reform the system to protect their human rights.²² This reveals a profound tension between universal human rights commitments and exclusionary policies predicated on ethnic nationalism. Japan has ratified major international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which recognize that human rights apply to all people within a state's jurisdiction, regardless of nationality or immigration status. Yet Japan's migration policies consistently undermine these human rights treaties, treating foreign residents as having conditional, limited rights contingent on their utility and compliance.

The Technical Intern Training Program: Structural Exploitation

The Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) exemplifies how identity-based exclusion enables rights violations. Openly designed for skills transfer to developing countries, TITP has functioned as a mechanism for importing cheap, controllable labor.

Workers faced restricted mobility, wage theft, dangerous working conditions, and sometimes physical abuse.²³ Since workers were defined as "trainees" rather than employees and tied to specific employers, they had little recourse against exploitation.

The upcoming Employment for Skill Development Program (ESDP) reforms attempt to address these abuses by allowing employer changes after 1–2 years and creating clearer pathways to long-term

22 Amnesty International, "Endless Detention."

23 Office of the Counselor for Overseas Human Resource Development, Office of the Director-General for Human Resource Development, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. "Materials for the 11th Textile Industry Technical Intern Training Program Council Meeting: Current Status and Challenges of the Technical Intern Training Program for Foreigners." *Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare of Japan*, 25 July 2023, www.meti.go.jp/policy/mono_info_service/mono/fiber/ginouiishshukuyougikai/230725/3-1.pdf.

residency.²⁴ Yet the fundamental framework remains: workers must prove themselves worthy of staying through years of training and evaluation.

As Foreign Affairs notes, this approach faces major setbacks, including slowness (years of training before advancement), brain drain (skilled migrants leaving for better opportunities), exploitation (labor abuses from prior programs), and political backlash from anti-immigrant populism.²⁵ They are not truly welcome to contribute to society, but tolerated as conditional labor inputs who must continuously demonstrate their value.

Conditional Belonging and Second-Generation Exclusion

Japan's approach to citizenship and belonging raises fundamental questions about who counts as Japanese. Unlike many countries with *jus soli* (birthright citizenship), Japan follows *jus sanguinis*, citizenship through blood. A child born in Japan does not automatically qualify as a Japanese citizen, even if that child has lived their entire life in Japan, speaks only Japanese, and identifies culturally as Japanese.

This can be particularly problematic for second-generation youth. Recent policy discussions have considered special resident status for foreign children without visas, recognizing the injustice of penalizing children for their parents' immigration status.²⁶ However, these proposals typically only offer temporary relief rather than automatic citizenship pathways. The message is clear: even growing up entirely within Japanese society does not make them legally or socially Japanese.

Civil society organizations have called for fundamental reforms, including a foreign/ethnic minority human rights basic law (*Gaikokujin/Minzokuteki Mainoriti Jinken Kihonhō*), a Racial Discrimination Elimination Law (*Jinshu Sabetsu Teppai Hō*), and the establishment of an independent human rights institution.²⁷ In November 2025, SMJ and the Japan

24 Liu-Farrer, Gracia, Miyai, and Korekawa, "Japan's Stalled Immigration Experiment." 25 Ibid.

26 Tauchi, Kosuke. "Special Resident Status for Foreign Children with No Visa in the Cards | the Asahi Shimbun: Breaking News, Japan News and Analysis." *The Asahi Shimbun*, 2023, <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14893613>.

27 Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan, "NO to Xenophobia!"

Network towards Human Rights Legislation for Non-Japanese Nationals & Ethnic Minorities stated that "basic human rights must be guaranteed regardless of nationality or ethnicity," a principle Japan formally accepts internationally but struggles to implement domestically.²⁸

Youth Perspective: Reimagining Japanese Identity for a Global Era

Japanese youth offer another perspective. Younger generations show markedly greater openness to diversity and skepticism toward ethnic nationalism. The education system in higher level schools—particularly in private education—has been encouraging younger generations to expand their international experiences and learn English early on in their childhood. Several universities have been implementing English-heavy entrance exams or have increased their emphasis on international extra-curriculars. These attempts show an emphasis on expanding a global mindset beyond Japan for younger generations and their families. Having grown up in a more globalized Japan, with greater access to international travel and cross-cultural relationships, younger generations have more open views that contrast with those of older generations, which are more strongly represented in the government.

This generation could understand better what their elders often deny: Japan has long been globally connected. Japanese corporations like Sony, Toyota, and Nintendo have been globally recognized for decades. Japanese popular culture, from anime to video games, sushi to kimono, has a worldwide influence. Japan's postwar "economic miracle" depended on international trade and technology transfers. The popular fantasy of pure ethnic homogeneity contradicts the reality that Japan already depends on and contributes to a highly integrated and diverse global market.

The perspectives of younger generations offer crucial insights for reform to the immigration system. Younger generations will inherit Japan's demographic crisis and be tasked with finding its solution. A number of new organizations already provide multi-ethnic students and foreigners with space in Japan's fluid yet

²⁸ Ibid.

controversial society, working alongside immigrants to navigate an increasingly interconnected world. Policies that treat immigration as a temporary expedient or immigrants as permanent outsiders ignore the lived reality of younger Japanese and the Japan they are building.

Importantly, the upturn of youth support does not represent abandoning Japanese identity. Younger generations remain deeply connected to their culture, language, and traditions, which are constantly adapting and changing within a more globalized world. Rather, I believe they are expanding what being "Japanese" can mean, recognizing that cultural and ethnic identity can coexist within society. The evolution from ethnic to civic nationalism presents hope that Japan's future generations will be able to reconcile demographic challenges with new forms of social cohesion.

Conclusion

Japan is facing a fundamental contradiction: it cannot sustain its economy without substantial immigration, yet it struggles to reimagine who truly belongs to its society. This tension surfaces in Prime Minister Takaichi's "orderly coexistence" framework, which treats immigration as a threat to manage rather than an opportunity to embrace. The human costs are real: exploitation under the Technical Intern Training Program, deaths in detention, family separations, and second-generation youth who remain perpetually foreign despite having no other home. These outcomes contradict the human rights principles Japan has formally endorsed. Still, labor reforms and growing openness among younger generations suggest that Japanese identity need not be defined by ethnicity alone. To maintain stable growth, Japan needs constructive dialogue, not exclusion.

Japan's path toward inclusive coexistence will require reform on three fronts. First, the national curriculum must honestly reflect its demographic diversity, including Japan's existing minority communities, so that students develop an informed, grounded sense of civic identity. Second, legal protections must be strengthened: children raised in Japan need clear pathways to legal status, and foreign workers deserve enforceable labor rights and transparent routes

to long-term residency, not indefinite precarity.²⁹ Finally, visibility must be prioritized, as publishing data on immigrants' contributions, establishing multilingual support centers, and elevating immigrant voices in public discourse will shift the conversation from fear to fact.³⁰ Lasting change cannot come from policy alone; it requires honest public deliberation and the full participation of those whose futures are most directly at stake.

Whether Japan can build a society where belonging extends beyond ethnic ancestry remains an open question. However, the demographic and civic pressures make it increasingly unavoidable. If policymakers can match the openness emerging among younger generations with frameworks that center human dignity, Japan may find that a broader, civically defined identity strengthens rather than threatens its social fabric. Japan's prosperity will require more than simply admitting foreign workers. It will depend on whether they can build an inclusive and safe society for all.

²⁹ The Japan Research Institute, Limited, et al. The Domestic and International Context of Foreign Worker Policies "Lessons from Europe and America and Challenges for Japan." 25 July 2025, www.jri.co.jp/MediaLibrary/file/report/researchfocus/pdf/15991.pdf.

³⁰ Ban, Takehiro. "Toward an Era of 8.2 Million Foreign Residents: Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's "Immigration Review" and Regional Resolve - Takehiro Banta | Election.com." *Election.com*, 5 November. 2025, go2senkyo.com/seijika/196888/posts/1222410. Accessed 12 December. 2025.

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Congressional Oversight and the Reduction of United States Forces of Korea in 1971 and 2025

MEHR SOHAL

This paper analyzes the critical role of congressional oversight in maintaining the United States–Republic of Korea (ROK) alliance by contrasting the United States Forces Korea troop withdrawal of 1971 with the potential retrenchment in 2025. I argue that Congress is the decisive variable in determining alliance stability. In 1971, the Nixon administration unilaterally withdrew the 7th Infantry Division. This was facilitated by a fiscally exhausted Congress that failed to utilize its "power of the purse". This legislative inaction catalyzed the ROK's pursuit of independent nuclear capabilities. Through a counterfactual analysis, I demonstrate how congressional intervention in 1970 could have prevented a credibility shock to the alliance. Applying these lessons to 2025, I evaluate whether the 119th Congress can safeguard the alliance against similar pressures from the Trump administration. I conclude that, unlike 1971, today's Congress is structurally positioned to block retrenchment through legislation, thereby ensuring the durability of U.S. commitments in the Indo-Pacific.

Introduction

The alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea (ROK) finds itself at its most critical juncture in seventy-two years. A Wall Street Journal article in May 2025 reported that the U.S. administration will withdraw a rotational brigade of around 4,500 troops from the Korean Peninsula before a broader reduction of United States Forces of Korea (USFK). Although the Pentagon denied that such plans were underway, it revealed a willingness to reconsider the deployed military presence that has long served as the U.S.–ROK alliance’s central deterrent.¹ This potential retrenchment would threaten the foundation of a linchpin partnership forged in the Korean War and codified by the 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty. Today, the permanent stationing of over 28,500 U.S. active personnel deters North Korean, Chinese, and Russian aggression, and is one of the most critical indicators of America’s strategic commitment to both ROK and the Indo-Pacific region.² Ultimately, the continuation of this military presence hinges on the U.S. Congress’s constitutional authority over government spending, its “power of the purse.” I argue that Congress is the decisive variable in maintaining the credibility of this alliance, past and present. The lessons of congressional inaction half a century ago are crucial for determining whether today’s Congress can safeguard U.S. leadership in Asia.

This analysis bridges two eras of retrenchment: the realized withdrawal of 20,000 U.S. troops in 1971 and the looming possibility in 2025. It then examines the institutional, political, and informational conditions that shaped the 1971 decision and Congress’s inaction. I construct a counterfactual scenario showing how congressional intervention in 1970 could have altered the alliance trajectory. Finally, this paper applies historical lessons to evaluate whether the 119th Congress is positioned to prevent a repeat of 1971 today. I conclude that a firmer congressional stance would have preserved ROK’s confidence in U.S. commitments, mitigated the proliferation of doubt that has since shadowed Seoul’s perception of

1 Sean Parnell, “Chief Pentagon Spokesman Sean Parnell Holds Press Briefing,” U.S. Department of Defense, 2025, <https://www.war.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/4234712/chief-pentagon-spokesman-sean-parnell-holds-press-briefing/>.

2 Scott W. Harold, “Increasing the Value of the ‘Linchpin’ Alliance Between the U.S. and South Korea,” RAND Corporation (2025), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2025/10/increasing-the-value-of-the-linchpin-alliance-between.html>.

U.S. reliability, and reduced the incentives for independent nuclearization.³

2025: The Withdrawal of USFK

Once shaken by Nixon’s administration, the alliance’s credibility is again under scrutiny amid President Donald Trump’s push for greater allied burden-sharing. The American military presence in the ROK functions as a tripwire deterrent, meaning that any attack will trigger a full American response. Such a visible form of commitment raises the costs of aggression for potential adversaries and reassures the ROK of U.S. resolve. It is a commitment that is increasingly important in an era defined by U.S.–China rivalry and North Korea’s growing nuclear arsenal. Rather than budgetary pressures or burden-sharing debates, it is the emergence of these threats that should dictate the baseline for any USFK posture analysis.

Another critical dimension of this alliance is that since 1953, the U.S. has committed to defend the ROK with all its forces in the event of a nuclear attack. Public sentiment in the ROK is consequently in favor of the alliance: 85% of South Koreans say they value it, and 92% support its continuation. At the same time, support for the ROK’s nuclear armament has reached 75%, driven by a lack of confidence in U.S. extended nuclear deterrence. Sixty-five percent of South Koreans also see the uncertainty of U.S.–China competition as the biggest threat to national security. This time around, the stakes are far higher. At the U.S.–ROK Alliance Security Forum in October 2025, former U.S. Ambassador to South Korea Mark Lippert warned that the alliance is “in good shape, but not without its challenges.”⁴ When doubts arise about U.S. willingness to uphold the alliance, public and elite support for an independent nuclear capability rises. The fallout of decisions about U.S. troop levels on the Peninsula thus reverberates far beyond Seoul.

In Washington, Congress exerts influence over the executive branch’s handling of this special relationship through the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, which hold annual hearings on U.S. military

3 I. H. Cho, “Downsizing Hegemony: Alliance, Domestic Politics, and American Retrenchment in East Asia,” *Asian Security* 14, no. 3 (2018): 252, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2017.1403900>.

4 “ROK-US Alliance Trans-Atlantic-Pacific Security Forum,” *Atlantic Council*, 2025, 3:18:16, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjiUAoLy9Q>.

activities in the Indo-Pacific. The USFK commander testifies before these committees, thus enabling Congress to draft an informed National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). This act typically includes multiple provisions related to both the ROK and North Korea.⁵ What distinguishes the present moment is Congress’s dramatic reversal of posture. In July 2025, the draft NDAA for FY2026 recommends a provision that “would prohibit the obligation or expenditure of funds authorized to be appropriated by this Act to reduce the total number of members of the Armed Forces permanently stationed in or deployed to the Republic of Korea below 28,500.”⁶ While Congress was an accomplice in 1971, today it is positioned as an institutional check.

Once shaken by Nixon’s administration, the alliance’s credibility is again under scrutiny amid President Donald Trump’s push for greater allied burden-sharing.

A recent report from the research institute RAND analyzes President Donald Trump’s desire to retrench militarily from Europe and Asia to promote greater allied burden-sharing by drawing on historical cases of U.S. retrenchment. The report notes the impact of the withdrawal of the 7th Infantry Division in 1971 on South Korean behavior. The ROK military expenditure rose from \$283 million in 1969 to \$552 million in 1974. South Korean leaders were angered by their exclusion from decision-making, and the fear of abandonment increased incentives for nuclear proliferation.⁷ In order to assess whether today’s congressional oversight can prevent a repeat of history, we must examine the events leading up to the 1971 withdrawal.

5 Caitlin Campbell et al., “U.S.–South Korea Relations,” *Congressional Research Service*, R41841, 2022, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R41841>.

6 Senate Committee on Armed Services, “National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026,” Report no. 115 (2025).

7 Miranda Priebe et al., “Balancing Act – How Allies Have Responded to Limited U.S. Retrenchment,” *RAND Corporation* (2025): 9, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RBA739-3.html.

A Closer Look At 1970: Military Retrenchment

The historical precedent for this threat of troop reduction emerged when President Richard Nixon unilaterally withdrew the 7th Infantry Division from the ROK in 1971. The decision was met with fierce opposition from South Korean President Park Chung Hee and the Korean public. However, the withdrawal was only made possible because Congress, constrained by fiscal pressures, validated the administration’s realignment. The result was an avoidable credibility shock that spurred Seoul’s pursuit of defense autonomy, the creation of the Agency for Defense Development, and nascent nuclear ambitions. These outcomes have echoed through alliance politics for over fifty years.

In 1970, the 37th President of the United States, Richard Nixon, was in his second year at the White House amid the ongoing Vietnam War. His administration sought a gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam. The Guam (or Nixon) Doctrine, introduced in 1969, also sought a broader reassessment of U.S. global defense posture. Under this, the U.S. would honor its treaty obligations and provide a nuclear shield if necessary, but allies like the ROK were expected to assume responsibility for their own defense. Accordingly, the idea to reduce USFK presence was framed as a necessary early implementation of this doctrine.⁸ The Korean Peninsula thus became a proving ground for Nixon’s efforts to recalibrate alliance roles and commitments.

To support his decision, President Nixon cited American intelligence reports that concluded the ROK had immense independent defense capabilities. In 1970, North Korea had 400,000 active personnel, while the ROK reported 634,000. They also had in their arsenal more reserve forces, tanks, and Armored Personnel Carriers. U.S.–ROK combined strength outnumbered North Korea’s almost two to one, though the adversary remained stronger in shelling capability, air, and sea power.⁹ It was also estimated that North Korea had no intent of initiating conventional

8 “Draft Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1974*, vol. XIX, pt. 1, Doc. 55 (Washington, DC: Office of the Historian, 1970).

9 Hubert H. Humphrey and John Glenn, *U.S. Troop Withdrawal From the Republic of Korea*, Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate (1978), 27.

operations against the ROK in the foreseeable future.¹⁰ Given this assessment, the initial internal U.S. policy decision was to withdraw 20,000 military personnel by the end of FY1971 troops while increasing military assistance to \$200 million per year (up from \$140 million). Nixon and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger also developed a five-year Korea Plan focused on the eventual self-reliance of the ROK against a potential, though in their view unlikely, North Korean attack.

To this end, Nixon called for the creation of an Under Secretaries Committee to inform President Park of this plan and create a situation in which U.S. withdrawal would appear to result from Park's own initiative. Park rejected this orchestrated narrative and viewed the policy as a degradation of security. Despite this friction, by the 4th of November 1971, the 7th Infantry Division had left the Indo-Pacific. Congress had made available the appropriation of funds to increase military assistance to the ROK. A joint declaration was also issued alongside the withdrawal to calm the Korean public and warn potential aggressors against any "miscalculation or misjudgment" regarding the enduring U.S. commitment to the ROK's defense.¹¹ However, these formal assurances did little to mitigate the emergence of doubts about American reliability.

Executive Actors: President Nixon and Henry Kissinger

Executive decision-making during this period was concentrated in the hands of President Nixon and his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger. While Nixon articulated the strategic mandate under the Guam Doctrine, it was Kissinger who oversaw the mechanics of retrenchment and translated the idea into operational reality. Under the 1950 UNSC and 1953 Armistice Agreement, the President of the United States, through the military chain of command, held direct operational control over the entire USFK.¹² American troops in the ROK served three functions: defense assistance, deterrence, and trucekeeping. The

10 "Draft Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting," Doc. 55.

11 "Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Korea," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1974*, vol. XIX, pt. 1, Doc. 72 (Washington, DC: Office of the Historian, 1970).

12 Humphrey & Glenn, *U.S. Troop Withdrawal From the Republic of Korea*, 37.

latter two could not easily be transferred from the U.S. to the ROK. The central question, then, that Nixon posed to Kissinger, was how to calculate the minimum level of U.S. presence to maintain the illusion of deterrence against North Korea.¹³

The internal deliberations reveal a leadership operating with selective threat assessments and a disregard for military expertise. At the 6 February 1970 NSC Review Group meeting chaired by Kissinger, General Unger of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) warned that the military had "not really analyzed the meaning and effect" of the modernizing equipment promised to compensate for the troop cuts. He cautioned that the cost figures were significantly underestimated and likely exceeded \$800 million. Kissinger appeared to brush aside this concern with the remark that "the President hates to be hit cold on issues of this kind."¹⁴ Just eleven days later, the JCS formally warned that "withdrawal, now, of US forces would be untimely," and stressed that USFK served both deterrent and symbolic functions that could not easily be replicated.¹⁵ Despite these stark warnings, National Security Decision Memorandum 48, issued on the 20th of March, codified the policy: 20,000 troops would be withdrawn, ROK would receive \$200 million per year in military assistance, and the optics would be managed to minimize backlash.¹⁶

The memorandum's most revealing instruction was that U.S. diplomats were to frame the withdrawal as emerging from President Park's own initiative. This shows a calculated effort to manage political optics rather than address the strategic risks identified by military advisors. When this strategy failed, Nixon attempted to appeal to Park through personal correspondence. In a 26 May letter, he insisted the reduction was "strategically negligible," and would not signal retreat of American commitment to North Korea or China.¹⁷ Park, however, found these assurances wholly

13 Laurence E. Lynn Jr., "Memorandum for Dr. Kissinger: Korea Decisions," The White House, National Archives and Records Administration (1970).

14 "Minutes of a National Security Council Review Group Meeting," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976*, vol. XIX, pt. 1, Doc. 51 (Washington, DC: Office of the Historian, 1970).

15 "Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff Representative to the National Security Council Review Group (Unger) to the Chairman of the Review Group (Kissinger)," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976*, vol. XIX, pt. 1, Doc. 52 (Washington, DC: Office of the Historian, 1970).

16 National Security Council, "U.S. Programs in Korea," National Security Decision Memoranda no. 48, Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum (1970).

17 "Letter From President Nixon to Korean President Park," in *Foreign Relations of*

insufficient against the threats facing his nation. In a tense August meeting with U.S. Ambassador to South Korea, William Porter, Park expressed his "displeasure" and stressed that the ROK public was one hundred percent opposed to the reduction.¹⁸ Korean anxieties about American abandonment intensified under the Nixon administration.¹⁹ Yet, Nixon and Kissinger pressed ahead. The only way this policy succeeded under such conditions was because of the absence of a legislative check.

Congress and the Power of the Purse

In a post-mortem analysis of the dynamics between the executive and legislative branches regarding policy in the ROK, Colonel William Berry argues that Congress was actually "the driving force" behind the withdrawal because of their "desires to reduce American commitments abroad in the aftermath of the Vietnam experience."²⁰ Indeed, Congress has more agenda-setting power than most would assume.²¹ The 1970 case warrants closer examination of the institutional mechanisms that enabled individual statesmen to execute this policy despite fierce resistance from within the NSC and the JCS. Beyond the constitutional authority to "raise and support armies," the most powerful legislative mechanism available to Congress in 1970 was its control over federal spending as holding the "power of the purse." While Nixon could order the movement of troops, he alone could not draw funds from the U.S. Treasury to finance their transportation.²² Congress possessed the ability to attach legislative "riders" as conditions or limitations on the use of appropriations for specific purposes.²³

Instead of utilizing their blocking mechanisms, Congress actively financed the withdrawal. The decisive

the United States, 1969-1974, vol. XIX, pt. 1, Doc. 58 (Washington, DC: Office of the Historian, 1970).

18 "Telegram From the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1974*, vol. XIX, pt. 1, Doc. 68 (Washington, DC: Office of the Historian, 1970).

19 William E. Berry, "The Invitation to Struggle: Executive and Legislative Competition Over the U.S. Military Presence on the Korean Peninsula," *US Army War College Press* (1996): 2, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/216/>.

20 Berry, "The Invitation to Struggle," 8.

21 William G. Howell and Jon C. Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather: Congressional Checks on Presidential War Powers*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007): 106, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt7sp7g>.

22 Jonathan Masters, "U.S. Foreign Policy Powers: Congress and the President," *Council on Foreign Relations* (2017), <https://www.cfr.org/background/under/us-foreign-policy-powers-congress-and-president>.

23 Sean Stiff, "Appropriations; Law, Constitution & Civil Liberties," *Congressional Research Services*, R46417 (2020), <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R46417>.

role of the 91st Congress in facilitating the withdrawal is most visible in the passage of the Special Foreign Assistance Act of 1971. By authorizing \$150 million in additional military assistance explicitly "to be appropriated to the President" for the ROK, this appropriation functioned as a legislative bribe designed to purchase President Park's reluctant acceptance of the USFK reduction. A Senate hearing in June 1970 provides a glimpse into the environment of fiscal exhaustion that made congressional inaction possible. The transcript reveals discussion about the fiscal pressure of U.S. commitments abroad. Since World War I, the U.S. had spent nearly \$120 billion in aid. Senator Norris Cotton noted that military spending was "now fast approaching a trillion dollars," and that America's presence in Vietnam and Korea demanded an "agonizing reappraisal."²⁴ This was juxtaposed with a conversation on national debt fueled by taxes, inflation, and high interest rates.

The burden of fiscal pressures led to a willful blindness during oversight procedures. Even when confronted with contradictory information, Congress did not change its stance. This was apparent during the February 1970 hearings of the Subcommittee on United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, chaired by Senator Stuart Symington. A report reveals that State Department officials engaged in a pattern of evasion, and Congress was willing to tolerate it. When the Subcommittee Counsel asked Ambassador Porter for an assessment of the ROK's military posture, his response was dismissive. Porter claimed that, in terms of intelligence, "little is known about North Korea," and declined to elaborate. This stonewalling frustrated the Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator J. William Fulbright, who complained that he had to "draw information out" of the Ambassador and that Porter "should not be so modest about his work."²⁵

This evasive position is equally evident in the testimony of Ambassador Winthrop Brown, Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. The Counsel asked him if internal studies supported a force reduction, to which Brown frankly admitted

24 "Congressional Record," vol. 116, pt. 14 (1970).

25 Central Intelligence Agency, "Highlights of Subcommittee Hearings on Korea," (3) (1970): 2-3, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP72-00337R000200020001-4.pdf>.

that while studies were conducted periodically, the prevailing conclusion was that “the time for substantial reductions has not yet arrived.” No details or evidence were offered to explain this claim, nor was he pressed to justify this stance.²⁶ This was an explicit admission that the U.S. was not ready for a withdrawal. Senator Fulbright closed the meeting with an admonition that the State Department must keep a careful watch on foreign activities, because they “have a real impact on the ability of the government to make foreign policy decision.”²⁷ Yet, this warning rang hollow. The Symington hearings revealed enough contradictions to give Congress sufficient reason to believe that the North Korean threat was not actually diminishing and that withdrawal was premature.

Counterfactual Analysis: Congressional Resistance

To determine whether the 119th Congress can safeguard the U.S.–ROK alliance in 2025, we must first analyze how the 91st Congress could have altered the trajectory of 1971. The decisive variable in this historical episode was the legislative branch’s failure to prevent a policy that should not have been executed. If Congress refused to pass the Foreign Assistance Act or had attached a rider prohibiting the use of funds to redeploy the 7th Division, the withdrawal would have been impossible to execute. The modernization package Nixon offered to President Park depended entirely on congressional approval. Without these funds, the U.S. could not have compensated the ROK and Park would not have accepted the withdrawal because of South Korean public anxieties. Facing military opposition, the absence of Korean cooperation, and no budgetary authority to execute this plan, Nixon would have lacked both the resources and political cover to proceed. If instead of a force reduction, the 20,000 troops remained in the ROK, how would that have reshaped the alliance?

First, what would have needed to change for Congress to have used its “power of the purse” in 1970? The most important condition that would have needed to change is the information environment. Congress faced a severe foreign policy information asymmetry.

The intelligence they received on North Korea’s intentions and the ROK’s defense capabilities was incomplete, contradictory, and in some cases, deliberately ambiguous. Some reports suggested the ROK was ready to assume primary defense responsibilities, while others were concerned by North Korea’s advantages in air and naval power. Testimony before the Symington committee was evasive and inconsistent. This asymmetry was reinforced by Nixon’s “formalistic” presidential management style. In this model, well-defined procedures placed the President at the top of a tightly controlled hierarchy. This system empowered Kissinger to channel policymaking through a small circle, filter dissent, and “downplay conflict.”²⁸ Thus, Congress did not receive the full strategic picture it needed to confidently oppose the administration.

A second crucial factor was Congress’s own institutional limitations. The legislature is designed to be fragmented across committees, often making it difficult to speak with one voice on foreign policy. In 1970, coordination between key bodies such as the Symington Committee and the Armed Services Committee was limited. In addition, in the presidential life cycle, Congress does not challenge much in the first one hundred days; however, this dynamic did not apply because Nixon had already been in office since January 20, 1969. The reluctance to challenge a newly elected President was therefore not a convincing explanation for Congress’s inaction. Had there been a stronger congressional foreign-policy apparatus, greater information-sharing between committees, or clearer partisan incentives to check a president belonging to the opposing party, intervention would have been more plausible.

I argue that another hidden variable was the covert dimension of alliance politics. Unknown to the 91st Congress, the Park administration had initiated ‘Operation White Snow.’ Managed by the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, this was an illicit influence-peddling campaign that would later explode as the Koreagate scandal, designed to mitigate the risk of U.S. abandonment. Korean businessmen like Tongsun Park targeted key legislators to buy influence in Washington, most notably Representative Otto Passman,

chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee responsible for food aid to the ROK.²⁹ Only in 1978 did the House International Relations Subcommittee decisively confirm that these actions went far beyond South Korea’s legal lobbying efforts. There are two implications here for the counterfactual. First, had it not been for Nixon’s aggressive push for USFK reduction, Korean anxieties would not have reached this heightened point. The U.S. should have been more responsive to the ROK government when Park explicitly warned that the public was 100% against this decision. Second, if speculation about Koreagate had emerged earlier, Congress would almost certainly have frozen the Foreign Assistance Act to protect legislative integrity. By severing the funding Nixon needed, the scandal’s exposure would have collapsed the diplomatic deal and halted the withdrawal.

Lastly, one cannot ignore the unique domestic political environment of 1970, marked by skepticism about extended overseas deployment, Vietnam War fatigue, and rising domestic inflation. Congress is ultimately responsive to the demands of its constituents. The American public, exhausted by these circumstances, had an appetite for retrenchment. Consequently, when the Guam Doctrine proposed a reduction in forces, Congress was predisposed to agree. Because Nixon’s administration successfully obscured the risks of the ROK’s potential for nuclear proliferation and the instability of the ROK military, neither the electorate nor Congress could weigh the true costs of abandonment.

Therefore, Congress faced no electoral penalty in authorizing the appropriation of funds. In this fiscal climate, the modernization costs were viewed as a severance package, financially and politically cheaper than the indefinite recurring expense of maintaining 20,000 U.S. forces in the ROK. However, this calculation undervalued the intangible asset of alliance credibility. A counterfactual scenario in which the public was informed of the risks, or in which Congress properly weighed the long-term reputational costs of retrenchment, would have raised the political price of authorization. Perhaps, then, maintaining the status quo would have emerged as the more attractive

option.

Assuming that, placed in an environment with these altered conditions, Congress had used its “power of the purse” to prevent the withdrawal, how would this have altered the U.S.–ROK alliance? The primary result would be the preservation of the status quo and the psychological integrity of the relationship. Most U.S. strategic alliances observe a “security-autonomy trade-off,” where the weaker nation cedes certain foreign policy autonomy in exchange for the security guarantee of the greater power.³⁰ In 1971, Nixon disrupted this equilibrium by removing the tripwire deterrent of the 7th Infantry Division. Had this not taken place, President Park would not have felt pressured to compensate by seeking greater autonomy. Specifically, through internal balancing, which took the form of the Agency for Defense Development and the start of the clandestine nuclear weapons program.

Of course, the increase in domestic defense capabilities is in the best interest of the U.S. and of stability in the Indo-Pacific. But the fact that the ROK was pushed to initiate independent nuclear armament is an irreversible outcome of the Guam Doctrine. By asserting institutional control, Congress would have signaled that American commitment and the U.S. nuclear umbrella were not subject to the whims of a specific administration. This would have arrested the proliferation of doubt at its source. Such stabilization would have prevented Koreagate, which was both a costly investigation and damaging for U.S.–ROK optics, from ever unfolding. Park’s authorization of illicit lobbying was a desperate attempt to buy back the security that Nixon was withdrawing. Had Congress maintained USFK levels, the acute security dilemma driving Seoul toward both nuclearization and corruption would have evaporated.

Finally, a legislative check in 1970 would have deterred future American administrations from treating the USFK as a disposable political asset. The Nixon withdrawal did not occur in a vacuum. Its successful execution emboldened presidential candidate Jimmy Carter to campaign on a total ground troop withdrawal in 1976, even before he took office. Congress’s acquiescence signaled to the executive branch

²⁶ Ibid, 6.

²⁷ Ibid, 7.

²⁸ James Dobbins et al., “Presidential Style, Institutional Structure, and Bureaucratic Processes,” *RAND Corporation* (2008): 5.

²⁹ CQ Almanac, Congress Ends ‘Koreagate’ Lobbying Probe (1978), <https://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/document.php?id=cqal78-1237310#>.

³⁰ Cho, “Downsizing Hegemony,” 249.

that retrenchment was a policy option with minimal legislative friction. Had Congress blocked Nixon, it would have reduced the probability of Carter's subsequent withdrawal attempt in 1977, which was viewed as even more controversial and further deepened the ROK's nuclear aspirations. Hence, Congress could have prevented the "abandonment fear" from becoming a mainstay of trouble within the alliance.³¹

The 119th Congress in 2025

Knowing all of this, are we about to see the same abrupt retrenchment decision in 2025 with lasting consequences to the credibility of the U.S.-ROK relationship? Indeed, the decision-making is again happening on the individual level within the executive branch. The key players this time around are President Donald Trump and Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth. Mirroring the Nixon-Kissinger dynamic, this administration attempts to redefine strategic priorities. The Pentagon has identified the defense of the U.S. homeland and deterrence of China in the Indo-Pacific as its top two priorities. To support the latter, Hegseth is pressing regional allies to boost defense spending to 5% of their GDP.³² This executive pressure lands on a country grappling with a profound crisis of confidence. The precedents of U.S. withdrawal, such as from Vietnam in the 1970s and Afghanistan in 2021, have intensified Korean doubts about long-term U.S. military protection.³³ These reminders that American security guarantees are not set in stone have amplified the abandonment fear that drives nuclear proliferation.

However, the 119th Congress has engaged in significant institutional learning to correct the failures of the 1970s. Today's legislature is actively checking individual preferences to reassure American allies. Congress is once again incentivized by fiscal pressures; withdrawal is expensive, more than it was in the 20th century, because the infrastructure, equipment, and weaponry of seventy years of American military presence are vast.³⁴ This intent is codified in Section

31 Cho, "Downsizing Hegemony," 253.

32 Andrew Yeo, "How Trump and Lee can 'modernize' the US-South Korean alliance," *Brookings Institution* (2025), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-trump-and-lee-can-modernize-the-us-south-korean-alliance/>.

33 Choi Bennett et al., "Options for Strengthening ROK Nuclear Assurance," *RAND Corporation* (2023), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA2612-1.html.

34 Larry Nikschi, "Potential Sources of Opposition To a U.S. Troop Withdrawal

1233 of the draft NDAA for FY2026. Though, as of November 2025, it has not yet passed the full Congress, there appears to be a collective preference for maintaining the status quo by prohibiting the use of funds to reduce the USFK. The draft goes further by tying the President's hands, adding that no such decision can be made unless and until the Secretary of Defense gives Congress a formal assessment and certification justifying this action 90 days in advance. This certification must emerge in consultation with the Commander of the USFK, the Commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, the Secretary of State, the Director of National Intelligence, and appropriate committees of Congress. It is an attempt to prevent the siloed decision-making and ineffective sharing of information characteristic of the Nixon era.

Moreover, the ROK government demonstrates a greater understanding of the importance of congressional oversight. Having witnessed how Ambassador Porter once weaponized the "power of the purse" to coerce leadership, South Korean leadership now recognizes that Congress is the primary institutional constraint on U.S. foreign policy autonomy. Hence, they are actively cultivating this relationship to counter presidential preferences. In August, Defense Minister Ahn Gyu-back met with members of the U.S. House of Representatives and emphasized appreciation for the unwavering support of the American Congress.³⁵

A critical distinction in the 2025 environment is the expansion of non-government actors, particularly think-tanks, which now wield more power in shaping the intellectual climate surrounding the alliance. Two months before the Wall Street Journal article, Defense Priorities published a proposal recommending the removal of ground forces and two fighter squadrons. It is likely that this report echoed, if not originated from, isolationist impulses within the Pentagon. However, unlike the information vacuum of 1970, such retrenchment proposals are now met with robust public opposition. Research institutions warn that

From South Korea," *The National Committee on North Korea* (2019), <https://www.ncnk.org/resources/briefing-papers/all-briefing-papers/potential-sources-opposition-u.s.-troop-withdrawal>.

35 Ministry of National Defense Republic of Korea, "Minister Ahn Gyu-back emphasizes US Congress's firm support as the foundation of the ROK-US Alliance," 2025, [https://www.mnd.go.kr/user/boardList.action?command=view&page=1&boardId=O_47261&boardSeq=O_394424&titleId=&siteId=mnd-EN_020100000000&column=title&search=US](https://www.mnd.go.kr/user/boardList.action?command=view&page=1&boardId=O_47261&boardSeq=O_394424&titleId=&siteId=mndEN&id=mnd-EN_020100000000&column=title&search=US).

the removal of forces creates a deterrence gap, and the impact on adversary calculation is dangerously unclear. Thus, it is not a risk the U.S. can afford to take right now. The significance of diverging opinions lies less in the arguments themselves, but in their availability. This vibrant policy ecosystem provides Congress and even the general public with alternative assessments to be able to challenge the executive branch.

Conclusion

From my analysis, I conclude that it is unlikely the U.S. will reduce troop levels on the Korean Peninsula in the short-term future, principally because Congress is now structurally positioned to block such a move. In stark contrast to the 91st Congress, the 119th Congress is actively using its "power of the purse" and oversight authority to signal that alliance credibility and extended deterrence are not subject to the preferences of a single administration. Where once, in 1970, the focus was on the modernization of the ROK's military, today, the discussion has shifted to the modernization of the alliance itself. Efforts should be directed toward transforming USFK and making it more resilient, not reducing it.³⁶ Although reducing personnel might appear cost-efficient, maintaining robust basing and support infrastructure is vital to deterrence and defense in the Indo-Pacific, and Congress's current stance makes a sharp drawdown in 2025 improbable.

36 Markus Garlauskas, "Focus on dual deterrence, not headcount, for transforming US Forces Korea," *Atlantic Council* (2025), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/focus-on-dual-deterrence-not-headcount-for-transforming-us-forces-korea/>.

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Debt and Development

How IMF Programs Impacted Investment in Pakistan's Energy Sector

AFRA ADIBA FAIROOZ

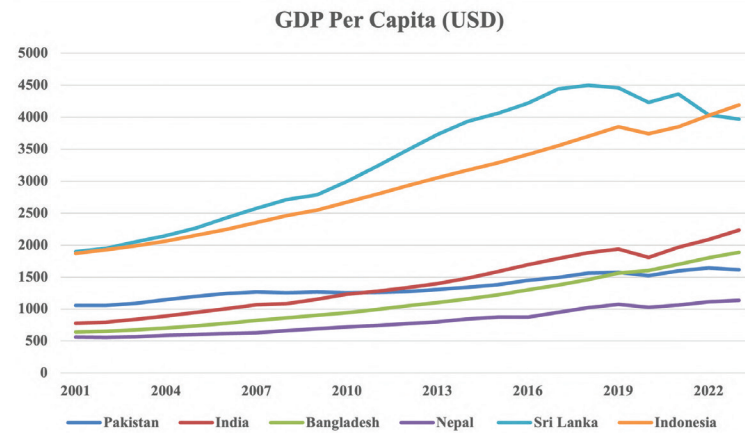
Abstract

This paper investigates the impacts of the International Monetary Fund's programs on Pakistan's energy sector between 2001 and 2023. It argues that the conditionalities that were enforced by the IMF on Pakistan between 2001 and 2023, along with the rising cost of debt servicing due to higher interest charges, decreased energy sector investments in Pakistan. To support this argument, the paper identifies and discusses the primary causes of the energy sector crisis in Pakistan, such as the circular debt crisis, geopolitical tensions, and aging infrastructure. Using publicly available data from the World Bank and a semi-log multivariable regression model, this study finds that between 2001 and 2023, IMF programs decreased energy sector investments in Pakistan at a statistically significant level. Specifically, energy sector investment in Pakistan decreased by 109% two years after Pakistan's enrollment in the program. The study also finds that a one percentage point increase in the debt-to-GNI ratio leads to a 1% decrease in energy sector investments if Pakistan were enrolled in an IMF program two years prior. Even though the study found a negative correlation between IMF interest charges and energy sector investments, the results were not statistically significant.

Pakistan's Energy and Economic Crisis

Early in 2023, the Pakistani rupee (PKR) depreciated by a record 28% against the dollar, triggering widespread concern across the country.¹ The sharp decline of the currency resulted in higher import costs for essential goods, contributing to higher inflation and a rapidly depleting foreign reserve. A weaker rupee also increased the cost of debt servicing and principal repayments, straining the economy further. By early February, Pakistan's foreign currency reserves were down to USD 3 billion, barely enough to cover three weeks of imports.² The country was teetering on the edge of a sovereign default when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a 3-billion-dollar bailout in July, providing temporary relief to the country.³ In 2023, Pakistan's GDP contracted by 0.03% and inflation surged to 30%, the highest in the country's recent history.⁴

In fact, Pakistan's economic performance since the beginning of the new millennium has been somber. Compared to its neighbors, Pakistan's per capita GDP growth has been slow, and development indicators such as access to electricity, healthcare, and education have lagged behind.⁵ Additionally, foreign direct investment (FDI) has dwindled, and exports have stagnated, pushing the economy further into decline.⁶ As a result, Pakistan frequently finds itself mired in a balance of payment (BoP) crisis, forced to seek help from the IMF. As of 2025, Pakistan has been bailed-out by the Fund, under several programs, 25 times—one of the highest numbers among member countries.⁷ The IMF programs are typically accompanied by extensive policy reforms, commonly known as conditionalities, that are prerequisites for the disbursement of loans and can have substantial impacts on the recipient country's economy. For instance, the 2024 Extended



Fund Facility (EFF) program, under which Pakistan received a loan of about USD 7 billion, required the country to increase energy tariffs and decrease energy subsidies substantially.⁸ The enforcement of tariffs and reduction of subsidies increased energy prices by almost 18%, making it difficult for poorer households to afford electricity.⁹

Some of Pakistan's economic woes can be traced back to its distressed energy sector. Pakistan's electricity access rate of 95% remains the lowest among its South Asian peers, indicating systemic inefficiencies in the sector.¹⁰ The low rate of accessibility can be attributed to weak infrastructure, low production, and high prices. Pakistan's grid system, built in the 1960s, consistently records average transmission and distribution losses exceeding 17%, indicating that a substantial portion of the generated power fails to reach end consumers.¹¹ Additionally, structural inefficiencies in the ailing grid system frequently lead to widespread blackouts akin to the one of January 2023.¹² The low production of energy and high costs are a result of years of underinvestment in the sector and an overdependence on imported fossil fuel.¹³ Almost 60% of Pakistan's energy comes from imported fossil fuel. As a result, the sector's cost of production is extremely sensitive to fuel price increases due to external shocks, such as war or current account imbalances. In fact,

8 International Monetary Fund, Pakistan: IMF Reaches Staff-Level Agreement on Economic Policies with Pakistan for 37-Month Extended Fund Facility (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 2024).

9 Abdul Waheed Bhutto, "Pakistan's Power Crisis: A Perfect Storm of Policy Failures," *The Diplomat*, August 20, 2024.

10 World Bank Group, "DataBank: World Development Indicators," accessed May 2, 2025, <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators#>.

11 Ibid.

12 Salman Masood and Zia-ur Rahman, "Power Outage Sweeps Pakistan, Dropping Millions Into Darkness," *The New York Times*, January 23, 2023.

13 International Energy Agency, "Pakistan," accessed May 2, 2025, <https://www.iea.org/countries/pakistan/electricity>.

1 "Pakistan is at risk of default," *The Economist*, February 7, 2023.

2 Ibid.

3 Peter Hoskins, "IMF Approves \$7bn Loan to Cash-Strapped Pakistan," *BBC*, September 25, 2024.

4 World Bank Group, "Data: Pakistan," accessed May 1, 2025, <https://data.worldbank.org/country/pakistan>.

5 Aasim M. Husain, *Rescuing Pakistan's Economy*, Issue Brief (Atlantic Council, April 1, 2025).

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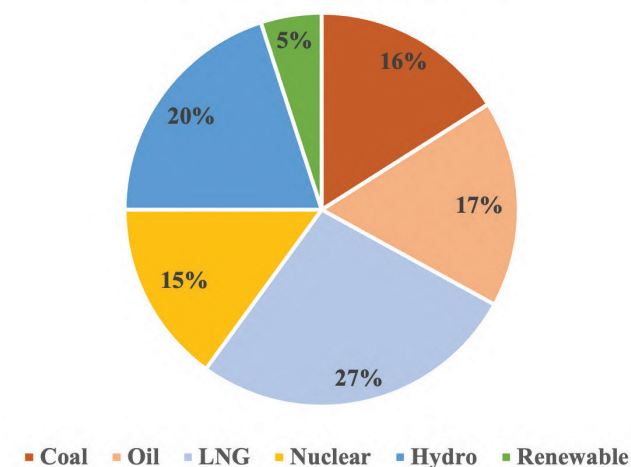
7 International Monetary Fund, "IMF Reaches Staff-Level Agreement on the First Review for the 37-Month Extended Arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and a New 28-Month Arrangement Under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF)," March 25, 2025, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2025/03/25/pr-2576-pakistan-imf-reaches-agreement-1st-rev-37mo-ext-arrang-eff-new-28mo-arrang-rsf>.

the balance of payment crisis of 2023 can be partially attributed to the onset of the Russia-Ukraine war that led to a global surge in fuel prices.

Low energy production in Pakistan leads to reduced industrial productivity that ultimately stunts economic growth.¹⁴ As a result of low energy production leading to low GDP growth, Pakistan often finds itself reliant on foreign aid and loans from multilateral and bilateral creditors to finance its development and infrastructural projects. According to the International Debt Report published by the World Bank, in 2024, China, Saudi Arabia, World Bank-IDA, Asian Development Bank, and the IMF were Pakistan's top five creditors.¹⁵ In 2023, Pakistan's external debt stocks and debt service as a percentage of its exports stood at 352% and 43% respectively, the highest in the region.¹⁶ These statistics indicate that Pakistan not only has a lofty debt burden but also a weak export sector, making it more difficult for the country to service its debt and rendering it more susceptible to BoP crises. Pakistan is usually forced to issue new loans to pay off its existing loans to avoid defaulting, ultimately locking the country in a vicious debt cycle.

A long-term solution for Pakistan, therefore, lies in targeted investment in the energy sector that would stimulate economic growth and alleviate the country's debt burden. However, Pakistan faces significant

Pakistan's Energy Mix



14 Sarwat Razzaqi, Faiz Bilquees, and Saadia Sherbaz, "Dynamic Relationship between Energy and Economic Growth: Evidence from DB Countries," *The Pakistan Development Review* 50, no. 4 (2011): 437–458.

15 World Bank Group, International Debt Report (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2024).

16 Ibid.

challenges. Since 2019, the implementation of tighter monetary policies globally, particularly in response to the economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, has led to a sustained increase in interest charges on Pakistan's debt obligations.¹⁷ In 2023, 60% of the government's revenue went towards interest payments on public debt.¹⁸ Furthermore, as IMF conditionalities and inflation lead to a weaker currency, more money is required to finance principal repayments. In tandem, this restricts the government's ability to allocate sufficient funds for investments in the energy sector. Additionally, weak institutions, endemic corruption, and recurrent military intervention mean that the Pakistani government often lacks political will and legitimacy to enforce policy reforms, leading to inefficiencies and mismanagement in the energy sector.

Pakistan's geopolitical environment further constrains sustainable investment in the energy sector, particularly from private sector actors. Bordered by Afghanistan and Iran to the west, India to the east, and China to the north, Pakistan is particularly vulnerable to spillover effects from regional instability. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, projected to supply 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually, has remained stalled for over three decades, primarily due to protracted conflict and insecurity in Afghanistan.¹⁹ The project's future remains uncertain, further complicated by strained India-Pakistan relations and India's strategic concern over the pipeline's proposed route through Pakistani territory.²⁰ On the southwestern frontier, Pakistan's cross-border natural gas pipeline project with Iran has been delayed by more than a decade due to fears of U.S. sanctions, which would jeopardize vital foreign aid and further strain the country's already fragile economy.²¹

More recently, following the terrorist attacks near Pahalgam in Indian-administered Kashmir, India

17 Ibid.

18 Aasim M Husain, *Resolving Pakistan's Debt Problems*, Policy Note 19 (Finance for Development Lab, October 22, 2024).

19 Syed Fazl-e-Haider, "Turkmenistan Resumes Work on TAPI Pipeline Despite Geopolitical Hurdles," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 21, no. 135 (2024).

20 Syed Fazl-e-Haider, "TAPI Pipeline to Remain Failure Without India and Pakistan's Participation," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 22 (2025).

21 Michael Kugelman, "Iran Puts Pakistan on Notice Over Gas Pipeline," *Foreign Policy*, September 4, 2024.

suspended the Indus Water Treaty as a punitive measure, raising serious energy sector concerns in Pakistan.²² The Indus Water Treaty, which was negotiated and signed by India and Pakistan in 1960, ensures the free flow and “equitable use of water flowing in the Indus River system”, Pakistan’s primary river system.²³ Given that hydroelectric plants account for about 20% of Pakistan’s total electricity generation, Pakistan is dependent on its rivers for energy security.²⁴ All of Pakistan’s 21 hydroelectric plants are located in the Indus River Basin.²⁵ India’s suspension of the treaty has the potential to reduce the flow of rivers flowing into Pakistan from India, threatening Pakistan’s hydroelectric energy generation capacity. In conjunction, uncertainty generated by regional tension usually dissuades both foreign and local companies from investing in the energy sector. Pakistan’s geopolitically sensitive location underscores the importance of sustained investment in its energy sector by both domestic and foreign entities. Persistent socio-political instability, fueled by slow economic growth and an ongoing energy crisis, poses the risk of spillover effects in the region, potentially exacerbating instability across South Asia. With an increase in terrorist activities driven by Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan, it is especially crucial now for Pakistan to invest in the energy sector to ensure its energy security.

This article examines the challenges that hinder energy sector investment in Pakistan, with a particular focus on the role of the International Monetary Fund. The Fund has played a crucial role in preventing sovereign debt crises in Pakistan on multiple occasions. However, the cost and conditionalities have had a long-lasting impact on the country’s economy and energy sector. Using publicly available World Bank data, this study employs a semi-log multivariable ordinary least squares regression to investigate the impacts of IMF conditionalities, interest payments, and debt servicing on public and private-sector investments in Pakistan’s energy sector between 2001 and 2023. This article argues that due to the macroeconomic stabilization measures imposed by the IMF on Pakistan

22 Anupreeta Das, Pragati K.B., and Zia ur-Rehman, “How India’s Threat to Block Rivers Could Devastate Pakistan,” *The New York Times*, April 24, 2025.

23 Ibid.

24 IEA, “Pakistan.”

25 David Michel, “Can India Cut Off Pakistan’s Indus River Lifeline?” *Critical Questions* (Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 1, 2025).

and the increasing cost of debt servicing, energy sector investments in the country have been adversely impacted.

The International Monetary Fund: Lending to Pakistan

With an outstanding debt of USD 8.3 billion, Paki-

Table 1: IMF-Pakistan agreements since 1980

IMF Program	Duration	Total Amount Sanctioned (Millions SDR)	Total Amount Drawn (Millions SDR)	Status
1 Extended Fund Facility (EFF)	1980-81	1268.00	349.00	Declared off-track
2 Extended Fund Facility (EFF)	1981-82	919.00	730.00	Partially Completed
3 Standby Arrangement (SBA)	1988-90	273.15	194.48	Completed
4 Structural Adjustment Facility Commitment (SAF)	1988-91	382.41	382.41	Completed
5 Standby Arrangement (SBA)	1993-94	265.40	88.00	Suspended
6 Extended Fund Facility (EFF)	1994-95	379.10	123.20	Suspended
7 Extended Credit Facility	1994-95	606.60	172.20	Suspended
8 Standby Arrangement (SBA)	1995-97	562.59	294.69	Suspended
9 Extended Credit Facility (ECF)	1997-2000	682.38	265.37	Suspended
10 Extended Fund Facility (EFF)	1997-2000	454.92	113.740	Suspended
11 Standby Arrangement (SBA)	2000-01	465.00	465.00	Completed
12 Extended Credit Facility (ECF)	2001-04	1033.70	861.42	Completed
13 Standby Arrangement (SBA)	2008-11	7235.90	4936.03	Partially Completed (terminated in 2010)
14 Extended Fund Facility (EFF)	2013-16	4393.00	4393.00	Completed
15 Extended Fund Facility (EFF)	2019-22	4268.00	1044.00	Completed (after 1 year delay)
16 Extended Fund Facility (EFF)	2024-present	5320.00	-	Ongoing
17 Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF)	2025-present	1000.00	-	Ongoing

Source: International Monetary Fund

stan has become the fifth largest debtor to the IMF after Argentina, Ukraine, Egypt, and Ecuador.²⁶ Since joining the Fund in 1950, Pakistan has signed a total of twenty-five agreements with the IMF, one of the highest numbers among member countries.²⁷ By contrast, Argentina, the largest debtor to the IMF, has signed twenty-two agreements, while neighboring India and Bangladesh have only signed seven and fourteen agreements with the IMF, respectively.²⁸ In September 2024, the IMF approved its most recent loan of USD 7 billion to Pakistan under the thirty-seven-month Extended Fund Facility (EFF) program.²⁹ Following the agreement, SDR, Special Drawing Rights, equivalent to USD 1 billion, was disbursed immediately, with the remaining slated for disbursement in tranches upon regular periodic review.³⁰ The

26 Alex-Irwin Hunt and Jiyeong Go, “The IMF’s Top 10 Biggest Debtors,” September 7, 2022, <https://www.fdiintelligence.com/content/091c7d50-1b0c-5b7c-a28b-30017b57c589>.

27 International Monetary Fund, “Pakistan,” 2025, <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/PAK>.

28 International Monetary Fund, “Argentina,” 2025, <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/ARG>; International Monetary Fund, “India,” 2025, <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/IND>; International Monetary Fund, “Bangladesh,” 2025, <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/BGD>.

29 IMF, Pakistan: IMF Reaches Staff-Level Agreement.

30 IMF, “IMF Reaches Staff-Level Agreement on the First Review.”

macroeconomic stabilization conditions for the latest agreement include broadening the tax base and improving tax collection, restructuring and privatizing state-owned enterprises, reducing energy sector costs, eliminating government intervention in price-setting, eliminating state-imposed barriers to ensure higher competition, and creating fiscal space for spending to strengthen social protections.³¹

Following the EFF program, in March of 2025, the IMF and Pakistan came to a staff-level agreement on a twenty-eight-month-long Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF) program, which disbursed an additional USD 1 billion.³² This program aims to address the climate-related vulnerabilities that Pakistan’s economy is subjected to, and build mechanisms to increase climate resilience. The disbursement of funds under this program is predicated upon the government’s successful implementation of policies to consolidate fiscal spending and reduce public debt, creating opportunities for private investments, maintaining tight monetary policy, and implementing structural reforms such as amending tax regimes.³³

IMF’s strict prerequisite conditionalities have historically had mixed effects on Pakistan’s economy. While most of these programs are able to reign in fiscal deficit, avert balance of payment crises, and increase foreign direct investment (FDI), they often exacerbate socio-economic inequalities and disproportionately impact the most vulnerable communities. A recent study by Naeem et al. on the IMF loans’ impacts on Pakistan’s economy between 2001-2019 found that enrollment in IMF programs significantly increased foreign direct investment in the country and helped considerably decrease the fiscal deficit.³⁴ Notably, in fiscal year 2003 under the IMF’s EFF program, the deficit declined to 2.4% of GDP from about 4% the previous year.³⁵ However, as Naeem et al. note, the IMF programs also induced high unemployment and increased commodity prices, negatively

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Muhammad Naeem, Zia Ur Rahman, and Muhammad Naveed Ul Hasan Shah, “Impacts of the International Monetary Fund on the Economy of Pakistan,” *FWU Journal of Social Sciences* (2023): 49–65.

35 International Monetary Fund, “IMF Concludes 2002 Article IV Consultation with Pakistan,” November 6, 2002, accessed May 2025, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2015/09/28/04/53/pn02128>.

impacting living standards.³⁶ After the Pakistani government implemented policies that privatized SOEs and devalued the Pakistani Rupee under the 2001-04 Extended Credit Facility program, the overall unemployment rate in the country increased by 0.4%.³⁷ The unemployment rate had exhibited a declining trend until the SBA and EFF programs of 2008 and 2013. In 2012, prior to the EFF program, Pakistan’s unemployment rate stood at 5.1%.³⁸ By the second year of the EFF program in 2015, Pakistan’s unemployment rate stood at 8.3%.³⁹ Later, the government moved to a market-determined exchange rate policy under the EFF program of 2019-22. This led the rupee to devalue by almost 64% against the dollar, which resulted in significant increases in commodity prices.⁴⁰

IMF conditionalities also tend to harm Pakistan’s GDP growth and overall poverty. Ramzan et al. note that, on average, Pakistan experienced declines in GDP growth rate in the years it was under an IMF structural adjustment program.⁴¹ A study on the impacts of structural adjustment programs on social welfare in Pakistan between 1988 and 1999 found that, due to policy interventions required by IMF programs, real wages for both skilled and unskilled labor declined significantly.⁴² Furthermore, elimination of food and electricity subsidies increased poverty rates between 2018 and 2021, and a decrease in healthcare spending due to IMF austerity measures impacted low-income communities the most.⁴³ A 2010 study on Pakistan’s economic growth by Khanna found that under the 2008 SBA program, FDI and gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) in the country decreased by 32% and 0.6%, respectively, with 3.5% decline in the private sector and 5% decline in the manufacturing sector.⁴⁴ The report concluded that continued re-

36 Naeem, Rahman, and Shah, “Impacts of the International Monetary Fund,” 49.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 World Bank Group, “DataBank: International Debt Statistics,” 2025, <https://data-bank.worldbank.org/source/international-debt-statistics>; Naeem, Rahman, and Shah, “Impacts of the International Monetary Fund,” 49.

41 Nimra Ramzan, Irfan Ul Haque, and M. Irfan Khan, “Analyzing IMF’s Structural Adjustment Program in Pakistan: Unveiling Trade-offs and Economic Dynamics,” *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs* (2023): 195–225.

42 Shahrukh Rafi Khan and Safiya Aftab, *Structural Adjustment, Labour and the Poor in Pakistan* (Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 1995).

43 Yasir Arafat, Farahnaz Turi, and Azra Amir, “The Economic and Social Cost of IMF Conditionalities: A Case Study of Pakistan,” *Dialogue Social Science Review* (2025): 320–329.

44 Sushil Khanna, “Growth and Crisis in Pakistan’s Economy,” *Economic and Political Weekly* (2010): 39–46.

duction in government spending on welfare programs due to IMF-sanctioned structural reforms exacerbated the poverty gap and reduced the formation of human capital at the turn of the century.⁴⁵ Existing literature, however, fails to investigate the impacts of IMF loans on Pakistan's energy sector. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how continued assistance from the IMF and high borrowing costs have shaped Pakistan's energy sector, with a focus on investment in infrastructure.

Data and Methodology

For the purpose of this study, I analyze the impacts of IMF loans on Pakistan's energy sector between the years 2001 and 2023 using World Bank data. This period was selected because Pakistan successfully completed most of its IMF programs between 2001 and 2023. Pakistan had agreed to ten IMF programs between 1980 and 2000, among which it successfully completed only three. The remaining were suspended or declared off track by the IMF due to Pakistan's continued inability to implement policy reforms agreed upon by the authorities under specific programs. Between 2001 and 2023, Pakistan agreed to four IMF programs, all of which were partially or entirely completed. Given that loans are disbursed in tranches upon periodic reviews, Pakistan was able to complete each program because it adhered to the terms and conditions set by the Fund. During this period, more policies related to macroeconomic stabilization were successfully implemented, which subsequently impacted the economy and the energy sector.

To investigate the relationship between IMF programs and investments in Pakistan's energy sector, I use a multivariable semi-log OLS regression model. The dataset for this study was compiled using data from the World Bank International Debt Statistics and World Bank Development Indicators databases. The dependent variable in this model is the natural logarithm of total energy sector investments by public and private entities in Pakistan between 2001 and 2023. I apply a log-transformed dependent variable for this model because it allows coefficients to be interpreted as percentage changes. This model has four main independent variables, namely "IMF Program

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Enrolment", "Lag Year 1", "Lag Year 2", and "Lag Year 3". In this model, an active IMF agreement is defined as the disbursement of allocated SDRs to Pakistan under a program within a specific year. However, enrollment in a program may not have an immediate impact on the economy, as the implementation of new policies can take several months, and their effects may take even longer to materialize. Therefore, I use three lag variables in the model. To account for confounding economic factors, I use GDP, per-capita energy consumption, interest rate, inflation, debt-service to GNI ratio, and interest paid to the IMF as control variables.

Results

It is evident from the regression analysis that the debt service-to-GNI ratio has a negative correlation with

Table 2: Determinants of energy sector investments (Regression Results)

Dependent Variable: Energy Sector Investment

Independent Variable	(1) IMF Enrolment	(2) Lag Year 1	(3) Lag Year 2	(4) Lag Year 3
	-0.778 (0.698)	-0.131 (0.616)	-10.95** (0.486)	0.515 (0.534)
Debt-to-GNI	-0.284 (0.469)	-0.699* (0.339)	-0.856** (0.281)	-0.674* (0.333)
GDP	1.703 (2.050)	0.829 (1.425)	0.997 (1.465)	1.005 (1.376)
Electricity Consumption	5.133 (4.558)	7.422 (4.667)	6.163 (5.321)	7.626 (4.571)
Interest Rate	0.147 (0.139)	0.071 (0.126)	0.032 (0.074)	0.082 (0.110)
Inflation	0.133** (0.054)	0.099 (0.069)	0.027 (0.051)	0.137** (0.049)
IMF Interest	-0.125 (0.414)			
Constant	-53.34 (31.17)	-45.44* (23.83)	-40.51* (19.53)	-52.12* (24.62)
Observations	17	17	17	17
R-Squared	0.602	0.557	0.679	0.585
Root MSE	1.0574	1.0576	0.8999	1.0244
Prob > F	0.034	0.053	0.004	0.058
Note	Robust Standard Error in parentheses. *, **, and *** represent statistical significance at 10%, 5%, and 1% level respectively			

energy sector investments and is statistically significant at a 10% level. This indicates that one year from the enrollment in an IMF program, a one percentage point increase in the debt service-to-GNI ratio decreases energy sector investment by 69% ceteris paribus. The model suggests that being enrolled in an IMF program two years prior would lead to a 109% decrease in investments in the sector. Similarly, if the

debt service-to-GNI ratio increases by one percentage point in the current year, the sector would experience a decrease in investments by 85%. Despite an overall negative correlation between enrollment in IMF programs, the debt-to-GNI ratio, and energy sector investments, the results are not statistically significant in the year that the program begins. The fourth column of Table 2 indicates that an increase in the debt-to-GNI ratio would decrease investments by 67% if Pakistan were enrolled in a program three years prior.

The R-squared for all the regressions are well above 0.50, indicating that the models are good fits and can explain more than 50% of the variation in energy investment across observations. However, the lack of statistical significance for most of the variables can be attributed to a small sample size of just 17 observations. To strengthen the regression model, future studies can increase the sample size and add more control variables, such as subsidy and tariff rates. Due to a lack of available data, increasing the sample size and accounting for further economic variations were not within the scope of this study. Furthermore, future studies can use subsidies and tariff data to study the impacts of conditionalities more specifically and investigate the specific impacts of IMF programs on private and public sector investments separately. As data reported by the World Bank are not segregated between public and private sector investment data, a more targeted study was not within the scope of this study. Given the lack of statistical significance in most of the coefficients of this model, the results should be interpreted as explanatory and not definitive.

Evaluation and Discussion

The analysis in the previous section asserts that there is, in general, a negative correlation between enrolment in an IMF program and energy sector investments, especially two years after the initial disbursement of the loan. One of the reasons for this could be that usually a prerequisite for accessing IMF loans is to increase government revenue and decrease government spending. The Extended Fund Facility, under which Pakistan gained access to SDR 4,393 million, was predicated upon the government reducing the budget deficit by 2% of GDP in the fiscal year 2013-14 by

increasing taxes and tariffs and decreasing subsidies.⁴⁶ Conditionalities as such can also discourage governments from making necessary investments in certain sectors. From publicly available World Bank data, it is evident that investments in the energy sector in Pakistan did decrease between 2012 and 2013 from USD 1,401 million to only USD 350 million, respectively. Furthermore, the IMF agreement also required the government to increase industrial energy tariffs by 50% and residential energy tariffs by 30%.⁴⁷ It also required the elimination of energy subsidies for the industrial and commercial sector in the first phase of the program.⁴⁸ Additionally, in the second phase of the program, the IMF conditionalities required the Pakistani government to eliminate energy subsidies for residential consumers who consume more than 200 kWh per capita.⁴⁹ In tandem, these policies work to increase energy prices for consumers and decrease consumption. This leads to a reduction in revenue and profit generation for power producers which would discourage investments in necessary upgrades for the plants, resulting in poor maintenance and infrastructure. Furthermore, increases in energy tariffs for the industrial sector and the elimination of subsidies also mean that productivity in the sector would decrease, leading to a decrease in GDP and triggering a reduction in overall investments. As increases in tariffs lead to a rise in production costs and increase the barrier to entry, it discourages private sector and foreign investors from investing in the energy sector.

The analysis also indicates that when the ratio of debt servicing increases, energy sector investment decreases. This is because when a large proportion of a country's income goes towards paying off principal and interest on dollar-denominated debts, it reduces the government's capacity to invest in the economy and infrastructure of a country. One of the conditionalities of the 2013 EFF package was to institute a more flexible exchange rate policy as well.⁵⁰ Policies as such often weaken a currency, in this case the Pakistani rupee (PKR), against the dollar. While this

⁴⁶ International Monetary Fund, *Pakistan: 2013 Article IV Consultation and Request for an Extended Arrangement Under the Extended Fund Facility*, IMF Country Report No. 13/287 (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 2013).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

makes the exports of a country cheaper and thus more competitive, it also makes paying off its dollar-denominated external debt more expensive. In fact, in 2013, 55% of Pakistan's external debt was dollar-denominated.⁵¹ This means that as the PKR weakened, the government had to pay more money to make principal and interest payments, making it harder to invest in the energy sector. Additionally, given that IMF loans are disbursed at variable interest rates, if monetary policies in the US, UK, EU, China, and Japan

IMF interventions can function as a double-edged sword: while addressing macroeconomic imbalances, they may simultaneously exacerbate structural weaknesses.

tighten during the program period, then the cost of debt servicing for Pakistan would increase further. A weak currency also means that imports would become expensive, fueling inflation. Given that a large proportion of Pakistan's energy comes from imported fossil fuel, including oil for the furnace-oil-based plants, a weaker currency would increase the price of the raw material for energy production, ultimately increasing costs. This is, in fact, one of the reasons for low energy production in Pakistan, despite having enough installed capacity. Often, power producers cannot afford the high cost of imported fuel, leading to idle power plants.⁵² A weak currency, elevated import costs, and high inflation collectively deter private sector investment by increasing uncertainty regarding currency valuation. Moreover, IMF-prescribed policies such as monetary tightening to curb inflation often result in higher borrowing costs for firms, thereby further constraining private investment. In this context, IMF interventions can function as a double-edged sword: while addressing macroeconomic imbalances, they may simultaneously exacerbate structural weaknesses.

51 World Bank Group, "DataBank: International Debt Statistics."

52 Haneesa Isaad, *Can Aging Thermal Power Plants in Pakistan Be Revitalized?* (Institute of Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, May 2024).

It is, therefore, imperative for the Fund to rigorously assess the country-specific implications for its policy recommendations prior to implementation.

Furthermore, as the interests charged by the IMF increase, the burden of debt servicing for Pakistan's government increases, meaning that the fiscal space for the government's discretionary spending decreases. As discussed in the section on IMF lending practices, the Fund imposes a surcharge of 2% when countries overborrow by more than 187% of their quotas.⁵³ Under the EFF program of 2013, Pakistan borrowed at 425% of its quota, subjecting it to a 2% surcharge and increasing its interest rate to almost 8%.⁵⁴ Similarly, under the EFF program of 2019, Pakistan borrowed at 210% of its quota, resulting in an increased cost of borrowing for the country.⁵⁵ Additionally, due to the pandemic, Pakistan failed to make timely payments to the IMF, subjecting it to another 1% surcharge on outstanding loans under the 2019 EFF program, increasing its costs further.⁵⁶ Higher interest rates increase the debt-service to GNI ratio for Pakistan, which can ultimately decrease investments in the energy sector for the country.

From the preceding discussion, we can come to the consensus that while IMF assistance is imperative for countries, including Pakistan, to avert balance of payment crises and rebuild foreign reserves to bolster trade, the conditionalities of macroeconomic stabilization mandated by the Fund can be harmful for growth and can stifle necessary investments for development. Furthermore, the structure of IMF lending and cost can also be detrimental to investments and ultimately sustained growth. The debate over IMF conditionalities and structure is not a new phenomenon, however. Writing in the early 2000s, Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz criticized the Fund for deviating from its original goal of being the world's financial firefighter in times of dire crisis.⁵⁷ "The IMF's original

53 Tobias Krahnke and Sander Tordo, *Has the IMF's Lending Become Too Expensive for Its Own Good? The Case for a Lending Rate Cap* (Center for European Reform, 2023).

54 IMF, *Pakistan: 2013 Article IV Consultation*.

55 International Monetary Fund, *Pakistan: Request for an Extended Arrangement Under the Extended Fund Facility*, IMF Country Report No. 19/212 (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 2019), <https://www.imf.org/en/publications/cr/issues/2019/07/08/pakistan-request-for-an-extended-arrangement-under-the-extended-fund-facility-press-release-47092>.

56 Anjum Ibrahim, "The IMF Surcharge Is Unfair," *Business Recorder*, May 16, 2022.

57 Joseph E. Stiglitz, "Failure of the Fund: Rethinking the IMF Response," *Harvard International Review* (2001): 14–18.

mandate", Stiglitz wrote, "was to provide liquidity in a world of imperfect capital markets, so as to enable countries to maintain output as close as possible to full employment."⁵⁸ He continues that assistance was conditioned not on macroeconomic stabilization measures that lead to contraction but on the recipient nation's efforts in adopting appropriate expansionary policies.⁵⁹ The IMF, he argues, has resorted to becoming a "missionary institution" that champions "market supremacy" and pushes "free market ideologies" popularized by the Washington Consensus onto poorer countries under the guise of stabilization without regard for dire social consequences.⁶⁰ Citing the example of the IMF's botched response during the East Asian Economic Crisis, he also criticizes the IMF for recommending a "one size fits all" economic prescription for countries that turn to it for help.⁶¹

In response to these criticisms, Stanley Fischer, a former IMF director, argued that stabilization reforms for countries in need are necessary because "structural problems lie at the heart of the economic crises" of the countries and that ignoring these issues would only lead to repetition of the crises.⁶² He also contended that, given the financial structure of the world had evolved, it was also important for the IMF to evolve and expand its mandate.⁶³ Fischer also supported the IMF engaging in surveillance of global financial markets, given the changing landscape of the world's financial architecture.⁶⁴ Joseph Stiglitz further criticized the Fund's fundamental structure. Given that, the Fund allocates voting rights based on member countries' relative contribution to the institution, G-7 countries with stronger economies, particularly the US, ultimately have more leverage on the Fund's policies and agendas.⁶⁵ This makes the Fund a political institution that advances the interests of the Western creditor countries while disregarding the

58 Ibid.

59 Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002).

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Stanley Fischer, "In Defense of the IMF: Specialized Tools for a Specialized Task," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 4 (1998): 103–106.

63 Stanley Fischer, "On the Need for an International Lender of Last Resort," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 13, no. 4 (1999): 85–104.

64 Stanley Fischer, Allan H. Meltzer, Jeffrey D. Sachs, and Nicholas Stern, "The Future of the IMF and the World Bank: Panel Discussion," *The American Economic Review* 93, no. 2 (2003): 45–50.

65 Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents*.

needs of the countries in need.⁶⁶ He also argued that the IMF should be held accountable by the governments and people of the debtor countries, given that they are impacted the most by its policies.⁶⁷ Furthermore, he called for greater transparency of the Fund, accusing it of conducting most of its evaluations and negotiations behind closed doors.⁶⁸

Responding directly to these criticisms, Stanley Fischer argued that "the Fund management is accountable to the shareholders, the member governments, who are represented in the executive board."⁶⁹ Given that the Fund's operation is made possible by the contributions of the member countries, it is logical, he argued, that "those who provided more of the resources" should also have more of the votes.⁷⁰ In terms of transparency, he argued that the Fund is sufficiently transparent with the governments it is dealing with and promotes transparency, and whether the governments were transparent with their citizens or not was the decision of the governments and not the Fund's.⁷¹

There is merit in both schools of thought, of course. On one hand, it is sound to argue that the institution needs to be democratized, given that those who are impacted the most by its decisions are developing countries, whose voices are often overshadowed by advanced industrialized countries. On the other hand, the argument that those who make the day-to-day operations of the Fund possible should have more say on the Fund's policies and agenda is also credible. To contend that the Fund's conditionalities have stifled growth is as plausible as reasoning that these conditionalities were necessary to prevent recurring crises. The International Monetary Fund, as the firefighter of the world's financial crisis, perhaps has a greater mandate today than ever before. Today, the institution not only lends money to member countries during crises, but also surveils the global economy, provides valuable technical assistance to its members, provides the mechanisms for consultation and collaboration

66 Joseph E. Stiglitz and Lindsey Schoenfelder, "Challenging the Washington Consensus," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 9, no. 2 (2003): 33–40.

67 Stiglitz, "Failure of the Fund," 14.

68 Ibid.

69 Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents*.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

on international monetary problems, collects critical data and improves data accessibility, and, akin to its sister organization, The World Bank, plays a key role in global development. Developing countries rely on the Fund in times of desperation for much-needed economic relief.

It is perhaps high time for the Fund to acknowledge that with an exceptional mandate, comes exceptional responsibilities and cease being beholden to shareholder politics. It is imperative for the institution to recognize that there is no one time-tested formula for growth, and that the definition and mechanism of growth vary from nation to nation and society to society. It is also important for the Fund to understand that cookie-cutter economic stabilization prescriptions are not appropriate for all economies and that policies need to be specialized and targeted. The Fund should, therefore, develop and embrace alternative and new models of growth, and unlike the past, it should avoid being beholden to any one model. Recent developments at the Fund suggest that it is perhaps rethinking its approaches. The Fund's 2019 EFF program for Pakistan acknowledged that Pakistan's circular debt crisis is a deep structural issue and cannot be tackled by just reducing subsidies and increasing tariffs.⁷² To truly tackle its energy sector problems, Pakistan needs to invest in developing its energy sector infrastructure and reducing T&D losses.⁷³ The program also emphasizes the need to strengthen social safety nets and urges Pakistan to invest in programs that support the most vulnerable population.⁷⁴

However, I contend that it is important for the Fund to be more specific with its recommendations. For example, one of Pakistan's principal problems with the energy sector is its poor efficiency and low-capacity factor of its plants. It is important that Pakistan invests in building energy plants that have a higher rate of efficiency. Besides investing in its Grid system to lower T&D losses, Pakistan should also diversify its energy mix so that it is not over reliant on imported fossil fuel and thus beholden to price fluctuations due to external political factors. To recover the cost

of energy production, the country should also invest in technology to prevent electricity theft and ensure utmost bill recovery. Additionally, Pakistan should invest in making energy more affordable for its citizens in order to boost growth. Pakistan should also consider public and private sector investments to explore its indigenous deposits of fossil fuels, such as coal, and develop infrastructure to extract resources sustainably. It should also explore avenues for development in renewable energy, such as solar power and hydroelectricity. I also assert that it is perhaps imperative for the Fund to reevaluate its surcharge policies, given the debt servicing burden it puts on developing countries and the adverse impact it has on investments. Moreover, the Fund must recognize that developing economies are acutely susceptible to external shocks, global monetary tightening, and geopolitical tensions and should tailor its policy recommendations to account for this heightened sensitivity. Finally, it is essential for the Fund to recognize that societies differ significantly in terms of cultural norms, existing social safety nets, geopolitical and climatic contexts, and historical trajectories. Given these structural variations, some countries may be more receptive to stringent austerity measures than others; failure to account for such differences in policy design can provoke populist backlash and lead to adverse political and social outcomes.

On the other hand, it is imperative for developing countries like Pakistan to understand that the economic prescription provided by the IMF is not going to automatically ameliorate all its issues. Economic reforms require strong political will, transparency, and a long-term agenda. Often, due to internal political instability, weak institutions, corruption, and non-democratic practices, countries like Pakistan fail to implement much-needed economic reforms at the detriment of their citizens. The burden of developing a country through targeted, well-designed policies and continuous effort is ultimately on the country and not the IMF. While the IMF, through reformed policies, can provide specialized assistance to the countries without stifling development, growth, and development cannot be attained without continued strong political will, accountability, and institutional reform by the recipient countries.

72 IMF, *Pakistan: Request for an Extended Arrangement Under the Extended Fund Facility*.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

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The Impact of Local Currency Bond Market Expansion on Governance in Emerging Markets

Evidence from Chile and Argentina

PATRICK CONNOLLY

This paper asks whether expanding local-currency bond markets (LCBMs) strengthens or weakens governance in Chile and Argentina, and why the same financial instrument produces opposite outcomes. Using a twenty-seven-country panel regression from 2003 to 2022, the analysis shows that LCBM expansion is positively associated with improved governance on average. Country-specific regressions for Argentina and Chile, however, reveal that this average masks different dynamics driven by institutional conditions. Drawing on Amartya Sen's framework, the paper argues that LCBMs can expand the real freedoms citizens enjoy when they develop in environments of credibility and transparency, as in Chile, where market deepening reinforced rule of law and government effectiveness. In Argentina, by contrast, weak initial governance meant that LCBM expansion often financed fiscal stress, further eroding institutional quality and constraining citizens' freedoms.

Section 1: Introduction

Emerging markets (EMs) lack a strict definition but generally refer to economies integrating with global markets while financial institutions and capital markets remain less developed compared to advanced economies. Over the past half-century, EMs have operated under the constraint of original sin: the inability to borrow abroad in their own currency.¹ Original sin forces governments to issue debt in foreign currency, leaving public balance sheets highly exposed to depreciation shocks. A report from the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) claimed that "the denomination of debt in dollars (or other foreign currency) has played a key role in virtually every financial crisis in the EM world since the early 1980s."² For decades, this constraint shaped the fate of EMs. It determined which governments survived currency shocks, which spiraled into crisis, and which never gained control over their own macroeconomic future.

Over the past two decades, however, the landscape has shifted dramatically. Since the early 2000s, LCBMs have expanded rapidly. In 2020, the LCBM in EMs was over 20 trillion USD and accounted for approximately 21% of the total global bond universe, up from just 2% in 2002.³ This expansion reflects both financial development in emerging markets and an increased willingness among domestic and foreign investors to hold sovereign debt denominated in local currency.⁴

This shift has generated a literature on how to develop LCBMs. Much of it emphasizes strong macroeconomic policy, credible legal frameworks, and effective financial regulation as prerequisites for market deepening and for reducing exposure to original sin. This paper starts from a different question: if good governance is required to build strong LCBMs, what happens to governance once these markets expand? The relationship is not obviously one-directional. In

some countries, LCBM growth coincides with stronger institutions; in others, it appears during periods of institutional deterioration. Understanding this divergence is the central puzzle of this paper.

To study this relationship, the analysis uses the World Governance Indicators (WGIs) from the World Bank, which capture government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, control of corruption, and political violence and stability.⁵ Alongside them, the development of LCBMs is examined through the share of sovereign debt issued in domestic currency, which serves as the key explanatory variable. The empirical strategy contains two parts. First, a panel regression covering twenty-seven emerging economies between 2005 and 2022 using a sovereign bond dataset from the BIS, which identifies how increases in the local currency share of debt correlate with stronger governance outcomes on average, and establishes the baseline against which the country cases can be compared. Second, the contrasting experiences of Chile and Argentina are analyzed. Both countries are considered EMs due to their middle-income status, ongoing integration into global markets, and developing financial institutions. Both faced original sin and expanded their local bond markets, yet their outcomes diverged sharply. Chile built a strong LCBM that reinforced rule of law and government effectiveness, while Argentina expanded its market to finance crises, which further weakened its institutions. These cases illustrate that the same financial instrument can behave differently across countries.

Section 2: Conceptual Framework and Literature

2.1 Original Sin, LCBMs, and Governance

The foundation of this paper stems from the concept of original sin, a term first formalized by Barry Eichengreen and Ricardo Hausmann in 1999 to describe the difficulty many emerging economies face in issuing debt denominated in their own currency abroad.⁶ In their 2003 paper, they explain original

sin as rooted in "the volatility of EM economies and the difficulty these countries have in servicing and repaying their debts" when that debt is denominated in foreign currency.⁷ The problem is not simply one of exchange rate management. Because governments must pay out bonds in a currency they do not control, even small depreciations can magnify debt and destabilize fiscal accounts. This issue stems from a currency mismatch created by original sin. Governments hold assets and collect taxes in local currency but owe liabilities in foreign currency, leaving public finances exposed to exchange rate shocks.⁸ The authors argue that this perceived heightened risk further depresses credit ratings, so countries face tightened borrowing constraints even at levels of debt that advanced economies could sustain.⁹ Original sin, therefore, acts as a structural barrier that exposes governments to financial crises, which constrain economic development and long-term domestic policy.

Eichengreen & Hausmann's initial empirical work showed that variation in original sin is only weakly related to institutional quality, and is instead primarily driven by the total size of the economy. This indicates that original sin cannot be explained by institutional quality alone, creating a fairly pessimistic view for smaller market economies. They highlight Chile as a country with notably strong institutions and policies, while noting that these strengths have not enabled it to borrow abroad in its own currency.¹⁰ This research, however, preceded a massive boom in LCBMs in EMs, especially in Chile. The majority of later research, by contrast, reaches a more optimistic conclusion: policies and laws matter. Countries with stronger institutions and monetary policy have been increasingly able to develop LCBMs and reduce their exposure to original sin.¹¹ This newer line of research suggests that while original sin may be difficult to escape, institutional reforms can shape the development of LCBMs. According to the IMF and World

Bank's Guidance Note for Developing Local Currency Bond Markets, the foundations of effective LCBMs include credible macroeconomic policy, strong legal and regulatory frameworks, and predictable debt management practices.

This literature naturally raises a reverse-causality question: if governance enables LCBMs, how does LCBM expansion reshape governance once these markets exist? LCBMs rely on the rule of law and transparency to function, but once established, can they also reinforce these institutional features through investor discipline and demand for predictable policy?

2.2 LCBMs and Development

Amartya Sen describes development as "a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy."¹² LCBMs can be seen as affecting the five key freedoms that underlie Sen's framework of development. These include political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security. The WGIs map closely onto these freedoms. Political stability and the absence of violence are foundational to political freedoms, shaping whether citizens can speak freely or participate in democratic life without fear. Regulatory quality and government effectiveness condition economic facilities by structuring the monetary and fiscal environment in which individuals save, invest, work, and access public services. Rule of law and control of corruption underpin transparency guarantees and protective security, determining whether citizens can rely on institutions to enforce contracts, safeguard property rights, and constrain the arbitrary use of power. However, these freedoms are often constrained when countries suffer original sin. Policymakers are limited in their ability to pursue investments in education, infrastructure, or social spending because they fear currency crises or sudden stops. Domestic development policies become hostage to the ability to raise revenue through financing.

On one hand, LCBM development can ease financial pressures on individuals by lowering borrowing costs, stabilizing inflation, and reducing the likelihood that households will see their savings eroded through

1 Barry Eichengreen and Ricardo Hausmann, "Exchange Rates and Financial Fragility," *NBER Working Paper* no. 7418 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1999), https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w7418/w7418.pdf.

2 Bank for International Settlements, Committee on the Global Financial System, *Financial Stability and Local Currency Bond Markets*, CGFS Paper no. 28 (Basel: Bank for International Settlements, 2007), <https://www.bis.org/publ/cgfs28.pdf>.

3 Suparna Sampath, "Bond Basics: Emerging Market Debt Explained" (London: Vanguard Group, 2022), <https://www.vanguard.co.uk/content/dam/intl/europe/documents/en/em-explainer.pdf>.

4 Ibid.

5 World Bank, "Worldwide Governance Indicators," <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/worldwide-governance-indicators>.

6 Eichengreen and Hausmann, "Exchange Rates and Financial Fragility,"

7 Barry Eichengreen et al., "Currency Mismatches, Debt Intolerance, and Original Sin: Why They Are Not the Same and Why It Matters," *NBER Working Paper* no. 10036 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2003), https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w10036/w10036.pdf.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 John Burger and Francis Warnock, "Local Currency Bond Markets," *IMF Staff Papers* 53, no. 2 (2006), <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/staffp/2006/03/pdf/burger.pdf>.

12 Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1999).

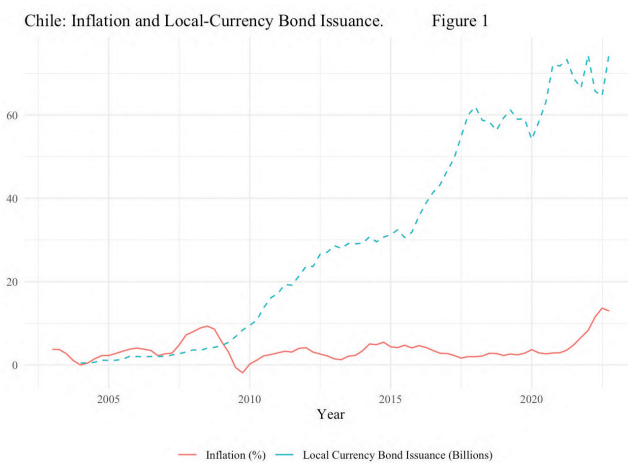
macroeconomic volatility. In this sense, stronger LCBMs expand the "capabilities" available to citizens in Sen's framework, giving them greater control over their financial lives and reducing exposure to external shocks. On the other hand, where institutions are weak, the cycle works in reverse. LCBM expansion can tighten the constraints individuals face: governments may rely more heavily on domestic investors to absorb public debt, creating risks of financial repression, crowding out private credit, or transmitting public-sector distress directly onto household balance sheets. The contrasting experiences of Chile and Argentina, examined later in this paper, demonstrate how sharply these dynamics can diverge depending on the institutional environment in which LCBMs emerge.

Section 3: Institutional and Macroeconomic Background

Before turning to the empirical results, it is important to outline the distinct economic and governance trajectories of Chile and Argentina. Although both countries operate in the same region and share exposure to the same international financial cycles, their macroeconomic frameworks, institutional histories, and debt management strategies differ significantly. These structural contrasts will help explain why LCBM expansion strengthens governance in some contexts while weakening it in others.

3.1 Chile: Credibility and Market Development

Chile is a regional model for institutional governance and macroeconomic stability. Although the country faced currency and banking crises in the 1970s and 1980s, the policy landscape shifted quickly with the 1989 reform granting full independence to the Central Bank, and thus laying the foundation for a stronger monetary framework.¹³ Caputo and Saravia show that Chile's early adoption of inflation targeting and the autonomy of its central bank helped bring inflation down from 22% in 1991 to 3.5% in 2001, and keep it low thereafter.¹⁴ Complementing these strengthening monetary conditions was the creation of the Pension



Reserve Fund in 2006, one of the strongest pension systems in the developing world. Jara and Naudon show that Chile's pension funds have become the dominant institutional investors, managing around 21% of financial assets ($\approx 72\%$ of GDP) and are "the main investor base in the sovereign bond market."¹⁵

This large pool of long-term savings created a stable domestic demand for LCBMs, strengthened the market and supported the institutional conditions under which Chile's local debt market could later expand in the 2000s. By 2022, Chile had \$75 billion in its LCBM outstanding, over 65% of its total bond market (Figure 1).

These foundations forged in the 1990s produced a macroeconomic environment characterized by credibility, low inflation, and prudent fiscal management over the subsequent decades. Despite some political struggles in recent years, Chile's democratic institutions have been relatively stable and well-functioning since the return to democracy in 1990 following the end of dictatorship.¹⁶ Governance indicators consistently reflect this stability. Chile ranks among the highest in Latin America across all WGIs and scores significantly higher than Argentina, as illustrated in Figure 2, where Chile's WGI scores (solid lines) consistently exceed those of Argentina (dashed lines).¹⁷

3.2 Argentina: Crisis-Driven Finance

In sharp contrast to Chile's financial successes is

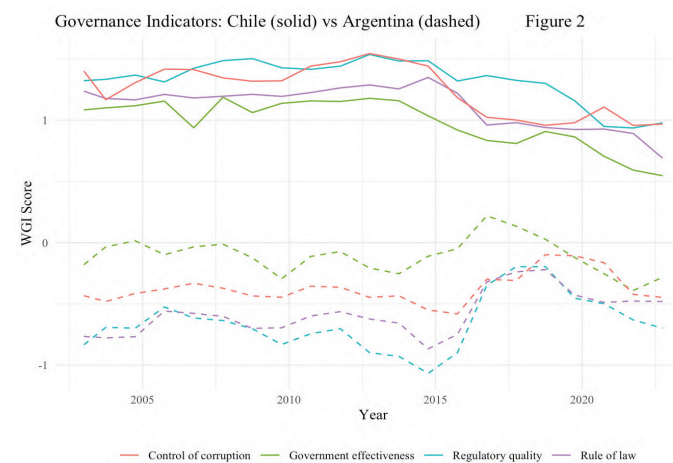
¹⁵ Alejandro Jara and Alberto Naudon, "The Changing Nature of the Financial System: The Chilean Experience," *BIS Papers* no. 148 (Basel: Bank for International Settlements, 2024), https://www.bis.org/publ/bppdf/bispap148_d.pdf.

¹⁶ BTI Transformation Index, *BTI 2024 Chile Country Report* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024), <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/CHL>.

¹⁷ World Bank, "Worldwide Governance Indicators."

¹³ Rodrigo Caputo and Diego Saravia, *The Case of Chile* (Chicago: Becker Friedman Institute for Economics, 2019), <https://bfi.uchicago.edu/wp-content/uploads/The-Case-of-Chile.pdf>.

¹⁴ Ibid.



Argentina's failures. The past several decades of Argentine fiscal and monetary policy provide a cautionary example of policy mismanagement: uncontrolled public spending, government pressure shaping monetary policy, and the central bank monetizing public debt during periods of fiscal stress.¹⁸ As a result, hyperinflation is a norm in Argentina, reaching double and triple digits across multiple decades. Between 1960-2017, Argentina "suffered several balance of payments crises, three hyperinflations, two defaults on government debt, and three banking crises."¹⁹ This outcome can be traced, in significant part, to weaknesses in Argentina's institutional and policy framework, as reflected in its persistently low scores on governance indicators in Figure 2. In this environment of fiscal stress and weak monetary institutions, the LCBM expanded less as a marker of financial development than as a mechanism to finance its ever-increasing stock of liabilities, exacerbated by currency mismatches. When fiscal deficits and inflation surged, the government frequently relied on local currency issuance to sustain fiscal operations. As shown in Figure 3, there is a clear correlation between rising inflation and increases in LCBM, particularly after 2015.

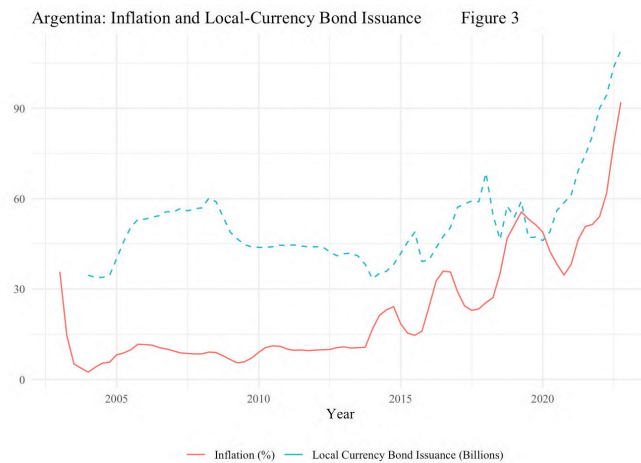
Section 4: Data and Empirical Strategy

4.1 Data and Variables

The empirical analysis uses the sovereign bond dataset developed by Onen, Sahel, and von Allmen (2023) at

¹⁸ Francisco Buera and Juan Pablo Nicolini, *The Case of Argentina* (Chicago: Becker Friedman Institute for Economics, 2018), <https://mafhola.uchicago.edu/wp-content/uploads/Argentina.pdf>.

¹⁹ Ibid.



the Bank for International Settlements. The dataset was built to examine original sin and the currency composition of sovereign debt and covers 27 EM economies from 2005 to 2022 at a quarterly frequency. It includes long-term government bonds issued by central, regional, and local authorities, along with sixty-five variables capturing a broad set of macroeconomic indicators such as GDP, inflation, market conditions, and global risk. Complete documentation is provided in the dataset's compilation guide.²⁰ From this dataset, the empirical analysis draws on several key variables (see table in the following page).²¹

4.2 Empirical Framework

The empirical strategy combines a panel regression for 27 emerging market economies with separate country-specific models for Chile and Argentina. In this way, the analysis identifies broad patterns across EMs between local-currency bond markets and governance, while allowing for closer examination of the divergent experiences of Chile and Argentina.

4.2.1 Panel Regression

The panel estimations use the following fixed effects model:

$$WGI_{c,t} = \alpha_c + \tau_t + \beta_1 LCshare_{c,t-1} + \beta_2 YTM_{c,t} + \beta_3 GDPgrowth_{c,t} + \beta_4 Inflation_{c,t-1} + \beta_5 CapitalOpenness_{c,t} + \beta_6 VIX_{c,t} + \varepsilon_{c,t}$$

The dependent variable WGI denotes one of the five

²⁰ Mert Onen et al., "Overcoming Original Sin: Insights from a New Dataset," *BIS Working Papers* no. 1075 (Basel: Bank for International Settlements, 2023), <https://www.bis.org/publ/work1075.htm>.

²¹ Summary statistics for all variables used in the analysis are reported in *Appendix A1*.

Variable Name	Definition	Construction
Local currency share of sovereign debt outstanding (LCshare)	The ratio of domestic currency-denominated government bonds to total sovereign bonds outstanding. Serves as the principal explanatory variable. *LCshare reflects a government's ability to issue debt in domestic currency and reduce currency mismatch associated with original sin, but it does not capture key dimensions of LCBM development such as market depth, liquidity, investor base composition, or issuance maturity. Accordingly, the estimated coefficients should be interpreted as capturing the institutional consequences of increased reliance on LCBMs, rather than a pure measure of market sophistication.	The variable is lagged by one year to mitigate endogeneity concerns.
World Governance Indicators (WGI)	The dataset includes the World Bank's WGIs, which measure regulatory quality, government effectiveness, political stability and violence, control of corruption, and rule of law. These governance indicators are the dependent variables.	Each indicator is expressed in standardized normal units, with values ranging from approximately -2.5 to +2.5.
Local currency bonds yield to maturity (YTM)	The interest rate on local currency bonds, which can capture market perceptions of sovereign risk and borrowing conditions.	Measured as the average yield on government bonds denominated in local currency.
Inflation	The rate at which the general price level rises over time.	The variable is lagged by one year to align with the slower-moving WGIs.
GDP Growth	The rate at which a country's total economic output increases over time.	Calculated as the percentage change in real GDP from the same quarter of the previous year.
Capital Account Openness	Measures the extent to which a country permits international financial transactions and capital mobility.	Originally scaled 0-1, but rescaled to 0-100 to maintain a percent interpretation comparable to the other regressors.
VIX	Measures global financial market volatility and acts as a control variable for global risk. VIX is included only in the country regressions in Chile and Argentina.	Constructed from S&P 500 option prices and measures expected 30-day market volatility

governance indicators for country c in year t . The central explanatory variable, LCshare, is the lagged share of sovereign bonds in local currency. Country fixed effects, α_c , absorb unobserved characteristics that do not vary over time, and time fixed effects, α_t , account for global shocks that affect all EMs. This two-way fixed effects structure helps isolate the relationship between LCBMs and governance outcomes.

4.2.2 Country-specific OLS for Chile and Argentina

The analysis then estimates separate regressions for Chile and Argentina:

These regressions use the same explanatory and control

$$WGI_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 LCshare_{t-1} + \beta_2 YTM_t + \beta_3 GDPgrowth_t +$$

$$+ \beta_4 Inflation_{t-1} + \beta_5 CapitalOpenness_t + \beta_6 VIX_t + \varepsilon_t$$

variables as the panel model but are estimated with ordinary least squares. Because country fixed effects cannot be included in a single country regression, and time fixed effects would absorb all the variation, the regression includes a control for global financial conditions that is introduced through the VIX. This control ensures that domestic institutional patterns

are not confounded with broad shifts in global risk appetite that tend to move EM borrowing conditions together.

4.2.3 Addressing Endogeneity

Endogeneity arises when explanatory variables are correlated with the error term, making it difficult to identify a clear causal relationship. If left unaddressed, it can bias coefficient estimates and lead to incorrect inferences about the relationship between institutional quality and local currency borrowing. The main endogeneity concern in this regression is reverse causality. Countries with improving governance may find it easier to issue in local currency, and macroeconomic shocks can influence both borrowing patterns and institutional performance. Several elements of the empirical strategy help mitigate these risks. First, the one-year lag on LCshare and inflation reduces the likelihood that contemporaneous changes in governance or price dynamics are driving the results. A one-year lag strikes a balance: shorter lags raise stronger causality concerns, while much longer lags weaken the link between observed variation and underlying financial-structure changes. Secondary concerns about

omitted variables are addressed through country fixed effects in the panel regression, macroeconomic controls, and the inclusion of the VIX in the country analysis to account for global financial shocks.²² Although these steps cannot eliminate endogeneity, the qualitative contrast between Chile and Argentina strengthens confidence in the findings.

Section 5: Empirical Results and Discussion

5.1 Panel Model for Emerging Markets

The analysis begins with the full 27 country panel. Across all five WGIs, the lagged LCshare exhibits a positive and statistically significant association with governance.

Coefficients range from approximately 0.0018 to 0.0150, with the strongest effects appearing in Government Effectiveness, Rule of Law, and Control of Corruption. Although these magnitudes may appear modest, it is crucial to remember the scale of the WGI's. While they do run between -2.5 and +2.5,

²² Correlations among the main explanatory variables and controls are reported in Appendix A2.

being standard normal units, the vast majority fall between -1 and +1. That being said, a 10% increase in LCshare increased government effectiveness by +.150 standard units on average. The results, therefore, suggest that expansions in local-currency debt markets are associated with gradual but meaningful institutional strengthening.

Control variables behave largely as expected. Higher yields coincide with weaker governance, consistent with investors pricing in institutional risk. Inflation shows little annual variation once fixed effects are included. GDP growth produces mixed signs, reflecting the fact that booms can either ease or strain institutions in EMs. Capital-account openness remains consistently positive, indicating that open financial regimes support better governance.

5.2 Chile: A Virtuous LCBM Governance Cycle

The Chile regression reveals substantially larger effects than those observed in the panel. Across all governance indicators, the coefficient on LCshare ranges from roughly 0.0138 to 0.0282, around two to three times larger than the average emerging-market estimate. The greatest improvements occur in Rule of Law, Government Effectiveness, and Control of

LCBM Impact on Governance Indicators

Dependent Variable: Governance Quality Measures (Index -2.5 to 2.5, WGI)

Variable	Regulatory Quality (1)	Government Effectiveness (2)	Political Violence and Stability (3)	Control of Corruption (4)	Rule of Law (5)
Share of Government Bonds in Local Currency (%)	0.0096*** (0.0005)	0.0150*** (0.0006)	0.0018** (0.0009)	0.0138*** (0.0007)	0.0146*** (0.0006)
Yield to Maturity (%)	-0.0101*** (0.0019)	-0.0087*** (0.0022)	-0.0066** (0.0031)	-0.0035 (0.0026)	-0.0095*** (0.0022)
Annual GDP Growth (%)	-0.0152*** (0.0044)	0.0009 (0.0052)	-0.0389*** (0.0072)	0.0072 (0.0060)	-0.0124** (0.0053)
Annual Inflation (%)	-0.0061** (0.0028)	-0.0018 (0.0033)	-0.0054 (0.0045)	0.0020 (0.0038)	0.0012 (0.0033)
Capital Account Openness (Index 0-100)	0.0148*** (0.0004)	0.0114*** (0.0005)	0.0116*** (0.0006)	0.0140*** (0.0005)	0.0136*** (0.0005)
Observations	1,713	1,713	1,713	1,713	1,713
R ²	0.5954	0.4494	0.2704	0.4022	0.4914
Adjusted R ²	0.5722	0.4177	0.2284	0.3678	0.4622
F Statistic (df = 5; 1619)	476.5510***	264.2629***	119.9805***	217.8271***	312.8493***

Dependent Variable: Governance Quality Measures (Index -2.5 to 2.5, WGI)

Variable	Regulatory Quality (1)	Government Effectiveness (2)	Political Violence and Stability (3)	Control of Corruption (4)	Rule of Law (5)
Share of Government Bonds in Local Currency (%)	0.0252*** (0.0021)	0.0250*** (0.0022)	0.0138*** (0.0021)	0.0282*** (0.0037)	0.0269*** (0.0019)
Yield to Maturity (%)	0.0162 (0.0179)	-0.0208 (0.0185)	0.0658*** (0.0176)	0.0141 (0.0318)	0.0001 (0.0163)
GDP Growth (%)	0.0006 (0.0054)	0.0084 (0.0056)	-0.0084 (0.0053)	0.0089 (0.0097)	0.0052 (0.0049)
Annual Inflation (%)	0.0235** (0.0099)	-0.00004 (0.0102)	0.0257** (0.0097)	0.0187 (0.0175)	0.0182** (0.0090)
Capital Account Openness (Index 0-100)	0.0204*** (0.0048)	0.0219*** (0.0050)	0.0378*** (0.0047)	0.0235*** (0.0085)	0.0164*** (0.0044)
VIX	-0.0083*** (0.0023)	-0.0005 (0.0023)	-0.0108*** (0.0022)	0.0057 (0.0040)	0.0015 (0.0021)
Constant	-2.2100*** (0.3898)	-2.6102*** (0.4040)	-3.6404*** (0.3831)	-3.0325*** (0.6928)	-2.3900*** (0.3549)
Observations	50	50	50	50	50
R ²	0.8679	0.8601	0.8358	0.6888	0.8736
Adjusted R ²	0.8495	0.8406	0.8129	0.6453	0.8560
Residual Std. Error (df = 43)	0.0770	0.0798	0.0757	0.1368	0.0701
F Statistic (df = 6; 43)	47.0973***	44.0617***	36.4919***	15.8589***	49.5273***

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Corruption.

These magnitudes are consistent with Chile's long-standing macroeconomic credibility: an independent central bank since the 1990s, a strong inflation-targeting regime, and a fiscal rule that stabilizes policy over the cycle. The mechanism is visible in Chile's market structure. As local pension funds (AFPs) deepened through the 2000s and 2010s, they became dominant buyers of local-currency bonds and demanded predictable policy, low inflation, and credible oversight.²³ This investor base effectively rewarded good governance and discouraged political shocks, reinforcing institutional strength as LCshare rose. The behavior of the control variables fits this narrative. Yields show limited variation because Chile rarely faces market stress; inflation remains within a narrow target band, and capital-account openness complements the country's rules-based economic model. The VIX only affects indicators tied to global volatility, while core governance measures remain stable, underscoring Chile's insulation from external

shocks.

Overall, Chile displays a virtuous cycle: strong institutions support LCBM expansion, and a growing local-currency market backed by a large domestic investor base, further reinforces stability and credible governance.²⁴

5.3 Argentina: A Perverse LCBM Governance Cycle

Argentina's regression results stand in stark contrast to Chile's. Here, the coefficients on lagged LCshare are negative for nearly all governance indicators, and significantly so for Regulatory Quality, Control of Corruption, and Rule of Law, with effect sizes ranging from approximately -0.004 to -0.014.

Instead of representing institutional maturation, increases in LCshare tend to occur during fiscal crises when other financing is unavailable. These episodes are often accompanied by central bank monetization

24 The Chile-specific regression is based on 50 observations, which limits statistical power relative to the full panel. However, the consistently high R-squared values across specifications indicate strong explanatory fit and relationships over time. Accordingly, these estimates are interpreted as illustrative evidence of mechanism and institutional reinforcement rather than definitive causal estimates.

23 Jara and Naudon, "The Changing Nature of the Financial System."

Dependent Variable: Governance Quality Measures (Index -2.5 to 2.5, WGI)

Variable	Regulatory Quality (1)	Government Effectiveness (2)	Political Violence and Stability (3)	Control of Corruption (4)	Rule of Law (5)
Share of Government Bonds in Local Currency (%)	-0.0137*** (0.0029)	-0.0060 (0.0047)	-0.0037 (0.0030)	-0.0115*** (0.0025)	-0.0092*** (0.0020)
Yield to Maturity (%)	-0.0026** (0.0011)	-0.0040** (0.0018)	-0.0031*** (0.0011)	-0.0008 (0.0010)	-0.0009 (0.0008)
GDP Growth (%)	-0.0011 (0.0025)	-0.00005 (0.0041)	0.0102*** (0.0026)	-0.0067*** (0.0022)	0.0025 (0.0017)
Annual Inflation (%)	-0.0004 (0.0017)	-0.0026 (0.0028)	0.0025 (0.0018)	-0.0020 (0.0015)	0.0007 (0.0012)
Capital Account Openness (Index 0-100)	0.0050*** (0.0008)	0.0023* (0.0013)	0.0007 (0.0008)	0.0005 (0.0007)	0.0037*** (0.0006)
VIX	0.0006 (0.0019)	-0.00005 (0.0030)	-0.0005 (0.0019)	0.0011 (0.0016)	-0.0026** (0.0013)
Constant	-0.0877 (0.1545)	0.2451 (0.2525)	0.1389 (0.1618)	0.1942 (0.1345)	-0.1828* (0.1059)
Observations	41	41	41	41	41
R ²	0.8932	0.5605	0.5740	0.7684	0.9147
Adjusted R ²	0.8743	0.4829	0.4988	0.7276	0.8996
Residual Std. Error (df = 34)	0.0737	0.1205	0.0772	0.0642	0.0505
F Statistic (df = 6; 34)	47.3837***	7.2258***	7.6361***	18.8038***	60.7671***

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

of the newly issued debt – such as in 2016, 2019, and 2022 – which accelerates inflation and further weakens institutional credibility (Figure 2). Control variables reinforce this instability. Yields spike during crises and inflation variation is too chronic and high to be meaningfully captured year to year. Capital-account openness has little systematic effect because Argentina oscillates between strict controls and abrupt liberalizations, often driven by short-term crisis management rather than a coherent strategy.²⁵

In contrast to Chile's virtuous cycle, Argentina exhibits a perverse cycle in which weak institutions lead to fiscal stress, in turn pressuring the government to issue local currency bonds under increasingly fragile conditions. Political cycles and external shocks amplify these dynamics.²⁶ Importantly, rising LCshare in Argentina should not be interpreted as bond market development in the conventional sense, but rather as an increased reliance on domestic-currency issuance

25 Buera and Nicolini, *The Case of Argentina*.

26 The Argentina regression is based on 41 observations, which limits statistical power relative to the full panel. However, the consistently high R-squared values across specifications indicate strong explanatory fit and relationships over time. Accordingly, these estimates are interpreted as illustrative evidence of mechanism and institutional reinforcement rather than definitive causal estimates.

during periods of fiscal stress. The resulting inflation further deteriorates governance, creating a self-reinforcing negative feedback loop.

Section 6: LCBMs, Governance, and Development Implications

Amartya Sen's perspective emphasizes not just economic output but the institutions and social conditions that enable people to live lives they value.²⁷ The contrasting LCBM trajectories of Chile and Argentina illustrate how LCBMs can either reinforce these freedoms or deepen unfreedoms, depending on broader institutional quality.

In Chile, the state's ability to finance itself reliably in local currency has translated into tangible gains in Sen's conceptualisation of people's freedoms. Deep LCBMs have supported institutional savings, especially pension funds, which hold substantial long-term assets and are significant investors in sovereign debt.²⁸ These funds anchor stable demand for government

27 Sen, *Development as Freedom*.

28 Jara and Naudon, "The Changing Nature of the Financial System."

bonds, thereby supporting credible fiscal planning. This financing capacity bolsters Sen's protective security and economic facilities because it allows the government to maintain commitments to long-term development priorities, such as social spending and public goods. For instance, Chile's public investment in education has remained comparatively strong, with expenditures on education accounting for about 5.9 % of GDP, above the OECD average of 4.7%.²⁹ Beyond pensions and education, Chile's fiscal institutions, including the Economic and Social Stabilization Fund, provide additional buffers that smooth cyclical fluctuations and support strategic planning rather than reactive policy shifts.³⁰ By avoiding abrupt budget reversals tied to crises, Chile reduces the risk that ordinary citizens will face sudden cuts to services or inflationary shocks. In Sen's framework, this contributes to transparency guarantees and the freedom to participate in economic interchange, as citizens and markets alike can anticipate stable policies instead of erratic reversals.

Argentina demonstrates the opposite causal chain: weak institutions undermine the state's ability to finance itself credibly, forcing governments into inflationary or crisis-driven forms of domestic borrowing that directly erode Sen's real freedoms. Rather than providing stable financing, expansions in LCBMs tend to be accompanied by sharp inflation spikes. In 2022, the inflation nearly reached 100%, along with massive LCBM growth, which destroyed savings and wages (Figure 2). This macroeconomic instability wipes out protective security, the very freedom Sen views as foundational, because households cannot plan for the future or maintain real incomes. The consequences for ordinary Argentines are severe. Real household incomes fell over 40% between 2016 and 2023, with collapsing labor earnings accounting for most of the surge in poverty.³¹ Job opportunities have also deteriorated. Around 42% of workers remain in informal employment, lacking legal protections,

29 OECD, *Education at a Glance 2025: Chile* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2025), https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2025/09/education-at-a-glance-2025-country-notes_9749f4ff/chile_49daa412.html.

30 Ministerio de Hacienda, "Economic and Social Stabilization Fund," *Government of Chile*, <https://www.hacienda.cl/english/work-areas/international-finance/sovereign-wealth-funds/economic-and-social-stabilization-fund>.

31 World Bank, *Poverty Traps in Argentina: Poverty and Equity Assessment* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2024), <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099103024144524874/pdf/P17545411ae34d0ab1a81a17f00b1279191.pdf>.

stable contracts, or credible wage prospects – conditions Sen would identify as direct constraints on the freedom to participate meaningfully in economic life.³² These social outcomes are not incidental; they flow directly from the government's financing failures. When the state can issue local currency bonds under fragile, inflationary conditions, debt markets cease to support development and instead exacerbate unfreedoms. Argentina's LCBM experience thus illustrates how, in the presence of weak institutions, financial instruments intended to expand freedoms can become mechanisms that systematically restrict them.

Section 7: Conclusion and Policy Implications

While most emerging markets now possess LCBMs, the findings of this paper point to important policy cautions regarding how these markets are used. The key lesson is not simply that strong institutions are needed to develop LCBMs, but that greater reliance on domestic-currency financing under weak institutional conditions can actively undermine governance. In such settings, increases in local currency issuance are more likely to reflect crisis-driven financing than genuine market deepening, transmitting fiscal stress into inflation and eroding institutional credibility, as in Argentina. By contrast, Chile's experience shows that when LCBMs are supported by credible monetary institutions and a stable domestic investor base, they can reinforce governance rather than weaken it. Policymakers should therefore treat LCBM expansion as a conditional instrument, not a substitute for institutional reform, and be cautious about relying on it when credibility is fragile. Taken together, these results and analyses show that LCBM development is not automatically achieved through expansion, and its effects depend on the institutional context in which expansion occurs. The contrasting cases of Chile and Argentina make this clear: financial markets do not create credibility on their own. They either strengthen it or reveal its absence.

32 OECD, *OECD Economic Surveys: Argentina 2025* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2025), https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-economic-surveys-argentina-2025_27dd6e27-en.html.

Appendix

A1: Summary Statistics

Appendix A1: Summary Statistics

Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max
GG_share_dc_lag	76.787	22.932	1.714	100.000
YTM	6.280	7.567	0.140	187.578
inflation_lag	4.318	5.319	-3.706	55.591
GDP_growth	3.773	3.304	-10.869	14.520
ka_open_pct	60.468	31.519	0.000	100.000
VIX	19.405	7.796	10.310	58.590

A2: Correlation Matrix

Correlation Matrix

Pairwise Correlations Between Variables

Variable	GG_share_dc_lag	YTM	inflation_lag	GDP_growth	ka_open_pct	VIX
GG_share_dc_lag	1.000	-0.185	-0.268	0.097	-0.225	0.024
YTM	-0.185	1.000	0.658	-0.047	-0.294	0.104
inflation_lag	-0.268	0.658	1.000	-0.099	-0.271	0.090
GDP_growth	0.097	-0.047	-0.099	1.000	-0.144	-0.182
ka_open_pct	-0.225	-0.294	-0.271	-0.144	1.000	0.010
VIX	0.024	0.104	0.090	-0.182	0.010	1.000

Note: Correlations in **green** indicate strong positive relationships (> 0.5), **red** indicates strong negative relationships (< -0.5), and **orange** indicates moderate relationships (|0.3-0.5|).

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A Neo-Colonial Outcry in Namibia

*A historical analysis of foreign
exploitation in South West Africa*

CHRISTOPHER FACTEAU
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Characterized by enduring structures of German colonialism, apartheid, and ongoing foreign exploitation, Namibia is one of the most unequal societies in the world. For over 35 years, since Namibia's independence, the ruling South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) has held onto power by employing populist rhetoric and empty promises of prosperity. This paper argues that their failure to deliver equitable economic growth comes from the "all-weather friendships" SWAPO formed during the liberation struggle. To repay past diplomatic and military debts, the government routinely hands out lucrative contracts to Eastern powers. North Korea builds national monuments, while Chinese companies are in charge of mining and infrastructure. Our research reveals a clear divide: while the political elite support these alliances, both working-class Black and White Namibians increasingly share feelings of resentment. This common frustration suggests a growing rejection of what many consider a new form of colonization, where the nation's sovereignty is sacrificed for the benefit of foreign state-owned companies.

Introduction

In January 2026, we traveled to Namibia, as part of a Middlebury College Conflict Transformation course, *Namibia/Germany Colonial Legacies*, to learn about the persistent legacies of German colonialism and their intersection with contemporary foreign influence. From our conversations with immigration officers, service workers, diamond industry executives, and other stakeholders, we noticed a common theme. Although perceptions of German presence differed, nearly everyone we spoke with expressed deep concerns about the present influence of Eastern powers on Namibia, particularly China.

The divergence between accounts of German colonialism and the lived realities of Namibians suggests an analytical dissonance. The histories we had studied before our trip did not always coincide with the lived realities of the Namibians we met. Why did our South African guide feel more resentment towards German tourists than our Herero driver? More importantly, why did Namibians from different racial and economic backgrounds come together in their detestation of Chinese influence? These sentiments coalesce into a broader demand for the end of Eastern exploitation.

To understand Namibia's ongoing trajectory, we must first consider how the legacies of colonialism and apartheid formed the basis for these new types of "neo-colonial" interference, in which foreign powers exercise indirect economic and political control over what is a sovereign nation. This paper aims to explain why the Namibian government continues to facilitate this second wave of colonization despite growing public outcry. By bringing together our own observations and insights from well-known scholars, we explore the government's dependence on foreign powers as a result of dependencies from the liberation era. Through this analysis, we hope to navigate Susanne Rudolph's "imperialism of categories," thereby resisting the colonial impulse to force Namibia's distinct historical experiences into rigid, pre-existing Western analytical frameworks.¹ In doing so, we strive to avoid applying relativist Western ideas while maintaining a strong, non-relativist critique of 21st-century Eastern

1 Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, "The Imperialism of Categories: Situating Knowledge in a Globalizing World," *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 01 (March 1, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1017/s153759270500024>.

neo-colonialism—an analysis rooted in universal principles of justice rather than one that excuses exploitation as a mere 'cultural difference.'

German Colonialism: "Short" Yet Brutal

Although often seen as a "short-lived" endeavor compared to British or French colonialism, German colonialism was marked by ruthless efficiency and a global ideological framework that deeply affected Namibia. Sebastian Conrad writes in *German Colonialism: A Short History* that the German colonial project was not a minor event. Instead, it was a "formative element" of the German nation-state, closely linked to the trends of late nineteenth-century globalization.²

The roots of this empire stretch back long before the official Scramble for Africa in 1884. As early as 1683, the Brandenburg-Prussian settlement of Gross Friedrichsburg in what is now modern-day Ghana signaled Germany's interest in Africa. In Namibia, the first German settlers were the Rheinisch Missionaries who arrived in the mid-nineteenth century. These missionaries often served as an unintended vanguard. They introduced European ideas of private property and centralized authority that oftentimes disrupted indigenous social systems.³

The change from missionary influence to commercial exploitation was spearheaded by Adolf Lüderitz, a struggling businessman from Bremen. In May 1883, Lüderitz bought large land holdings, including what would become the port of Angra Pequena, from Nama Captain Josef Frederiks II.⁴ Along with merchant Heinrich Vogelsang, Lüderitz aimed to create a German settler colony he called "Greater Germany." This was intended to shift the new waves of German migration away from North America.

To secure these acquisitions, settlers relied on systematic deception. Negotiations often involved intoxicating tribal leaders or the infamous geographical mile fraud. In the 1883 treaty, Frederiks thought he was selling land measured in English miles (about 1.6 km), only to discover that the Germans planned

2 Sebastian Conrad, *German Colonialism: A Short History*. (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

3 Ibid.

4 Jürgen Zimmerer, *From Windhoek to Auschwitz?: Reflections on the Relationship Between Colonialism and National Socialism* (de Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2024).

to enforce the much longer Prussian mile (7.5 km). This effectively swindled the Nama out of nearly their entire coastline.⁵

The transition from colonial exploitation to organized extermination reached its peak during the Herero and Nama uprisings of 1904. Following the initiation of resistance by indigenous groups against land dispossession and cattle seizure, a formal extermination

After World War I, formal German rule may have ended; however, oppression did not cease. It transformed. After World War I, formal German rule may have ended; however, oppression did not cease. It transformed.

order (Vernichtungsbefehl) was deployed by German military administrator General Lothar von Trotha. The first genocide of the twentieth century followed: a campaign of mass shootings, poisoning of wells in the desert, and forced relocation of those who survived to "concentration camps." In sites like Shark Island, prisoners were subjected to lethal forced labor and medical experimentation. Historians like Jürgen Zimmerer have argued that the period created a "lethal blueprint" for racial bureaucracy and state-sponsored violence that was later to be replicated in Europe.⁶

After World War I, formal German rule may have ended; however, oppression did not cease. It transformed. As the territory became a South African Mandate, the 'scientific' racial hierarchies the Germans had enforced were not abolished. Instead, they were entrenched and amplified.⁷ The systemic frameworks of segregation and the expropriation of indigenous land established the basis for the next phase in the history of Namibia. This legacy of state-enforced racial division was later institutionalized under apartheid,

5 Sebastian Conrad, *German Colonialism*.

6 Jürgen Zimmerer, *From Windhoek to Auschwitz?*

7 Henning Melber, "We will not move" from the Old Location to Katutura: Forced Resettlement in Windhoek, South West Africa', *Historia* 68, 1, May 2023, 54-85. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-8392/2023/v68n1a3>.

further deepening the inequalities that continue to haunt the nation's social and political landscape today.

Apartheid Years: Occupation and Resistance

South Africa's administration of Namibia under apartheid restructured the territory's social, political, and economic systems. Unequal policies by the South African apartheid regime entrenched racial inequality and fostered resistance movements that ultimately gave rise to the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO). Following the League of Nations mandate after World War I, South Africa imposed apartheid policies in Namibia. These policies aimed to extend South Africa's system of racial segregation and economic exploitation, ensuring South Africa's territorial control over the majority Black population. The consequences of these policies still define Namibia's structural inequality today.

A key aspect of apartheid rule in Namibia was the systematic use of forced removals and the exploitation of labor. In the 1950s, in cities such as Windhoek, Black residents were forced to relocate from the central Windhoek Main Location (now called the Old Location) to segregated townships on the margins of the city, such as Katutura—a name which, poignantly, translates to "the place where we do not stay." On the 10th of December 1959, residents refused to abandon their homes and protested on the streets. This provoked a massacre by the apartheid administration. Under the guise of modern urban planning, these central areas were subsequently cleared to make way for apartments intended for the White population.⁸ Similar policies were enacted in other Namibian cities, such as Swakopmund, a coastal city established by German colonists, where spatial segregation ensured that White settlers maintained privileged access to the coastline and economic resources.

This domestic repression eventually drew the scrutiny of the international community. In 1966, as part of the United Nations' global decolonization movement, the UN revoked South Africa's mandate, declaring its continued occupation illegal. However, South Africa's refusal to withdraw from Namibia intensified

8 Ibid, 1-15.



tensions between the international community and the South African government.⁹ In response to the failure of international law, SWAPO formed the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN).

Adopting a distinctly asymmetric, guerrilla warfare style, the PLAN began its armed resistance against the South African Defence Force (SADF) in 1966. The ensuing war, initially referred to as the South African Border War, later became known as the Namibian War of Independence (1966–1990). Operating from bases in neighboring Angola and Zambia, PLAN fighters conducted cross-border attacks, sabotage, and military campaigns across the northern region of Namibia, including Ovamboland, Kavango, and the Caprivi Strip. While having little effect militarily, PLAN operations demonstrated organized resistance that strengthened SWAPO's legitimacy.¹⁰ As Chris Saunders highlights, these decades of struggle

transformed SWAPO into the leading representative of Namibian nationalism, attracting foreign support and framing the liberation movement as a part of the more extensive global fight against structural racism.¹¹

Therefore, the legacy of apartheid in Namibia extends beyond the boundaries of formal colonial rule. By institutionalizing forced relocation, racial segregation, and violent repression, the South African government attempted to codify racial inequality as a permanent feature of the Namibian landscape. The intensification of these policies mobilized SWAPO and its military wing, PLAN. This organized resistance ultimately culminated in the attainment of Namibia's independence in 1990, while simultaneously entrenching SWAPO as the nation's dominant political force.

The Eastern Front: Chinese and North Korean State Actors

Namibia's contemporary interactions with foreign states strongly resemble "all-weather friendships,"

9 Chris Saunders, "SWAPO, Namibia's Liberation Struggle and the Organisation of African Unity's Liberation Committee," *South African Historical Journal* 70, no. 1 (2018): 152–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582473.2018.1430846>.

10 South African History Online. "The People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN)." Accessed February 22, 2026. <https://sahistory.org.za/article/peoples-liberation-army-namibia-plan>.

11 Chris Saunders, "SWAPO, Namibia's Liberation Struggle," 1.

deep-seated alliances formed during the liberation struggle that remain steadfast regardless of global political shifts or internal controversy. As Henning Melber and Chris Saunders highlight, SWAPO relied heavily on international support to sustain its fight against South African occupation. Along with significant military aid from the Soviet Union, Namibia secured foundational ties with the People's Republic of China and North Korea that have since evolved into modern strategic partnerships.

The Namibian government's relationship with China is often seen as a "South-South" alliance, by which the developing nations bypass Western dominance through mutual cooperation and shared post-colonial solidarity. In a 2013 statement, Founding President Sam Nujoma praised the "win-win" nature of the China-Africa cooperation. He asserted that financial assistance from Beijing would "add more impetus to the acceleration of economic growth and development."¹² This partnership has manifested in significant agricultural deals, such as the 2016 agreement allowing Namibia to export beef to Chinese markets. However, Gregor Dobler notes that such high-level "solidarity" often masks mounting local resentment. While political elites, namely SWAPO officials, have benefited from large-scale infrastructure and mining investments—particularly in the uranium sector—ordinary Namibians often express "fears of a new imperialism" powered by the dominance of Chinese retail and construction firms.¹³

North Korea's influence, while less economically pervasive than China's, remains visible in Namibia's architectural environment. Pyongyang's main contributions have come from civil and military projects. The most notable examples of which are the National Heroes' Acre and the Independence Memorial Museum in Windhoek, both built by the North Korean firm Mansudae Overseas Projects. These projects support a particular narrative about the liberation struggle. As Melber argues, these relationships are part of a "struggle history" that the ruling elite

12 Sam Nujoma, "Inaugural Speech," March 21, 1990, Posted in 2021 by the Sam Nujoma Foundation, https://samnujomafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Inaugural-speech-of-dr-sam-nujoma_21_march-1991.pdf.

13 Gregor Dobler, "China Returns to Africa," in *China Returns to Africa A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace*, ed. Chris Alden, Daniel Large, and Ricardo Soares De Oliveira, 2008, 237–55.

utilizes to maintain political legitimacy, even as public outcry grows over the "neo-colonial" consequences of such deep dependencies on Eastern powers.¹⁴

The Namibians we spoke with, both industry executives and working-class individuals, expressed firm frustration with how lucrative government contracts are consistently awarded to foreign firms rather than being used to develop domestic industry. For many, this dependence on foreign state-owned companies is a lost chance to build a self-sustaining national economy. SWAPO has effectively exchanged one form of foreign dependence for another.

The Peoples' General: Grassroots Resistance and the Anti-Chinese Sentiment

Michael Amushelelo, also known as "The People's General," is an activist and leading figure of the Namibia Economic Freedom Fighters (NEFF).¹⁵ His growing popularity signals a substantial turn towards civilian-militant opposition to Chinese economic presence in Namibia. Amushelelo has become the voice for ordinary Namibians—those who feel excluded from the "win-win cooperation" touted by Nujoma—to express their mounting frustrations.

The most controversial of his efforts happened in May 2022, when he led a shutdown of the Chinatown shopping complex in Windhoek. Amushelelo was upset about what he saw as double standards by the Namibia Revenue Agency (NamRA). After NamRA destroyed N\$5 million worth of counterfeit goods sold by local entrepreneurs, Amushelelo argued that the government was favoring Chinese businesses by failing to destroy their counterfeit goods.¹⁶ He insisted that the law "be applied equally." If local businesses were to be punished for these violations, Chinese competitors selling similar products should also face the same consequences.

The state's reaction proved immediate. Inspector General Sebastian Ndeitunga condemned

14 Melber, Henning, Daniela Kromrey, and Martin Welz. "Changing of the guard? An anatomy of power within SWAPO of Namibia." *African Affairs* 116, no. 463 (2017): 310. <http://www.istor.org/stable/44508019>.

15 "Counterfeits Saga Rages On," *Business Express*, May 15, 2022, <https://nambusinessexpress.com/?p=384>.

16 Staff Reporter, "Amushelelo Causing Public Disorder – Ndeitunga," *Informanté*, May 13, 2022, <https://informante.web.na/?p=319508>.

Amushelelo's actions as "illegal and intimidation" and warned they could lead to "public disorder" and "anarchy."¹⁷ Amushelelo and fellow activist Dimbulukweni Nauyoma were subsequently arrested. Initially denied bail, the High Court later imposed strict conditions that prohibited them from coming within one kilometer of Chinatown.¹⁸

Despite legal consequences, Amushelelo's message continues to resonate across a broad socio-economic spectrum. His efforts articulate what scholar Gregor Dobler identifies as a blend of "xenophobia mixed with fears of a new imperialism."¹⁹ For his supporters, Amushelelo is not merely a "Forex trader" causing chaos, but rather a representative of a generation that views the dominating Chinese economic presence as an erosion of the sovereignty achieved during the liberation struggle. His activism suggests that for many Namibians, the battle against foreign exploitation has shifted from the colonial "Red Line" to the storefronts of Chinatown.

Perspectives in Namibia: History and Foreign Influence

During our trip to Namibia, we spoke with a wide range of people in Windhoek and Swakopmund. From our conversations with professors, tour guides, hotel staff, and service workers, a recurring theme was the persistent concern regarding China's growing economic and political influence. Most individuals we spoke with expressed distrust toward China's expanding presence, especially its impact on Namibia's economy, tourism sector, and political independence. Several people described how foreign investment, especially from China, has increased Namibia's economic dependence.

Opinions and perceptions of the German colonial genocide in Namibia vary significantly. While some respondents argued that the genocide should receive greater attention in public discourse, others viewed it as a relic of the past secondary to present-day challenges. For instance, a waiter studying Namibian history expressed national pride in the exhibits at the Independence Memorial Museum and SWAPO's history. He believed that public knowledge about the German genocide should be expanded. Conversely, several tour

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Amushelelo v. S.*, [2023] NAHCMD 498 (High Court of Namibia 2023).

¹⁹ Gregor Dobler, "China Returns to Africa."



Source: Grobler du Preez, Shutterstock

guides from a sightseeing company we toured with minimized or questioned the scale of the genocide. Some even suggested it had been exaggerated. To them, the topic of the Herero and Nama genocide is considered so trivial that one guide pivoted the conversation toward the immediate consequences of foreign investment, explaining how economic influence from China is impacting Namibia's culture, politics, and development.

Moreover, personal experiences deeply affected perspectives on history and current issues. For example, in Swakopmund, we met a hotel receptionist and manager who expressed more concern for present-day economic and political challenges than for the Herero and Nama genocide. After asking about life in the United States and our academic goals, he described the difficult living conditions in Mondesa, the Black township of Swakopmund, where he lives. He stressed the urgency of addressing current socioeconomic problems. He stated that he simply wanted everyone to be happy. As someone who manages a luxury hotel in a German vacation destination and experiences relative poverty in Mondesa, he emphasized the prioritization of current issues, especially the impact of China on Namibian industries. However, his limited engagement and understanding with Namibia's colonial past raise questions about how histories of German rule are taught and portrayed in Namibia's education system. Although he initially expressed a desire to leave the genocide as a matter of the past, he showed a strong interest in learning more. We offered him the course materials and readings of our class on German colonial rule and the genocide, which he gratefully accepted.

Finally, a university professor described concerning levels of corruption within the Namibian government and the state's willingness to permit the expansion of foreign influence. While he stated the importance of understanding Namibia's history, he, too, argued that greater attention should be paid to the country's pressing present challenges.

Our interactions with different stakeholders in Namibia were both surprising and fascinating. While we expected more discussion surrounding Namibia's colonial history and the restitution of colonial artifacts, our conversation revealed a different focus: a tension between the collective memory of German colonial atrocities

and today's urgent political and economic concerns.

Conclusion: The Shifting Frontline

The analytical dissonance we first felt in Windhoek turned into a sobering reality. For the Namibians we met, the fight for sovereignty did not end when the South African flag came down in 1990; rather, the struggle transitioned into a more opaque economic phase. The long history of German colonialism and apartheid has left Namibia with a strong need for development—a void the government has tried to fill by relying on "all-weather" partnerships with Eastern Asian countries. Still, as the rise of activists like Michael Amushelero shows, there is a considerable difference between state-level diplomacy and street-level survival.

Ultimately, both the monuments in Windhoek and the shops in Chinatown show a country struggling with its own "imperialism of categories." While the ruling elite leverages "struggle history" to defend their partnerships with Beijing and Pyongyang, everyday Namibians are starting to see these ties as a new form of exploitation. The resentment we saw suggests that the "win-win cooperation" promoted by the state now seems like a zero-sum game for local workers. Today, the fight for Namibia's future is in the tension between its revolutionary past and its neo-colonial present. As our South African guide eloquently put it, "Namibia will forever remain poor, so long as there are other countries here exploiting us." Our interactions with different stakeholders in Namibia were both surprising and fascinating. While we expected more discussion surrounding Namibia's colonial history and the restitution of colonial artifacts, our conversation revealed a different focus: a tension between the collective memory of German colonial atrocities and today's urgent political and economic concerns.

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The Perceived Effects of Climate Change

*on Women's Empowerment in
the Seaweed Farming Industry of
Bagamoyo District, Tanzania*

ELLA WILSHIRE

Abstract

This study examines the perceived impacts of climate change on the predominantly women-run seaweed farming industry and its implications for women's empowerment in Bagamoyo, Tanzania. The study has two specific objectives: to examine the effects of climate change on seaweed farming and to assess the perceived impacts of climate change on women's empowerment in the industry. Data is collected from four all-women seaweed farming groups, with findings revealing widespread perceived negative impacts of climate change on seaweed farming. Perceived changing coastal conditions as well as weather patterns disrupt seaweed yield and health, limiting women's economic security and social empowerment within communities.

Introduction

The predominantly women-led seaweed farming industry of Tanzania is a crucial component to the sustainable development of coastal socio-economic systems.¹ Tanzanian seaweed exportation began in the early 1930s and since has gained status as a focus crop in the country's value-addition sector.² Commercial farming of seaweed began in Zanzibar in 1989 with the cultivation of *Kappaphycus alvarezii* (commercially known as cottonii) and *Eucheuma denticulatum* (commercially known as spinosum) imported from the Philippines.³ Currently, species of cottonii and spinosum have emerged as predominant crops on the islands of Zanzibar and 11 mainland regions, including Bagamoyo.⁴

The growing seaweed farming industry employs over 80% women, challenging the traditionally male-dominated business sectors by positioning women as key contributors to income generation.

Seaweed is cultivated in intertidal or subtidal areas in Bagamoyo and harvested through shallow water techniques as displayed in image 1.⁵ 'Tie tie' is a common shallow water farming technique (*Figure 1*) where seaweed seedlings are tied to lines using small nylon ropes with the main lines stretched between two sticks anchored in the seafloor.⁶ The seaweed grows between the lines floating in the water above

the sea floor. Crops are harvested after growth periods ranging from 45 days to three months, with a portion of the yield kept to grow in future cultivation cycles.⁷

Figure 1. Peg and Line Seaweed Farming Technique in Bagamoyo



The expanding consumer demand for seaweed is largely beneficial to seaweed farmers as the industry has long-term growth potential expected to increase at a compound annual growth rate of 9.1% through 2027.⁸ Emerging sectors of seaweed hold significant potential to strengthen Tanzania's economy, with new markets such as bio stimulants, animal feed, and methane-reducing applications projected to reach a global value of \$4.4 billion by 2030.⁹ In Bagamoyo, economic revenue from seaweed is primarily generated through the development of conventional and novel cosmeceutical products.

The growing seaweed farming industry employs over 80% women, challenging the traditionally

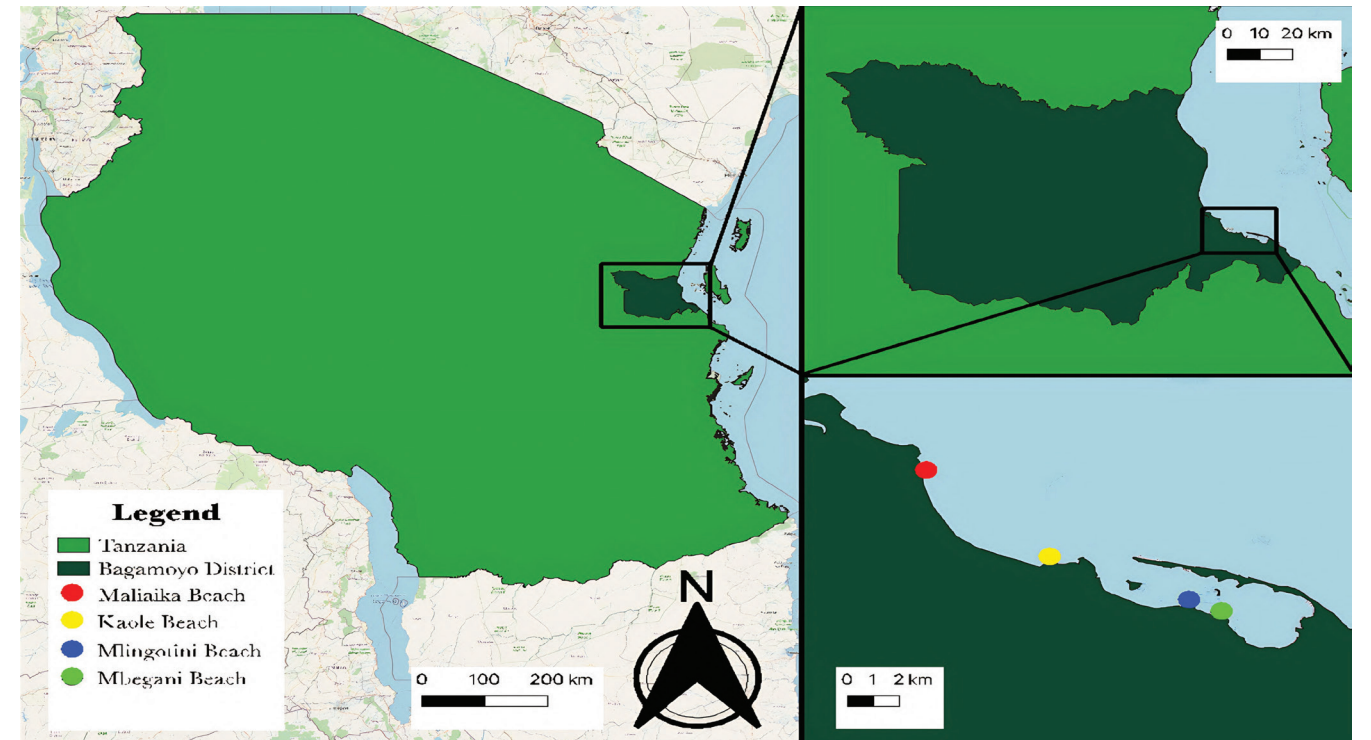


Figure 2. Map of Bagamoyo District and Four Study Site Beaches

male-dominated business sectors by positioning women as key contributors to income generation.¹⁰ Seaweed farming expands opportunities for women by fostering knowledge-based empowerment, strengthening respected roles in communities, and enhancing economic autonomy.¹¹ Information transmission via traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is leveraged by women seaweed cultivators producing productive seaweed farming techniques resulting in a high crop yield with minimal environmental impacts.¹² The integration of women into a respected economic sector perpetuates gendered structural transformations by positioning women in breadwinning positions in Bagamoyo.¹³

Bagamoyo's coastlines are increasingly vulnerable to climate change, with local communities reporting significant impacts on coastal livelihoods.¹⁴ The

majority of recent studies surrounding the effects of climate change on seaweed farming and women's empowerment are focused on Zanzibar.¹⁵ This study aims to expand existing bodies of literature relating to the perceived social and ecological impacts of climate change on mainland Tanzanian coastlines seaweed farming industries.¹⁶ The main objective of this study is to assess the perceived effects of climate change on seaweed farming and the perceived implications of climate change on the empowerment of women seaweed farmers in the Bagamoyo district. A limitation of this study is the language barrier between Kiswahili and English. Data collection, in the form of interviews, was conducted in Kiswahili with a translator and subsequently translated after the conversation, potentially affecting shared understandings of the nuance or depth of participant responses.

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Methodology

Bagamoyo is located 65 km north of Dar es Salaam in Eastern Tanzania's Pwani region on the Coast of the Indian Ocean.¹⁷ The area spans 945 square kilometers with a fast-growing population projected to increase from 212,889 in 2023 to 366,508 in 2050.¹⁸ Bagamoyo provides ideal conditions for seaweed cultivation with an intertidal area including flowing water, sandy ocean floor, and knee-deep water during low tide.¹⁹ Women-led seaweed farming has emerged alongside fishing as a crucial economic activity in the area, contributing to local income generation and community resilience.²⁰ This study includes four seaweed farming locations: Maliaka Beach, Kaole Beach, Mbegani Beach, and Mlingotini Beach. The Bagamoyo Entrepreneurs Group cultivates seaweed on Maliaka Beach, located in the Magomeni locality, situated roughly 30 meters off the shoreline, behind a planted mangrove forest in a sheltered inland area with a soft sandy sea floor.²¹ Kaole beach is utilized by the Cucumber & Seaweed Farming Group, located at a midpoint between Malaika and Mbegani beach (Figure 1) with the seaweed farm being free-standing and positioned adjacent to a cucumber farm enclosure with a muddy ocean floor. The Msichoke and Nasi Tumo group farm at Mbegani Bay situated 400 meters adjacent to each other (Figure 2) in a shallow sheltered lagoon protected by reefs with a maximum depth of eight meters consistently knee-deep water at low tide, and a sandy seabed.²²

A qualitative multi-site case study design is employed to examine the perceived effects of climate change on seaweed farming and women empowerment across four groups, with data collection spanning from April 14-15, 2025. Purposive non-probability sampling is utilized to interview a total of 13 women across the four groups with common criteria of active

involvement in the cultivation and production of seaweed in Bagamoyo. This study utilizes group semi-structured interviews, dyadic interviews, and participant observations. The semi-structured group-based interview structure, ranging from 3 to 4 women, aims to reflect the social and collaborative nature of seaweed farming, predominantly being conducted in small group settings with various women working on one plot. Three participants were interviewed from the Bagamoyo Entrepreneurs Group, including the chair member and two members. Four women were interviewed from the Msichoke Group, including the secretary, the vice chairperson, and two members. Lastly, four members were interviewed from the Nasi Tumo Group. A dyadic interview was conducted with the chair member of the group and a general member from the Cucumber & Seaweed Farming Group. These differing leadership positions contribute to a more nuanced understanding, allowing for direct examination of the effects and perceptions of climate change from both leadership and community-level perspectives. The observer-as-participant method was utilized to become immersed in the farming and production process to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the farming, community interactions, and cosmetic production.²³

Participants were fully briefed on the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any time without consequence.²⁴ Informed consent was obtained in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner, certifying participants understand the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and how their responses are utilized.²⁵ The study respected local customs, practices, and cultural sensitivities with a particular emphasis on gender dynamics.

Results

Cottonii (Figure 3) and Spinosum (Figure 4) species are cultivated in Bagamoyo and harvested through shallow water hand-harvesting techniques.



Figure 3. Cottonii Seaweed species on an underwater line at Mlingotini Beach



Figure 4. Spinosum Seaweed species on an underwater line at Mlingotini Beach

There are various reported perceived effects of climate change on seaweed farming across the four groups. The Bagamoyo Entrepreneurs Group, Nasi Tumo Group, and Msichoke group expressed concern relating to high sea surface: "Hot weather and increased sunny days increase the water temperature and destroy the seaweed."²⁶ The Spinosum and Cottonii seaweed species were reported to have shorter growing seasons and increased rotting.²⁷ Responses document the negative impacts of rising ocean temperatures. "The seaweed rots on sunny hot days when the temperature is too high."²⁸ The Nasi Tumo group, the Cucumber & Seaweed Farming Group, and the Bagamoyo Entrepreneurs Group identified rainfall conditions outside the typical rainy season as a concern for seaweed farming. Nasi Tumo group and Cucumber & Seaweed Farming group cited increased heavy wind patterns, particularly coming from the north, resulting in losses of entire farms due to seaweed lines becoming dislodged from the sand. Msichoke group and Nasi Tumo group identified increased intensity of tides and currents as a growing threat to seaweed

26 Nasi Tumo Group Member 2, personal communication, April 15, 2025.

27 Nasi Tumo Group Member 1, personal communication, April 15, 2025.

28 Msichoke Group Member 1, personal communication, April 15, 2025.

cultivation. Heightened waves and levels of low or high tides disrupt productive traditional seaweed farming techniques.²⁹

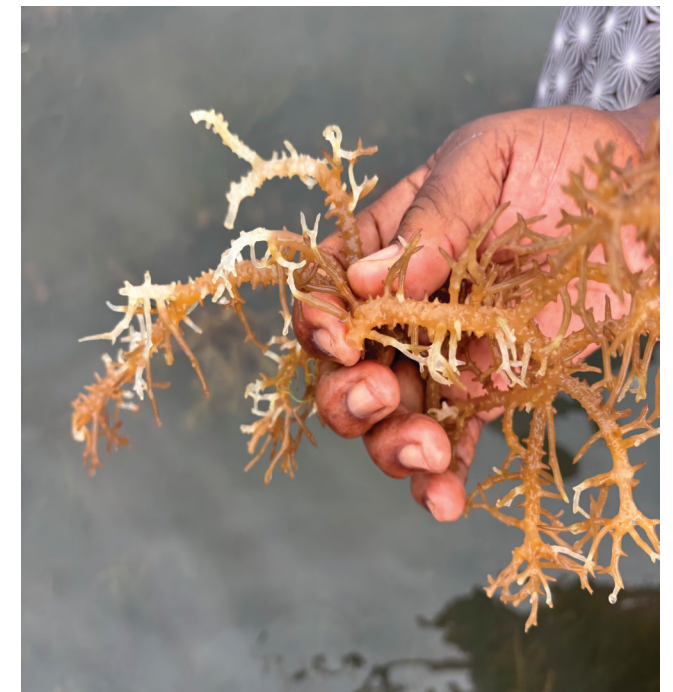


Figure 5. Bleaching of seaweed

Freshwater intrusion from rivers is posing threats reported by the Cucumber & Seaweed Farming Group, Msichoke Group, and Bagamoyo Entrepreneurs Group. As asserted, "The biggest challenge we face is the change in ocean water caused by rivers spreading freshwater into the mangrove and seaweed farming areas. Last year, the river overflowed and flowed into the ocean, which destroyed all our seaweed. We had to buy new seeds from Bagamoyo to start over."³⁰ Entire farms are being destroyed by this climatic occurrence.³¹ Coastal erosion is impacting the Nasi Tumo Group and the Cucumber & Seaweed Farming group with compounding effects contributing to increased saltwater intrusion and changing coastline composition.

29 Msichoke Group Member 1, personal communication, April 15, 2025; Nasi Tumo Group Member 3, personal communication, April 14, 2025.

30 Bagamoyo Seaweed Farming Group Member 3, personal communication, April 14, 2025.

31 Bagamoyo Seaweed Farming Group Member 3, personal communication, April 14, 2025.

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23 Lisa M Given, *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008).

24 Hadjer Mirza, Fouzi Bellalem, and Chahrazed Mirza, "Ethical Considerations in Qualitative Research: Summary Guidelines for Novice Social Science Researchers," *Social Studies and Research Journal*, May 17, 2023.

25 Ibid.



Figure 6. Skin Jelly, Soap, and Dried Seaweed made from Bagamoyo Entrepreneurs Group

Increased bleaching (Figure 5), fungus, decomposition, and diseases such as ice-ice are reported as apparent threats to seaweed health.³² Bleaching emerges as the most frequently reported issue across all four groups often resulting from ice-ice disease or fungus.

Reduced seaweed productivity, yield, and health resulting from perceived effects of climate change negatively affect women's empowerment. Bleached and diseased seaweed limits production of food and cosmetic products reducing income generation activities for women. The ability to produce high-quality seaweed products has declined due to the impacts of climate change.³³ Despite the increased external support of training sessions for farmers and market availability, the overall production of seaweed has decreased due to climate change.³⁴ If a single plant becomes diseased, a full harvest is often required to prevent the spread which is time-consuming and

32 Nasi Tumo Group Member 1, personal communication, April 15, 2025; Cucumber & Seaweed Farming Group Member 2, personal communication, April 14, 2025; Bagamoyo Entrepreneurs Group 3, personal communication, April 14, 2025; Msichoke Group Member 4, personal communication, April 15, 2025; Bagamoyo Entrepreneurs Group Member 2; Nasi Tumo Group Member 2, personal communication, April 15, 2025; Cucumber & Seaweed Farming Group Member 1, personal communication, April 14, 2025; Nasi Tumo Group Member 3, personal communication, April 15, 2025.

33 Nasi Tumo group Member 4, personal communication; Cucumber & Seaweed Farming Group, Member 2, personal communications, April 14-15, 2025

34 Bagamoyo Entrepreneurs Group.

reduces overall profits.³⁵ Early decay forces groups relying on their own seeds for regeneration face additional expenses to replace lost seed stock.³⁶



Figure 7. Soap, Oil, and Dried Seaweed Products Produced by Msichoke Group

Qualitative findings assessing the perceived impacts of climate change on women seaweed farmers' empowerment conclude the majority of women in the four groups acknowledge the impacts of climate change on their farms while relying on seaweed farming as a source of income and a sense of increased empowerment. Collective responses across the four groups highlighted empowerment derived from the economic revenue generated through products made from harvested *Kappaphycus alvarezii* (*cottonii*) and *Eucheuma denticulatum* (*spinosum*). The Nasi Tumo group exclusively manufactures sea moss powder. The Cucumber & Seaweed Farming Group and Bagamoyo Entrepreneurs Group produce jelly, lotions, and soaps sold locally (Figure 6). The Msichoke group makes oil, jellies, soaps, and dried seaweed for eating, selling their products at markets in Bagamoyo, Arusha, and Dar es Salaam (Figure 7).

Opportunities for women to lead trainings or workshops, combined with direct income generation, fosters increased empowerment, heightened public

35 Nasi Tumo Group Member 3, personal communication, April 15, 2025.

36 Msichoke Group.

status, and integration into the community.³⁷ The Nasi Tumo group did not identify a strong sense of empowerment, potentially due to the group's sole focus on the production of sea moss powder, which limits income generation.³⁸

Figure 1 displays economic reliance on seaweed farming, 5 being high reliance and 0 being low reliance. The overall high reliance underscores the severe impact of increasing climate-related challenges, resulting in declines of seaweed production. The Nasi Tumo group with the highest reliance did not report a sense of empowerment, highlighting a potential disconnect between economic dependence and perceived empowerment.³⁹

Discussion

Results demonstrate a perceived correlation between the impacts of climate change on coastal ecosystems and challenges facing seaweed cultivation. Intertidal coastal areas which support seaweed cultivation are dynamic ecosystems characterized by both short- and long-term variability in tidal range, fluctuating salinity levels, and shifting temperatures.⁴⁰ Compounding effects of climate change increase health complications for seaweed as "survival, growth, and reproduction are known to vary with numerous climatically sensitive environmental variables."⁴¹ Commonly used *Eucheuma* and *Kappaphycus* seeds imported from the Philippines have limited genetic diversity, furthering vulnerability to diseases and pests such as ice-ice syndrome and epiphytes.⁴² The predominant farming technique in Bagamoyo of shallow water seaweed cultivation heightens exposure to the increasing effects of climate change.⁴³

The warming of the Indian Ocean throughout the twentieth century can be attributed to human-induced climate change.⁴⁴ Ocean warming threatens

37 Msichoke Group Member 2, personal communication, April 15, 2025; Cucumber & Seaweed Farming Group, Member 3 personal communication, April 14, 2025.

38 Nasi Tumo Group, Member 2, personal communication, April 15, 2025.

39 Nasi Tumo Group, personal communication, April 15, 2025.

40 Patrick Faulkner et al., "Human-Ecodynamics and the Intertidal Zones of the Zanzibar Archipelago," *Frontiers in Earth Science* 10 (October 3, 2022).

41 Christopher Harley et al., "Effects of Climate Change on Global Seaweed Communities," ResearchGate, July 2012.

42 Matoju et al., "A Resilience Lens to Explore Seaweed Farmers' Responses to the Impacts of Climate Change in Tanzania," 1-17.

43 Ibid.

44 Caroline C. Ummenhofer et al., "Heat and Freshwater Changes in the Indian

seaweed health by increasing physiological stress, reducing performance, and heightening vulnerability to additional stressors.⁴⁵ Rising temperatures have the potential to create compounding effects such as solar radiation, desiccation stress, and eutrophication, ultimately pushing species beyond their lethal thermal limits, causing cellular or subcellular damage.⁴⁶ Seaweed species exceeding lethal thermal limits pose a multitude of threats, including the inability to reproduce, coupled with reduced abundance of species and susceptibility to bleaching or disease.⁴⁷

Wind patterns in Tanzania are correlated with northerly and southerly monsoon wind systems, influenced by seasonal shifts in the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ).⁴⁸ Intensifying wind patterns are directly linked to the tidal and wave-related challenges reported by local seaweed farmers in Bagamoyo. The ITCZ also controls the rain seasons in Africa and is sensitive to changes in the Indian Ocean Sea Surface Temperatures and fluctuations perpetuated by climate change.⁴⁹ The ITCZ is weakening across Tanzania, affecting convergence of monsoon wind systems as well as the start and cessation of the rainy season.⁵⁰

Coastal erosion and sea level rise are leading to shoreline changes, including a decrease in beach areas and disappearance of indigenous trees such as *Casuarina*, *Coconut*, and *Terminalia*.⁵¹ Sea level rise has the potential to cause increased coastal erosion, saline intrusions, floods, and increased occurrences of extreme events, including tropical storms.⁵² Freshwater river intrusion is observed at most of the surveyed beaches in Bagamoyo, originating from river deltas along the

Ocean Region," *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment* 2, no. 8 (July 20, 2021): 525-41.

45 Thomas Wernberg et al., "Decreasing Resilience of Kelp Beds along a Latitudinal Temperature Gradient: Potential Implications for a Warmer Future," *Ecology Letters* 13, no. 6 (April 16, 2010): 685-94.

46 Sandra C. Straub et al., "Resistance, Extinction, and Everything in between - the Diverse Responses of Seaweeds to Marine Heatwaves," *Frontiers in Marine Science* 6 (December 13, 2019).

47 Ibid.

48 N Nyandwi, "The Major Cause of Observed Erosion Surge on the Beaches North of Dar Es Salaam City," *Tanzania Journal of Science* 36 (2019).

49 Philbert Modest Luhunga, "Projected Changes in Climate Extremes over Tanzania," *Scientific Reports* 15, no. 1 (January 2, 2025); Golden Melkiory Kavishe and Paul Tilwebwa Shelleph Limbu, "Variation of October to December Rainfall in Tanzania and Its Association with Sea Surface Temperature," *Arabian Journal of Geosciences* 13, no. 13 (June 23, 2020).

50 Luhunga, "Projected Changes in Climate Extremes over Tanzania," 1-15.

51 Mushi and Kangalawe, "Climate Change Impacts on Coastal Resources Used as Tourist Attractions and Vulnerability of Coastal Tourism: A Case of Bagamoyo District, Tanzania," 1-21.

52 S.B. Mahongo, J Francis, and S.E. Osima, "Wind Patterns of Coastal Tanzania: Their Variability and Trends" 10, no. 2 (October 1, 2012): 107-20.

coastline. This intrusion is influenced by increased rainfall, erosion-related flooding, regional sea level fluctuations driven by changing ocean circulation, and intensified wind events and storm surges.⁵³ These compounding effects greatly affect seaweed growth and health.

Increased rainfall patterns, erosion, and freshwater river intrusions have direct effects on ocean salinity levels.⁵⁴ Salinity variances occur from dilution or concentration of fresh water entering a saltwater ecosystem.⁵⁵ Salinity levels in seaweed farming areas are increasingly diluted due to heightened rainfall and freshwater river intrusion, falling outside the optimal range of 25.3–36.5 ppt required for healthy seaweed growth.⁵⁶ Changes in salinity affects seaweed at a cellular level through osmotic stress, ion stress, and ionic imbalance.⁵⁷ These detrimental effects are destructive for the health of seaweed, fostering heightened vulnerability to diseases.⁵⁸

All four groups identified bleaching of seaweed as a major implication from the perceived effects of climate change. Bleaching of seaweed is caused by increased sea surface temperatures which affects the blade tissue of the plant creating loss of surface integrity and resulting in discoloration.⁵⁹ Lowered chlorophyll concentrations causes seaweed species to become bleached of pigment, reducing the ability to photosynthesize.⁶⁰ Consistently reported with seaweed and kelp species, increased temperatures contribute to accelerated decomposition rates of seaweed species, causing premature die-off.⁶¹ The resulting decomposition increases concentrations of organic matter and nitrogen and phosphorus-based heavy

metals in water sediments.⁶² Seaweed is prematurely decomposing, which creates large-scale die-offs, creating farm-wide destruction.

Ice-ice is a non-infectious disease triggered by both abiotic and biotic factors, primarily driven by elevated temperatures, low salinity levels, and marine-derived fungi.⁶³ Rising temperatures increase the occurrence of ice-ice disease, causing the base of the seaweed thallus to bleach, soften, and eventually disintegrate.⁶⁴ Dis-

A sense of empowerment is consistent with broader literature surrounding seaweed farming in Zanzibar, which highlights seaweed cultivation as a pathway to improved quality of life and economic empowerment for women.

eases such as ice-ice are detrimental to seaweed health; “ice-ice disease...could be brought on by adverse environmental factors like severe temperature, pH, salinity, and opportunistic bacterial infections like *Vibrio* species. Epiphyte outbreaks with concurrent IID can result in 25–75% harvest losses or worse.⁶⁵

The high level of concern reported among seaweed farmers in Bagamoyo underscores the widespread awareness of climate-related stressors and their impacts on seaweed farming. This awareness aligns with findings from a recent study in Zanzibar, where 60% of seaweed farmers demonstrated an

53 Ming Li and Hans Burchard, “Oceanic Salt Intrusion into Tidal Freshwater Rivers (Saltwater),” 2024.

54 D. M. Talley and T. S. Talley, “Salinity,” ed. Sven Erik Jørgensen and Brian D. Fath, ScienceDirect (Oxford: Academic Press, January 1, 2008).

55 Ibid.

56 Ridwan Bohari and Musbir Musbir, “Seaweed Production Based on the Distance of Culture Location from River Mouth and Oceanographic Factors,” *IOP Conference Series Earth and Environmental Science* 1119, no. 1 (December 1, 2022): 012007–7.

57 Manoj Kumar et al., “Salinity and Desiccation Induced Oxidative Stress Acclimation in Seaweeds,” *Advances in Botanical Research* 71 (January 1, 2014): 91–123.

58 Ibid.

59 Straub et al., Resistance, Extinction, and Everything in between – the Diverse Responses of Seaweeds to Marine Heatwaves,” 1–13.

60 Ezequiel M. Marzinelli et al., “Continental-Scale Variation in Seaweed Host-Associated Bacterial Communities Is a Function of Host Condition, Not Geography,” *Environmental Microbiology* 17, no. 10 (August 4, 2015): 4078–88.

61 Karen Filbee-Dexter et al., “Kelp Carbon Sink Potential Decreases with Warming due to Accelerating Decomposition,” ed. Andrew J. Tanentzap, *PLoS Biology* 20, no. 8 (August 4, 2022): e3001702.

62 Hongtian Luo et al., “Biomass Decomposition and Heavy Metal Release from Seaweed Litter, *Gracilaria Lemaneiformis*, and Secondary Pollution Evaluation,” *Journal of Environmental Management* 310 (May 2022).

63 Marzinelli, “Continental-Scale Variation in Seaweed Host-Associated Bacterial Communities Is a Function of Host Condition, Not Geography,” 4078–88; Albaris B Tahiluddin and Ertugrul Terzi, “Ice-Ice Disease Prevalence and Intensity in Eucheumatoid Seaweed Farms: Seasonal Variability and Relationship with the Physicochemical and Meteorological Parameters,” *Plants* 13, no. 15 (August 3, 2024): 2157–57.

64 Georgia M. Ward et al., “Ice Ice Disease: An Environmentally and Microbiologically Driven Syndrome in Tropical Seaweed Aquaculture,” *Reviews in Aquaculture* 14, no. 1 (August 20, 2021): 414–39.

65 Khan, “Macroalgae Farming for Sustainable Future: Navigating Opportunities and Driving Innovation,” 2.

understanding of varying climate stressors and their effects on seaweed production.⁶⁶ In response, women in Zanzibar have implemented mitigation strategies to address threats to the health of their seaweed species.⁶⁷ The expressed concern in Bagamoyo reflects both local experience and broader regional patterns, highlighting the urgency of addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by the climate crisis on seaweed farming livelihoods.

Natural-based livelihoods in Bagamoyo are shaped by gendered asymmetrical entitlements to resources resulting from “de facto or de jure rights, exclusive or shared, primary or secondary, ownership or use.”⁶⁸ Patriarchal ideologies shape gendered access to information, knowledge, resources, and technologies that are critical for improving livelihoods. Feminist political ecology (FPE) framework emphasizes the disproportionate effects of climate change not as a neutral process but rather as emerging through political processes deeply shaped by gender.⁶⁹ FPE is essential when examining issues related to women and natural resource-based livelihoods, as “gender has lost its critical and politicized edge within mainstream natural resource management.”⁷⁰ The growing impacts of climate change on the seaweed farming industry are increasing the vulnerability of women relying on seaweed cultivation for income and empowerment with limited career mobility due to patriarchal norms.⁷¹

The sustainability and viability of seaweed farming as a source of income and self-reliance are increasingly threatened as environmental conditions shift. Women’s empowerment is categorized into economic and social factors. The majority of women in this study report experiencing both economic and social empowerment through the industry, while also identifying climate change as a significant threat to these gains. A sense of empowerment is consistent with

66 Venance E Kalumanga, “209 Understanding Perceptions of Climate Stressors and Mitigation Measures Employed by Women Seaweed Farmers in South District of Zanzibar, Tanzania,” *Journal of Policy and Development Studies* 15, no. 1 (May 6, 2024): 209–32.

67 Ibid.

68 Barbara Thomas-Slyter, Esther Wangari, and Dianne Rocheleau, “Crosscutting Themes, Theoretical Insights, Policy Implications,” 2013: 291.

69 Rebecca Elmhirst, “Feminist Political Ecology,” *ResearchGate*, 2016.

70 Ibid, 520.

71 Matoju et al., “A Resilience Lens to Explore Seaweed Farmers’ Responses to the Impacts of Climate Change in Tanzania,” 1–17.

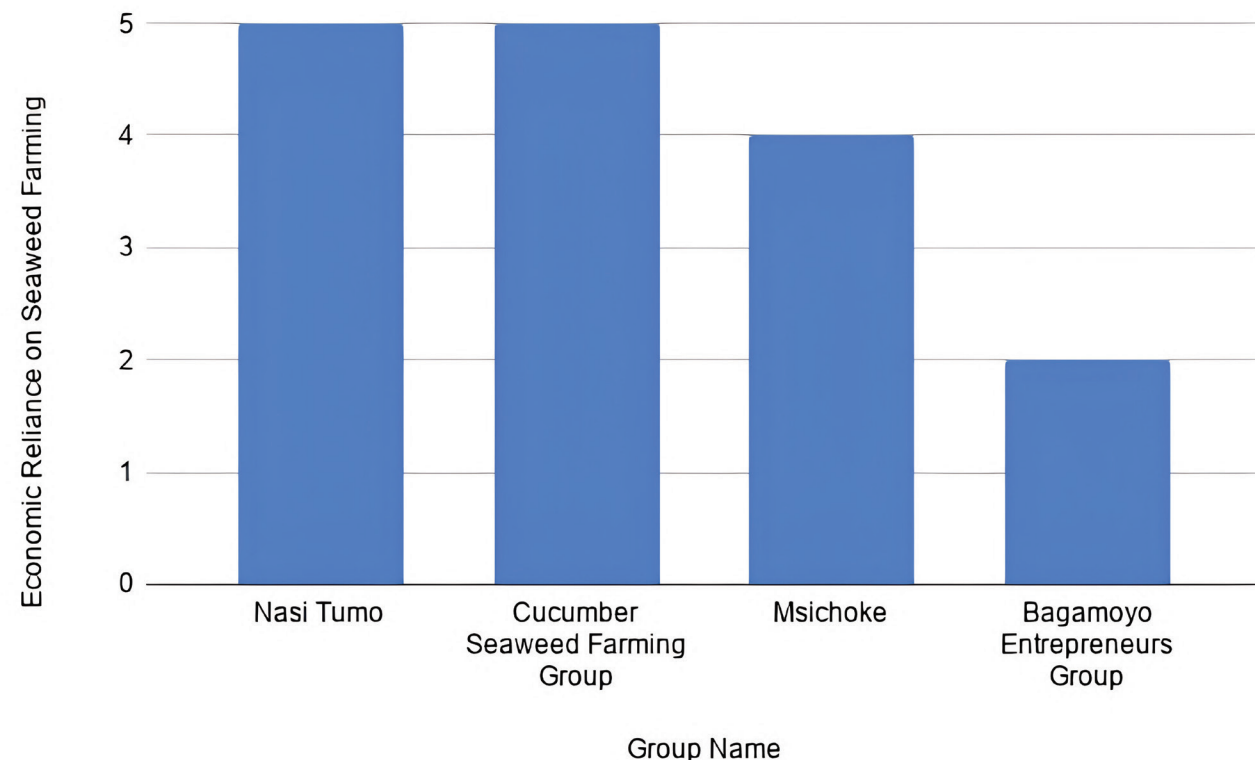
broader literature surrounding seaweed farming in Zanzibar, which highlights seaweed cultivation as a pathway to improved quality of life and economic empowerment for women.⁷²

Three out of four groups report economic empowerment through the generation of sustainable income and express a sense of pride in involvement with the market. Economic generation for women can be crucial to establishing independence and autonomy, allowing freedom for individual choices or actions. Although most groups identified seaweed farming as a source of empowerment, the Nasi Tumo group expressed disagreement, citing limited market access and an inability to sell sufficient products to generate a sustainable income. This may be because their sales are limited to sea moss powder, which generates less income compared to selling a variety of seaweed-based products. Economic revenue through seaweed products is generated locally within Bagamoyo, with the volume of seaweed production being insufficient to meet the demands of international exportation. In contrast, seaweed farms in Zanzibar sell raw seaweed to local buyers for international exportation for large-scale processing and production.⁷³ Seaweed farms relying on international sales are subject to fluctuating export prices based on global market conditions. Exportation provides additional pathways for income as limited local infrastructure constrains large-scale domestic production of carrageenan.

The results indicate that seaweed farming contributes to social empowerment for the majority of groups, with benefits including enhanced public status and leadership opportunities. However, the extent of empowerment is tied to the profitability and diversity of seaweed products. Groups with limited market access or lower-value products, such as sea moss powder, reported lower levels of empowerment. These findings highlight that while seaweed farming can be a powerful tool for women’s empowerment, its effectiveness is shaped by product viability, market integration, and broader environmental and economic conditions.

72 Msuya and Hurtado, “The Role of Women in Seaweed Aquaculture in the Western Indian Ocean and South-East Asia,” 484.

73 Flower E Msuya, “Seaweed Farming in Tanzania: Farming Processes and Interactions between Farmers and Other Stakeholders,” *Proceedings of National Stakeholders Workshop on Establishment of an Innovation Systems and Clusters Programme in Tanzania*, January 24, 2005.



Graph 1. Average rating of economic dependence on seaweed farming for income generation for the four study groups. One being no dependence and five being complete dependence.

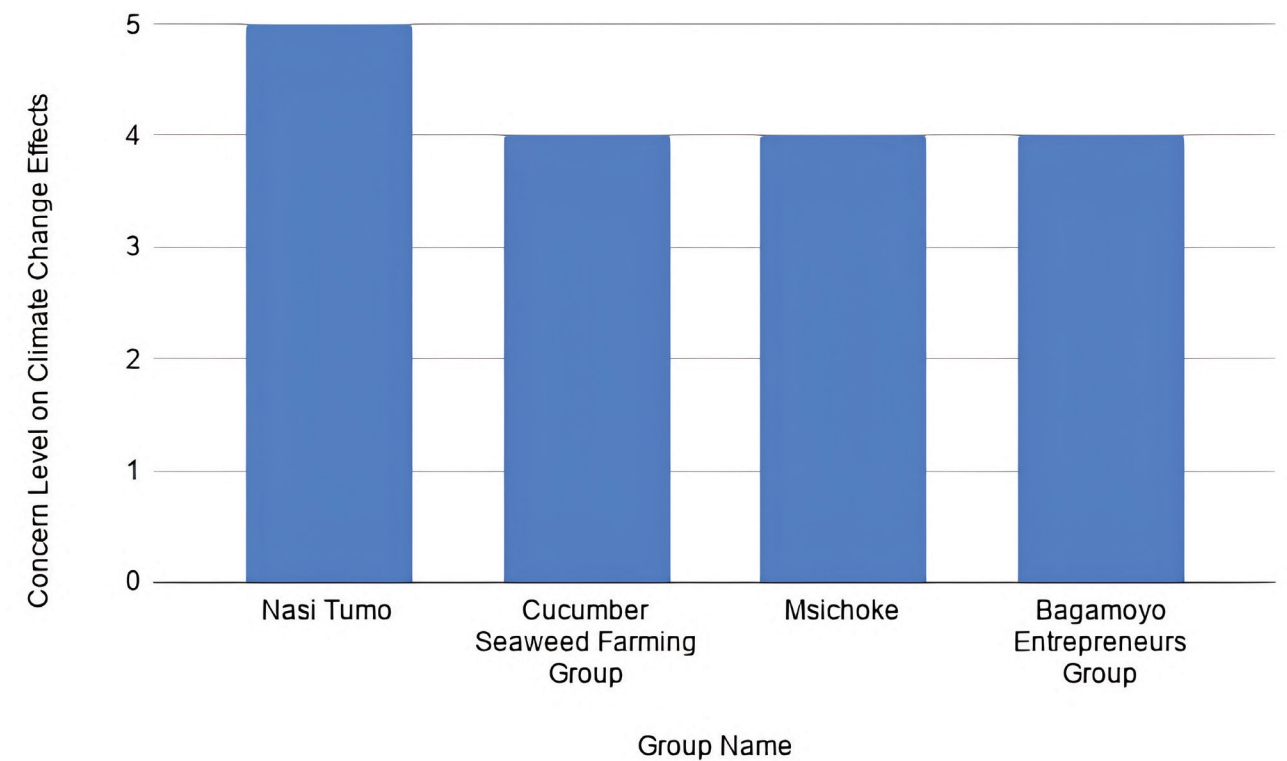
The relationship between climate change impacts, economic reliance, and concern levels further illustrates how environmental stressors shape women's experiences in the natural based livelihood of seaweed farming. The Bagamoyo Entrepreneurs group has the lowest economic reliance on seaweed (Graph 1) but had a high concern level (Graph 2) and reported five effects of climate change affecting their farm. The Cucumber & Seaweed Farming group identified high economic reliance (Graph 1) and high concern level (Graph 2). Nasi Tumo had both high concern level (Graph 2) and high economic reliance (Graph 1). The Msichoke rated a concern level of 4 (Graph 2) and high economic reliance (Graph 1).

The data suggest a strong relationship between the number of climate change effects experienced, the level of economic reliance on seaweed farming, and the degree of concern expressed by women in these groups. Groups with higher economic dependence on seaweed farming reported heightened climate change impacts and concern for the industry. This illustrates

that women who rely on seaweed farming are both aware of and vulnerable to the environmental stressors caused by climate change. The Bagamoyo Entrepreneurs Group, despite having the lowest economic reliance on seaweed farming, still expressed high concern and identified multiple climate change effects impacting their farm. This suggests that the impacts of climate change are evident and concerning even to those who do not fully depend on seaweed farming for their livelihoods, highlighting the widespread and visible nature of environmental disruptions across all groups. It can be inferred that climate change is diminishing forms of social and economic empowerment by threatening seaweed cultivation.

Conclusion

The effects of the climate crisis impact oceanic ecosystems, which pose a multitude of issues affecting the health of seaweed. Women-led seaweed farming groups in the Bagamoyo District are increasingly experiencing the impacts of climate change affecting their livelihoods. These challenges are particularly



Graph 2. Average concern ratings for the impacts of climate change on seaweed health across the four study groups. One being no concern and five being the highest concern.

concerning for women who depend on seaweed farming as a primary source of income. The most common direct issues relating to seaweed farming are identified as bleaching, decomposition, and ice-ice disease, caused by changing oceanic conditions due to the climate crisis. The majority of groups also report experiencing a sense of economic and community-level social empowerment. The findings of this research highlight that the global climate crisis is a multifaceted issue that is unequally affecting people relying on natural resources for their livelihoods at a fast rate. Despite the extremity and issues created by climate change, most seaweed farming groups expressed hope for the future of seaweed farming through local government support, training opportunities, growing markets, and technological advancements.

Reported challenges included a lack of technical equipment for safe and effective harvesting, such as appropriate footwear, including boots (Nasi Tumo Group Member 2, personal communications, April 15, 2025). Based on the results of this study, it is

essential to raise awareness of the unequal impacts of shifting ocean conditions on social and environmental levels. Expanded bodies of literature and raised awareness about this topic are crucial to increase support for adaptation strategies, ensuring consistent government funding, and improved access to technological resources and technical equipment. Future research should further explore Tanzania's mainland coastal areas, which have received less attention than the larger farms in Zanzibar while facing similar climate-related challenges.

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Interações Entre Movimentos

*De Niterói Com As Instituições Do
Estado E A Sociedade Brasileira*

ISAK BARRERA

Abstract

This article analyzes the actions of LGBT+ movements in Niterói, Brazil, focusing on their interactions with state institutions, political parties, and civil society organizations. Based on a literature review and semi-structured interviews with local activists, it examines strategies of political influence, institutional barriers, and the impact of public policies on social inclusion. The findings indicate that, despite normative advances and significant initiatives, policy effectiveness remains limited due to political dependency, internal movement fragmentation, and the rise of conservatism. Judicial activism emerges as a central strategy for protecting rights, while grassroots collectives continue to provide direct support to vulnerable populations. The study highlights both the potential and limits of local institutionalization of LGBT+ agendas, emphasizing the need to strengthen participatory mechanisms, enhance representation, and ensure administrative continuity of diversity policies.

Desde o processo de redemocratização do Brasil, houve uma crescente representação e participação política da comunidade LGBTQ+, o que indicaria uma melhoria nas condições da comunidade. Nas últimas décadas, o país tem sido palco tanto de avanços progressistas significativos — como a equiparação da homofobia ao racismo pelo Supremo Tribunal Federal (STF) e políticas nacionais de saúde voltadas a pessoas trans — quanto de reações conservadoras intensas contra a chamada “ideologia de gênero”. Ao examinar de que modo redes ativistas interagem com as diferentes instituições nacionais, este estudo busca compreender de que maneira os movimentos sociais atuam como empreendedores de políticas públicas: isto é, como traduzem demandas de base em legislação, programas administrativos e reformas institucionais.

O estudo tem como objetivos identificar as estratégias utilizadas por movimentos LGBTQ+ para influenciar políticas de diversidade e programas de inclusão; analisar como atores governamentais respondem, resistem a, ou incorporam essas demandas; avaliar se tais políticas públicas produzem inclusão social efetiva ou se permanecem predominantemente simbólicas. Para isso, o estudo conta com as seguintes perguntas norteadoras: 1) Como organizações LGBTQ+ no Brasil interagem com formuladores de políticas públicas e instituições estatais para promover políticas inclusivas? 2) Quais fatores políticos ou institucionais facilitam ou limitam sua influência? 3) Como ativistas e formuladores de políticas públicas avaliam os resultados sociais dessas políticas?

Há uma vasta literatura que estuda a relação entre os movimentos LGBTQ+ e o Estado, inclusive no que diz respeito aos partidos políticos.¹ Porém, dado que as relações político-sociais estão em constante mudança, é importante a contínua produção de conhecimentos nessa área.

A análise e a discussão dessa temática se fazem essenciais no contexto político atual, em que o ressurgimento da extrema-direita parece ter decidido que um dos maiores perigos da sociedade moderna é a comunidade

LGBTQ+, causando constantes ataques às nossas áreas do conhecimento, nossas visões do mundo, nossas identidades, e nossos corpos. Além disso, o Brasil, enquanto um dos maiores países do mundo em território e população, abriga uma das mais expressivas populações de pessoas com sexualidades dissidentes do mundo com uma grande mobilização política, e conta com muitas iniciativas e legislações progressistas para defender essas populações. Apesar disso, paradoxalmente, o país também apresenta elevados índices de violência contra essas populações, especialmente as pessoas trans.

O artigo inicia-se por uma breve exposição do contexto histórico, seguida pela metodologia e pelo desenvolvimento. Nele, há uma divisão entre eixos temáticos: Desafios Estruturais e Organizacionais, Redes e Relações Institucionais, Política Partidária, Eleições e a Disputa por Espaço, e Síntese Analítica. Para o aprofundamento da pesquisa, considera-se imprescindível conectar os estudos de gênero e sexualidade à ciência política e às políticas de desenvolvimento, investigando como as questões de igualdade são negociadas dentro das instituições democráticas brasileiras.

1.1. CONTEXTO HISTÓRICO

Como tantos outros países sul-americanos, o Brasil teve uma sangrenta ditadura militar na segunda metade do século XX, caracterizada pela cooperação entre governos ditatoriais sul-americanos no marco do Operativo Condor.² Essas ditaduras inauguraram um processo de reorganização social, em que tudo aquilo que era visto como uma ameaça, deveria ser combatido ou eliminado; o que incluía as pessoas LGBTQ+, pelo fato de se contraporem aos valores tradicionais. O processo de redemocratização foi marcado pela forte presença de movimentos sociais, que até então permaneciam às margens da sociedade e passaram a construir a esfera pública.³ Alguns sociólogos apontam que esse foi um dos períodos mais “frutíferos do ponto de vista da pluralização”, e que se soma à criação do Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), que assumiu um protagonismo na defesa dos direitos LGBTQ+.⁴

2 Samantha Viz Quadrat, “Operação Condor: o ‘Mercosul’ do terror,” *Estudos Ibero-Americanos* 28, no. 1 (2002): 167, <https://doi.org/10.15448/1980-864X.2002.1.23793>.

3 Iago Figueiras, “Movimentos sociais do Brasil: lutas e transformações,” *ICL Notícias*, 26 de setembro de 2025, <https://iclnoticias.com.br/conhecimento/movimentos-sociais-do-brasil/>.

4 Arim Soares do Bem, “A centralidade dos movimentos sociais na articulação entre

1 Luiz Mello et al., “Por onde andam as políticas públicas para a população LGBTQ no Brasil,” *Sociedade e Estado* 27, n. 2 (2012): 289–312, <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-69922012000200005>; Cleyton Feitosa, “Reflexões Teóricas Sobre A Interação Entre Movimento Lgbt+ E Partidos Políticos No Brasil,” *Teoria & Pesquisa: Revista de Ciência Política* 31, n. 3 (2022): 3–23, <https://doi.org/10.31068/tp.310301>.

No início do processo de redemocratização, durante o governo Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC), as políticas estavam relacionadas à crise da HIV/AIDS, mas rapidamente e graças ao diálogo entre o governo e o movimento LGBTQ+, passou-se “a priorizar a reivindicação de políticas públicas voltadas à promoção de [...] cidadania e direitos humanos [...]”⁵. Criou-se em 2001 o Conselho Nacional de Combate à Discriminação, no qual foi articulada a iniciativa “Brasil Sem Homofobia” (BSH), em que nasce essa primeira camada de legislação LGBTQ+. Depois, nos primeiros dois mandatos do presidente Lula (2003-2010), do PT (2003-2011), diversas iniciativas foram criadas para a proteção dos direitos da comunidade. Mello et al. (2012) acreditam que há quatro iniciativas norteadoras nesse período: BSH; 1ra Conferência Nacional LGBTQ; Plano Nacional de Promoção da Cidadania e Direitos Humanos LGBTQ; e Programa Nacional de Direitos Humanos 3.

O processo de redemocratização foi marcado pela forte presença de movimentos sociais, que até então permaneciam às margens da sociedade e passaram a construir a esfera pública.

Muitas das demandas do movimento LGBTQ+ foram atendidas pelo Poder Executivo, o que as limita à vontade política do governo.⁶ É nesse contexto que essa pesquisa se insere, ao questionar a efetividade dessas iniciativas e como elas foram influenciadas pelos ativistas brasileiros.

1.2. O CAMPO DA MILITÂNCIA LGBTQ+ EM NITERÓI

Niterói apresenta características particulares em sua configuração, especialmente se for comparada com as suas vizinhas São Gonçalo e Rio de Janeiro. É muito mais rica do que as duas, com um PIB per capita que é o dobro do Rio de Janeiro, mesmo sendo territorialmente menor que ambas.⁷ Niterói é uma cidade muito influenciada pela presença da Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF) que acolhe cerca de 30.000 estudantes, atraindo uma população jovem e usualmente politizada. O nível de vida é um dos mais altos do Estado do Rio de Janeiro e a cidade destaca-se na sua gestão dos serviços públicos⁸. A cidade é historicamente votante da esquerda, embora a direita tenha tido uma presença destacada nos últimos anos.⁹

Com uma sucessão de governos progressistas, a pauta LGBTQ+ tem ganhado força, convertendo Niterói, por exemplo, na primeira cidade do Estado a ter um Conselho LGBTQ, e uma das primeiras a ter uma vereadora trans.¹⁰ Os movimentos estudantis e a pressão de ativistas locais a tornam uma cidade progressista no contexto regional. Apesar desses aspectos positivos, a militância ainda parece ser necessária, já que seguem havendo relatos de perseguição, a exemplo da vereadora Benny Briolly, que mencionou a necessidade de se exilar devido a ameaças de grupos conservadores. Isso nos mostra que ter uma das Paradas LGBTQ+ mais importantes do Estado não é suficiente e temos ainda bastante trabalho pela frente.¹¹ Essa pesquisa busca entender como podemos melhorar a situação da comunidade LGBTQ+ na cidade.

7 Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, “cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/rj/niteroi”, 22 de dezembro de 2023, <https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/rj/niteroi/panorama>.

8 Prefeitura Municipal de Niterói, “Niterói é destaque em ranking nacional de qualidade de vida,” 5 de julho de 2024, <https://niteroi.rj.gov.br/niteroi-e-destaque-em-ranking-nacional-de-qualidade-de-vida/>.

9 Marcelo Remigio, “Com tradição de esquerda, Niterói tem conservadores entre principais pré-candidatos para 2020,” *O Globo*, 16 de setembro de 2019, <https://oglobo.globo.com/politica/com-tradicao-de-esquerda-niteroi-tem-conservadores-entre-principais-pre-candidatos-para-2020-23950296>.

10 Alessandra Monterastelli, “Niterói é a primeira cidade do Rio de Janeiro a ter um Conselho LGBTQ,” *Vermelho*, 10 de setembro de 2017, <https://www.vermelho.org.br/2017/09/01/niteroi-e-a-primeira-cidade-do-rio-de-janeiro-a-ter-um-conselho-lgbt/>; Jaqueline Deister, “RJ: Benny Briolly, primeira vereadora trans de Niterói, sai do país após ameaças,” *Brasil de Fato*, 14 de maio de 2021, <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2021/05/14/rj-benny-briolly-primeira-vereadora-trans-de-niteroi-sai-do-pais-apos-ameacas/>.

11 Ibid.

o Estado e a sociedade brasileira nos séculos XIX e XX,” *Educação e Sociedade* 27, n. 97 (2006): 1137, citado em Iago Figueiras, “Movimentos sociais do Brasil: lutas e transformações,” *ICL Notícias*, 26 de setembro de 2025, <https://iclnoticias.com.br/conhecimento/movimentos-sociais-do-brasil/>.

5 Luiz Mello, Bruno De Avelar Rezende, and Daniela Maroja, “Por onde andam as políticas públicas para a população LGBTQ no Brasil,” *Sociedade e Estado* 27, n. 2 (2012): 295.

6 Ibid., 307.

2. DESENVOLVIMENTO

2.1. Metodologia

O estudo usa uma abordagem indutiva, baseada na revisão de literatura e entrevistas semiestruturadas.

As entrevistas foram realizadas com ativistas LGBTQ+ que, por terem nascido, crescido ou trabalhado na cidade, possuem uma forte conexão com Niterói. Eles foram informados do propósito das entrevistas e da garantia de seu anonimato. A entrevista número 1 foi com uma equipe que trabalha numa iniciativa do governo que busca garantir os direitos das pessoas LGBTQ+. A entrevista número 2 foi com um ativista que não recebe nenhum apoio do governo, e a entrevista número 3 foi com um ativista que tem muita presença no diálogo entre o Estado e os movimentos LGBTQ+. Portanto, nesse estudo, são consideradas três perspectivas muito diferentes no que diz respeito à posição com/para o Estado.

2.2. DESAFIOS ESTRUTURAIS E ORGANIZACIONAIS

2.2.1. Obstáculos sociais e políticos

Um ponto consensual entre todos os entrevistados é a dificuldade de garantir a proteção dos direitos das pessoas LGBTQ+. Essas dificuldades são complexas e correspondem a diferentes áreas, mas uma das questões mais prevalentes foi a ameaça de movimentos fascistas e a influência de grupos políticos evangélicos. Diz um dos entrevistados: “hoje a gente não está enfrentando o desconhecimento do que é a pauta LGBTQ+, a gente está enfrentando um fascismo, a gente está enfrentando um fundamentalismo religioso muito pior do que tinha antes” (Entrevista 3, 2025)

Assim como em alguns momentos tem sido conveniente para setores políticos defenderem a pauta LGBTQ+, também convém abandonar a comunidade quando ela é atacada. Vertentes fascistas e neofascistas como o bolsonarismo são parte de um fenômeno internacional de reconfiguração do nacionalismo e ultraliberalismo econômico e precisam de um inimigo interno e no nosso tempo esse inimigo constantemente é o movimento LGBTQ+. ¹² O campo dos

direitos LGBTQ+ sempre teve uma respeitabilidade epistemológica muito menor em comparação a outros movimentos sociais, o que não parece ser um déficit intrínseco do campo, mas o resultado de disputas políticas que buscam deslegitimar suas articulações sociais. ¹³ Na Entrevista 1 (2025), essa questão foi expressada assim: “vários movimentos, mesmo às vezes sendo mais jovens, eles têm um reconhecimento mais nítido dos partidos políticos, das pessoas, dos deputados, dos parlamentares e tudo mais, da política em si. O movimento LGBTQ+ não, então ele tem que conquistar um espaço.”

Assim, o movimento LGBTQ+ enfrenta uma batalha multidimensional, na qual se luta pelos direitos da comunidade ao mesmo tempo em que se busca a validação da luta em si. Essa constante disputa coloca o movimento numa situação muito precária e que, com a crescente influência neopentecostal, faz com que seja facilmente trocada por esses votos que são percebidos pelos partidos como mais lucrativos. A impressão geral é que “a busca do apoio evangélico [...] faz com que a nossa pauta seja a pauta que é vendida, que é fácil de você vender” (Entrevista 1, 2025). A pauta LGBTQ+ é mais fácil de vender, porque é um movimento que não gera tanta empatia na sociedade, e é a falta de consenso social que faz com que ela seja um alvo mais vulnerável. ¹⁴ O maior problema da comunidade nesse momento é, pois, a defesa da posicionalidade das pessoas LGBTQ+ na sociedade brasileira frente à crescente influência do conservadorismo manipulado pelas igrejas evangélicas.

Ainda, dentro da comunidade LGBTQ+, dificilmente há um consenso sobre as pautas. A realidade é que é difícil falar de um único movimento LGBTQ+, porque existe uma pluralidade de movimentos com objetivos diferentes, que às vezes levam a agressões intracomunitárias. A parte mais polêmica da pauta é a T, já que é a subcomunidade que mais é rejeitada pelo resto do movimento, sendo que inclusive pessoas trans podem ter posturas muito transfóbicas, como foi expressado na Entrevista 2 (2025): “[...] recentemente, numa

públicas LGBTQIA+ no Brasil: conquistas e retrocessos diante do neoconservadorismo,” *Bagoas – Estudos gays: gêneros e sexualidades* 15, no. 23 (2024): 59–101.

¹³ Rinaldo Walcott, “Outside in Black Studies: Reading from a Queer Place in the Diaspora,” in *Black Queer Studies*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822387220-006>.

¹⁴ Sales Torres e dos Santos Junior, “Políticas públicas LGBTQIA+ no Brasil,” 87.

discussão sobre isso, travesti [...] falando que travesti que tem barba não é travesti.” Um dos maiores problemas da comunidade é que está baseada na identidade das pessoas, e embora haja consensos gerais do que significa ser uma pessoa gay ou trans, por exemplo, sempre há pessoas que têm interpretações próprias. Além disso, existem pessoas LGBTQ+ que até apoiam Bolsonaro, embora ele tenha atacado as suas identidades e existências várias vezes por meio de falas preconceituosas. ¹⁵ A comunidade é instrumentalizada pelos partidos políticos: “essas pessoas utilizam os nossos corpos, a nossa pauta, como moedas de troca política” (Entrevista 3, 2025). Tanto partidos de esquerda quanto de direita aproveitam a pauta para ganhar esse voto, e no caso da direita, por exemplo, ao ter uma quantidade significativa de pessoas LGBTQ+ que a apoiam, os movimentos e partidos de direita conseguem defender a ideia de que eles não são LGBTQ+-fóbicos.

2.2.2. Barreiras institucionais

Fora das tensões internas do movimento e sua busca por validade na sociedade brasileira, existem obstáculos também nas iniciativas propostas pelo Estado. As políticas e programas não chegam a ser encaixes institucionais, que são definidos como:

*“sedimentações institucionais de processos de interação socioestatal que ganham vida própria (artefatos: instrumentos, regras, leis, programas, instâncias, órgãos) e mediante as quais atores sociais são, em alguma medida, bem-sucedidos em dirigir de modo contínuo a seletividade das instituições políticas ao seu favor, ampliando sua capacidade de agir.”*¹⁶

As consequências de não serem encaixes são sentidas pela comunidade. A equipe da Entrevista 1 (2025) diz que “temos uma parceria que é, em aspas, consolidada entre esferas, mas eu, pelo menos, percebo que tem uma dificuldade muito grande de continuidade.” Essa continuidade é comprometida pela rotação natural do sistema democrático, com a eleição de diferentes

¹⁵ Lucas Bulgarelli, “Por que 29% dos LGBTQs votam em Bolsonaro?”, *El País Brasil*, 26 de outubro de 2018, https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/10/27/opinion/1540592921_823943.html.

¹⁶ Adrian Gurza Lavalle et al., “Movimentos sociais e institucionalização: políticas sociais, raça e gênero no Brasil pós-transição,” *Sociedade e Política* (Rio de Janeiro: EdUERJ, 2019), citado em Beatriz Rodrigues Sanchez, “Feminismo Estatal Representativo: Um Conceito Útil Para A Análise Das Interações Entre Os Movimentos Feministas E O Legislativo,” *Revista Feminismos* 11, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.9771/rf.v11i2.57422>.

atores políticos. O problema é que as conexões interinstitucionais acabam sendo destruídas, já que a maioria dos projetos iniciados por políticos de Niterói, são projetos pessoais. Portanto, quando muda a diligência política, o projeto some, muitas vezes também não há uma vontade geral por manter o projeto, já que aquelas iniciativas não respondem às necessidades reais da sociedade. Ou seja, uma grande parte das iniciativas ficam dependentes da vontade política, especialmente se vêm do Poder Executivo, como é o caso no Brasil, dado que podem perder o interesse e reduzir o orçamento ou acabar completamente com o programa. ¹⁷

Essa idiosincrasia de fazer política representa uma das duas principais interpretações que há no contexto político do Brasil, que acredita que as iniciativas são criadas sem diálogo com a sociedade. A segunda interpretação é que governar necessariamente inclui a sociedade civil no diálogo. Na Entrevista 3, o seguinte foi dito:

“Eu acredito, a ABGLT acredita, que a melhor forma de você gerenciar o Estado brasileiro é participando, a sociedade civil participando da decisão, da discussão da política pública. Você pactua com a sociedade civil, você tem opinião, você ouve a opinião das pessoas. Isso é um jeito de governar. E a gente acredita. O governo Bolsonaro e o governo Temer não acreditavam nesse jeito e acabou com as políticas de participação. Então, objetivamente, mudou. O número de violência e assassinatos das pessoas LGBTQs aumentou.”

Por conseguinte, uma parte significativa da sociedade civil foi excluída da conversa durante esses governos conservadores. Isso é uma ferramenta política para poder atacar as iniciativas que já existem, como foi característico do governo Bolsonaro, que sistematicamente desmontou políticas públicas. ¹⁸ Essa abordagem que não convida ao diálogo é traduzida em projetos políticos personalistas que dependem quase inteiramente da vontade política.

¹⁷ Mello et al., “Por onde andam as políticas públicas,” 309.

¹⁸ Sales Torres e dos Santos Junior, “Políticas públicas LGBTQIA+ no Brasil” 87.

¹² Geovane Gesteira Sales Torres and Raimundo Batista dos Santos Junior, “Políticas

2.3. REDES E RELAÇÕES INSTITUCIONAIS

As interações com as instituições do Estado brasileiro são complexas e dependem do tempo (governo no poder) e do nível (prefeitura, governo estadual, governo federal etc.). Em todas as entrevistas, há avaliações diferentes sobre as relações com essas entidades, já que elas têm muito a ver com a posição política do locutor. Na Entrevista 1, que foi com a equipe de coordenação de um órgão público, há uma visão mais positiva; na Entrevista 3, com um dirigente político do movimento LGBTQ+, ele fala sobre as dificuldades de reclamar os espaços e garantir a participação pelo

O problema é que as conexões interinstitucionais acabam sendo destruídas, já que a maioria dos projetos iniciados por políticos de Niterói, são projetos pessoais.

Estado; por último, na Entrevista 2, com um ativista de um coletivo menor, ele fala sobre a falta de iniciativas para apoiar o trabalho local.

A equipe de coordenação, por exemplo, disse que desde o começo eles vieram “[...] para Niterói com o termo de cooperação técnica assinado [com a prefeitura].” Eles acham que há uma boa relação com o governo da cidade que é “mais abert[o], diferente [...]”. Essa predisposição positiva faz sentido já que, como foi mencionado, esse é um programa do governo estadual do Rio de Janeiro, e não uma iniciativa civil. Além disso, o prefeito faz parte de um partido progressista, o Partido Democrático Trabalhista (PDT), e forma uma coalizão à esquerda, portanto, a equipe não tem que lutar pela legitimidade da sua proposta, o que não é uma experiência universal. Em São Gonçalo, a outra cidade em que trabalham, esses grupos enfrentam muito mais resistência por parte do prefeito, já que ele representa um eleitorado mais conservador.

Adicionalmente, eles elogiaram as interações com vários encaixes institucionais: “A gente tem um bom

entendimento com todos os CAPs, CRAS, CREAs. [...] A rede funciona” (Entrevista 1, 2025). Também foi mencionado que a advogada da equipe de coordenação foi convidada pela UFF para palestrar sobre a cota trans. A boa interação entre a equipe dessa iniciativa do governo e o corpo estudantil força a universidade a colaborar. Todos os programas mencionados têm a ver com o apoio de pessoas em situação de vulnerabilidade, e parece que ter uma rede deles é benéfico para eles compartilharem boas práticas e se apoiarem uns nos outros. Esses programas, de fato, representam uma boa tradição governamental de intervenção e resgate de populações vulneráveis, embora talvez não sejam os programas sociais com mais apoio econômico.

Similarmente, na Entrevista 3 (2025) destacou-se o espaço que os primeiros governos Lula deram aos ativistas da comunidade LGBTQ+. Ele indica especificamente que a AGBT foi várias vezes convidada para participar de conselhos nacionais e que era frequentemente contactada como órgão de consulta. Porém, ele também disse que desde os governos Temer e Bolsonaro, algo mudou e embora se tenha um governo progressista nesse momento, as coisas não voltaram a ser o que eram. Contudo, segundo a Entrevista 1 (2025), os governos conservadores não afetaram muito a sua atuação, o que demonstra seus matizes. Os governos conservadores mantiveram as iniciativas de primeira necessidade que já existiam, mas deixaram de considerar as opiniões dos ativistas civis na criação de novas políticas.

O conservadorismo produziu, também, uma mudança do aliado que os ativistas encontravam no Estado: os ativistas LGBTQ+ passaram, em termos gerais, de serem apoiados pelo Executivo para unicamente receber o suporte do Judiciário. Como diz o Entrevistado 3 (2025): “A gente não tinha relações com o Supremo Tribunal Federal, que a gente passou a ter”. A realidade é que no Brasil há pouca vontade no Congresso para legislar sobre a comunidade LGBTQ+ e seu bem-estar. A hipótese geral é que após a Constituição Federal de 1988, as políticas públicas LGBTQ+ foram marcadas pelo acionamento do ativismo judicial.¹⁹

¹⁹ Beatriz Rodrigues Sanchez, “Feminismo Estatal Representativo,” *Revista Feminismos* 11, n. 2 (2024): 8, <https://doi.org/10.9771/rf.v11i2.57422>; Sales Torres e dos Santos Junior, “Políticas públicas LGBTQIA+ no Brasil,” 67.

O entrevistado 3 reconhece que o governo Bolsonaro sistematicamente atacou políticas e que isso fez com que os ativistas tivessem que reconquistar esses espaços depois da saída do Bolsonaro do governo. Essa falta de encaixes duradouros, e luta pela reconquista de espaços faz com que partes do movimento sigam avançando e que ao mesmo tempo haja “um descompasso entre o que o governo está fazendo e o que é a vontade do movimento [LGBT+].” A diferença entre o que o movimento quer e o que o governo Lula está disposto a fazer só agrava a frágil relação entre eles.

Essa instabilidade no apoio institucional se reflete de diferentes formas, a exemplo do que é dito pelo entrevistado 2 (2025), o entrevistado diz que quase não existe apoio dos governos de nenhum tipo. Seu coletivo tem acordos com algumas instituições privadas e esse é o único tipo de apoio recebido. Essa situação relata um país onde os únicos ativistas que recebem algum tipo de patrocínio dos atores estatais são aqueles que podem oferecer algum tipo de ganho eleitoral. As únicas pessoas que acabam se destacando na esfera política são aquelas que fazem ou buscam fazer parte do Estado. Na pluralidade da comunidade LGBTQ+ há uma divisão histórica sobre as orientações políticas que o movimento deveria ter:

“Já no 1º Encontro de Grupos Homossexuais Organizados (EGHO), no ano de 1980, evidenciou-se a divisão entre setores autonomistas e setores ligados às organizações de esquerda. Os autonomistas rejeitavam alianças com a esquerda sob o argumento de que os partidos cooptariam o movimento homossexual, enquanto aqueles mais próximos da esquerda defendiam alianças com partidos políticos e outros movimentos sociais, além de ações de protesto na rua.”²⁰

Por outro lado, também existe uma diferenciação entre o que os militantes entendem que deveria ser o movimento em si. Esse é o problema dos movimentos baseados em políticas identitárias: as pessoas não habitam exclusivamente uma identidade. Isso leva a grandes disputas sobre como fazer a militância, não obstante, se trata de diferenças minuciosas, dado que a maioria da comunidade se encontra no lado esquerdo do espectro político.

²⁰ Cleiton Feitosa, “Reflexões teóricas sobre a interação entre movimento LGBTQ+ e partidos políticos no Brasil,” *Teoria & Pesquisa: Revista de Ciência Política* 31, no. 3 (2022): 12.

2.4. POLÍTICA PARTIDÁRIA, ELEIÇÕES E A DISPUTA POR ESPAÇO

Segundo as entrevistas, tem havido uma mudança na política brasileira, em que agora há outros votos e populações mais rentáveis do que o voto rosa: “Fazer críticas à população LGBTQ+ também faz com que determinados grupos políticos ganhem eleição” (Entrevista 1, 2025). Nesses últimos anos, grupos como os evangélicos têm ganhado uma presença muito forte na política brasileira, e eles têm instrumentalizado essa influência para atacar e ostracizar o movimento LGBTQ+. Ao mesmo tempo, a esquerda não tem se desligado completamente do movimento, mas não o defende com tanta força quanto antes: “Quando vai chegando o mês do Orgulho, quando vai chegando aquela coisa dos direitos humanos, tem que botar uma galera colorida, então a gente faz esse movimento de se aproximar” (Entrevista 1, 2025). Existe um uso da comunidade para ganhar alguns votos, mas como foi expresso na Entrevista 1 (2025), o apoio tem-se reduzido bastante. Há muitos políticos que, embora votem pela pauta LGBTQ+ no Congresso, não participam das conferências da comunidade, assim como de outras instâncias de diálogo, enquanto antes dos governos Temer e Bolsonaro havia uma participação muito mais presente de legisladores aliados ao movimento. Claro que se fosse o contrário, em que os políticos participam de conferências, mas não votam a pauta, seria pior, mas a mudança ainda é relevante, porque indica uma covardia dos políticos por serem vistos em espaços LGBTQ+. Consequentemente, as pessoas do movimento não sentem um interesse genuíno que venha dos políticos. Existe, portanto, uma severa assimetria no balanço de poder dessa relação: enquanto os movimentos LGBTQ+ sempre precisam do apoio dos partidos, esses só oferecem o mínimo para não perder o voto rosa.

Dentro dos partidos políticos, há pessoas da comunidade LGBTQ+ que apoiam movimentos do seu mesmo campo ideológico. Todas as pessoas entrevistadas apresentam correntes ideológicas progressistas semelhantes, o que é padrão no movimento LGBTQ+. Os movimentos LGBTQ+ mais progressistas se alinham mais com o PT, o PCdoB, o PSOL e outros partidos de esquerda. Há um grau de influência dos partidos, já que usualmente os políticos priorizam a pauta da sua

liderança e não os movimentos sociais, mas “a agenda do movimento é independente dos partidos” (Entrevista 3, 2025). Nesse sentido, há ainda um pouco de interferência dos partidos, já que mesmo que a pauta do movimento seja independente, ela é filtrada pelos partidos na hora de ser discutida em órgãos do Estado. O diálogo militância-partido é uma dialética em que ambos são alterados. Devido a isso há um peso partidário importante, mas não há uma cooptação direta. A comunidade LGBTQ+ cobra aos seus representantes eleitos que avancem a pauta, e aí esses representantes têm que negociar com o restante do partido uma interpretação da pauta que seja aceitável por pessoas mais conservadoras do partido mesmo. Por outro lado, ao partido abrir suas portas a representantes da comunidade, a composição e identidade do partido também muda progressivamente.

No caso da Entrevista 2 (2025), houve um caso de pressão política de um outro coletivo: “A gente também teve uma ruptura também política. Porque a gente tinha um apoio de uma ONG daqui, de Niterói. Só que eles entraram... a cobrar da gente uma postura política, como se o coletivo inteiro fosse pertencer a um político tal.” Esse relato evidencia a importância de analisar as interações entre diferentes coletivos, uma vez que eles também podem ser instrumentalizados como proxies por partidos políticos. Muito embora haja similitudes sociais, alianças entre movimentos nem sempre são possíveis caso haja tensões ideológicas. Essas rupturas de alianças resultam em um enfraquecimento do movimento geral, fazendo com que tenha menos impulso e que possa lutar por menos projetos.

Embora a maioria das pessoas que militam em grupos LGBTQ+ seja de esquerda, há também militantes conservadores. Esse é o caso da Diversidade Tucana ou do grupo Gays por Bolsonaro (Entrevista 3, 2025). Por um lado, isso é um sintoma de uma democracia forte que permite a pluralidade; por outro, é uma manipulação da comunidade LGBTQ+ para que seja mais heteronormativa. Os movimentos LGBTQ+ que estão conectados com a direita são muito menos disruptivos e críticos da sociedade na que eles existem. Esse fenômeno não é exclusivo ao Brasil, mas responde ao reordenamento da direita global. Desde o começo da guerra contra o terrorismo, iniciou-se um processo

de valorização dos corpos queer: quem antes era excluído da sociedade agora é um cidadão merecedor de proteções, sempre e quando seu comportamento seja heteronormativo.²¹ Esse processo é conhecido como homonacionalismo e no Brasil é aproveitado por grupos conservadores para evitar críticas de homofobia, defendendo a ideia de que há bons gays e maus gays, por irem contra a moral cristã.

Essa diferença em visões políticas e morais leva a que pessoas como Eduardo Leite seja o governador conservador do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul. Ele é permitido como um representante de direita gay, porque

A pesquisa demonstrou que, embora existam iniciativas relevantes, elas permanecem em grande medida frágeis, descontínuas, e dependentes da vontade política dos governos, o que limita a capacidade de produzir inclusão social estrutural.

ele não questiona e não vai contra essa moral cristã. Isso leva a questionar quem legitimamente representa a comunidade LGBTQ+, porque a realidade é que ele também não faz muito para defender a pauta. Para essa conversa é interessante usar o termo “femócrata”.²² Femócrata é quem vem do movimento feminista e consegue se converter em empregado da administração pública por e para avançar a pauta feminista, e é assim uma representante da comunidade muito mais legítimo. Se formos pensar nessa definição aplicada à comunidade LGBTQ+, pessoas como a Symmy Larrat são muito melhores representantes, já que constantemente tentam avançar a pauta. Ela, porém, é imobilizada por causas da identidade que habita como mulher trans, e a discriminação institucional que enfrenta:

21 Jasbir K. Puar, “Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times,” Tenth anniversary expanded edition, *Next Wave: New Directions in Women's Studies* (Duke University Press, 2017): 1-36.

22 Marian Sawyer, “Sisters in Suits: Women and Public Policy in Australia” (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), 45, citado em Beatriz Rodrigues Sanchez, “Feminismo Estatal Representativo,” *Revista Feminismos* 11, n. 2 (2024): 2, <https://doi.org/10.9771/rfv11i2.57422>.

“Um dos primeiros problemas é o caso da transfobia institucional. É a pessoa não reconhecer a outra como sendo de fato uma autoridade. Então você precisa todos os dias acordar e pensar na roupa que você vai usar, como você vai falar, como você tem que se comportar, coisas que homens héteros não precisam pensar no seu dia a dia. Ele bota um terno e uma gravata e todo mundo compreende que ele é uma autoridade. Se você é uma pessoa LGBTQ e não bota um terno e gravata e não entra naquele padrão... Ainda se você entrar naquele padrão, talvez você não seja reconhecido. Então você precisa passar por isso todos os dias. Isso é uma dificuldade da sua vida. Você tem que se provar, todos os dias, de que você pode estar ali, que você é capaz de estar ali. Isso não é fácil, porque é uma violência diária contra você mesmo. (Entrevista 3, 2025)”

Essa institucionalidade da violência faz com que representantes como a Symmy não sejam respeitados. Todo dia é uma constante luta para provar a legitimidade da sua posição no governo e na sociedade. Esse também é o caso da vereadora Benny Briolly. Tanto quanto a Symmy, ela é “[...] um corpo necessário, estar aí presente, mas acaba inerte, porque não consegue aprovar [projetos]”. No caso de Briolly e outras pessoas que trabalham no Poder Legislativo, elas não conseguem aprovar os seus projetos porque são constantemente antagonizadas pelas suas Câmaras. Embora sejam representantes legítimos e tentem avançar a pauta, não conseguem, e acabam tendo só um avanço simbólico. Para que haja uma mudança real, dever-se-ia ter uma presença maior das diferentes comunidades oprimidas na sociedade, assim como uma vontade política real por criar projetos para a sociedade toda, e não só quem o legislador ache como uma pessoa merecedora.

2.5. SÍNTESE ANALÍTICA: MOVIMENTOS LGBTQ+ COMO EMPREENDEDORES DE POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

As políticas públicas que afetam a cidade de Niterói e sua população são bastante positivas em comparação a outras cidades do Estado. As diferentes iniciativas (federais, estaduais, municipais, e sociais) ajudam a população a ter acesso a serviços públicos. Graças às cotas trans na UFF, as pessoas trans, travestis, não-binárias, etc. têm mais possibilidades de receberem

uma educação universitária.²³ Os ambulatorios para a comunidade LGBTQ+ também são importantes, porque facilitam o acesso ao sistema de saúde. Há muitas iniciativas na cidade que ajudam à comunidade LGBTQ+, mas definitivamente poderiam ser mais.

A advogada do Centro de Cidadania LGBTQ+ de Niterói foi, por exemplo, convidada pela UFF para palestrar sobre a cota trans e seus benefícios. E como foi mencionado, a ABGLT por exemplo é convidada pelo governo nacional para prestar consultoria sobre questões que dizem respeito à comunidade. Desse modo, percebe-se que há um interesse em criar políticas inclusivas e efetivas por parte do governo nacional. Algumas tem-se provado como mais duradouras e outras menos, em qualquer caso a sociedade civil não vai deixar a sua comunidade desprotegida:

Mas muitas vezes quando o Estado não faz, os movimentos sociais fazem. Embora a gente sempre diga isso, não é a nossa obrigação, porque a obrigação é do Estado. Então a gente tem que cobrar do Estado para que ele faça, mas por um momento, não deixando o nosso povo morrer. (Entrevista 3, 2025).

O objetivo sempre é que os direitos e o acesso aos serviços seja garantido pelo Estado, mas se isso não for possível as pessoas podem procurar apoio nas suas comunidades. O papel dos coletivos e as ONGs nesse sentido é crítico. Elas não só cobram e demandam ao Estado criar boas políticas para a proteção das minorias do país, elas também oferecem abrigo às pessoas mais vulneráveis da sociedade. Aqui é importante termos presentes as prioridades da comunidade, a realidade é que trabalhar com um partido e negociar as próprias pautas pode ser muito benéfico na hora de desenvolver iniciativas para melhorar a qualidade de vida da comunidade LGBTQ+.

Não é claro ainda quanto essas políticas e iniciativas têm ajudado dado que algumas são muito novas, mas parecem estar bem orientadas para garantir o acesso a serviços e defender a dignidade da comunidade LGBTQ+.

23 Bruno de Freitas Moura, “UFF se torna 1ª universidade federal do Rio a criar cotas para trans”, *CNN Brasil*, 25 de setembro de 2024, <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/educacao/uff-se-torna-1a-universidade-federal-do-rio-a-criar-cotas-para-trans/>.

3. CONSIDERAÇÕES FINAIS

Este artigo analisou a atuação dos movimentos LGBT+ em Niterói a partir de sua interação com instituições nacionais, partidos políticos e outras organizações da sociedade civil, em um contexto que está marcado por avanços normativos, mas também por intensas disputas políticas e simbólicas. A pesquisa demonstrou que, embora existam iniciativas relevantes, elas permanecem em grande medida frágeis, descontínuas, e dependentes da vontade política dos governos, o que limita a capacidade de produzir inclusão social estrutural.

Os resultados indicam que a influência dos movimentos LGBT+ sobre o Estado não se dá de forma linear nem homogênea. Ela varia conforme o nível institucional, o momento político, e a posição ocupada pelos ativistas na relação. A influência é também condicionada por dinâmicas eleitorais, antagonismos ideológicos e processos de deslegitimação ativa. O avanço do conservadorismo contribuiu para o deslocamento do apoio estatal do Poder Executivo para o Poder Judiciário, reforçando a centralidade do ativismo judicial como estratégia de defesa de direitos.

Por fim, o caso de Niterói revela tanto os potenciais quanto os limites da institucionalização das pautas LGBT+ no nível local. A existência de conselhos, programas e redes de atendimento representa avanços significativos, mas a ausência de encaixes institucionais duradouros impede que essas iniciativas se convertam em políticas de Estado plenamente consolidadas. Nesse sentido, a pesquisa reforça a importância de fortalecer mecanismos participativos, ampliar a presença de representantes legitimamente vinculados aos movimentos sociais e garantir maior continuidade administrativa às políticas de diversidade.

Apesar das tensões internas e da fragmentação do movimento, os coletivos LGBT+ continuam a desempenhar um papel fundamental tanto na cobrança do Estado quanto na oferta direta de apoio às populações mais vulneráveis, mesmo em contextos adversos. O caso de Niterói revela avanços importantes no plano local, mas também tem a necessidade de fortalecer encaixes institucionais duradouros, ampliar a participação democrática, e enfrentar os conflitos políticos que estruturam a exclusão da comunidade LGBT+ no Brasil de hoje.

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L'Union Européenne Face Aux Conflits

Entre ambition et réalité

MADAKET RZEPKA

This analysis aims to explore how the European Union (EU) has “transformed the arena into a forum.” Through the academic work of Franck Petiteville and that of Julian Bergmann and Arne Niemann, one can examine the efficacy of the EU as a global actor in conflicts. Petiteville uses the Yugoslav wars to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the EU’s methods in ending violence. Furthermore, how the internal divisions within the EU hinder the effectiveness of these methods. Bergmann and Niemann draw on the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia to show that the EU is effective in negotiations, but, as Petiteville explains, the lack of unity within the EU undermines this efficacy. These problems persist today. As shown by the internal fractures, lack of power, and the absence of a military, I argue that the EU must become more autonomous to be more effective as a global actor.

L'idée d'une Europe unifiée a existé depuis l'empire de Rome. En 1951, le traité de Paris a créé la Communauté européenne du charbon et de l'acier (CECA) pour mettre ces deux matériaux en commun entre les six premiers États membres et unifier l'Europe après les deux guerres mondiales. Le charbon et l'acier sont des matériaux qui peuvent être utilisés pour faire la guerre, mais l'idée de la CECA était d'éviter la guerre en établissant une relation commerciale fondée sur le commerce de ces matériaux. La CECA est devenue l'Union européenne en 1992 avec le Traité de Maastricht. En 2025, elle est composée de vingt-sept États membres, fondée sur le marché unique, la monnaie unique, la libre circulation et la politique étrangère. Le principe central de l'UE est de transformer l'arène en forum. L'UE aspire à devenir une actrice dans la transformation des conflits, non seulement au niveau régional, mais aussi au niveau mondial. Cette ambition soulève la question suivante : quel est le rôle de l'Union européenne dans la transformation des conflits ? Nous allons commencer par analyser l'argument de Franck Petiteville dans son chapitre intitulé « L'Union européenne, acteur conditionnel de la résolution des conflits ». Ensuite, nous examinerons l'article « Mediating International Conflicts: The European Union as an Effective peacemaker? » de Julian Bergmann et Arne Niemann. Enfin, nous discuterons de la réalité de l'UE comme acteur dans la transformation des conflits.

Le chapitre de Petiteville explore de grands conflits qui ont influencé le rôle de l'UE dans la transformation des conflits mondiaux. Il explique que « l'UE a la capacité de mobiliser aussi bien la politique étrangère, de sécurité et de défense stricto sensu que les politiques relevant de sa diplomatie coopérante [...] Cette capacité multidimensionnelle de l'UE lui permettrait ainsi d'intervenir sur toutes les séquences du cycle de gestion d'un conflit ».¹ Malgré cette capacité, Petiteville montre que les guerres yougoslaves ont empêché la capacité de l'UE à progresser en tant qu'acteur mondial. À cette époque, les seules méthodes que connaissait l'UE étaient, par exemple, l'arbitrage, les sanctions, et l'aide humanitaire.² Petiteville ajoute

que tous ces moyens « ne permirent en rien d'arrêter les crimes de masse ».³ L'inefficacité de l'UE d'agir comme un acteur fort de transformation des conflits dans ces guerres lui a apporté « les stigmates des crimes de masse commis au nom de l'épuration ethnique dans les conflits d'ex-Yougoslavie ».⁴ En dépit de l'échec d'avoir mis fin à la violence, Petiteville explique que l'UE a été le principal acteur de la reconstruction de la région, investissant du temps, de l'argent et des ressources humaines à ce projet.

Petiteville décrit ensuite le rôle de l'UE dans les conflits depuis le début des années 2000. Il décrit que « l'UE s'est généralement cantonnée aux marges de celles-ci » et que, dans le cas d'Afghanistan, elle est intervenue non pas sous l'égide de l'UE, mais sous celle de l'Organisation du Traité de l'Atlantique Nord (OTAN).⁵ L'UE a donné « l'aide humanitaire, faire de l'aide au développement rural, procéder à des observations électorales », etc.⁶ Le problème, selon Petiteville, est qu'il existe des divisions au sein de l'UE, principalement liées au fait que les États membres ne parviennent pas à s'accorder sur un plan d'action commun.

Le manque de cohérence dans l'UE a également provoqué des problèmes en Libye en 2011. L'Organisation des Nations Unies (ONU) a décidé d'avancer avec un plan militaire-humanitaire « qui autorise les États membres de l'Organisation à prendre 'toutes les mesures nécessaires' pour protéger les civils libyens ».⁷ Cependant, il y avait des divisions dans l'UE car la France et le Royaume-Uni ont voté pour ce plan d'action alors que l'Allemagne s'y est opposée. En conséquence, l'UE ne s'est pas impliquée et ce manque d'accord a encore affaibli la vision de l'UE en tant qu'acteur mondial de transformation des conflits.

Tandis que Petiteville dresse un bilan nuancé du rôle de l'UE selon les contextes historiques et militaires, Bergmann et Niemann offrent une évaluation plus ciblée portant sur l'efficacité de la médiation de l'UE dans un cas spécifique, celui du dialogue Serbie-Kosovo. Il existe différentes définitions de l'efficacité de

l'UE en tant que médiateur. La définition de l'UE elle-même est la suivante : « whether the EU has successfully achieved its objectives as a mediator in a particular conflict ».⁸ Bergmann et Niemann se réfèrent à une définition externe qui évalue le changement observable créé par la médiation de l'UE.⁹ Ils proposent un cadre d'évaluation alternatif qu'ils appliquent au dialogue de Belgrade-Pristina entre le Kosovo et la Serbie qui a débuté en 2011. En un an, l'UE a réussi à obtenir sept accords entre les deux nations, notamment des négociations sur la gestion intégrée des frontières et la représentation régionale du Kosovo.¹⁰ Dans

Si l'élargissement reste le principal « carrot » utilisé par l'UE, cela soulève une question de durabilité : que se passe-t-il dans les contextes où l'adhésion ne s'avère pas une option réaliste ?

son rôle de médiateur dans ce conflit, l'UE a cherché à améliorer la qualité de vie et à rapprocher les parties de l'UE.¹¹ Les auteurs évaluent plutôt haut dans leur cadre d'analyse la réalisation des objectifs de l'UE et son efficacité dans la transformation des conflits dans ce contexte.

Les auteurs expliquent ensuite comment l'UE a réussi à orchestrer ces négociations en utilisant l'adhésion à l'UE comme levier et en combinant formulation et manipulation.¹² Bergmann et Niemann citent une phrase qui résume bien les moyens de l'UE dans ce contexte : « 'enlargement is the big pull factor, the main carrot the EU has to offer' ».¹³ De plus, les auteurs expliquent qu'en utilisant la « stratégie de manipulation », l'UE a spécifiquement lié le statut d'adhésion à l'UE du Kosovo et de la Serbie à leurs

concessions dans le dialogue. Si l'élargissement reste le principal « carrot » utilisé par l'UE, cela soulève une question de durabilité : que se passe-t-il dans les contextes où l'adhésion ne s'avère pas une option réaliste ? L'UE peut-elle développer d'autres formes d'influence légitimes ? Néanmoins, les auteurs, comme Petiteville, soulignent l'importance de l'UE dans les négociations : « The EU very much played a structuring role in the talks: [...] the EU (along with the conflicting parties) developed some general principles on how to structure the talks, one of which was that the talks were status-neutral, another one that the EU facilitators sets the negotiation agenda ».¹⁴ À la lumière de cet article, l'UE réussit à structurer le dialogue et à mobiliser efficacement l'aspiration à l'adhésion pour résoudre les conflits.

Malgré l'efficacité de l'UE en tant que médiateur, des difficultés ont surgi et des défis subsistent encore. Pendant les négociations, l'UE n'a pas présenté un front unifié. En ce qui concerne le Kosovo, à l'époque, seuls vingt-trois États membres reconnaissent le Kosovo. Cela a créé des problèmes non seulement pour le Kosovo, mais aussi pour l'UE, parce que le manque d'unification au sein de l'UE sur cette question a empêché la progression des accords. Il y a eu une impasse similaire avec la Serbie mais sur le sujet de la candidature du pays. Les auteurs notent l'effet sur la Serbie : « This seems to have fostered suspicion among Serb negotiators concerning the credibility of the EU's commitment towards the accession process ».¹⁵ Le point principal de cette partie est le manque d'unification entre les États-membres de l'UE, ce qui a des conséquences négatives sur sa capacité d'être efficace dans la transformation des conflits, et que ces incitations doivent être perçues comme crédibles par les parties au conflit.¹⁶

Cependant, toute analyse de cette question doit prendre en compte la situation actuelle de l'UE. En 2020, le Royaume-Uni a quitté l'Union. Depuis plusieurs années, la Hongrie et la Pologne posent de sérieux défis aux institutions européennes. La pandémie de Covid-19 a également suscité de grandes discussions sur le plan d'action, le financement et le

1 Franck Petiteville, "L'Union européenne, acteur conditionnel de la résolution des conflits," in *L'Union européenne et la paix* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2017), [116-117], <https://doi.org/10.3917/scpo.bazin.2017.01.0113>.

2 Ibid, 120-121.

3 Ibid, 121.

4 Ibid, 122.

5 Ibid, 126.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid, 127.

8 Julian Bergmann and Arne Niemann, "Mediating International Conflicts: The European Union as an Effective Peacemaker?" *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 53, no. 5 (May 2015): [8], <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12254>

9 Ibid.

10 Bergmann & Niemann, « Mediating International Conflicts », 15.

11 Ibid, 16.

12 Ibid, 19.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid, 19-20.

15 Ibid, 22.

16 Ibid, 24.

remboursement de la dette commune. À l'origine, les États membres devaient remplir certaines conditions pour bénéficier de l'aide, notamment le respect de l'État de droit. Ces conditions ont été ajoutées pour inciter la Hongrie et la Pologne à se conformer aux règles.¹⁷ De plus, l'article 7 du traité sur l'Union européenne a été déclenché en 2017 contre la Pologne et en 2018 contre la Hongrie. Cet article « donne à l'UE la possibilité de sanctionner un État membre qui ne respecterait pas les valeurs énumérées dans le traité ».¹⁸

La montée du populisme dans l'UE engendre encore plus de difficultés. Il ne faut pas oublier la menace d'un 'Polexit' en 2021, évoquée par le vice-président du Parlement polonais, Ryszard Terlecki.¹⁹ Ces problèmes internes sont encore aggravés par la menace que Donald Trump fait peser sur la puissance mondiale de l'UE avec son retour à la Maison Blanche. L'échec d'Emmanuel Macron à avoir un dialogue fructueux avec Trump sur les droits de douane ou la guerre en Ukraine, illustre également le pouvoir décroissant de l'UE comme acteur mondial.²⁰ La guerre aux frontières de l'UE, les relations transatlantiques tendues et le besoin croissant de l'UE d'être autonome en termes de défense et d'énergie, montrent la multiplications des défis auxquels l'UE est confrontée.

L'idée principale qui ressort de Petiteville et de Bergmann et Niemann est que l'UE joue un rôle efficace dans la médiation et le soutien à la reconstruction, mais que l'absence d'une armée propre et le manque d'unité entre ses États membres ont limité l'impact de ses actions. La situation est d'autant plus compliquée par les problèmes internes auxquels elle est confrontée, ainsi que par ses relations tendues avec les États-Unis. Tout cela compromet l'efficacité de l'UE en tant qu'acteur de la transformation des conflits ainsi que sa légitimité. Bien que fondée sur des bases solides et

animée de bonnes intentions, l'UE doit aujourd'hui se redéfinir comme un acteur mondial plus autonome. Face aux ambitions de Vladimir Poutine et à la menace de Trump, qui dictent les affaires mondiales, l'UE doit trouver un équilibre interne qui démontre sa force et un front uni, et également développer de nouveaux mécanismes de manipulation.

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¹⁷ Barthélémy Gaillard, "Budget européen et plan de relance : que contient l'accord trouvé au Conseil européen ?" *Touteurope.eu*, 2020, <https://www.touteurope.eu/fonctionnement-de-l-ue/budget-europeen-et-plan-de-relance-que-contient-l-accord-trouve-au-conseil-europeen/>.

¹⁸ Vincent Lequeux, "Qu'est-ce que l'article 7, qui permet de sanctionner un État de l'Union européenne ?" *Touteurope.eu*, 2024, <https://www.touteurope.eu/fonctionnement-de-l-ue/violation-des-valeurs-de-l-ue-comment-fonctionne-la-procedure-de-sanctions-article-7/>.

¹⁹ "La Pologne juge certains articles de l'UE incompatibles avec sa Constitution," *France 24*, October 7, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/fr/europe/20211007-trait%C3%A9s-de-l-ue-la-pologne-juge-certains-articles-incompatibles-avec-sa-constitution>.

²⁰ « France's Macron and Donald Trump Meet in Washington: Four Key Takeaways », *Al Jazeera*, 2025.





北漂：无根一族在 梦想与现实之间的 漂泊

*The Beijing Drifters: A Group Without
Roots Floating Between Dreams and
Reality*

KIRA WALDHALM

This paper focuses on the "Beijing Drifter" (Beipiao) population as its research subject, examining the existential conditions and psychological characteristics of this group as they navigate the space between dreams and reality. It begins by introducing the household registration system (hukou) and defining Beipiao, analyzing their distinctions and similarities with the migrant worker demographic. Subsequently, through an analysis of films, documentaries, short videos, and online posts, the paper delves into the practical challenges faced by the Beipiao concerning employment, housing, social interaction, and psychological well-being. Research indicates that this group commonly experiences a sense of "rootlessness" alongside a strong initiative-taking spirit. They struggle between societal equity and inequity, seek psychological belonging through hometown ties, and persevere tenaciously amidst the conflict between aspiration and reality. This paper also argues that the Beipiao phenomenon is not merely a product of individual choice but a distinct social outcome shaped by China's rapid urbanization, household registration system, and the opportunities presented by the market economy.

一、引言：北漂现象的背景和研究意义

本文的研究话题是北漂。在中国社会中，常有一种观点认为大城市的生活既精彩又热闹，小城镇很无聊，只有大城市才更适合年轻人。这种观点引发了一个值得探讨的问题：那些移民到大城市的人，他们的奋斗经历和心路历程究竟是怎样的？

北京，作为中国的首都，一直是梦想、机遇与挑战的象征。它吸引着无数心怀梦想的年轻人，他们离开家乡，来到这里追求更好的职业发展、教育资源和生活品质。这群人被称为“北漂”。本研究的目的是深入探讨北漂群体的生存状态、心理特征及其在当代中国社会结构中的位置，感受他们在梦想与现实之间的挣扎与坚持。本文首先介绍户籍制度的背景以及北漂的定义，进而分析北漂在就业、住房、通勤等方面的现实困境，接着探讨这一群体的心理特征，最后通过影视作品和网络评论来呈现北漂群体在“去与留”之间的挣扎与选择。

二、北漂的定义与群体特征

人们对北漂的第一印象，往往容易将其与生活辛苦的外来务工人员混淆，比如农民工。但是事实上北漂和农民工是两个不一样的群体。虽然他们都没有北京的户口，但是北漂一般有学历和高技能。¹ 他们有些人已经找到工作，有些还正在寻找。第一批来北京的北漂主要是从事演艺事业的人，后来北漂的范围扩大了。现在各行各业都有北漂人的身影，他们很多已经是行业的精英。

但值得注意的是，对于北漂的定义并没有一

1 百度百科.《北漂一族》百度百科

个完全清楚的界定。有些人明显属于北漂，例如高学历的创业者，但也有些人的情况更复杂。可以说，判断一个人是否算北漂，最重要的方面是看其来到北京的目的。农民工通常并非来北京“追梦”的，他们只是随着工作机会流入北京。而北漂的重要特征是他们明确地选择北京来作为实现梦想的地方。这里所说的“梦想”范围很广：有人希望进入大企业获得更好的职业发展，有人想在演艺或模特行业闯出一片天，也有人追求北京丰富的文化资源和更自由的生活方式。总之，他们来到北京不仅仅是为了谋生，而是带着对未来的某种期待和主动选择。

三、户籍制度与北漂的生存困境

通过相关资料的研究可以发现，北漂的生存困境大多与户籍制度的限制有密切的关系。中国政府的数据显示，北京积分落户每年的落户规模仅维持在6000人左右，而北京的常住外来人口高达800万。² 大多数移民到北京的人由于受到买房的限制只能长期租房子。³ 这种严格的户籍制度阻碍了迁入北京的人享受与本地居民同等的福利待遇。⁴

中国的户籍制度不仅是为了身份登记，更是一种资源分配机制。北京户口与教育、医疗、养老等公共服务有密切的关系，这导致无北京户口的外来人口在诸多层面受到限制。例如，非京籍人员的子女不能在北京参加高考。⁵ 这种制度性的排斥让许多北漂，即便已经拥

2 123hukou.《北京户口政策十年变迁：从严格控制到结构性松绑的趋势分析》2025年4月5日

3 界面新闻/空间家.《透视‘北漂’：80%租房住，办公室是最安全的地方》2018年2月5日（引用《北京蓝皮书：北京社会发展报告（2016~2017）》数据）

4 澎湃新闻.《在北京如何落户？这8种方法可以拿到北京户口》澎湃新闻，2020年9月19日

5 同前

有高学历和稳定工作，仍感到自己像无根的浮萍在漂泊，这大概就是北漂的“漂”字产生的原因。

四、北漂的生活：就业、住房与通勤

除了户籍制度的阻碍，北漂还要面对许许多多的挑战。新华网的一篇文章里有一个叫杨帆的北漂，他毕业于四川大学，来到北京以后，租住在三里屯附近一栋被隔成六七个单间的居民楼里，每个单间只有三四平方米。房间没有窗户，也不隔音，洗漱、上厕所和做饭都要和其他租户排队共用。⁶ 在工作上，尽管他有大学学历，他的第一份工作只是在一家保健品公司做广告策划，月薪仅2300元。为了追求自己的广告梦想，他只能从最基层干起。

还有一个短视频也让我更加深刻地了解了北漂人的辛苦。⁷ 视频里的主播住在燕郊，而他的单位在军博附近。他每天通勤时间在3到5个小时之间。值得关注的是视频下的评论，大家的态度明显的两级分化：一些人无法理解，问“为什么不租得近一点？”或者提出疑问“既然这么辛苦，为什么不回老家？”。对于这种评论很多人回复“何不食肉糜”，意思是他们根本不理解北漂人的无奈。对于北漂人来说，北京机遇多，有丰富的资源和广阔的平台。这种巨大的吸引力，让他们宁可过着每日通勤5个小时的生活，这是他们为了留在这座城市和实现人生理想而不得不付出的代价。

6 新华网.《“北漂”讲述租房生活：每半年换一次房》，2015年3月21日

7 五月博主.《睡在河北燕郊的北京上班族，每天通勤5小时，买套房现已亏损百万》哔哩哔哩 (Bilibili)，2022年6月8日，

五、北漂的心理特征：无根、进取与无归属

在辛允星在2010年发表于《中国社会科学报》的《北漂族的迷失与守望》一文中，辛允星指出北漂普遍都有一种深深的无根感。⁸ 调查显示，大多数北漂并不知道自己未来会在哪里生活。他们有强烈的动机和愿望来到这座城市，他们不满足现状，极具进取心，很多是全年无休的工作狂人，虽然感到身心疲惫，却仍然为实现梦想而拼命努力。在巨大的工作和生活压力下，老乡关系对于北漂来说变得特别重要。“老乡见老乡，两眼泪汪汪”是他们真实的情感表达。通过组织老乡见面会、建立网络群等方式，他们像滚雪球一样不断扩大自己的社交群，寻找事业上的依靠和心理上的归属感。

六、影视作品中的北漂形象

除了上述提及的案例除，我也关注影视作品是如何表现北漂这一群体的。

《您好，北京》（2022）这部影片非常写实，它通过讲述闫男、顺子和李总这三个小人物的故事，让我们看到整个北漂群体的缩影。电影里虽没有惊天动地的情节，却充满很多打动人心的小细节。例如，在寒冷的早上有人送给快递员的一杯热咖啡，这种不经意间传递的温暖，虽然细微，却成为了许多北漂人在逆境中坚持下去的光。这部电影精准地表现了在北京这座追梦之城中，梦想与痛苦交织的日常，让观众特别是北漂人在看了以后不禁湿了眼眶。

相比之下，《后来的我们》（2018）并不是

8 辛允星：《北漂族的迷失与守望》，《中国社会科学报》，2010年8月17日

一部以表现北漂生活为主题的片子，而是一部爱情片。影片中的男女主角都是北漂。电影在展现他们之间爱情的同时，很自然地表现了北漂生活的真实状态。影片中，两个相爱的人住在又破又小的房间里，一起吃泡面充饥。虽然爱情让他们幸福，但后来他们还是因为现实的压力以及不同的生活目标而渐行渐远。这部影片让观众有很强的代入感，好像看到了自己的经历，那些痛苦与幸福交织的回忆。

除了这两部电影之外，我还看了一部纪录片，就是日本NHK公司拍的纪录片《北漂一族》(2012)。这部完全写实的纪录片没有华丽的台词，镜头也非常朴素。在所有被拍摄的人物当中，其中有一个北漂的形象尤为引人深思。她叫徐林青，是一个来自河南的普通女孩子。她来到北京梦想成为一名职业模特。其实她并不漂亮，身材也很一般。她周围的人都劝她要“面对现实”，但她听不进别人的劝告。这个人物因为她的天真和固执以及近乎愚蠢的自信而显得特别真实。这个人物并不完美，甚至有点荒唐可笑，但她恰恰有别于影视作品中那些被过分美化的虚假人物。她展示了追梦路上的另一种真实：盲目、固执，为了梦想勇往直前。

所有这些影视作品，纪录片和自媒体，为北漂这个巨大的群体提供了一个展示和发声的渠道。它们记录了写字楼里不灭的灯光、早高峰时拥挤的地铁，更让人看到了北漂人的汗水和眼泪。这些作品不是成功学指南，但它们明白地告诉每个在都市打拼的普通人：你的坚持和努力值得被看见。

七、北漂的出路：返乡还是坚持？

梦想终归只是梦想，成功者终究是少数。面对高房价、激烈的竞争以及巨大的心理压力，许多北漂最终选择返回家乡。在纪录片《北漂一族》中，来自四川的唐宁就是这样的一个例子。他最初为了追求梦想来到北京，却发现现实跟想象并不一样。尤其让他感到压抑的是，他的老板同样是四川人，这种“老乡”关系不但没有给他带来很多利益，反而让他感觉一直生活在老板的阴影之下。虽然他的老板鼓励他坚持下去，失落感加上孤独感（他的妻子在老家）让他毅然决定离开北京，返回四川生活。他的选择代表了部分北漂的想法：当北漂的代价远超机遇时，放手也是一种对自我的负责。

然而，还有一些北漂去而复返。这些人返回家乡后感到格格不入，难以适应老家相对缓慢的节奏和狭小的熟人社会，最终又回到北京继续“漂”。对他们来说，北京生活虽然辛苦，但却感觉“有意义”。⁹

八、从网络评论看北漂生活

为了更真实地了解北漂的日常生活和内心想法，我也关注了很多北漂在小红书上发表的帖子和评论。这些帖子和评论就像他们的“网络日记”，详细记录了他们最真实的感受。这些评论让我看到了北漂群体更复杂、更多样的面貌，这比电影和数据更鲜活有趣。以下我将列举几个有代表性的北漂感受。

成功“扎根”的故事：奋斗终有回报

一些北漂会在网上分享他们终于在北京“安

9 辛允星：“北漂族的迷失与守望”，《中国社会科学报》，2010年8月17日

定下来”的成功经历。

比如，一个叫“饭饭”的网友2025年详细写了她和丈夫从外地来北京读书、工作、拿到户口、买房、生孩子的全过程。¹⁰她说：“我们是靠自己的打拼在北京有了一个家。”后来，她还把父母的户口也迁到了北京，她说“至此才感觉在北京扎下了根”。这样的故事给了很多还在奋斗的北漂希望，让他们相信努力终会有回报。

北京的“包容性”与自由感

对很多来自小城市的女性北漂来说，北京最大的吸引力是它的“包容性”。

一个叫“夷陵迪丽热巴”的网友2024年在小红书帖子上称她自己是“农村来的‘大龄剩女’”。¹¹她说在北京，没人觉得一个大龄剩女很奇怪。她的工资是家乡的2-3倍，可以尽情地满足自己爬山、看话剧等爱好。另一个网友“箫寒独自生活”也说，北京很大，很包容，让她感觉“一个人可以隐藏在任何角落”，没人在意你的存在。这种自由，让北京成为她们逃离家乡传统压力的“庇护所”。

“逃离”还是坚守？

社交平台上也有大量疲惫、想要“逃离”北京的声音。鱼尾用户2025年详细对比了“老家140平米的房子”和“北京13平米的合租屋”，描述了共用厕所的不方便、房间不隔音以及每天长时间通勤的痛苦，最后说：“真的好累啊，不知道我还能撑多久。”¹²另一个结束了八年北漂的网友“小七”评论感叹，在

10 “饭饭”用户，小红书(Xiaohongshu)，2025年8月7日

11 “夷陵迪丽热巴”用户，小红书(Xiaohongshu)，2024年9月5日

12 “鱼尾”用户，小红书平台：关于北漂生活的帖子，小红书(Xiaohongshu)，2025年2月6日

北京想要达到老家同样的生活水平，“可能奋斗一辈子也得不到”。¹³对她来说，回家意味着更好的居住条件、更多的家庭温暖和更小的压力。

平静的告别也是另一种选择

除了“成功”的喜悦以及“逃离”的无奈，还有一些北漂的离开则更加平静和坦然。

网友“玩户外的大师兄”在北漂十年之后选择去了成都。¹⁴他在2025年告别帖子中写到：“北京对我不冷不热，我对北京也没有不舍和遗憾，也许刚刚好。”这种“没有遗憾的离开”，代表了一种成熟主动的选择，而不是无奈下的被动。他的故事展示了另一种可能：漂泊可以是一段有意义的成长经历，而离开则是开始下一段人生之旅的积极改变。

这些来自小红的真实评论，这些普通人发出的声音，没有标准答案，却充满了真实的情感。他们让“北漂”这个词变得更加鲜活，为我研究北漂提供了非常宝贵的材料。

九、总结

常常有人质疑：既然北漂这么辛苦，为什么还有无数的人涌入北京？为什么都要拼命留在这里？有北漂人这样回答：因为北京的包容性，让人觉得自己在这里找到了意义；同时也坚信，只有这里才可以实现自己的梦想。所以不论在这里的生存有多艰难，大多数人都愿意后退。于是，北漂的命运充满了奋斗、无奈和坚韧。他们在迷茫中坚持，在压力下追梦。无论去与留，他们本身都是这个时

13 “小七”用户，小红书平台：关于北漂生活的帖子，小红书(Xiaohongshu)，2025年2月7日

14 “玩户外的大师兄”用户，小红书(Xiaohongshu)，2025年11月23日

代个人奋斗最真实的见证。

通过各类研究材料、影视作品以及网络调查，本文对“北漂”这一特殊群体进行了较为全面的分析。北漂现象不仅是个体生命历程的选择，更是中国快速城市化、户籍制度壁垒与市场经济机遇相互交织下的产物。北京是一座包容的城市，而北漂群体的未来，也值得社会持续的关注与思考。

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Desprotección de las Ovejas en España

¿La Política Agrícola Común (PAC) cuida la lana o compromete la sostenibilidad?

ARIC DUNCAN

Este ensayo examina el estado de la industria de lana en España y Europa dentro del contexto de la agricultura sostenible, la Política Agrícola Común (PAC) y el contexto histórico y económico de España. A través del análisis de documentos legislativos y medioambientales, entrevistas con expertos y datos económicos, se argumenta que la lana ha sido desvalorizada por las políticas de la Unión Europea. Se presentan los efectos económicos, políticos y culturales de esta desvalorización, así como el potencial de la lana como un producto sostenible con valor ecológico. Sostiene que con una revaloración legislativa y mayor apoyo institucional, la lana se podría convertir en un pilar clave en España para la revitalización rural.

Introducción

La industria de la lana en España tiene una historia rica y compleja que abarca miles de años. Según algunos expertos, la oveja merina se originó en el país y por muchos años la lana fue uno de los productos económicos más valiosos. Actualmente, España es todavía uno de los países más importantes en Europa para la producción de la lana, específicamente la lana merina. La lana, además de ser una fibra de primera calidad, es natural, biodegradable y ecológicamente sostenible. Sin embargo, en la actualidad el estado de la lana en toda Europa está amenazado a causa de factores económicos, políticas de la Unión Europea (UE) y una falta de apoyo para los que crían ovejas. La Política Agrícola Común (PAC) de la Unión Europea, diseñada como un sistema para fortalecer la agricultura, la seguridad de la alimentación y la sostenibilidad, ha prestado escasa atención al potencial de la lana como recurso ecológico con aplicaciones más allá del sector textil. Es un producto infravalorado por el mercado y un mayor apoyo institucional permitiría a la UE alcanzar su propósito como un continente «verde» al tiempo que fortalecería su propia economía. Una revaloración de la lana podría aportar beneficios significativos en términos de sostenibilidad y desarrollo rural en España.

Contexto histórico de la lana en España

Del siglo XII al XVIII, España dominó el mundo de las ovejas merinas y esta historia sigue presente en la cultura española de la actualidad. De hecho, hasta finales del siglo XVIII y principios del XIX, la exportación de la oveja merina fuera de España se consideró un delito castigado con la pena capital.¹ En el año 1273, el rey Alfonso X estableció una organización llamada La Mesta que protegió las prácticas tradicionales de los pastores, mantuvo la supremacía económica de la lana y permitió el acceso a los pastos.² La protección jurídica de la industria de la lana y sus prácticas es lo que diferenciaba a España de otros países de la época y lo que le confiere tanta importancia cultural aún hoy en día.

La práctica que La Mesta se centró más en proteger fue la llamada trashumancia—o el movimiento estacional de los rebaños. Según la experta en trashumancia y política agrícola Concha Salguero, este movimiento migratorio ocurre entre el norte (Castilla y León) y el sur de España (Extremadura), desplazándose de las montañas en verano a los valles en invierno. Este proceso aprovecha las diversas condiciones de los pastos y el clima de las distintas regiones para mejorar el pastoreo. La investigación moderna ha demostrado que este proceso no solo produce lana de mayor calidad, sino que también tiene efectos profundos en la biodiversidad, con beneficios como la propagación de semillas y la captura del carbono.³ Esta práctica ocurre en la actualidad en España, pero factores económicos y la legislación de nivel nacional y de nivel europeo dificultan que los pastores sigan con las prácticas tradicionales. Especialmente en los siglos XIX y XX, la trashumancia y la industria de lana han sufrido un declive grande y no se ha recuperado.

Tan recientemente como en 1992 comenzó el proceso de la revitalización de la trashumancia, pero ha sido difícil a causa de una falta de infraestructura y conocimiento.⁴ Para generar un cambio duradero y apoyar la tierra, las ideas tienen que surgir del público, de los agricultores y de los ganaderos. Con un incremento en la demanda de lana, los gobiernos se darán cuenta de que la legislación tiene que apoyar la industria. El papel de la trashumancia como una autopista de biodiversidad es solo una parte de la importancia de la lana. La propia fibra tiene un valor como un sustituto natural de las fibras sintéticas contaminantes y un número creciente de usos que podrían revolucionar su valor.

La lana como un producto diverso y sostenible

La mayoría del mundo sabe que la lana es una fibra versátil y de buena calidad para los textiles. Absorbe y expulsa la humedad, funciona bien en el calor y el frío e incluso es resistente al fuego.⁵ Propiedades así



cimentaron la lana como clave para productos desde alfombras y artículos domésticos hasta ropa y sombreros. Las fibras sintéticas que han sustituido a la lana no tienen la misma calidad, así que la lana todavía ofrece un gran valor a los consumidores.

Sin embargo, la lana tiene la oportunidad de ser utilizada de formas más diversas que solo en textiles. En los años recientes, innovadores de la industria han descubierto métodos para utilizar la lana como producto sostenible que lucha contra la crisis medioambiental. Es un material cien por ciento natural y biodegradable, así que cualquier uso del producto no puede contaminar la tierra como las fibras sintéticas. Por esta razón, algunas empresas pequeñas han empezado a crear fertilizantes con la lana. Su contenido en potasio, nitrógeno, sodio y otras sustancias lo convierte en un candidato ideal y se han desarrollado formas sólidas (pellets) y líquidas.⁶ Kimberly Hagen, una experta de la lana, dijo que el fertilizante de la lana funciona bien en suelo arenoso y produce cosechas idénticas al fertilizante tradicional.⁷ Además, su composición, que es

baja en fósforo, es ideal en muchas ubicaciones porque un exceso de fósforo en los fertilizantes tradicionales suele causar floraciones de algas y zonas muertas ecológicas. El abono no es lo primero que viene a la mente cuando se piensa en la lana, pero su potencial sostenible es enorme.

Además de fertilizantes, se puede usar la lana como un biomaterial plástico. Su contenido de queratina puede ser utilizado para crear bolsas o envases de un solo uso que son biodegradables.⁸ La creación de la lana bien estructurada es una industria que preserva la tierra y lucha contra la contaminación por microplásticos. Además de estos usos, la lana también funciona como firme de caminos, materiales absorbentes acústicos, en las industrias de química, farmacéutica y decoración interior.⁹ De hecho, una empresa británica, Solidwool, trabaja para utilizar la lana como recurso sostenible en la construcción de muebles.

La producción de la lana crea valor ecológico de al menos dos maneras distintas: en el proceso de la trashumancia y en los usos de la propia fibra. El público y el gobierno deben entender el alcance de la importancia que la lana puede tener para el futuro.

La industria de la lana en la actualidad en España

En la actualidad, la industria lanera en España está en crisis. Por falta de demanda, solo 1 % del recurso está utilizado y 85 % del sector ha desaparecido.¹⁰ La causa principal es el aumento de fibras sintéticas que han superado a la lana por su bajo coste de producción. Como resultado, la lana ha sufrido un declive enorme que ha cerrado infraestructuras y terminado prácticas tradicionales.¹¹ Estas fibras sintéticas utilizan plástico y combustibles en su producción. Además de su impacto en el cambio climático, las fibras sintéticas también contribuyen significativamente a la contaminación por su persistencia y toxicidad. Mundialmente, entre el 16 % y el 35 % de los microplásticos

2025.

8 Proyecto El Batán de las Mujeres, *Manual de usos*, 165.

9 Ibid.

10 Beatriz Fabián, "Objetivo: recuperar el legado y el valor de la lana," *El País*, 13 de marzo de 2025, <https://elpais.com/estilo-de-vida/2025-03-13/objetivo-recuperar-el-legado-y-el-valor-de-la-lana.html>.

11 Proyecto El Batán de las Mujeres, *Manual de usos*, 13.

1 Mary Cutts, *The Life and Times of Hon. William Jarvis of Weathersfield, Vermont*, facsimile ed. (repr. de la ed. de 1869; 1991), 272.

2 Antonio Gómez Iruela, *Las cabañas de ovejas merinas de la Cartuja El Paular* (Asociación de Amigos de El Paular, 2023), 8.

3 Concha Salguero, *Manual de la trashumancia* (Trashumancia y Naturaleza, 2021), 10-11, <https://trashumanciaynaturaleza.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/manual-trashumancia-SEAE.pdf>.

4 Fiona Flintan and Marco Buemi, "Win-Win-Win: Reinstating Sheep Transhumance in Spain," *ThinkLandscape*, 29 de junio de 2021, <https://thinklandscape.globallandscapesforum.org/viewpoint/win-win-win-reinstating-sheep-transhumance-in-spain/>.

5 Sally Coulthard, *A Short History of the World According to Sheep* (London: Head of

Zeus, 2020).

6 Proyecto El Batán de las Mujeres, *Manual de usos de la lana en España* (Federación de Asociaciones de Mujeres Rurales [FADEMUR], 2022), 164-166.

7 Kimberly Hagen, entrevista realizada por la prof. Catherine Wright, 22 de enero de

en el océano son fibras sintéticas.¹² Los precios de la lana se han desplomado, causando desastres para pastores y el sector en general. En 2019, el precio de la lana merina rondaba los 2 €/kilo y en 2020 cayó a 0,40 €/kilo.¹³ Esto es una caída de 80 %. En su estado actual, la lana no es viable económicamente. Los datos son aún peores para la lana común: desde 55 céntimos en 2019 a casi menos de un céntimo.¹⁴ Como consecuencia, los medios de subsistencia de los pastores han disminuido drásticamente y tienen que trabajar con material casi inservible. En algunos casos, los pastores han optado por quemar la lana en sus pastos porque no vale la pena procesarla.¹⁵ Esta práctica, impensable hace décadas, refleja el nivel extremo de desvalorización de un recurso que antes era símbolo de riqueza rural. Además, la quema de la lana presenta más problemas ecológicos y representa una oportunidad perdida para utilizar la lana de una manera más sostenible. Estos problemas, además de los factores económicos, también se ven perpetuados por la política europea.

La Política Agrícola Común (PAC) y la industria de lana

La Política Agrícola Común (PAC) es un programa fundado por 6 países europeos en 1962 que forja una asociación entre el gobierno de Europa y sus agricultores con el propósito de asegurar la disponibilidad de la alimentación, apoyar a los granjeros y lograr sostenibilidad.¹⁶ Es un sistema bastante complicado que crea reglamentos y legislación y también ofrece apoyo directo para los agricultores. Para 2023-2027, el presupuesto planificado es 189.20 mil millones de euros en pagos directos (72%), 66 millones de euros para el desarrollo rural (25%) y 8.90 mil millones de euros en pagos para sectores específicos (3%).¹⁷ Aunque la PAC ha apoyado sin duda a millones de granjeros en España y toda Europa, los pagos son a menudo desiguales y no ofrecen apoyo a los ganaderos y la industria de lana. El enfoque

¹² European Environment Agency, *Microplastics from Textiles: Towards a Circular Economy for Textiles in Europe* (2022), <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/microplastics-from-textiles-towards-a-circular-economy-for-textiles-in-europe>.

¹³ Leire Díez, "De materia prima a subproducto: la lana que no abriga al pastor," *NueveCuatroUno*, 11 de junio de 2024, <https://nuevecuatrouno.com/2024/06/11/de-materia-prima-a-subproducto-lana-esquileo/>.

¹⁴ Díez, "De materia prima."

¹⁵ Red PAC, "Los Grupos de Acción Local de Mallorca y Menorca cooperan para revalorizar la lana de oveja," 26 de enero de 2024, <https://redpac.es/en/news/local-action-groups-mallorca-and-menorca-cooperate-to-revalue-sheep-wool>.

¹⁶ Comisión Europea, "La PAC en resumen," consultado el 27 de junio de 2025, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/cap-glance_en.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*



primario de la PAC es financiar la agricultura intensiva conectada con empresas transnacionales y la producción de carne con respecto a los animales. El 80 % se destina a apoyar la producción de alimentos de origen animal intensivos en carbono.¹⁸ Esto significa que los pastores, ganaderos pequeños o trashumantes quedan fuera del apoyo de la PAC cuando su trabajo tiene la oportunidad de aprovechar los beneficios de la trashumancia. Juan Vielva, el Director del Centro de Investigación, Seguimiento y Evaluación (CISE) del Parque Nacional de la Sierra de Guadarrama y Pastor Honorario de España, durante una presentación en Rascafría, España el 9 de junio, 2025, dijo que el mantra del gobierno es siempre "el que contamina paga" pero nunca "el que cuida cobra". Los que trabajan para promover la sostenibilidad están infravalorados y poco respaldados.

Fuera de la propia PAC, otro componente de la ley europea causa estragos para los pastores: el Reglamento Europeo (CE) 1069/2009. Esta ley clasifica los subproductos animales en tres categorías según su peligrosidad para el ser humano: la 1 es la más peligrosa y la 3 es la menos peligrosa. La lana se clasifica como categoría 3.¹⁹ Esto significa que la lana no es un producto sino un subproducto que se considera peligroso. En el caso de la lana, el miedo es que el material no lavado pueda contener bacterias y enfermedades. Sin embargo, según una reunión de la Comisión Europea en 2023, la industria de la lana se enfrenta a restricciones a la exportación a causa de enfermedades que han sido erradicadas.²⁰ Estas normativas obsoletas impiden al sector adaptarse al futuro y mantienen los obstáculos al éxito. Además, la recomendación durante esta reunión fue que la UE necesita una nueva clasificación para la lana para determinar cuándo la situación es peligrosa o no, y que la UE necesita explorar otros usos de la lana para aumentar su valor.²¹ El tratamiento de la lana como subproducto empeora la situación. La PAC y los ideales futuros de la Unión Europea afirman que se enfocan en la sostenibilidad y la lucha contra el cambio climático. Por ejemplo,

¹⁸ Fiona Harvey, "Welfare for the Rich: How Farm Subsidies Wrecked Europe's Landscapes," *The Guardian*, 2 de noviembre de 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/nov/02/farm-subsidies-wrecked-europe-environments-common-agricultural-policy>.

¹⁹ Comisión Europea, "Animal By-Products," *European Commission*, consultado el 27 de junio de 2025, https://food.ec.europa.eu/food-safety/animal-products_en.

²⁰ Comisión Europea, *CDG on Animal Production – Sheepmeat and Goat / Beekeeping: Meeting Minutes* (Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2023), https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-12/cdg-animal-production-2023-11-22-minutes_en.pdf, 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

el Pacto Verde Europeo trabaja para garantizar que Europa sea “el primer continente climáticamente neutro” con planes sostenibles.²² Hay una contradicción en la política europea. La trashumancia, la utilización sostenible de la lana y la innovación pueden ayudar a lograr este propósito.

La legislación crea fuertes barreras para los pastores y subraya aún más la percepción de la lana como un producto sin valor. La realidad es que, sin apoyo de la PAC, la industria de la lana nunca será viable económicamente y la ausencia de apoyo de la UE representa una oportunidad perdida para promover la sostenibilidad.

La industria de lana y dependencia de China

Con el surgimiento de la globalización e industrialización, la mayoría de los productos viajan a diferentes partes del mundo antes de llegar a destino final. Esto también es verdad con la lana. En el siglo XX, el proceso de la deslocalización de la industria de la lana y textil empezó a mudarse a China y fuera de España.²³ En la actualidad, España exporta lana a China e importa los tejidos una vez procesados. Aunque este proceso puede tener justificaciones económicas clásicas—los costes laborales son más baratos en China—ignora la importancia cultural de la lana en España y elimina la oportunidad de tratar la lana como algo más que un textil. Según el Carnegie Endowment, Europa tiene una dependencia “peligrosa” de China y muchos líderes se están dando cuenta de que tienen que trabajar juntos para crear una Europa unida contra la influencia de China.²⁴ La exportación de la industria lanera ha desmantelado las infraestructuras españolas, ha disminuido el empleo y ha frenado la oportunidad de innovar. Este modelo no solo representa una pérdida económica y cultural, sino que también tiene un alto coste medioambiental. Transportar la lana a China, procesarla en fábricas allí y transportarla de vuelta a España emite carbono y se basa en la legislación china en materia de regulación

²² Comisión Europea, “El Pacto Verde Europeo,” consultado el 27 de junio de 2025, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_es.

²³ Proyecto El Batán de las Mujeres, *Manual de usos*, 156.

²⁴ Judy Dempsey, “Europe’s Dangerous Dependence on China,” *Strategic Europe*, April 4, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/europe/strategic-europe/2023/04/europes-dangerous-dependence-on-china?>

medioambiental. Esta externalización a China implica una dependencia de la normativa medioambiental china, lo que significa que la UE y España ya no tienen la capacidad reguladora que parecen desear. Mantener la producción dentro de la UE y dentro de España creará trabajos “verdes”, revitalizará economías rurales y reconstruirá las capacidades industriales, todos ellos objetivos que cuentan con el apoyo de la UE. Europa no debe perder su industria lanera si quiere ser líder mundial en la era sostenible.

Conclusión

La historia de la lana en España desde la época medieval hasta la actualidad revela que los productos tradicionales no desaparecen únicamente por cambios tecnológicos, sino por decisiones económicas, políticas y sociales. La situación de la lana está en crisis, pero hay esperanza y un camino hacia adelante para los responsables políticos de la UE y la industria en general. La lana no es un subproducto; es un resultado del trabajo de ganaderos, artesanos y pastores que se han estado dedicados a la industria por generaciones.

Sin embargo, el cambio rara vez proviene de los niveles más altos. El público puede tener un gran impacto si escoge la lana cuando pueda en vez de las fibras sintéticas. Las voces de la gente que trabaja dentro de la industria tienen que ser apoyadas para crear cambios a nivel legislativo. Reconocer el valor de la lana es también reconocer el valor del conocimiento tradicional, de las economías rurales y de los modelos sostenibles. No se puede avanzar hacia un futuro verde dejando atrás lo que ha sostenido a la sociedad durante siglos.

Contexto del autor

En junio de 2025, pasé un período de tiempo en España estudiando los efectos culturales, económicos y medioambientales de la ganadería ovina y la agricultura sostenible en un curso de Middlebury financiado con una beca de transformación de conflictos. Mientras viajaba a diferentes partes del país, conversé con expertos políticos y científicos y pasé tiempo en zonas rurales con ganaderos y organizadores de comunidades. Aprendí sobre la industria de lana en España y Europa en su conjunto así como el papel de la legislación de la Unión Europea en la política agrícola.

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Rise of Germany's Alternative für Deutschland

by Charlie de Ramel

The AfD was founded in 2013 by a group of economists and conservative academics, including Bernd Lucke and Frauke Petry, initially as a Eurosceptic movement opposing Chancellor Merkel's handling of the eurozone crisis. In its early years, the party had monetary policy and resistance to EU financial integration rather than nationalist identity politics. However, there was a turning point that occurred during the 2015 refugee crisis, when the party began to shift towards an explicitly anti-immigration stance. Populist rhetoric gradually became central to the party's identity and helped unify previously fragmented far-right constituencies.¹ Scholars have argued that contemporary populist movements reflect a new rift in international conduct that expands political competition in cultural issues. As one study notes, the "AfD created a new dimension of the political space by its own combination of issues." It fused a combination of Euroscepticism, anti-immigrant policies, and nationalist rhetoric into a strong electoral strategy that has changed and disrupted Germany's traditional center-left / center-right party alignment.

Further understanding the AfD's rise requires examining structural changes within Germany's political system. One key change has been to the transformation of political identities themselves. Studies looking at party alignments show that German politics has been shifting from traditional class-based conflict towards a more cultural axis centered on national identity.² The AfD has recreated and now occupies a new space within the changing German political landscape while positioning itself as a "cultural right" alternative that opposes usual democratic norms. However, this transformation is not unique to Germany. This autocratic behavior is consistent across broader patterns in Europe and North America,

including France's National Rally, or the United States under the Trump-aligned Republican Party. These groups champion political values such as national identity and sovereignty.

Another factor contributing to regional inequality between eastern and western Germany has further advanced the party's growth. Recent studies on the growth of populist movements show that economic stagnation and the decline of a specific demographic have helped to create "radical" movements that challenge long-standing traditional parties.³ Support for the AfD is consistently stronger in regions that experienced more profound disruption after reunification, which suggests historical grievances and marginalization remain significant drivers of political behavior. The party's recent rise reflects broader debates about the uneven impacts of globalization. People in communities that feel forgotten or have their values ignored are more likely to vote for politicians who will fight for their rights and stand up for them.

Migration politics have equally shaped the AfD's trajectory as a major political power in Germany. For example, research has been done to show that there have been more hostile attitudes towards immigrants in areas with more refugee integration and stronger right-wing support. The findings here support how political rhetoric and perceived individual sentiment surrounding immigration can reinforce polarization. The AfD has capitalized on this economic insecurity and demographic decline by using anxiety surrounding migration to challenge the "traditional German" national identity. The AfD sustains support through campaign messaging that frames immigration as a significant security threat to the "pure nation" by publicly highlighting isolated criminal incidents involving migrants. They also portray EU governance as an erosion of German sovereignty. By linking these cultural and political anxieties, the AfD turns these grievances into electoral movements. Their general anti-immigration sentiment has been one of the unifying forces across many far-right groups across the world. It also enables the AfD to consolidate influence within the broader populist landscape.⁴

Beyond Germany's borders, the AfD's growth has implications for greater European policies. As the largest economy in the European Union, Germany plays an essential role in shaping policy. The normalization of a strong right-wing populist actor in German politics is likely influencing and has influenced debates around immigrant rights and social inclusion, such as asylum law or social integration funding. Also, due to Germany's hold as one of the central architects of EU migration frameworks, shifts in German policy discourse could influence the direction of international immigration policy and law. Tendencies like these could suggest that as globalization reshapes political identities, conflicts will increasingly emerge around heritage and cultural values rather than basic economic ideology.⁵ In this context, Germany's political experience mirrors developments across national boundaries, including Western Europe and the United States, where populist parties challenge established institutions while appealing to voters who feel excluded from traditional political structures.

The AfD serves as a lens through which to examine the evolving nature of Western democracy itself. Democratic norms value debate and discussion, but the rise of overtly liberal or autocratic tendencies undermines core democratic norms. Structural changes, like migration debates (or complete rejection and blatant anti-muslim hate in the AfD's stance), regional inequality, and declining trust in traditional parties, all have led to the transformation of Germany's electoral landscape and reshaped political competition. However, this isn't a trend specific to Germany, and academic research on anti-immigration populism suggests that these dynamics are part of a broader shift towards nationalism.⁶

The rise of the AfD suggests that contemporary democratic competition is increasingly structured around cultural identity rather than economic redistribution. The AfD's core political appeals, such as national sovereignty and cultural protectionism, closely resemble those advanced by other populist movements in Italy, France, and the US. Scholars have drawn clear parallels between the AfD's political platform and other right-wing movements. Evident today in the United

States, nationalist rhetoric and anti-immigration policies have similarly reshaped partisan competition. These organizations threaten the core principles of our democracies, and we should view a larger political realignment driven by globalization and cultural conflict.

In my opinion, the durability of democratic norms will depend less on suppressing populist actors and more on whether mainstream institutions, such as how major parties, courts, and the media, can respond to the fuel that organizations like the AfD use to mobilize their support. In this sense, it will be interesting to see whether Germany's institutions can adapt to these pressures without making polarization worse and preventing a broader change to Western democratic norms.

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3 Görge, "Alternative for Germany," 2025.

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6 Görge, "Alternative for Germany," 2025.

How Did We Get Here? A Timeline of the Begin Doctrine

by Helen Schiller & Zachary Taylor

Introduction

When Israeli warplanes bombed Iranian nuclear sites in June, 2025, killing high-level commanders and more than 1,000 civilians, world leaders were shocked, both by the scale and success of Israel's attacks and their apparent indifference to international law.¹ To Israel, however, it was the continuation of a decades-old ethos of their national security rhetoric entitled the Begin Doctrine. The doctrine states that while Israel will not be the first state to use nuclear weapons in the Middle East, it will not allow a second nuclear power to emerge in the region, prioritizing preemptive strikes to maintain a nuclear monopoly.² *So how did we get here?*

Background

The Begin Doctrine takes its name from Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who served from 1977 to 1983. The doctrine reflects Israel's strategic judgment that the nuclear weaponization of any other Middle Eastern state constitutes an existential threat, and commits Israel to preventive military action to forestall that outcome.³ Israel's security doctrine has long been grounded in a posture of strategic self-reliance—a product of both the material vulnerabilities of a small, densely populated state lacking strategic depth and the ideological inheritance of Zionism, which frames Jewish historical experience as one of chronic exposure to persecution culminating in the Holocaust.⁴ These factors have produced a security

culture in which preemption is institutionally embedded and ideologically legitimized.

From Osirak to Iran

Iraq

Israel formally articulated the Begin Doctrine after Operation Opera, when eight Israeli F-16 fighter jets secretly flew over Jordan and Saudi Arabia and successfully destroyed Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor, located near Baghdad on June 7, 1981.⁵ Despite numerous intelligence assessments that the reactor lacked the ability to produce nuclear weapons, Begin, ignoring the concerns of his cabinet and numerous Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) officials, still saw the reactor as an imminent threat to the state of Israel.⁶

In sharp contrast to the strikes in June 2025, Operation Opera was globally condemned. Israel did not inform its allies of its plans and executed the operation unilaterally. In response, the United Nations passed Resolution 487 which condemned the attack, and the United States, then considered Israel's closest ally, suspended shipments of F-16 jets to Israel for ten weeks.⁷

In the aftermath of the operation, Begin invoked the memory of the Holocaust, stating "...if we stood by idly, two, three years, at the most four years, and Saddam Hussein would have produced his three, four, five bombs... [and] another Holocaust would have happened in the history of the Jewish people [...] We shall not allow any enemy to develop weapons of mass destruction turned against us."⁸ Thus, the Begin Doctrine was born.

Syria

Israel has also applied the Begin Doctrine in Syria.

On September 6, 2007, Israel launched Operation Outside the Box under Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's premiership, striking a nearly complete nuclear facility called Al-Kibar that was located in Syria's Deir ez-Zor Governorate. The facility had been constructed secretly from 2001 onward with North Korean technical assistance, and Israeli intelligence—confirmed by a CIA briefing to Congress in April 2008—assessed with high confidence that it was a nuclear reactor modeled on North Korea's Yongbyon facility.⁹ Without support from his American counterpart, George W. Bush, Olmert struck the Syrian site unilaterally.¹⁰ In sharp contrast to Begin's dramatic press conference in the immediate aftermath of Operation Opera, Israel did not acknowledge the Operation until 2018. The global response was muted, and the United Nations failed to settle on a resolution. Although Syria submitted a formal complaint to the UN, it was withdrawn, signaling a growing acceptance of the Begin Doctrine throughout the international community.¹¹

Iran

On June 13, 2025, the IDF struck numerous Iranian nuclear sites, military and infrastructure targets, and senior members of Iran's military leadership, triggering a brief but intense period of direct armed conflict between the two states that lasted twelve days.¹² The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) repeatedly reported Iranian noncompliance with its safeguards obligations, including limitations on inspector access and unresolved questions regarding undeclared nuclear material, including large amounts of weapons-grade Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU).¹³ Following years of escalating international tension, these strikes were launched amid unproductive negotiations between the United States and Iran regarding

its program.¹⁴

By June 22, the conflict grew when the United States entered the fighting, employing GBU-57 Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP) munitions ("bunker busters") against Iranian nuclear facilities buried deep underground.¹⁵ Despite the scale of the strikes and the risk of regional escalation, the international response was notably restrained. While some states expressed concern regarding escalation and civilian harm, there was little to no sustained diplomatic or institutional backlash against Israel or the United States. No major sanctions followed, and the United Nations Security Council took no binding action against Israel or the United States.¹⁶

Looking Forward

Although the Begin Doctrine has effectively prevented additional Middle Eastern states from full nuclear weaponization, it poses serious challenges to the legitimacy of the treaties-based, multilateral global nonproliferation regime. Nonproliferation efforts have been fundamentally structured around multilateral cooperation, and Israel's continued use of unilateral force undermines this paradigm. Moreover, in an era of increasing global fragmentation and disregard for the postwar rules-based liberal order, the international community's acceptance of such exceptional actions is deeply troubling.

Nuclear warfare would be catastrophic, and even absent definitive evidence that Iran intends to reconstruct their nuclear program to its pre-strike capacity, uncertainty itself presents a profound risk. For example, in the wake of Operation Opera, Saddam Hussein was motivated to aggressively and secretly pursue nuclear weaponization, and although his efforts were unsuccessful, it shows that preemptive action can be an impetus for nuclear posturing. It is

1 State of Israel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Operation Rising Lion: Key Factual and Legal Aspects of the Iran-Israel Hostilities" (Jerusalem, 2025), [https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/generalpage/operation-rising-lion-key-factual-and-legal-aspects-of-the-iran-israel-hostilities-june-2025-11-aug-2025/en/English_Swords_of_Iron_DOCUMENTS_Operation_Rising_Lion_2025_\(Israel-Iran\)-Key_Factual_and_Legal_Aspects-18-09-2025%20.pdf](https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/generalpage/operation-rising-lion-key-factual-and-legal-aspects-of-the-iran-israel-hostilities-june-2025-11-aug-2025/en/English_Swords_of_Iron_DOCUMENTS_Operation_Rising_Lion_2025_(Israel-Iran)-Key_Factual_and_Legal_Aspects-18-09-2025%20.pdf). (official Israeli government account); Reuters, "World Reacts to Israeli Strike on Iran over Nuclear Programme," June 13, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/world-reacts-israeli-strike-iran-over-nuclear-program-me-2025-06-13/>.

2 Avner Cohen, *The Worst-Kept Secret: Israel's Bargain with the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 224.

3 Shlomo Brom, "Is the Begin Doctrine Still a Viable Option for Israel?" in *Getting Ready for a Nuclear-Ready Iran*, ed. Henry Sokolski and Patrick Clawson (Carlisle: U.S. Army War College, 2005), 137-139.

4 Avner Yaniv, *Deterrence Without the Bomb: The Politics of Israeli Strategy* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1987), 12-27; Zeev Maoz, *Defending the Holy Land: A Critical Analysis of*

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5 Amos Perlmutter, Michael I. Handel, and Uri Bar-Joseph, *Two Minutes over Baghdad* (London: Routledge, 2003), 132-137.

6 Avi Shilon, Menachem Begin: A Life, trans. Danielle Zilberberg and Yoram Sharett (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 341.

7 UN Security Council, Resolution 487 (S/RES/487), June 19, 1981, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/22225?ln=en&v=pdf#files>; Giordana Pulcini and Or Rabinowitz, "An Ounce of Prevention, A Pound of Cure? The Reagan Administration's Nonproliferation Policy and the Osirak Raid," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2021): 20-23.

8 Quoted in Colin Kahl, "Before Attacking Iran, Israel Should Learn from Its 1981 Strike on Iraq," *Center for a New American Security*, March 2, 2012, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/before-attacking-iran-israel-should-learn-from-its-1981-strike-on-iraq>; No direct archival source exists for this statement.

9 Ronen Bergman, *Rise and Kill First: The Secret History of Israel's Targeted Assassinations* (New York: Random House, 2018), 589-592.

10 George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown, 2010), 431-432.

11 Leonard S. Spector and Avner Cohen, "Israel's Airstrike on Syria's Reactor: Implications for the Nonproliferation Regime," *Arms Control Today* 38, no. 6 (2008): 17-20.

12 Darya Dolzikova and Matthew Savill, "Operation Rising Lion: The First 72 Hours," *Royal United Services Institute*, June 16, 2025, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/operation-rising-lion-first-72-hours>.

13 "Fact Sheet: The Iran Deal, Then and Now," *Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation*, March 10, 2021 (Updated June 2025), <https://armscontrolcenter.org/the-iran-deal-then-and-now/>; Parham Ghobadi, "Iran Significantly Growing Uranium Stockpile, Warns UN Nuclear Agency," May 31, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1mg7kx2d45o>.

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15 Chris Gordon, "7 Air Force B-2s Drop 14 Bunker-Buster Bombs on Iran," *Air and Space Forces Magazine*, June 22, 2025, <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/us-strikes-iranian-nuclear-facilities-b-2-bombers-cruise-missiles/>.

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important to recall that, although never officially acknowledged, Israel remains the only nuclear-armed state in the Middle East. And just as Israel perceives its neighbors as posing existential threats, other states in the region may view Israel through a similar lens.

Effective, sustainable nonproliferation efforts are multilateral and diplomatic in nature, and continued deference to unilateral enforcement, whether by Israel or any other state, functions as a bandaid solution without addressing states' core motivations behind nuclear armament. If exceptional enforcement continues to substitute for collective security, the long-term consequence may not be deterrence, but the unraveling of the nonproliferation regime itself.

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The Architect of its Own Prison

How Thailand's Engineered Historiography Created a Zero Win-Set in the Cambodian-Thai Border Dispute

by Someta Ly

The 2025 Cambodian–Thai border conflict that resulted in over 100 deaths and more than 500,000 displaced stems from border disagreements that emerged in the aftermath of the 1904 Franco-Siamese (Franco-Thai) Treaty.¹ A 1907 French survey produced a map that placed Preah Vihear temple on Cambodia's side of the border. This deviated from the watershed principle of the 1904 Franco-Siamese border treaty, which would have placed the temple in Siamese hands.² While the Thais never officially approved the French map, their failure to formally object at the time became the legal foundation for Cambodia's International Court of Justice (ICJ) victories in both 1962 and 2013.³ Since 1962, Thailand has consistently rejected the Court's jurisdiction, favoring “a flexible, consent-based approach” through a bilateral mechanism between the two countries.⁴ Cambodia, on the other hand, has sought ICJ adjudication multiple times—most recently in 2025.⁵ A paradox emerges where a consolidated authoritarian state is repeatedly seeking international adjudication while a hybrid regime with semi-democratic features is systematically refusing it, even when bilateral approaches have historically resulted in paralysis and

violence. Thailand's refusal to accept ICJ jurisdiction does not reflect an unwillingness to resolve the dispute, but rather an impossible structural position that they have constructed for themselves.

Since the contested land itself is void of any meaningful natural resources, nationalism is the driving force behind this conflict. At its center stands Preah Vihear, a temple that was built during the 11th century under the Khmer Empire — Cambodia's direct predecessors.⁶ Irrespective of the ICJ's legal adjudication, both countries view themselves as the rightful heirs to the temple, though Cambodia's direct link provides them a stronger claim.⁷ However, within Thai historical memory, the temple functions not as architectural heritage but rather as a symbol of national humiliation,

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playing into the ‘lost territories’ narrative where the country is framed as a victim of foreign imperialism.⁸ This nationalist mythology was constructed in the 1930s by the military through maps of ‘lost territories,’ monuments commemorating French occupation, and grievances cultivated through the education system.⁹ It enabled the regime to curry legitimacy and justify territorial expansion against French Indochina.¹⁰

This grievance-based historiography grew to permeate into Thailand's Constitutional Court's jurisprudence,

elite political strategy, and self-reproducing popular culture.¹¹ It has proved so effective at mobilizing mass support that it has empowered veto players within Thai politics behind its many coups — the Constitutional Court, military, and monarchy — to now make territorial compromise politically lethal for any leader. The country has essentially created a political infrastructure fueled by nationalist mythology that can generate on-demand political mobilization, with the only caveat being that it operates as an autonomous constraint that no actor can override.

This mechanism has been activated repeatedly across Thai history with remarkable parallels. When then-Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej and his Foreign Minister Noppadon Pattama formally endorsed Cambodia's UNESCO World Heritage application for Preah Vihear 2008, the royalist Democrat Party filed a complaint seeking to nullify the document, and accused Noppadon of failing to submit the communique to parliamentary scrutiny.¹² The People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), another Thai royalist faction, mobilized supporters to demonstrate outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before moving to occupy the Government House, utilizing rhetoric that leaders were “selling out the country” instead of preserving territorial integrity.¹³ The political upheaval from the decision, involving a Constitutional Court ruling against the communiqué, forced Noppadon out of his position and destabilized Samak's government till its ousting by the end of December under a different Constitutional Court case.¹⁴ The dismantling of Samak's People's Power Party (PPP), elected in 2007 with nearly half of the parliamentary seats on a pro-Thaksin anti-royalist-military platform, paved the way for Abhisit Vejjajiva's military-backed Democrat-led royalist coalition to come to power from 2008 to 2011 through coercion of smaller parties.¹⁵

The royalist-military faction's use of the Preah Vihear question as a nationalist flash point to legitimize rule mirrors the country's original sin: Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat's weaponization of the 1962 ICJ loss—using Cambodia's victory as a nationalist grievance to shore up his dictatorship's legitimacy after a coup in 1958. In a speech, Sarit declared that “[Thais] must reclaim Preah Vihear Temple for our nation,” vowing “lifelong resentment — in this life and the next.”¹⁶

Recent studies have established a causal link between contemporary nationalist feelings caused by the Preah Vihear question and the legitimization of Sarit's rise to full political power as Prime Minister.¹⁷ The most recent and evident case of this mechanism is the 2025 political crisis that arose after Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra's June 15 compromising phone call with Cambodian Senate President and ex-Prime Minister Hun Sen against the backdrop of the first round of renewed deadly fighting in 14 years.¹⁸ The scandal, stemming from Paetongtarn's deference to Hun, referring to him as “uncle” and criticising her own military, triggered nationalist sentiments and mobilized thousands of protesters.¹⁹ The veto mechanisms from the 2008 crisis kicked in. The Constitutional Court ousted Paetongtarn from office in a 6-3 vote, citing that she “lacks the qualifications and possesses prohibited characteristics” of premiership under the constitution.²⁰ This political vacuum led to the formation of a pro-royalist, pro-military interim coalition government under Anutin Charnvirakul, leader of the conservative opposition Bhumjaithai party who empowered the military to respond to the conflict by bombing border communities and

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7 Panchali Saikia, “The Dispute over Prea Vihear: Seen Problems, Unseen Stakes,” *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies*, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09270>.

8 Shane Strate, “A Pile of Stones? Preah Vihear as a Thai Symbol of National Humiliation,” *South East Asia Research* 21, no. 1 (March 2013): 41–68, <https://doi.org/10.5367/sear.2013.0139>.

9 Shane Strate, “Introduction: The Idea of ‘Loss’ in Thai Historical Narratives,” in *The Lost Territories: Thailand's History of National Humiliation* (University of Hawaii Press, 2015).

10 Ibid.

11 Shane Strate, “Conclusion,” in *The Lost Territories: Thailand's History of National Humiliation* (University of Hawaii Press, 2015), 189–96, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x1j8w.11?seq=1>.

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14 Hannah Beech, “Legal Blows Imperil Thai Government,” *TIME* (nextgen, July 10, 2008), <https://time.com/archive/6943759/legal-blows-imperil-thai-government/>; Ian MacKinnon, “Thai PM Stripped of Power as Court Finds Government Guilty of Corruption” (The Guardian, December 2, 2008), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/dec/02/thailand-protests-government-court-somchai>.

15 Steve Inskeep and Michael Sullivan, “Thailand's People's Power Party Wins

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17 Yingyot Boonchant, “The Preah Vihear Temple Conflict and the Consolidation of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat's Political Legitimacy, 1958–1963,” *Journal of the Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University* 43, no. 1 (2021): 155–78, <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jasu/article/view/252059>.

18 John Yoon, “A Timeline of the Latest Conflict between Cambodia and Thailand,” *The New York Times*, July 24, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/24/world/asia/cambodia-thailand-conflict-timeline.html>.

19 Helen Regan and Kocha Olarn, “Thailand's Prime Minister Removed from Office over Leaked Phone Call Scandal with Cambodian Strongman,” *CNN*, August 29, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/08/29/asia/thailand-paetongtarn-shinawatra-court-hnk-intl>; Jerry Harmer and Sahattaya Kraikhunhot, “Protesters in Bangkok Demand Resignation of Court-Suspended Prime Minister Paetongtarn,” *AP News*, August 2, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/thailand-protest-prime-minister-paetongtarn-05f7768aab5d9dbf380774f4d269979b>.

20 Regan and Olarn, “Thailand's Prime Minister Removed from Office over Leaked Phone Call Scandal with Cambodian Strongman.”

establishments suspected of harboring scam centers.²¹ The crisis culminated in the electoral victory of the Bhumjaithai Party, which rode on nationalist sentiments, doubling its parliamentary seats in an election where border security and national pride were top voter concerns.²² These recurring episodes unveil a territorial nationalism that is weaponized domestically by an anti-democratic establishment to delegitimize elected officials, justify constitutional interventions, and consolidate power for themselves. The genius of the royalist-military faction is their ability to position themselves as conservative guardians of territorial integrity and their capacity to transform a crisis into electoral legitimacy for their regime — be it Sarit in 1962, Abhisit after 2008, or the new Charnvirakul government in 2026.

This powerful domestic mechanism, however, has implications for the country's negotiating capacity on the international stage. Robert Putnam's 1988 Two-Level Game framework lays out that international negotiations occur simultaneously on two levels: Level I, the international bargaining between states, and Level II, the domestic stage influenced by constituents and veto players. Essentially, leaders must find outcomes within a "win-set", which is the range of agreements that is acceptable both to international counterparts and domestic actors. If no overlap exists, the win-set becomes zero, making agreements structurally impossible regardless of leadership preference. This is the case that Thailand has found itself in.

Meanwhile, Cambodia's consolidated authoritarianism allows it to mostly bypass different domestic interests, giving Hun Sen a wide array of policy options.²³ Two ICJ adjudication precedents in the coun-

try's favor give the country even more of a leg up on the international stage, where accepting ICJ rulings does not even involve domestic friction. In contrast, the more complex Thai case has a severely constrained win-set as a hybrid authoritarian regime consisting of multiple veto powers and domestic players, one of which is a fervently nationalist population of their own making.²⁴ On the first level, two options emerge. Both nations can either choose to (1) accept ICJ jurisdiction, which favors the Cambodian case due to precedent, or (2) resort to bilateral negotiations which favors the Thai case due to power asymmetry between the two countries. On the second level, the Thai nationalist infrastructure makes any territorial concession political suicide as it triggers the veto mechanism involving judicial intervention, military mobilization, and a political crisis that has often resulted in regime change. However, the successor government, which has tended to be from the royalist-military faction, finds itself equally trapped as their nationalist-driven ascendancy to power now demands the hard-line posturing their predecessors lacked. Thailand is thus faced with a lose-lose dilemma: accepting ICJ jurisdiction guarantees legal defeat leading to domestic political death, while refusing jurisdiction to lean on bilateral negotiations with Cambodia, which is legally advantaged and has the authoritarian flexibility for a wider win-set, only leads to further conflict. Thailand's politically engineered historiography that has deeply embedded itself in the national consciousness and socio-political fabric has taken a life of its own. More importantly, it has resulted in a foreign policy paralysis that they guise as principled resistance to international law. The zero-win set leaves the Kingdom in a strategic purgatory where the only sustainable solution is to simply refuse to engage with the question, as it had between 2011 and 2025, to maintain a precarious status quo.

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An experiment in sanctions-proofing: Russian “domestic offshore” tax havens

by Ava Janet Slocum

Introduction

The imposition of sweeping Western sanctions following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has prompted significant attention to the mechanisms by which targeted states adapt their financial and legal infrastructure to mitigate economic pressure. One little-discussed adaptive strategy is the Russian government’s creation of Special Administrative Regions, or SARs. These are regions intended to serve as “offshore” tax havens within the territory of the Russian Federation, where registered companies can simultaneously enjoy the favorable tax treatment they once enjoyed in overseas jurisdictions and stay out of reach of Western sanctions. In 2018, Russian federal legislation created two SARs: one on Oktyabrsky Island in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad in the Baltic Sea, and the other on Russky Island in the Sea of Japan in Russia’s far east.¹

In order to evaluate this development, this article will briefly examine the characteristics of Russian offshore wealth, the challenges posed by sanctions, and the advantages and limitations of special economic zones aimed at corporate re-domiciliation and asset repatriation within a sanctioned economy. Ultimately, I argue that while SARs represent an innovative step at sanctions-proofing by repatriating corporate registration, their long-term effectiveness in bringing offshore wealth back to Russia is limited by structural constraints and political risk, as well as the availability of third-party jurisdictions.

Russian Offshore Wealth

Russian elites have long sequestered their wealth in overseas tax havens and jurisdictions that offer financial secrecy and strong legal protections. Economists Novokmet, Piketty, and Zucman estimate that wealth held offshore by rich Russians is roughly equivalent

in scale to total household financial assets held inside Russia, representing an extraordinary concentration of capital outside the country’s borders that reflects decades of capital flight accelerated by the economic instability of the 1990s.² However, a distinction must be made between two forms of offshore activity.

The first is the registration of operating companies within foreign jurisdictions. Large Russian-born firms like Yandex and VKontakte moved their legal registrations outside of Russia primarily to access international capital markets and credible legal systems.³ This re-registration abroad is a phenomenon described by scholars as “institutional escape,” wherein firms seek more favorable institutional environments where the “rules of the game” of economic exchange are stable and predictable.⁴ The second form of Russian offshore wealth is the registration of offshore financial structures whose purpose is to contain and conceal private fortunes. Complex ownership structures, shell companies, and the use of professional intermediaries serve to create jurisdictional buffers that partition an individual’s wealth from their domestic legal identity.⁵ By “layering” ownership through jurisdictions like the British Virgin Islands, Russian elites effectively convert physical assets into liquid, global instruments protected by Western common law.⁶

While these offshore jurisdictions offer minimal liability and reporting requirements, their utility for the Russian elite extends beyond fiscal optimization. Since the 1990s, Russia’s wealthy have navigated an unstable domestic environment characterized by weak property rights and selective law enforcement. The relationship between the oligarchs who made their wealth during the chaotic privatization of the post-Soviet period and Putin has been characterized by political support in exchange for lucrative government

2 Filip Novokmet, Thomas Piketty, and Gabriel Zucman, “From Soviets to oligarchs: inequality and property in Russia, 1905–2016,” *The Journal of Economic Inequality* 16 (2018): 189–223, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10888-018-9383-0>.

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contracts. High-profile instances of imprisonment and exile of oligarchs who publicly criticized Putin, such as Boris Berezovsky and Mikhail Khodorkovsky, cemented the precarious position of these oligarchs’ wealth under Putin.⁷ Offshore jurisdictions with legal systems viewed as less vulnerable to arbitrary state intervention thus offered insurance against domestic political risk. It is precisely these offshore holdings that have made Russia’s wealthy elite vulnerable to the sanctions regime that followed the 2022 invasion.

Sanctions and Sanctions-proofing

Given their strong ties to the Russian government, oligarchs and their assets are natural targets for Western sanctions, which are aimed at decreasing Russia’s revenues and access to capital in order to cripple its war effort in Ukraine. Traditional Russian money havens and investment destinations like Switzerland, Cyprus, the US, and the UK—whose capital London earned the nickname “Londongrad” due to the large influx of

By “layering” ownership through jurisdictions like the British Virgin Islands, Russian elites effectively convert physical assets into liquid, global instruments protected by Western common law.

Russians and Russian capital it has experienced since the collapse of the Soviet Union—have ceased to be secure jurisdictions for oligarchs’ assets.⁸ Western allies have imposed broad multilateral sanctions targeting key sectors of the Russian economy, including the financial sector, as well as targeted sanctions against specific individuals and entities. These sanctions generally involve asset freezes, travel restrictions, financial isolation, and prohibitions on doing business with or providing business services to the targeted entities.⁹

7 Marshall I. Goldman, “Putin and the Oligarchs,” *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 6 (2004): 33–44, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20034135>.

8 “The Rise and Fall of Londongrad,” *The Economist*, March 5, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/britain/2022/03/05/the-rise-and-fall-of-londongrad>.

9 Council of the European Union, “Sanctions against Russia,” <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-against-russia/>.

Although the full-scale invasion triggered an unprecedented volume and variety of sanctions against actors in Russia, the government has been operating under sanctions since its occupation of Crimea in 2014.¹⁰ This has given it ample time to engage in “sanctions-proofing,” defined by scholars as measures that aim to “limit both the *exposure* of the government to sanctions and the *influence* of sanctions on government decisionmaking.”¹¹ One important component of this effort has been *deoffshorizatsiya*, (“de-offshorization”), which involves attracting Russian businesses and investment back from foreign jurisdictions in order to increase tax revenue, improve transparency, and reduce reliance on Western financial systems. Putin has spoken publicly about de-offshorization since the early 2010s, and initial policy focused on the fiscal dimension of taxing offshore wealth: a 2014 law instituted stricter reporting and tax requirements for foreign-registered entities controlled by Russian tax residents.¹² However, these policies had limited success at enticing assets back to Russia until sanctions removed the ability to maneuver around these laws.¹³

Special Administrative Regions

The Russian government created a number of incentives for re-domiciliation in the Special Administrative Regions. Re-domiciliation, which is the process by which a company changes the jurisdiction where it is legally registered while maintaining its corporate structure, is the central mechanism of the SAR regime.¹⁴ Incentives include preferential tax regimes, with certain rates like that on received dividends dropping to 0%, simplified currency controls, and

europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-against-russia/.

10 European Commission, “Sanctions adopted following Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine.” European Commission, December 15, 2025, https://finance.ec.europa.eu/eu-and-world/sanctions-restrictive-measures/sanctions-adopted-following-russias-military-aggression-against-ukraine_en.

11 Caleigh Glenn, “Lessons in Sanction-Proofing from Russia,” *The Washington Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (2023): 105–120, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2023.2188829>.

12 National Institute for Systematic Research of Entrepreneurship Problems, “Prezident obyavil o «deoffshorizatsiya» ekonomiki Rossii” [The President announced the deoffshorization of the Russian economy], December 12, 2012, https://nise.ru/articles/business/details.php?ELEMENT_ID=112779; Federal Law No. 376-FZ.

13 “On Amendments to Parts One and Two of the Tax Code of the Russian Federation (Regarding Taxation of Profits of Controlled Foreign Companies and Income of Foreign Organizations),” *Ofitsial’nyi internet-portal pravovoi informatsii [Official Internet Portal of Legal Information]*, November 24, 2014, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201411250003>.

14 Polina Devitt, “Declare offshore wealth? Russia tycoons would rather ship themselves off shore.” *Reuters*, June 6, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/business/declare-offshore-wealth-russia-tycoons-would-rather-ship-themselves-off-shore-idUSKBN18X1KN/>.

15 Meridian Trust, “Redomiciliation of Companies,” <https://meridian-trust.com/redomiciliation-of-companies>.

streamlined restructuring procedures so that corporations can maintain their original legal identity and assets despite moving their place of incorporation.¹⁵ In exchange, companies agree to invest at least 300 million rubles in the local economy's infrastructure within three years and maintain a presence of at least 50 square meters of office space and 15 local employees, creating a symbiotic relationship where the Russian government gains much-needed economic stimulus.¹⁶

For operating companies, the SAR regime offers a solution to a specific problem. A firm like Yandex, whose main business activities occur in Russia, gains little from being registered in a jurisdiction which is now hostile to its operations. In fact, Yandex's Russian assets were severed from its parent company as part of broader Western divestment from Russia and reconstituted as Yandex MKAO, illustrating how re-domiciliation can enable structural survival.¹⁷ Re-domiciling to a SAR allows the firm to bridge the gap between its Russian customer base and its newly isolated corporate governance while enjoying tax benefits. According to the Russian Ministry of Economic Development, as reported by *Izvestia*, at the end of 2024, 488 companies were registered in the SARs: 379 on Oktyabrsky Island and 109 on Russky Island.¹⁸ This represents a significant increase from the period before the 2022 invasion, and a sharp rise from the first two years of the war. Although there is no transparent list of all companies registered in the SARs, several high-profile companies with Russian roots have publicly re-registered on these islands, including Yandex MKAO, online recruitment company HeadHunter, and private healthcare company Mat' i Ditya.¹⁹

¹⁵ Giacomo Tognini, "Inside The Russian Tax Havens Set Up By Putin To Help Sanctioned Billionaires." *Forbes*, February 2, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/giacomotognini/2022/02/02/inside-the-russian-tax-havens-set-up-by-putin-to-help-sanctioned-billionaires/>.

¹⁶ Interfaks. "Gosduma pozvolila rossiiskim kholdingam stanovit'sia rezidentami SAR" [The State Duma has allowed Russian holdings to become residents of SARs]. *Interfaks*, February 16, 2022. <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/822466>.

¹⁷ Alexander Marrow, "Yandex NV finalises \$5.4 bln deal to sell Russian businesses," *Reuters*, July 15, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/deals/yandex-nv-finalises-54-bln-deal-sell-russian-businesses-2024-07-15/>.

¹⁸ Evgenii Grachev and Olga Anaseva, "Rezidentskii polk: chislo firm v rossiiskikh ofshorakh vyroslo v 1,5 raza" [Resident Regiment: The Number of Firms in Russian Offshore Zones Increased by 1.5 Times], *Izvestia*, January 16, 2025, <https://iz.ru/1822844/evgenii-grachev-olga-anaseva/rezidentskii-polok-chislo-firm-v-rossiiskikh-ofshorah-vyroslo-v-15-raza>.

¹⁹ Sostav.ru, "Kolichestvo kompanii v rossiiskikh ofshorakh vyroslo v 1,5 raza" [The number of companies in Russian offshore zones has increased by 1.5 times], January 16, 2025, <https://www.sostav.ru/publication/rossiiskie-ofshory-72590.html>.

While SARs afford companies structural continuity, their benefits for personal wealth vehicles lie primarily in guarding assets from Western seizure. It is a striking irony that Russian oligarchs, who structured their fortunes through offshore holding companies partly

Registering in these jurisdictions allows Russian companies to diversify political exposure, removing the direct threat from both Western sanctions and Russian state intervention.

to insulate that wealth from the Russian state, may now feel compelled to move those same structures back to Russia in order to avoid confiscation by the very governments that they had sought out for greater security. Due to the lack of a public registry, it cannot be ascertained how companies registered in SARs fall into the personal wealth vehicle category. However, following the imposition of wide-ranging sanctions in 2022, the Russian government facilitated the repatriation of these types of structures to the SARs by amending capital amnesty laws to grant immunity from tax and currency prosecution for assets voluntarily disclosed and repatriated.²⁰ By offering a 0% tax rate on dividends, a shield against Western legal reach, and assurances that past violations of tax law will not be prosecuted, the SAR is marketed as a sanctuary for embattled oligarchs.

Structural Limits

Nevertheless, the SARs face inherent limitations. These regions cannot replicate the advantages of globally integrated financial centers. "Domestic offshore" is still domestic, situated within a highly sanctioned economy that cannot reproduce the deep capital markets, convertible currencies, international arbitration mechanisms, and reputational credibility

²⁰ Federal Law No. 48-FZ, "On Amendments to the Federal Law 'On Voluntary Declaration by Individuals of Assets and Accounts (Deposits) in Banks and on Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation,'" *Ofitsial'nyi internet-portal pravovoi informatsii* [Official Internet Portal of Legal Information], March 9, 2022, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202203090006>.

of Western jurisdictions. In this regard, although the tax benefits and operational efficiency that SARs offer are boons to Russian operating companies, they are unable to fill all the roles that registration in the West once did.

Compounding this structural problem is the increased exposure to Russian state control that comes with relocation to SARs. Since 2022, the Russian government has demonstrated an increased willingness to seize and sell off private assets. Moscow-based law firm Nektorov, Saveliev, & Partners (NSP) published a report that estimated the value of private property nationalized by the Kremlin in 2025 at 3.12 trillion rubles, a 4.5-fold increase from that seized in 2024.²¹ An October 2024 ruling by the Russian Constitutional Court removed the statute of limitations on anti-corruption-based asset seizures, removing a legal barrier to this redistribution.²² These seizures serve the dual aims of providing a much-needed boost to fiscal revenue and tying business elites inextricably to the success of the government. For wealth vehicles in particular, this trajectory suggests that the domestic "safe harbor" is actually just trading Western sanctions exposure for Russian asset seizure exposure. By requiring mandatory physical substances, including the 300 million ruble infrastructure investment, in order to reap the benefits of SAR registration, re-domiciliation effectively ties the registrant's capital to Russian jurisdiction at precisely the moment Russian state seizure is accelerating.

These limitations together help explain why many Russian firms and individuals appear to prefer re-domiciliation in "friendly" jurisdictions like the United Arab Emirates. The UAE has not joined Western sanctions on Russia, maintains relative political neutrality with regard to the war in Ukraine, and preserves access to global markets. Registering in these jurisdictions allows Russian companies to diversify political exposure, removing the direct threat from both Western sanctions and Russian state intervention. Recent diplomatic activity between Russia

²¹ Nektorov, Saveliev & Partners, "Natsionalizatsiya aktivov v RF" [Nationalization of assets in the Russian Federation], December 19, 2025, https://www.nsplaw.com/back-end/media/filer_public/2c/cd/2ccd6437-dafc-46d5-8a3a-d4840d3b5f07/nsp_issledovanie_po_natsionalizatsii_v20251219_clean.pdf.

²² Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, "Postanovlenie ot 31 oktyabrya 2024 g. No. 49-P" [Ruling of October 31, 2024, No. 49-P], *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* [Ros. Gaz.], November 1, 2024, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202411010001>.

and the UAE, including signing a treaty preventing double taxation by Russia of Russian businesses registered in the UAE and the removal of the UAE from Russia's offshore "blacklist," has made it easier to re-domicile in the UAE.²³ In 2024, the number of Russian companies registered in the UAE increased 2.5-fold compared to the previous year, and the UAE Minister of Economy and Tourism announced at the end of 2025 that more than 13,500 Russian companies were registered in the country.²⁴

Conclusion

Russia's Special Administrative Regions are an innovative attempt to mitigate sanctions pressure. They have succeeded in attracting hundreds of companies since 2022, and politically signal the Russian government's determination to reduce dependence on Western financial infrastructure and further centralize control. However, the central paradox of the SAR regime is that while it successfully shields assets from Western horizontal seizure, it significantly amplifies the risk of domestic vertical appropriation.

For operating companies like Yandex MKAO, re-domiciliation in the SARs enables structural survival and offers reduced tax liability. While exposure to potential state seizure is a real cost, companies operating Russia with no viable alternative may simply have to absorb it. The public registrations of several high-profile operating companies in the SARs indicate that this is a price they are willing to pay. But given concentrated domestic political risk, the rational strategy for personal wealth vehicles seeking to preserve both asset security and market access may be to relocate to "friendly" third countries like the United Arab Emirates. The recent double taxation law between Russia and the UAE and the removal of the UAE from Russia's offshore blacklist indicate that this

²³ United Arab Emirates, Ministry of Finance, *Agreement between the Government of the United Arab Emirates and the Government of the Russian Federation for the Elimination of Double Taxation with Respect to Taxes on Income and on Capital and the Prevention of Tax Evasion and Avoidance*, signed February 17, 2025, <https://mof.gov.ae/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/UAE-Russia-DTA.pdf>; VitalLaw, "Russia Removes UAE from Tax Blacklist," January 5, 2026, <https://www.vitalaw.com/news/russia-removes-uae-from-tax-blacklist/gdn01172163>.

²⁴ Tatiana Romanova, "Kolichestvo novykh rossiiskikh kompanii v OAE v 2024 godu vyroslo v 2,5 raza" [The Number of New Russian Companies in the UAE Increased by 2.5 Times in 2024], *Forbes Russia*, March 5, 2025, <https://www.forbes.ru/biznes/532107-kolichestvo-novykh-rossiiskikh-kompanii-v-oae-v-2024-godu-vyroslo-v-2-5-raza>; Ilya Lakstygal, "V OAE zaregistrirvano bolee 13 500 rossiiskikh kompanii" [More Than 14,500 Russian Companies Are Registered in the UAE], *Vedomosti*, December 10, 2025, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/business/news/2025/12/10/1162201-oae-zaregistrirvano>.

is not necessarily an odious outcome for the Russian government: strengthening ties with non-Western countries is another dimension of sanctions-proofing.

In this sense, Russia's experiment in domestic offshore development highlights both the adaptability of sanctioned states and the enduring pull of global financial interdependence. Rather than returning en masse to Russia, Russian capital may increasingly settle in politically flexible jurisdictions, redirecting capital flows and offshore integration instead of reversing them.

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Europe's Right-Wing Challenge

by Thie Harthono

The United States' response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine has strained its relationships with transatlantic allies. At a moment when Washington's retrenchment and European rearmament are reshaping the continent's balance of power, Europe's rising right-wing parties threaten the region's security.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has entered its fifth year, and the Kremlin has failed to gain territory as quickly as they had hoped. Russian casualties number 1.2 million—a number no major power has suffered since World War Two—and Moscow has resorted to a war of attrition and propaganda.¹ Despite slow progress on the frontlines, Russian propaganda has succeeded in spreading a narrative across the West that Russian victory is inevitable in a protracted conflict, a belief that has driven the United States to pause and scale back military aid to Ukraine, and to push for a resolution that would force costly Ukrainian concessions.

The Trump administration's National Security Strategy outlines a continuation of the United States' pivot towards competition with China.² The document narrowly redefines the American national interest and introduces a "Trump Corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine, shifting focus to the western hemisphere.³ The first Trump administration's security strategy cast Russia as a threat to global stability and its values as "antithetical" to the United States'. The strategy of the second Trump administration emphasizes diplomacy with Moscow and economic, rather than ideological, disagreements. The shift in American strategy is welcomed by Moscow.⁴

European allies view Ukraine's security as "inseparable" from the continent's, and Washington's retrenchment has forced them to rethink the foundations

of regional stability.⁵ Talk of a ruptured rules-based international order and a return to "great power politics" dominated this year's World Economic Forum and Munich Security Conference.⁶ Were the United States to withdraw further from the region, a Russian victory in Ukraine is not inevitable. However, Ukraine's freedom will depend on its European allies' ability to expand development and production of weapons, and to navigate domestic political unrest that threatens regional stability.⁷

NATO members have heeded President Trump's calls to share more of the defense spending burden. Allies agreed last year to increase defense spending to 5% of GDP by 2035.⁸ Since the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, allies have progressed quickly towards this goal. European Union countries collectively spent 2.1% of GDP in 2025, an increase of 58.7% from 1.5% in 2022.⁹ Germany, the continent's largest economy, spent 2.5% of its GDP in 2025, up from 1.5% in 2022.¹⁰ The nation now ranks fourth in the world in military expenditure. French, British, and Canadian, military spending has risen at similar rates.¹¹

As Europe adapts to a new American stance towards the region, European leaders must recognize the dangers that come with rearmament. Experts have recently argued that America's retrenchment from the region could result in the return of rivalry between European powers.¹² Germany leads the continent's rearmament, and is on track to once again become

5 Ministry of Defence, "Coalition of the Willing: Joint UK-France Statement Following 10 April Meeting." GOV.UK, April 11, 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coalition-of-the-willing-joint-uk-france-statement-following-10-april-meeting>.

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2 United States of America, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America," October 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>.

3 United States of America, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America."

4 Andrew Yeo et al., "Breaking Down Trump's 2025 National Security Strategy," *Brookings*, December 8, 2025, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/breaking-down-trumps-2025-national-security-strategy/>.

a great military power. Despite promising to use its renewed military might for the collective security of Europe, neighbors and rival powers are uneasy that Germany's renewed military might could be used to bully and coerce.¹³ The growing possibility that the right-wing, nationalist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) could soon govern the nation compounds these anxieties.

The rise of right-wing parties across Europe poses a threat to the continent's stability and unity in the face of Russia's invasion.¹⁴ The "firewalls"—strategic alliances adopted by mainstream parties to block far-right parties from government—are coming down.¹⁵ Right-wing parties now lead polls in Germany, France, and Britain. Like the Trump administration, many of these parties view Russia as a model of nationalist leadership and identify with its anti-gay and anti-immigrant policies. Right-wing leaders promote Russian talking points, and some have been exposed for financial ties to Moscow.¹⁶

While public polling shows that European opinion remains broadly supportive of Ukraine, the continent's rising right-wing parties hold a range of foreign policy positions.¹⁷ Italy, which is governed by the right-wing Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) has moderated its foreign policy positions and downplayed leaders' ties to Russia. Doing so has solidified the party's power.¹⁸ Today, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is seen as a strong advocate for Ukraine and EU defensive autonomy. FdI's foreign policy has successfully united the current European consensus with the government's conservative domestic policies.

13 Steven Erlanger, "Germany Is Pumping up Its Military Spending. That Worries Its Neighbors," *The New York Times*, March 3, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/03/world/europe/germany-military-defense-spending-europe-nato.html>.

14 The Economist, "Hard-right Parties Are Now Europe's Most Popular," February 28, 2025, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2025/02/28/hard-right-parties-are-now-europes-most-popular>.

15 The Economist, "Europe's Populist Right Should Be Outvoted Rather Than Ostracised," March 25, 2026, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2026/03/25/europes-populist-right-should-be-outvoted-rather-than-ostracised>.

16 Alexandra Topping, "Farage Accused of 'Parroting Kremlin Lines' After Remarks on UK Troops in Ukraine," *The Guardian*, January 8, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2026/jan/08/farage-accused-of-parroting-kremlin-lines-after-remarks-on-uk-troops-in-ukraine>; Benjamin Dodman, "Le Pen's Far Right Served as Mouthpiece for the Kremlin, Says French Parliamentary Report," *France 24*, March 6, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20230603-le-pen-s-far-right-served-as-mouthpiece-for-the-kremlin-says-french-parliamentary-report>.

17 More in Common, "International Public Opinion on the Ukraine Peace Process," More in Common, November 28, 2025, <https://www.moreincommon.com/media/4gx-lm0nv/dec25-mic-ukraine-polling.pdf>.

18 IISS, "The Janus Face of Italy's Far Right," n.d., <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/survival-online/2024/09/the-janus-face-of-italys-far-right/>.

In contrast to the FdI, Germany's AfD maintains a more extreme position on the conflict in Ukraine. It opposes military aid for Ukraine and increased EU military and economic integration. Compared to American, French, and British voters, German public opinion showed less sympathy for Ukraine, though a large majority still believes Russia to be responsible for the conflict.¹⁹ Within the AfD itself, a divide has emerged between its hardline pro-Kremlin wing and

A fractured Europe could prove costly to the United States, which would have to commit more resources to the continent than it had before.

more pragmatic voices, who hope moderation will bring the party closer to power.

Similar to the AfD, France's Rassemblement National (RN) and Britain's Reform face internal divisions over the conflict in Ukraine. RN leader Jordan Bardella has sought to shed the party's pro-Kremlin image, casting Russia as a threat to Europe and France. This is a change from the leadership of Marine Le Pen, who has close personal ties to President Putin. Nigel Farage's Reform has also sought to shed its pro-Kremlin image as it gains popularity.²⁰ Despite the reassurances of Reform's leaders, European partners remain wary of their foreign policy ambiguity.

Whatever their differences on Ukraine, Europe's rising populist parties share a deep skepticism towards transnational institutions like NATO and the EU that have underwritten the continent's stability for decades. The possibility of a Europe governed by right-wing parties should concern the United States. A continent undergoing its most significant armament since the Cold War, fragmented by nationalist governments with historical grievances, would be far

19 More in Common, "International Public Opinion on the Ukraine Peace Process," November 28, 2025, <https://www.moreincommon.com/media/4gx-lm0nv/dec25-mic-ukraine-polling.pdf>.

20 Esther Webber, "Nigel Farage Tries to Fix His Russia Problem," *Politico*, February 9, 2026, <https://www.politico.eu/article/nigel-farage-tries-to-fix-russia-problem/>.

more vulnerable to new conflicts and pressure from Russia.²¹

Washington has openly supported and encouraged Europe's right-wing "patriotic parties."²² The Trump administration believes Europe faces "civilizational erasure" as a result of relaxed migration policies, censorship of free speech, and transnational institutions like the European Union, which "undermine political liberty."²³ Washington must be careful in casting aside longtime alliances and encouraging destabilising movements in Europe. A fractured Europe could prove costly to the United States, which would have to commit more resources to the continent than it had before.

It is also crucial that Europe's leaders take seriously the threat that these far-right, populist movements pose to the continent's stability and security. In a fiery speech delivered at last year's Munich Security Conference, Vice President J.D. Vance condemned European leaders' treatment of right-wing parties and their voters.²⁴ The "firewall" approach of mainstream parties—which excluded and censored right-wing parties—may have succeeded for the last decade in keeping right-wing parties from power, but not anymore. A side effect of that strategy was the alienation of disaffected voters, which strengthened right-wing parties' appeal as political outsiders.²⁵ The Trump administration is correct in pointing out that Europe's current leaders are deeply unpopular, especially on issues of immigration, crime, and economic stagnation.²⁶ If Europe's leaders want to successfully ward off growing right-wing movements, they will need to trust the people. The stability and security of the continent depends on it.

21 Fix, "Europe's Next Hegemon: The Perils of German Power."

22 United States of America, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America."

23 Ibid.

24 J.D. Vance, "Speech by JD Vance," Munich Security Conference, February 14, 2025, https://securityconference.org/assets/user_upload/MS_C_Speeches_2025_Vol2_Ansicht.pdf.

25 The Economist, "Europe's Populist Right Should Be Outvoted Rather Than Ostracised."

26 YouGov, "What Do Europeans Think About Immigration?" n.d., <https://yougov.com/en-gb/articles/53744-what-do-europeans-think-about-immigration>.

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