

# GLOBUS MUNDI

The background of the cover is a dark, expressive painting. It depicts a large, intense fire in the center, with bright orange and yellow flames rising. In the background, there are silhouettes of people, possibly a crowd or a group of individuals, standing or moving. The overall mood is somber and dramatic, with a focus on the fire as a central element.

DEPARTMENT OF  
POLITICAL SCIENCE &  
GLOBAL STUDIES

VOLUME XV  
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C O S U M N E S   R I V E R   C O L L E G E





Colloquium 2025



Wednesday night pre-Revolutions Dinner, 2025

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Welcome to Volume XV of *Globus Mundi*,  
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Department of Political Science & Global Studies



## FACULTY PAGE

MARTIN MORALES

### WHAT A GOOD YEAR !

Our events series made a great comeback this year. During Fall semester, we hosted our annual **“New Student Orientation”** on September 18, 2024, at which we were able to provide students with transfer insights and GE/IGTC course selection advice unavailable through traditional avenues. **“Israel & Hamas: One Year Later”** followed on October 7<sup>th</sup> and addressed the situation in Gaza. Beth Huffman hosted **“The 2024 Ballot”** a week later (October 15<sup>th</sup>).

The election’s aftermath was felt across campus. A lot like 2016, there were tears, fear and a sense of unease and insecurity. Needless to say, there were many negative emotions lived through at **“Election Debriefs”** on November 6<sup>th</sup>. Never in my wildest nightmares did I envision having to include a “What To Do if ICE Comes to the Classroom” talk as Spring semester began. LRCCD PD and Administration did an amazing job in stating our district and state’s positions and deserve to be acknowledged for their diligence and thoroughness in preparing faculty for what should never happen – and we hope doesn’t. The only good thing to come from the election for this program was renewed interest in internships and, to those ends, we were able to recommend students for internships at the California Democratic Party and with elected officials at both the federal and state levels.

We were able to resurrect our film series this year and, as usual, tied it to the Global Studies courses offered. During the fall, as I was teaching Politics in the Pacific Rim, we screened **“City of Life & Death,”** (September 18<sup>th</sup>) a film about the 1937 Japanese invasion of China, **“The Killing Fields,”** (October 2<sup>nd</sup>) showcasing the brutality unleashed by the Khmer Rouge on the people of Cambodia, **“Death of a Nation,”** (November 25<sup>th</sup>) a documentary

by John Pilger on events in Timor L’Este and finally **“Apocalypse Now”** (December 2<sup>nd</sup>). Francis Ford Coppola’s oeuvre served to both focus on Vietnam and set the stage for Spring’s Global Studies course on African Politics.

This semester, we attempted to show **“Blood Diamond”** on January 27<sup>th</sup> but, due to technical difficulties, watched **“Beasts of No Nation”** instead. It was followed by **“Virunga”** on March 10<sup>th</sup>. This 2014 documentary focuses on how poaching and war impact silver backed mountain gorillas in Virunga National Park and, how, tragically, nothing has changed. **“The Last King of Scotland,”** starring Oscar winner Forrest Whitaker, highlights the relationship Uganda’s dictator Idi Amin had with a visiting Scottish doctor, Nicholas Garrigan. The other documentaries shown in African Politics included **“Mandela: From Prison to President,”** **“Red Rubber, White King, Black Death”** and **“Born this Way: Gay and Lesbian in Cameroon.”**

**“Two Broads Abroad”** featured **Brenda Chavarin and Gabriella Violet**, discussing their study abroad experiences. **Brenda** interned through Tammasat University at their Rangsit Campus, Bangkok. Her internship was with Yunnus Thailand where she was a Financial Inclusion Intern for Grameen Bank, interacting with the bank’s founder, 2006 Nobel Peace Prize recipient Muhammad Yunnus, presently senior advisor to the government of Bangladesh. Throughout her time in Thailand, Brenda was able to travel, experience local culture and even see the King ! **Gabriella** attended the London School of Economics at LSE Ideas, the LSE Foreign Policy Think Tank and took EU integration themed courses. Throughout, and at the conclusion of her studies, she traveled through the UK (Ireland, Wales and Scotland) and the continent. Gabriella returns to the UK in the

fall to pursue a graduate degree in History. “**Two Broads Abroad**” is posted for viewing on the departmental website. When the event concluded, both presenters stayed for “Part II” – an informal discussion and Q&A session on “Life after CRC.” Frank discussion on expectations, rigor, reading and performance at the UC system followed. Students were grateful for this portion of the program, particularly those that are expecting transfer acceptance letters this year.

This year’s final event used to mark the end of academic years in the past: an “**End of Year BBQ**.” At press time, details have not been finalized but there will be photos in a future issue of *Globus Mundi*.

### VOLUME XV

**Grey Juanola**, our returning covers artist, has once again outdone himself – and we are grateful. This year’s covers, “Self Immolation” and “Embrace” reflect the troubled times the world is living through.

The articles for this issue of *Globus Mundi* were edited by **Katelynn Lyall**, **Raj Parhar** and **Ryan Pearce**. All three are Honors Program students and we thank them for their diligence in editing this volume.

Alumni are important contributors to the work we do and we’re grateful for all they do. This year, **Brenda Chavarin** contributes “*The Leftover Women*” *Narrative in Contemporary China*,” a wonderful article focusing on “shengnu,” a term used in China for unmarried, financially independent, professional women – women pressured to marry and have children while they still can. Brenda graduates from UC Davis this year with a BA in IR and plans to pursue an MA in History in the future.

**Ryan Pearce’s** “*China’s Energy Security: Of Inertia & Empty Promises*” examines the realities of China’s goals of energy security and weighs them against already made carbon commitments; it was one of two presentations at this year’s Colloquium. Ryan returns next year to complete his studies ahead of transferring. In addition to being TA, Ryan will also work as our discipline tutor in the Tutoring Center.

**Xochitl Alvarado’s** “*The 4B Movement and its Effects on the South Korean Economy*” chronicles societal changes driven by women in South Korea. “No to marriage, childbirth, dating and sex” are the subject of Xochitl’s article which is one of two presentations at this year’s Colloquium. Xochitl transfers to University of the Pacific.

**Wajiha Chaudhary** writes “*Kashmir: Caught in the Crossfires of Colonization*,” an article examining how religious divisions have affected Kashmir’s struggle for independence.

**Baylor Buechler** examines “*Recent Chinese International Economic Development:*

*Trade, Partnerships and Tariffs*,” a timely article in the early months of a new US administration. Baylor returns next year to complete his studies ahead of transferring.

**Lily Marie Munoz** discusses fast fashion and its consequences in “*Made in Vietnam: Social & Environmental Consequences of Fast Fashion*.” Lily interned with Dream.Org, a nonprofit dedicated to prison reform and climate justice advocacy where she mentored five bright young women of color impacted by the justice system. She’s transferring to UC Berkeley in the Fall.

**Eric Romero Roberge** explores “*Cartels, Corruption and the New Law*.” in his look at potential outcomes associated with legislative changes made at the end of Manuel Lopez Obrador’s term in office. Eric transfers to SDSU to pursue his BA in Political Science & Public Policy.

**Andre Baltazar’s** article examines the consequences of last year’s election in Venezuela in “*Venezuela’s 2024 Election: A False Victory*.” Andre returns next year to complete his studies ahead of transferring.

### COLLOQUIUM

Colloquium was held Wednesday, April 30<sup>th</sup> and featured two presenters, **Ryan Pearce** and **Xochitl Alvarado**, both of whom presented their articles “*China’s Energy Security: Of Inertia & Empty Promises*” and “*The 4B Movement and its Effects on the South Korean Economy*.”

Colloquium was, as usual, well attended by students, family and friends.

### PASSING THE BATON AND SAYING THANK YOU

**Katelynn Lyall** was one of the first students I met when we were allowed to return to campus post Covid closure. Her brilliance shown immediately and, after her first semester, she became TA. I’m pleased she didn’t rush through her education and took her time. Because she did, Katelynn was able to do more – serve as TA, publish an article and thereafter present it at Colloquium, edit this journal, work in the Tutoring Center and intern in Governor Gavin Newsom’s office.

As our departmental tutor, Katelynn tutored students in US Government, Comparative Politics, IR, Political Theory, Statistics, Revolutions & Ideologies and Global Studies courses on Latin American Politics, Politics in the Middle East, Modern Europe & European Unification, Politics in the Pacific Rim and African Politics. She also tutored students studying California Politics.

**Ryan Pearce** succeeds Katelynn as my Teaching Assistant, Editor in Chief of Globus Mundi and departmental tutor. He's already been "on the job" this year and I look forward to working with him next year. Ryan will be "the last TA."

## ALUMNI NEWS

**Madison Hinshaw** graduated from San Francisco State University with her BA in IR in December. She'll be returning to SFSU in the fall as a graduate student (MA in IR) and continues to build on her article "Musical Instruments of Wartime." Her plans are to pursue a Ph.D. after she graduates.

**Gabriella Violet**, my former TA, graduates UC Davis. She attended the London School of Economics in the fall as part of her studies and is awaiting news of admission to a program in the UK to pursue a Master's Degree in History.

**Brenda Chavarin**, graduates UC Davis with her BA in IR. Brenda is taking a year off and thereafter applying to pursue an MA in History.

**Angela Felix** graduates from UC Davis with her BA in IR.

**Ricardo Miles**, presently at my alma mater (SFSU), represented Ecuador at the MUNFW Conference as one of the E-10 on Security Council. I'm pleased to see his continued growth within our discipline.

**Dylan Bednarz**, presently finishing his first year at UoP, comes to Wednesday night dinners when he can and we're happy to have him.

**Samantha Bland**, My Portugal travel partner and former TA begins her last semester at Hull University as she competes her MA Digital Marketing and Advertising. Samantha plans to remain in the UK and pursue employment opportunities.

**Karanbir Singh** has just completed his second year of law school at George Washington University in Washington, DC. Karanbir transferred to and graduated from UC San Diego.

**Jaime Velasco** completes the first year of his MPA program at USC. Jaime transferred to and graduated from UC Davis. He was Legislative Aide to California Senator Steve Glazer. He is preparing for the LSAT and will be applying to law schools this fall.

**Ammar Ansari** is preparing for the LSAT and applying to law schools later this year. He graduated from UC Berkeley (BA in Political Science and BA in History with Honors); he also attended the London School of Economics ahead of obtaining his Masters from Oxford University. He came to visit in February and spoke to my US Government class about his academic journey.

**Hawa Amiri** completes her first year at The American University (Washington, DC) where, as a SIS student pursues a MA in Global

Affairs. Hawa transferred to and graduated from UC Davis. Hawa came to visit and spoke to my US Government class about her academic journey in February.

**Julian Ramos** is still at UC Berkeley – but, having completed his MA, is pursuing a Ph.D. in Health Policy and Management. Much to his and Professor Frazee's surprise, Julian has turned out to be a "number's dude."

If you're alumni, please check in and tell us how you're doing. We'd love to hear from you.

## NEXT YEAR

As disclosed at Colloquium, our model is changing. This cohort begins in great hands with **Ryan Pearce, Noel Prudente, Shaan Chima, Caleb Mosley, Will Walker, Alex Prasad, Veah Davis, Alondra Rodriguez** and **Baylor Buechler**. It should be able to build on itself and carry itself as "the last cohort."

## CONCLUSION

Inquiries regarding Globus Mundi should be directed to Professor Martin Morales, Department Chair, at (916) 691-7114 or, via email, to [morem@crc.losrios.edu](mailto:morem@crc.losrios.edu)

Thank you for your support.



# THE “LEFTOVER WOMEN” NARRATIVE IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

BRENDA CHAVARIN

## I. INTRODUCTION

“You’re too picky.” “You’ll become one of *them* if you don’t lower your standards.” Thousands of women hear these remarks all around China, whether from coworkers in the office, or at the family dinner table. The *them* which women are warned not to become is otherwise known as a *Shengnu*. *Shengnu* (剩女) or “leftover women” refers to urban women who are in their mid-20s, in the professional workforce that have financially independent and are unmarried. The character 剩 (sheng) refers to leftover or rotten food that must be thrown out. For several years, it has evolved into a derogatory term coined by Chinese society and the Chinese media as a way to shame unmarried women and simultaneously apply pressure to women to marry quickly. Within the past two decades, China has seen a large economic rise, with this comes increased industrialization and a rise in the labor force. This increased industrialization meant advancements in women’s participation in the workforce, according to the World Bank, the labor force participation rate for women as of 2023 was 60.5%, while rates of higher education degrees are higher among women than men. Author Lisa Rofel, who wrote *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture*, highlights how women were able to gain greater access to education and financial independence, through neoliberal economic reform. Some of these included the expansion of higher education starting in the early 1990s, where the government expanded university enrollment, allowing women to pursue white collar professions. Next came less economic regulation by the government and greater employment opportunities, with less regulation came greater private sector jobs in finance, technology, and business. With this came a financial

autonomy challenging the notion that women had to rely on their husbands for financial security. Similar, Harriet Evans, author of *The Subject of Gender: Daughter and Mothers in Urban China*, examines how intergenerational pressures reinforce Confucian ideals about women’s primary role being wives and mothers even with their educational and professional pursuits. Chinese women have made great strides in their professional life, but with this professional advancement, there has been a wave of stigma against educated working women who have chosen to prioritize their career over starting a family.

Despite the progress that China has been able to create in recent decades, the “leftover women” term has created a negative social stigma for women in the country. With this, several questions arise: Why does the “leftover women” discourse continue despite China’s continued modernization? How does this reinforce gender inequality and what are the larger implications for women’s rights and their autonomy? The issue of “leftover women” needs to be understood because it is crucial to understand how marriage is perceived in China. As compared to other countries, which see marriage as a personal choice, in China marriage can be heavily influenced by the state, essentially turning it into a social institution.

This article argues that the “leftover women” narrative works as a state-backed tool which contributes to gender regulations, where the media, government policies, and social pressures work to continue the traditional social/gender norms. By looking at state narratives, media portrayals, marriage expectations, and using theoretical framework, for comparison this paper will show how the *Shengnu* narrative reinforces gender inequality even with the increasing empowerment of Chinese women.



## II. BACKGROUND

Shortly after the Mao reign (1954-1976), in 1979, Premier Zhou Enlai put in place a campaign which would regulate the population: this campaign encouraged families to have no more than two children. The campaign was seen as a way to avoid the projected population of 1.27 billion and the government wanted to ensure that modernization continued, and that there was less competition for resources among families and within the nation. However, this implementation was not equally enforced in urban areas. This policy was strictly enforced in urban areas, while in the rural areas it was not heavily enforced, with families often having two children. Through the one-child policy came inadvertent consequences which the state did not see coming. The policy was able to contribute to empowering women in urban areas, this occurred through several factors. The first being an increase in parental investment, because of the policy, many parents were able to have more resources, which allowed them to invest in their one child, the gender of the child did not matter. However, those who were only daughters of the family benefited heavily because they were provided with an increased support from their parents, something which would not be possible if a son was a part of the family. Next, there was a challenge to the traditional gender norms, with the absence of sons in many families, there was a decline in the patrilineal system following the one-child policy. Daughters now had more power than usual, they used this power to challenge the traditional gender norms, but something unique about this was that these daughters were then able to use certain norms to their advantage. Thirdly came the change of a mother's role in the family, because women were encouraged to only have one child, this allowed mothers to participate in the workforce. Mothers were no longer tied to their home, they were able to provide for their family, changing the narrative that only fathers and sons could provide for their family. Finally came the changes in family structures, with daughters and mothers now being able to generate income, this meant that they could support their aging parents, which is one of the most important features in the familial Chinese structure.

China's economic boom and fast modernization have increased educated career women, specifically in urban areas like Beijing and Shanghai. After the unexpected consequences of the one-child policy, many daughters were pursuing higher education, which allowed them to pursue higher levels of financial independence. Although women's involvement in the workforce has increased significantly, the *duty* of marriage continues to be the expectation for women. This *duty* that is imposed upon women continues to minimize the achievements which have been created in the past few decades. Those who have achieved the highest level of

education, and choose to postpone marriage, are also deemed a "leftover woman". One of China's leading women's rights organizations, the All-China Women's Federation, which is often progressive in their stance for women's rights, published several articles cautioning women that "time is running out" for them to get married. This furthers the notion that women's social value will decline after their mid-20s. This push and pull between independence and marriage expectations creates a contradiction. At the same time, women are trying to continue to advance in their careers, they face societal pressures that make them follow traditional family roles.

This contradiction between women gaining larger economic independence and the constant marital pressures reflects a larger societal struggle, the modern progress versus traditional Confucian gender norms. With the rapid development in China that has empowered careerist women, the Confucian ideals, which are prevalent in China, of filial piety and gender hierarchy continue to dictate that women should prioritize getting married and have children over their professional goals. Confucian ideals emphasize continuing the family and have the male lineage shape how women are currently perceived. This strengthens the belief that a woman's success comes from marriage and motherhood.

Confucian gender roles are even embedded within the state, so much that they influence state policies. In recent years, the Chinese government has promoted policies which show marriage and childbirth as a national responsibility for women. They have created state-sponsored matchmaking events, something not usually seen in western countries. These events often show the narrative that marriage is an obligation for the future parents rather than an individual's choice.

This tension between modernity and tradition is highly prevalent in the divide between rural and urban China. Major Chinese cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou see women delaying marriage to advance their career. According to a study done by Jisoo Hwang, it was found that women with a higher education and financial independence tend to wait later in life for marriage, leading to a phenomenon in East Asia known as the "gold miss". This is a term used to describe financially successful unmarried women.

In rural areas, women often adhere to traditional gender expectations, with the norm being that they marry and have children early. Research done by Sandy To (University of Hong Kong) found that rural women have greater pressure to marry early because of their economic situations and family expectations, allowing for the reinforcement of gender divisions in marriage. Furthermore, these rural areas have seen a shortage of women who

can get married, which causes arranged marriages and marriage migrations to occur.

The divide between the urban and rural areas shows how socioeconomic factors contribute to the current gender norms. For urban women, they have greater autonomy over delaying marriage back while rural women continue traditional expectations. Even with the increase in economic progress, there is still a large presence of Confucian values which continue to shape the marriage norms of China and reinforce the gender inequalities across social class in the country. It should be noted that women in rural areas, although not faced with the “Leftover Women” term, they still face the issue of forced marriages and an unhappy life.

### III. GENDER INEQUALITY AND MARRIAGE EXPECTATIONS

A report done by the Seventh National Population Census in 2020 showed that China still faces a severe gender imbalance with a gender ratio of 105.07. Combine this with the “leftover women” label, you have a storm of pressure and prejudice against women. While the Confucian ideals mentioned earlier shape the majority of expectations for women’s abilities to get married, there also lie demographic & structural factors. These further intensify the gender inequalities in the marriage market. With the effects of the one-child policy and the history of families choosing sons over daughters, these have been one of the factors why there is a gender imbalance in the population. This gender imbalance has led to a gender squeeze, which occurs when women are scarce relative to men, leading to fewer eligible women and men struggling to find wives.

This marriage squeeze has been seen as heavily gendered. In the case of men, they find difficulty in finding a marriage partner. As mentioned before, in rural areas there has been a rise in bride prices (彩礼), which is essentially a dowry paid by the groom to the bride’s family before they marry. Some reports have documented rural areas families paying bride prices as high as 100,000-200,000 RMB, ( \$13,000-\$27,000). This can often be unachievable or a large financial burden for families in rural areas who are most likely considered low-income. From this we have seen these rural men looking to neighboring countries like Vietnam and Myanmar, so that they can find brides from poorer areas, this continues to portray marriage as a commodity. In contrast, educated women in urban areas, the marriage squeeze materializes in the form of social stigma as opposed to economic barriers. With women’s education levels and salary increasing, so do their expectations for a partner who is equal to them. However, this becomes difficult for women because of a family’s expectations to “date up,” women are encouraged to date men with

higher financial and educational levels. The expectation to “date up” shrinks the pool of eligible men, furthering the stigmatization of them as they get older. These successful women continue to be labeled as “leftover” even though all they are trying to do is meet the expectations of their families.

As parents continue to play a large role in their child’s marriage decisions, these familial pressures continue gender inequality in China. Parents often participate in matchmaking events for their children, one of them being the Shanghai’s People’s Park marriage market. This is where parents go and show off their unmarried children’s qualities, like their education, if they own a home, and their salary to prospective partners. Events like this show how parents often prioritize someone’s economic and social background over the compatibility between two individuals and the personal preferences of their child, leading to continuous pressure on women to marry within a gendered framework of a financial and economic security over emotional fulfillment.

Both men and women face challenges from this marriage squeeze but in very gendered ways. Men from a lower social and financial status struggle to find a wife because of the gender imbalance created by the one-child policy and the financial pressures that have evolved. While women with careers and financial independence face the social stigma and family intervention that goes against a woman’s autonomy. These examples show that even though China has made great strides in the economic and social sector, the notion of marriage continues to remain the same. With these expectations continuing to be in the background, leading to a constant gender inequality in society.

We can see that the marriage squeeze, and family pressures contribute to the growing anxieties around marriage. These structural issues, mixed with deeply ingrained gender norms, can define a woman’s worth based on her marriage status. In China, a woman’s social perception and her marriage status are crucial because, as mentioned earlier, marriage is not just a personal choice but also a form of social capital. For men, their financial success and career can determine their ability and desirability to find someone to marry, often they are labeled as “Diamond Bachelors,” a term describing a highly educated man who is perfect for marriage. Something to note for this term is that age does not hinder the man’s marriage potential, often these “Diamond Bachelors” are 30 years old and above. This is a drastic difference and double standard compared to women, their economic and educational success does not determine their desirability, instead they are seen as hindrances. Furthermore, despite the financial independence and their career success, educated women continue to struggle to be seen as “ideal”

for marriage. Instead of increasing their desirability, their accomplishments can be displeasing to possible partners and their family, who can see them as too independent.

#### IV. STATE AND MEDIA DISCOURSES ON MARRIAGE & GENDER ROMANCES

Marriage, apart from being a personal milestone, has often been a political and social issue that is shaped by state policies and media narratives that continue gender roles. Economic reforms and globalization have given women greater independence, but still the Chinese government and media continue their campaign to have women marry early, placing it as a social duty needed for national stability. The Chinese state has been intervening in the nation's marriage, especially through the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF). This institution was established as an advocacy organization for women, and it has been at the center of promoting the "leftover women" narrative.

In an article published by ACWF in the 2000s, warned women that if they continue to delay marriage, their social and romantic desirability would decline as they grow old. This aligns perfectly with the government's demographic anxieties, as birth rates decline and an aging population grows, economic stability becomes threatened. Hence, the reason why the framing of marriage and reproduction are seen as a national responsibility. Apart from the ACWF, the government has also implemented policies to encourage marriage, such as state-backed matchmaking events (as mentioned earlier). Second, there have been financial incentives, for example, some cities throughout China have offered housing benefits and tax breaks for couples who are married and have children. Finally, you had discriminatory marriage policies which were seen to improve national development. Government jobs would often prioritize married individuals who are applying because their marriage status makes them seem more desirable. Policies like these add a layer of burden on marriage and having children, instead of addressing serious issues in the workplace, issues like discrimination in the workplace, lack of affordable childcare, and gendered career expectations.

Apart from government intervention, the media has also heavily contributed to the reinforcement of traditional gender norms. Chinese media outlets like China Daily and People's Daily (outlets that have ties to the Chinese state), often publish articles which pressure women to marry. Some of these articles include topics like portraying single women as "regretful" or "unfulfilled," essentially minimizing career success and bolstering the idea that a husband is the ultimate achievement. Furthermore, these publications suggest that unmarried women add to family instability and continue to impede the effort against lower birth

rates. These types of publications use fear-based messaging to warn women that if they wait longer to marry they will end up with unsuitable partners. All of these narratives, which are being published, align and contribute to the government narratives and policies that shift the responsibility of marriage and childbirth to marriage.

In the realm of media, television and popular culture have also heavily contributed to shaping marriage norms. Around the 2010s, there was a heavy emergence of matchmaking shows, one that stands out from the rest is "If You Are the One" (非诚勿扰). This matchmaking show began in 2010 on the JSBC network and continues to garner large viewership with it now being in its 15<sup>th</sup> season. Shows like these follow traditional gender expectations with successful men being labeled as "Diamond Bachelors" and their attractiveness coming from their wealth and status. Meanwhile, women with prestigious educational backgrounds were seen as too picky and not willing to compromise. It is important to note that this show broadened throughout the years, with beginning episodes going against traditional family values. Once the Chinese authorities began to get involved and regulate the show, they began to show traditional Chinese values in the show. In popular culture, many Chinese romantic dramas and reality shows promote the idea of a women who need to be obedient and family oriented. Both the state and media work together to reinforce traditional roles, convincing women that it is a duty to the notion rather than a personal choice. Government policies and media campaigns have contributed to the "marriage squeeze" phenomenon, where women are portrayed in a negative light and continue to be penalized for prioritizing their career.

#### V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: STIGMA & GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

While state policies and media narratives continue traditional marriage norms, the social consequences of not meeting those expectations can be seen through Erving Goffman's Social Stigma theory and Judith Butler's Notion of Gender Performativity. The "Leftover Women" label allows for a social exclusion to form, which pressures women to marry when they are not ready and makes them miss out on their aspirations.

Sociologist Erving Goffman's social stigma theory can be used to understand how women in China are marginalized. From Goffman's theory, stigma happens when an individual "possesses an attribute that discredits them in the eyes of society," leading to a "spoiled identity" or an identity that is no longer socially desirable or valued. Looking at the "Leftover Women" label, the stigma can show up in many ways, beginning with public shaming and the media narratives. After a certain age, women are seen



as undesirable, this being furthered with state-controlled media seeing them as “failed” to find a husband. The next manifestation comes in the form of family and social pressures, as mentioned before, parents have a great deal of say over their daughter’s marriage prospects due to them not wanting their daughter to bring shame to their family. To avoid this, they arrange matchmaking events, emotionally guilt their children or offer financial incentives. The third manifestation is workplace and social consequences for unmarried women who are in the workforce or are looking to be in the workforce, face discrimination when it comes to getting raises or job promotions. All this because unmarried women are labeled as unstable for not prioritizing marriage.

The effects of this stigma often force women into self-censorship or forced conformity. From all the social pressures women often find conforming to marriage, over the grueling process of fighting back against pressures leading to a life they did not desire. In other cases, women will self-censor by minimizing their educational and career achievements to make themselves seem ready for marriage. This stigma results in a paradox that has been repeated throughout the paper: With large economic modernization, women gain larger independence, for women who use this independence often risk being socially excluded.

Separately from stigma, Judith Butler’s Notion of Gender Performativity allows for an explanation of how marriage functions as a gendered social performance rather than a personal or romantic decision. The Notion of Gender Performativity argues that “gender is not an innate identity but a series of repeated performances” that are shaped by the society’s expectations. For China, this means that marriage confirms a woman’s femininity instead of it being a personal choice, and women who reject marriage are “failing in their gender performance, reinforcing stigma.”

Gender performativity shapes marriage expectations in China by reinforcing traditional gender norms where women are seen as the caregiver while men are the providers. In this traditional family form, women take charge of the domestic role even if they are financially independent. Furthermore, marriage can be a form of validation for femininity, successful men are celebrated with the positive label “Diamond Bachelor” while women who have similar successful backgrounds are criticized for their “selfish” drive of career success and not fulfilling their role as women. Finally, dating shows and public narratives reinforce and shape marriage expectations. The show mentioned earlier, *If You Are the One*, highlights women exhibiting traditional femininity in order to be

chosen by men, this strengthens Butler’s claim that gender roles are upheld through social repetition.

By using Butler’s framework, it is evident that Chinese women’s decision to marry is not just a personal choice but instead it is tied to gendered social norms. The pressure that comes from the stigma of being an unmarried woman, makes them conform to a small and skewed version of womanhood reinforcing the idea that a woman’s value is defined by her marital status.

## VI. WOMEN’S RESISTANCE AND ALTERNATIVE PATHS

While women are faced with pressure from the state and societal pressures, which have led to conforming to traditional marriage expectations, some women are fighting against these norms and choosing to prioritize their career and personal decisions. Instead of having marriage be the ultimate goal, women are choosing to create new paths and demonstrate new versions of success and self-worth. For these women, higher education and career advancements have become a new form of self-validation that was once exclusive to marriage. Currently, there are women who are financially secure and are delaying or choosing to never marry. Furthermore, the traditional support system women often relied on, such as their husband who would provide emotional and financial support, is being rewritten. Now single women are turning to their friendships for this support, often choosing friends over their new family, one that supports modern ways of thinking and independence. Although the media has become a tool to further traditional gender norms, women have used it to their advantage. Social media has become the home of feminist individuals who are popularizing the new definition of what a fulfilling life is. The majority of this feminism can be found on the Chinese platform Weibo. A fulfilling life is no longer tied to having a husband or giving birth, women now associate it with things like traveling the world, growing as an individual, and advancing economically. These new outlooks for women challenge the Confucian values which have been prominent in China for years, it demonstrates the shifting generational mindset in urban China where women are resisting pressure to marry.

The “Leftover Women” phenomenon differs from neighboring Asian countries such as South Korea. In South Korea, there is a different phenomenon known as the “Gold Miss,” this describes women who are highly educated and financially successful who choose to remain single. While both terms/phenomena are similar, the societal perception of each differs in their own country. In South Korea, women labeled as “Gold Miss” are mainly respected and praised for their financial independence and ability to make a name for themselves. In contrast, the “Leftover Women” are

stigmatized and rejected by Chinese society. The state and media portray these women as selfish rather than independent and empowered. This stark difference demonstrates how cultural narratives can change the perception of single women, it can be seen that when a woman shows resistance, it does not always end in social condemnation. This example of the “Gold Miss” can be a prospective future feminist movement for China, where a shift in the societal perception of women will allow for the challenge of traditional gender roles.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The “Leftover Women” (Shengnu 剩女) phenomenon is not just a product of the societal perception of marriage but rather a state-backed gender regulation tool that reinforces traditional ideas that adapt to China’s recent economic boom and its realities. “Leftover Women” is not just a label but a way to pressure educated, career-driven women to marry early and make it a priority for the nation. With this, the state can combat the birth decline and promote population growth and social stability. Intellectuals like Leta Hong Fincher argue that the state and media create and constantly continue stigma against these single women in order to maintain patriarchal structures, while Sandy To brings attention to how these independent women navigate and resist the stigma and pressures around them.

With China’s implementing a Three-Child Policy since 2016, state influence on women’s reproductive autonomy has dramatically increased. The Chinese state continues to frame marriage and childbirth as a national responsibility instead of a personal choice, furthering the pressures of single women. With a declining birth rate and an aging population in the country, women’s role has become even more crucial for government officials, allowing for a reinforcement of gender expectations. Leta Hong Fincher demonstrated how these policies put in place by officials disproportionately impact educated urban women, these women are expected to balance professional aspirations with traditional roles of wives and mothers.

Despite the pressures, Chinese women have launched a feminist movement which has gained momentum. Weibo activism, online feminist communities, and increased awareness of the gender inequality in the country challenge state narratives of marriage and family roles. Even with the large government censorship against this feminist movement, the constant pushback from young Chinese women demonstrates a change within the society. Lisa Rofel shows how “China’s neoliberal economy has paradoxically both expanded opportunities for women and reinforced traditional gender roles,” this creates tension that can drive future change. I find that the future of the “Leftover Women”/ “Shengnu”

phenomenon depends on if the Chinese society can embrace these new paths which go beyond the standard fulfillment of marriage. The Chinese state continues to be conservative in this and many other matters, women’s resistance continues to grow, allowing for the possibility of change to occur. Women who are actively rejecting marriage expectations have created social and financial support for themselves, and whether this resistance can lead to long-lasting change remains an open question however they do signal a challenge to the traditional gender norms in contemporary China.

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1. (Fincher 2014)
2. (Gender Distribution of Postgraduate and Undergraduate Students in China, by Type 2023)
3. (Rofel 2007)
4. (Fong 2022)
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. (Fincher 2014)
8. (To 2013)
9. (Fincher 2014)
10. (To 2013)
11. (Hwang 2016)
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13. (Hwang 2016)
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15. (Ji 2015)
16. (Zhang Yanzhe 2022)
17. (Buckley 2023)
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19. (Evans 2008)
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24. Ibid.
25. (Rofel 2007)
26. (Wang 2017)
27. (Goffman 1963)
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30. (Butler 1990)
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# CHINA'S ENERGY SECURITY: OF INERTIA AND EMPTY PROMISES

RYAN PEARCE

## INTRODUCTION

Energy security is one of the most important and unremarked on conditions a state must maintain in the modern world. The availability of electricity and fuel matériel for economic and defensive purposes is a consideration that states must always prioritize. If a state does not have stable electricity, it cannot have a modern industrial or digital economy. If that state has no oil, it has no defense.

The People's Republic of China has an energy problem. It is one of the largest economies in the world, and its inexhaustible growth has led to their demand for energy ballooning into a strategic risk. Their domestic energy security, or lack thereof, presents them with an obstacle. To comply with global commitments to environmental sustainability, they must make a green transition. This transition, however, does not afford them the energy security that they require. They simply cannot meet demand on their own. Put more succinctly, China's present and expected demand for energy precludes the successful fulfillment of its carbon commitment. In turn, as they seek to meet their energy needs, their demand will drive their increasing belligerence within the international community.

## BACKGROUND

In 2020, The People's Republic of China published their "1+N" policy. This proposal aims to peak their domestic carbon emissions by 2030 and reach a state of carbon neutrality by 2060. On the ground, this policy aims to increase the share of renewable energy sources in China's domestic energy sector. If such goal were achieved, they would reach the status of carbon neutrality decades

before the United States (US) or European Union (EU). Noble as it is, this would be a difficult, if not impossible, goal to achieve.

China's position going into this mission is not enviable. They are the single largest emitter of greenhouse gasses in the world. Due to their use of coal as a stop gap measure to ensure constant power in an ever growing and unevenly developed country, the nation is responsible for almost one-third of global emissions. Sixty-three percent of the energy grid is powered by coal burning plants, and consumed, in large part, by the rapidly industrializing manufacturing sector.

In May of 2021, as China began their slow emergence from the initial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, they were hit by a cascading series of errors: Surging demand from the economy shifting off life-support, backlog within the international transportation system, and un-seasonal warm and cold temperatures across the South and North, respectively. This sequence strained their power grid to near failure and led to rolling blackouts across some twenty provinces. Faced with a near failure of their electric grid, and while already using their most easily accessible sources, it seems difficult to imagine how they can maintain their energy security. Further, while still attempting to maintaining their energy security, they simultaneously intend to go from being the largest producer of carbon emissions in the world, to carbon neutral by 2060. Difficulties notwithstanding, the world desperately needs China to succeed in this task, herculean though it may be.

China faces many obstacles in making this transition. It is the second largest economy in the world, with a steady rate of growth, albeit slowing by comparison to the previous decade. The momentum within this economic system presents a considerable obstacle to rolling out new renewables at scale

and decommissioning its current, and considerable, coal power system. As demonstrated by the blackouts, China has little room for error in providing for its energy needs and, therefore, cannot afford to curtail the growth of its energy sector. The momentum of this system does not favor the prospect of wide-scale re-tooling. Certainly not a slowing of the stop-gap measure of coal consumption. Given the demands for stable electricity across all sectors in a highly industrialized economy, the sheer scale of China's energy problem humbles even the most optimistic.

China has necessarily invested considerable resources into its energy infrastructure. Nearly double that of the US, it consumes an average of 8.5 trillion kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity per year. It has already spread its generation methods into several sectors beyond coal including: nuclear, solar, wind, and hydroelectric. This offers hope that China has the will and technology for migration into these sectors, at least to nominal production levels. Nevertheless, collectively, they only represent approximately thirty-five percent of the total domestic energy production, while the gross remainder is still provided by coal. These sectors shall be discussed individually before concluding with a final assessment of China's current energy security, and its impact on foreign relations for the state.

## NUCLEAR

Nuclear energy remains a hot topic in some circles, but this has not stopped China from investing heavily in the sector. It represents 4.7% of domestic energy production with fifty-six currently operational facilities, and almost half as many under development. Nuclear energy certainly presents a powerful and robust method of migrating away from coal. However, following the Fukushima disaster in Japan, domestic attitudes among the population seem to be rather mixed. Despite the sanguine nature of national media coverage, local media outlets and the public are somewhat skeptical.

The authors of *Learning from Fukushima: Nuclear Power in East Asia*, however, argue that this is not the primary reason for a marked decline in support of the Chinese government's policies for nuclear energy infrastructure. They note several factors leading to this state. First, the slowing momentum of growth contributing to lower absolute demand for baseload power. Second, skepticism in the government regarding the safety of older generation nuclear systems (generation one and two style reactors respectively, upon which the preponderance of their nuclear system currently relies). Third, the expense and technical difficulty of building newer generation three style reactors. Lastly, and the age-old dilemma of nobody wanting that reactor in their backyard, thus having to curtail most of the in-land construction.

Notwithstanding, the remaining in-progress sites will be finished and brought online. However, several factors that limit the possible expansion of this capacity remain. The staggering cost and length of bringing new facilities online, coupled with selective site allocation, do not suggest an incoming surge in development. Nuclear energy represents a powerful source of electricity generation in the Chinese system. However, their system appears to be moving in a direction wherein such absolute capacity may no longer be the preferable methodology. Thus, while nuclear energy remains in theory a viable alternative, the conversation around it leaves little hope for a fission-based China.

## SOLAR

The Chinese solar energy industry, like so many other sectors within its economy, is both blessed and cursed by the duality of its own governmental policy, and the consequences of a globalized economy. China has bankrolled a massive build up in domestic supply chains and production capacity within the solar sector. This has provided vast amounts of capital to get firms started, but also allowed them fail, leading to a simultaneously highly competitive and yet stilted market. On one hand, this has resulted in a robust industry, with many high-level globally competitive firms. On the other hand, however, this has led to numerous trade disputes with the US and European markets, concerning this subsidized industry.

China entered the solar industry around the 2000's, amidst an era of peaking demand, seeing an opportunity to enter a new sector not yet dominated by any major Western power. This launching point provides an insight into why the Chinese have maintained such subsidies within this sector, they want to dominate the market. To quote from an article in *The New York Times*, "the country's solar factory capacity is roughly double the entire world's demand". This has produced a wildly abundant production capacity, and predictably, an over-abundance of production that has crashed prices and forced the state to try and dump the excess production onto the international market, leading to the aforementioned trade disputes.

Such abundance in production, however, has not translated into easy solutions for its energy needs. While China remains a massive producer of the components and finished solar cells, their installation and usage of them in generating electricity has been nowhere near commensurate. In 2013, over a decade after its splash into the solar industry, and in combination with its wind sector, these renewables only accounted for less than three percent of total generation. As of 2022, their solar capacity still only approached 4.7% of their gross total.



Logistical and technological issues abound in renewable energy infrastructure, (i.e., loss via transmission) accounts for nearly 327.874 billion kWh of waste. The range of topography and distance between where a renewable energy source is effective versus where it is consumed can make it both difficult and expensive to accommodate the necessary expansion of energy infrastructure at scale. Similarly, the storage capacity required to harbor the excess energy during periods of reduced demand, present similar wide-scale application hurdles.

In 2019, a study examined the installation of a combined solar cell and battery storage system in a Chinese apartment complex. Their analysis found that while the system has a major effect on peak load consumption and export-import balance, it was not economically viable. The authors concluded that there remains hope for the viability of such systems, however, it would require changes across several policy areas and doubling the price of electricity, an obvious hang-up. China appears to have the necessary solar infrastructure in place to make a considerable impact on its energy needs. Nevertheless, China remains unwilling to commit to an economically infeasible expansion of the technology.

### WIND

Wind-based renewables offer an optimistic path toward China's increasingly dire energy forecast. Currently, wind-based systems generate 8.5% of their total consumption. Despite comprising a fraction of their current usage, data suggests that China may have the capacity to utilize their wind resources in a viable way.

One study examined the potential of wind integration in the country. The study found that with current costs and policies, it was feasible for China to reach a utilization of roughly twelve percent of potential capacity by the original deadline of 2030. Additionally, the study notes a more optimistic projection that, accounting for flexibility in the coal system and a full commitment to the project, the potential could be as high as a monumental twenty-eight percent. Notwithstanding, this projection assumes that China commits a nearly blank check of resources to this project, a suggestion which remains dubious.

Furthermore, the same study additionally considered the relevant geography of the Chinese state in predicting its ability to access this resource. From this, it found that the highest measurable wind resources lay in the northern and coastal regions, and this would be beneficial for the industrialized cities within these regions. Much like solar integration, however, the unpredictability of wind-based systems, the lack of effective large-scale storage capacity, and the difficulty of fully integrating

such sites into the national grid, present concerning obstacles. While these windy, and remote, regions present locally available renewable sources, they do not represent the areas of primary consumption, the provinces comprising the Chinese interior. The northern-most provinces are responsible for roughly thirty-five percent of domestic wind-based renewable energy production, half of which is transmitted into the Chinese interior.

The technical and logistical constraints on wind-based renewables remain a source of frustration, as do the financial. Considering the costs for setup and grid integration, at current and stable prices, the researchers concluded that the cost to integrate wind-based systems in the most wind abundant regions are still non-viable. Instead, they suggested an investment towards wind renewables in areas with the largest demand, with an approximate difference of forty percent in the economic viability. The researchers involved in *Integrating Wind into China's Coal-heavy Electricity System*, suggest that only some regions present sufficient conditions of abundant wind resources and matching demand to make these systems economically viable. Further, the extraordinary costs for offshore wind development make it an unattractive option. Yet again, the practical concerns, the limitations of technology, and market conditions, suggest a difficult path toward reaching carbon neutrality and energy security via wind-based systems.

### HYDRO

The vast river basins of China offer it the largest potential capacity for hydroelectric systems in the world. As of 2022, these systems accounted for fifteen percent of domestic energy production. Of the nearly fifty-thousand large dams in the world, China has nearly half of them, and their generating capacity is "more than that of Brazil, the United States, and Canada combined". Predictably, however, like the other environmentally based renewable sources discussed previously, hydroelectric systems face numerous challenges in supplying the electricity generating capacity necessary to help China make the green transition. Some of these problems include: exorbitant cost, limited technology, and the disparity between where the resources are economically viable and where consumption occurs. These problems are only magnified with hydroelectric systems due to the scale necessary for them.

While solar and wind systems can be produced in modular format and installed ad hoc where feasible, hydroelectric power is constrained by terrain and scale. Despite these constraints, for decades, China's capacity for hydroelectric power increases annually. One study considered current development rates and predicted that the country could continue to grow the

hydroelectric capacity of the nation by 1.72% annually for at least another eight years. The same researchers noted, however, that for China to reach its own stated goals for hydroelectric generation capacity by 2030, it would need to double its current development.

No conversation of China's hydroelectric systems would be complete without acknowledging the Three Gorges Dam project. Taking two decades to build, and at a staggering cost of nearly thirty-billion US dollars, it is the largest hydroelectric dam in the world. To call it a mega-infrastructure project is an understatement. At 1.5 miles wide, and generating approximately 22,500 megawatts of power, it produces three times the power of the largest dam in the US. Its vast cost and production aside, the project is beset by numerous other complications such as: devastation of local wildlife and ecology, the annihilation and submersion of numerous cultural heritage sites, as well as 1.4 million people being forcibly displaced in service to the project. The geographical restriction of where dams can be placed, economically limits the building of other similar infrastructure projects to the highly populated river basins. On its own, Three Gorges stands as an incredible symbol of the potential for the green transition, with one source claiming that it accounts for 3 percent of the total energy production in China. The symbolic value of Three Gorges stands tall amongst the optimistic projections of potential green energy sources in China. However, it stands quite starkly opposed to the reality of the situation. The consideration of various renewable energy sectors presents numerous shared, and sector specific, hurdles to their broader installation into the Chinese system.

The enormous beast of Chinese energy demand must be fed at any cost. Failing to do so would risk economic ruin, amongst a myriad of other nested problems. The obvious choices within domestic renewable energy sectors seem incapable of furnishing the necessary means to achieve energy security. The Chinese know this well. In the absence of other scalable means of maintaining energy security within their own borders, they must turn to importable, commodified energy products: coal, oil, and natural gas. To keep up with their dramatic growth in recent decades, the Chinese have been forced to rely on these dirty energy sources. Particularly, on one of the oldest, dirtiest, and most reliable fuels known to man: coal.

## COAL

China's place in the global order is in many ways a result of its astounding economic growth. Such growth has resulted in a necessity to keep electricity both easily available and cheap, and coal provides an easy means to this end. Coal provides sixty-five percent of China's domestic energy production, and in the face of

few incentives to slow their economic growth, it seems likely they will continue to use it. Coal, therefore, is the narrow wedge that may make or break China's future energy security.

China has an enormous supply of domestic coal reserves, and as of 2022, produced approximately ninety-three million TJ(Terajoules) of coal, or roughly 3.2 billion metric tons. This marks a near 214% increase in domestic production since the year 2000. However, this massive production still does not meet Chinese demand. Similarly, imports of coal product have increased by a staggering 10,671% since the year 2000. China's domestic coal supply, counting production and imports, is one-third larger than the next twenty largest countries *combined*.

Coal is what provides the fuel for the juggernaut of the modern Chinese economy. The majority of China's coal consumption is utilized to power the national electric grid. Nearly twenty-three percent is consumed as an end user fuel for domestic heating. Likewise, commercial use in heavy industries like steel making account for seventy-six percent of this end user consumption. The problems with coal, much like their mines, are as wide as they are deep.

While China has proclaimed their commitment to carbon neutrality by 2030, their reliance on coal lends little credibility to this prospect. This reliance presents an even further complication beyond the economic. Since they are increasingly dependent on imports, it creates a strategic risk if their access is cut. In 2022, net energy imports comprised twenty-one percent of the total supply, an 800% increase from the year 2000. The danger posed by this dramatic increase in imports, though necessary to keep the engine of the economy running, is compounded by another sector of the energy industry: China has almost no oil.

## OIL

Oil, is the stuff that makes the world go round and, as ever, is inextricably tied to energy and national security concerns. Oil is an interesting foil to the coal predicament in China. They are both finite resources, and both are necessary to the maintenance of the Chinese economic system at this point.

Oil supplies 17.9% of the total energy product in China and supply has increased by 208% since 2000. Predominantly, oil usage in the Chinese economy centers heavily around transportation and industry, with less than one percent utilized for electricity. China consumes oil products domestically nearly as much as the US does but has approximately one-fourth of the production capacity. This renders China increasingly reliant on foreign states, predominantly Middle Eastern and Northern African, for this vital commodity.

China imports this oil predominantly by tanker ship, eighty percent of which, pass through the Straits of Malacca between Malaysia and Indonesia. Notwithstanding the risk variable of piracy in the region, nearly ninety percent of the gross import volume of this oil is carried by foreign owned shipping conglomerates. China's habit of spot trading, and the general inelasticity of the commodity price for oil, makes its importation both expensive and inefficient.

This logistical chain, for a necessary and inelastic product, presents a wildly dangerous risk to the Chinese. Their own domestic uses of oil products (i.e., transportation), but also the fuel matériel necessary for a modern mechanized armed force are threatened by this supply chain. Oil will continue to be a strategic risk for the Chinese well into the future, and while thus far the commodity fossil fuels have painted an extraordinarily dire picture, one may yet hold some potential.

### NATURAL GAS

Like oil products, the usage of natural gas in the Chinese system centers around end user consumption and manufacturing, rather than electricity generation. While natural gas comprises a minor portion of total energy product supply within China at 7.8%, seventy-five percent of this natural gas is consumed as an end user product.

Natural gas presents an interesting possibility for China in its attempt to fulfill its carbon pledge. Coal is obviously problematic in meeting demand for power in China; and natural gas may provide a solution. One study considered the possible challenges facing the industry under the new carbon pledge, noting that "Although natural gas is a fossil energy source, its carbon emissions are about 45% lower than those of coal". As a candidate energy source then, while still relatively dirty, natural gas seems to be a preferable alternative to the ubiquitous usage of coal. It holds the possibility of fulfilling the same end user consumption patterns that coal currently does, and could replace some portion of the coal generated electricity currently in the system. Predictably, this optimistic projection faces enormous difficulty in practice.

Similar to the other commodity fuel products, domestic production simply cannot keep up with demand. Net imports of gas reached 38.1% of total supply within the Chinese market in 2022. This represents a staggering 14,739% increase in the volume of gas imports since 2006. This increase is particularly spectacular given the logistical complexity of delivering gas to market. Natural gas must be piped in directly via overland transmission lines and is difficult to ship in any other manner. While new methods of liquifying the natural gas (LNG) enable traditional shipping

modalities, these expensive and complex processes still require the end user processing facilities and transmission lines that this LNG technology is meant to negate.

### STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

With renewables incapable of meeting the current demand in the Chinese energy market, it seems obvious they would rely on commodity fuels in the manner that they have thus far. More concerning, however, is the demand being so high that they will need to increase their current rates of consumption to avoid recession. This increasing dependence on foreign sources for fuel matériel is an intolerable condition. It is a profound strategic risk to the energy security of the Chinese state. Any number of scenarios, including: sanctions, trade war, or a potential embargo from the major oil states, could lead to severe consequences. Thus, the present condition of energy security in China suggests that an expansion of sources is a necessity, and being that such security is a necessary condition to maintaining China's position in the international system, they are disinclined to be cooperative.

One region in which these unfortunate conditions manifest, is in the South China Sea. While the previously discussed factors are not the solitary reason for increasing Chinese belligerency, they do illuminate a motivation. China has, in recent years, begun to aggressively exert its authority over an exclusive economic zone (EEZ), which they claim to hold over the South China Sea. This concept has been rejected by international courts and continues to foment discontent within the region with China showing no signs of backing down. The *Council on Foreign Relations* suggests this aggressive posturing may in part be due to the "estimated 11 billion barrels of untapped oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas" found within the region.

Increasing Chinese militarization in the region also provides better security for their oil imports. The Malacca Straits, through which eighty percent of the oil imported into China transits, is found near the southern edge of the South China Sea. China has a twofold incentive to occupy and assert dominance in the region. They may safeguard a strategic vulnerability in their necessary importation of oil and simultaneously gain access to enormous reserves of untapped fuel material, reducing their dependence on those same foreign sources.

China has similarly relied on its relationship with Russia to meet its voracious demand for energy. Trade relations between the two states have grown increasingly interwoven since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and this balance of trade has been entirely lopsided in favor of the Chinese. Trade sanctions have limited the economic viability of partnering further with the Russian state.



However, these sanctions have also placed an enormous reserve of cheap and accessible fuel supply on their doorstep, with few other buyers around to drive up the price. Importations of Russian oil product rose to 28.53% of total import volume this year, surpassing the prior leader Saudi Arabia. This would suggest that China does not mind the invasion of a sovereign state, in violation of every principle of international law, if it gets its fuel.

## CONCLUSION

China has an energy problem. The various methods available to provide for their energy security seem unlikely to do so. Further, China's colossal economic system leaves no room for error. Although there is evidence of China's GDP slowing in recent years, it is still growing. Correspondingly, it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which China would willingly settle into a recessionary period. Thus, the forecast of China's economic growth seems unlikely to change, and this necessitates an expansion of their energy demands, not a contraction.

Therefore, the conundrum for China is attempting to juggle a necessity to expand their energy security infrastructure, their public commitment to carbon neutrality, and their own need for energy independence. The economic necessity of energy security demands an expansion of all possible sources, of which coal will certainly provide a preponderance of the means, and which they can no longer supply in sufficient quantities domestically. Their diplomatic commitments suggest that China will at least project the appearance of a green transition, despite an inability to alleviate their energy security issues. Lastly, the necessity of energy security in maintaining the independence of a modern state would require an aggressive commitment to the expansion of energy sources. To treat energy security as anything less than an existential risk to the continuation of the modern state would be folly.

On the one hand, it is easy to acquire energy independence if a state is willing to simply take what it needs by force. The international community condemns this type of behavior outright but has yet to forcefully stop the Chinese trespass into the South China Sea. Further, the international community seems reticent to do so anytime soon. On the other hand, a state relying on their "allies" to meet their energy needs is fine in peacetime, but it can never shake the vulnerability attached to it. The Chinese state faces an increasingly large and complex question. With momentum already built, how do they achieve energy security for such a massive economy without its contraction and without an overt reliance on foreign sources? The evidence suggests a continued reliance on the dirty and easily accessible fossil fuels, like coal, that their system already is built upon. While the world desperately

needs a solution to the carbon crisis, China for its part seems unlikely to be a contributor.

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# THE 4B MOVEMENT AND ITS EFFECT ON THE SOUTH KOREAN ECONOMY

X O C H I T L A L V A R A D O

In a prosperous economy with a GDP of 1.713 trillion USD, South Korea has the lowest fertility rate in the world. With only 15% of its population being under the poverty line, in economy like theirs, it should be shocking to see that South Korea would have surpassed the number of births with the number of deaths in 2020 alone. A country with such strong family values, carrying traditional roles from centuries ago, what is happening in South Korea to cause such a concerning decline? Emerging amongst the young women in South Korea is an ideology that women should no longer follow the societal expectations the country has put on them. Ideas like motherhood, marriage, or even relationships with men are becoming widely rejected as a result of the support of the 4B Movement. Known as the “4 Nos,” the movement says no to marriage, childbirth, dating, and sex. The movement slowly emerged in the 2010s, but just now being widely adopted, most women’s demographics have been accepting of it over the growing issues among the male population in South Korea. Carrying many of the same traditional roles from centuries ago, women in modern times have been stuck in patriarchal roles that have governed their bodies and their role in society. Since the start of the South Korean government creating pro-natalist policies that incentivized women to reproduce since the decline in the early 90s, today, women experience a 31% wage gap compared to their male counterparts while also experiencing sexual violence and digital sex crimes online. With these contradictions, women in South Korea have followed through with the ideals and goals of the 4B Movement to try and improve the social state of women. Still, the fertility rate in South Korea has been heavily affected, which can also create stages of decline in its economy. With a lack of demographic security from its population, South Korea can face social and economic insecurity just because of this issue alone and the birth rate will need to be fixed soon with the participation

of women. With the number of deaths passing the number of births in 2020 alone, low birth rates can affect the GDP through workforce scarcity, quality and quantity of labor, and sustainability of welfare programs that the majority of low-income mothers use. At its current fertility rate, estimates suggest that South Korea will decline to half of its 51.71 million population by the end of the century. Needing a fertility rate of 2.1 to have a stable population, South Korea’s 0.78 fertility rate has the South Korean government coming up with plans on how to alleviate the problem in the long run, to ensure that the economy does not collapse. Creating incentives like childcare benefits for working mothers, low-interest mortgages for newly-wed couples to buy a home, and expanding maternity and paternity leave, the South Korean government has invested \$200 billion over the past 16 years to ensure that the fertility rate would keep up. Growing dissatisfaction among South Korean women, though, has led these policies to fail and cause even more dissatisfaction among them as they believe their bodies have been politicized for the benefit of the country. The 4B Movement has recognized how such policies have only come to view women as a “baby-making machine” rather than fixing the deep-rooted gender inequality in the country. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries ranks South Korea among the worst for its gender wage gap, making it impossible for women to be able to support themselves while bearing children. So, in light of the 4B Movement, women have considered focusing on their careers rather than acting out plans to create a family. Going as far as not having any kind of relationship to ensure that their focus is purely on their career and education, the birth rate has now dwindled to the point of desperation that the South Korean government enforced a “baby payment”<sup>3</sup> policy that gave women money when giving birth to a newborn. Corporate companies also joined in on this effort by providing



employees \$75,000 just to have a baby, understanding that the declining birth rate affecting the economy will eventually affect them. Understanding how much this would affect their population, South Korea developed a four-stage plan in 2006 concerning the decline and plan to raise their birth rate. Despite continuous failed incentives and initiatives, the South Korean government has only added more policies and regulations regarding this issue. South Korea recognizes that it must do something compelling to fix this social predicament that's heavily affecting their population, and later, their economy.

However, we might ask the question, why don't South Korean women want to give birth, let alone get married? To answer this and understand where the 4B Movement is coming from in having such a strong stance against the South Korean patriarchy, we should consider their history. In light of the government's esteemed efforts to enhance or even reduce the birth rate at some points, South Korean history allows us to see how South Korean women are so impacted by this movement. A prevalent event that stands out is during the Japanese occupation of Korea. Occupying Korea in 1910 by annexing it through the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1910, Japan would have control of Korea until 1945 with the end of World War II. Within that 35-year occupation, Korean women would become subjects of forced sexual servitude for military men. Known as "comfort stations," Japanese military men would form brothels across the countries they'd occupy and have them for their own convenience. Filling these brothels by kidnapping or coercing women they would find; they would go as far as purchasing some of the girls through their parents. Women not just from Korea but also Chinese and Filipina women would all live in a brothel for the remainder of their life as after the reign of Japan fell, it was reported that 90% of the women who became "comfort women" died as one. Many of the Korean women who have survived would become social rejects because of their history. With many women being raped and held in inhumane conditions, Korean women would have to live through extreme health conditions as well as the indignity of Japanese officials who would deny the creation of the brothels in the first place. With many Korean women sharing their stories and the horrors of what they were forced to do, finally, by 1993, Japanese officials would acknowledge the tragic events forced upon Korean women without regard for their humanity. But even with this acknowledgment from the perpetrator, Korean women would face shame and the disability of having a family of their own. Because of the sexual violence that Korean women were subjected to, Korean men would shame women who had been "used" already, making it impossible for Korean women to form relationships. Facing shame and embarrassment due to their past

of forced servitude, Korean women would go into unbalanced relationships and fall victim to suicide. At this time, Korea's birth rate was 1.5, down from 2.0 in the 80s. With the rise of a greater understanding about the "comfort women," women would learn not just of the physical pain these women went through but the way men had treated them in light of these events. In a conservative country like South Korea, where a woman's sexuality is controlled, women would always have to be viewed as innocent. So, victims of rape would often be ostracized and degraded for their past no matter the situation, rejecting any kind of relationship or choosing not to live anymore. With women facing shame in their own home country and Japan assuming no legal responsibility for the activities of their past, South Korean women would start to avoid men. With a tragic event like this, though, it would not be the jumpstart of the 4B Movement, girls growing up from that generation would see the way women have been ostracized and mistreated in society, and a division would form socially between the two.

Emerging stories of what some women went through in times of war and occupation, girls and women at home would also become victims of gender-based crimes themselves. At the same time that Japan acknowledged the cruel intentions of the brothels, South Korea was on an anti-natalist run with the condoning of abortions as well as family planning programs that forced women to consider having only one or two children. Hitting a fertility rate of 1.63 by 1995, South Korean women would soon see themselves blamed for the decline in the birth rate and the financial crisis that Korea would experience three years later. In 1998, when the Asian Financial Crisis hit Korea, the South Korean government transformed into a neoliberal capitalist state, shifting from its traditional collectivism. In the context of this shift, young men faced difficulty adapting, as jobs became more challenging to acquire, leading to difficulty supporting a family. Alongside not being able to find a job, South Korean men would lose their traditional role of being a provider and start perceiving themselves as victims of this climate and placing blame on feminism. "Misogyny becomes an outlet for their frustration and masculinity crisis as they search for a scapegoat for their struggles in neoliberal society." South Korean men would drive the gender conflict between women even further when a reward system for veterans who take public service exams would be deemed unconstitutional. This system, that young Korean men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, would see as compensation for their mandatory enlistment, and the "waste" of their young lives while in service. After this ruling in 1999, young men started to blame feminist activists for the action, as well as blaming women for the decline of the birth rate that would continue to decrease into the early 2000s.

Feeling like they've been discriminated against, men would argue that women not being able to reproduce meant that they were inferior to men because they couldn't do their "only job." With this ideal in mind, "gender wars" would ensue both offline and online, with South Korean men discriminating against women in the workforce, as well as online forums that allowed them to continue to spread their misogynistic views. Even with the societal pressure to reproduce, the women who did have children, couldn't afford the costs of raising one. By 2005, the South Korean government would launch a committee to combat the low birth rate issue. The Basic Act on the Low Fertility and Aging Society would be birthed into law to try and correct the declining birth rate and the increasingly aging population with a multi-stage framework. South Korea would start 4-year stages beginning in 2006 to raise the fertility rate with making new policies and efforts to achieve their goal. From 2006 through 2010, South Korea would implement new ways of support to newly weds by alleviating burdens of creating a new family. Continuing through 2011-2015 with new plans of creating healthy environments to raise children. By 2020, South Korea would reach a new goal of hitting a fertility rate of 1.5. Despite these efforts, South Korea would get hit with another financial crisis in 2009, leading to a second decline in the birth rate. Failing to meet the goals and standards for the population with the first stage, South Korea would transition into its second stage in the Basic Plan for Aging Society. But as the second stage started to progress, South Korean women were having enough of both the discrimination from the male demographic and the pro-natalist policies that the government would push upon them. With the idea of starting a family becoming increasingly unappealing to young women and growing resentment towards the male demographic, the South Korean government would see itself caught between a rock and a hard place in trying to gain momentum for raising the birth rate. However, with growing feminist movements like the 4B Movement and others like it, South Korea's strategy would have to work equally for both men's and women's concerns to make an impact. Without change, it's been proven that the decline in the birth rate will disrupt the economy and then affect the population. If the decrease in fertility continues, understaffing and the quantity and quality of labor will become a national economic disaster—unfastening the progress of rebuilding the Korean economy after multiple financial crises.

In recounting the history of events that have dissuaded women from family planning, the decline in the fertility rate was a natural response to how society was treating them. Dissatisfaction on political and social fronts, such as a woman's decision not to have a family, would start affecting the country's state. But before South Korea would take first place in the world's lowest fertility,

they were once one of the highest. Before everything would fall in the 90s, Korean women were motivated to use contraceptives or have an abortion because of how high the fertility rate was. In the early 80s, South Korea's fertility rate would be at 2.57, so the South Korean government created a family planning program that encouraged families to have only one or two children. It's also notable that South Korea would substantially recover from multiple economic imbalances at this time. Factors like the rise in oil prices and interest rates would see South Korea with an inflation rate of 35 percent in 1980. However, the inflation rate would drop to 5 percent in two years thanks to South Korea's economic recovery plan. By 1983, South Korea entered a low fertility society, where the rate would drop to less than 2.1, which came close to the population replacement level. This would prove South Korea's previous anti-natalist policies were working. This would also be impacted by another downturn in the economy from a high level of international debt. Another crisis affecting how families planned for their futures was that the one-child family programs would not work for an economy facing multiple hits in their financial status. Although it was the goal for South Korea to lower the birth rate, what would ensue later was a gradual decline that continued after its intended period, affecting the economy in the long run. With the economy flourishing again, South Korea would continue to see a decline in the fertility rate that would eventually hurt the nation. With this constant decline, it's been estimated that the economy will face a substantial decrease in the working-age population, affecting the quality and availability of labor. Entering 2022, South Korea would have a fertility rate of 0.78, being the only country with a rate of less than one child per woman. With a dramatic statistic like that, South Korea could face even more consequential issues surrounding its vast economy. Workers are relied on heavily to continue economic growth and productivity in an economy like South Korea's, but, with a population that's getting smaller, the working-age population is also decreasing, leaving the elderly to pick up the slack. With the projected population of the elderly being 20% by this year, if the decline continues, it's estimated that the elderly population will take up 46% by 2067. With this high percentage, the South Korean economy could suffer from a lack of workers to fill jobs, leading to higher labor costs that could eventually stop South Korea's economic growth. Even more detrimental is that since 2023, the working age population in South Korea between the ages of 15 and 64 has reached 41.45%. Contrasting the rise of the elderly population and the decrease in the working-age population, many experts have stated that this relationship can severely affect not just their population but also how money will be spent in South Korea. As said before, South Korea has invested \$200 billion over the past 16 years to help the





fertility rate increase. However, with its continuous failure, the South Korean government will have to worry about investing in elder care while simultaneously working on raising the birth rate. With the investment in both the elderly and children, the economy dealing with the working-age population could see a reduction in tax revenue, eventually hurting the fertility rate even more. However, in the ways these issues are trending, the South Korean government has also raised incentives to fix them despite past failures. New financial incentives like raising new parents' allowance to \$750 monthly in 2024 and providing childcare support and education subsidies have become one of South Korea's leading ideas for their 4th stage in their plan. However, since reaching the fourth stage of their plan to raise the fertility rate, South Korea is still viewing a vast decline in participation in increasing it. Still, with South Korean women vexed by how Korean society has pressured them into matriarchal roles and following through with the 4B Movement, what could the South Korean government do to fix this issue?

With feminist movements growing and the fertility rate continuing to decrease, the South Korean government will have to come up with a different solution. The Korean Statistical Office would report the population yearly and compare it with how many they've lost. After 2020, the population would lose 32,611 people, 57,118 in 2021 and 123,800 in 2022. With increasing numbers like this every year, it is critical for South Korea to repopulate to keep its current economic and demographic security. This could be done by reinvigorating the state's harmony between men and women. As previously mentioned, men and women in South Korea are experiencing "gender wars" that are affecting the way South Korean women view ideas like childbirth, marriage, and heteronormative relationships. Because of the issues women face in the workforce, and in the dating pool, feminist campaigns like the 4B Movement have proven how deep the problem is and that a new course of action is needed by the South Korean government. Without knowing the exact number of women participating in the 4B Movement, due to extreme backlash if they ever proclaimed

themselves feminists, it's estimated that 5,000 to 500,000 could be following along the ideals of the 4B Movement. With such a high number, South Korea must look for solutions that can provide actual results, such as opening up to immigration policies, solving both the working and current population issues. Immigrants have been shown to have an economic impact, and in South Korea's case, can also impact the fertility rate. "Migrants are typically young and productive and usually have more children than the native-born population." With South Korea's current strict immigration policy, restricting certain visas, and not allowing citizenship unless married to a native, opening up to immigration can also increase employment by one percent every five years. Welcoming migrants can also boost the fertility rate by welcoming young migrants who typically visit to marry and settle down. Finding a solution to issues that have not been sought out yet, South Korea opening up to immigration policies could see positive results just like neighboring countries. What's most important is that women can also start feeling comfortable with the idea of giving birth through pro-natalist policies and fixing major misogynistic issues in South Korean society. The emergence of the 4B Movement was not the first feminist-led movement, as South Korean women had banded together before against prevalent issues. As mentioned before, after the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis, men became frustrated by the shift to neo-liberalism and more so when jobs became more challenging to acquire. With growing frustrations and the required enlistment of military service, men would discuss gender roles and power dynamics and blame women for their exemption. Discussing the expectations between the two genders, South Korean men would grow adamant, thanks to populist politics, that women weren't "living up to their expectations." Forums and websites would emerge, allowing anti-feminist discourse to continue, as well as online harassment against women with the growth of technology and social media. 2015 would see the rise of feminism in South Korea amongst young women after the continued hate speech and threats of violence against them and one of its first online movements. Calling out the extreme hate and misogyny towards them, 70,000 South Koreans would come together in 2018 to create the biggest feminist-led protests South Korea has ever seen. A result of a female student being indicted on charges of violating the Special Act on Punishment after taking pictures of a nude male model, the protestors would argue that male offenders have more lenient punishments for the same crime. Taking photographs of female students without their consent and issues of hidden cameras in female bathrooms, South Korea would see about 5,000 cases of spy cams hidden in female rooms by 2022. With most of these cases in universities, young women have started emerging under the ideals of the 4B Movement. With its growth, South Korean

women are aiming for a change in the patriarchy through calls for actions like encouraging parental leave for men so women can continue to work, as well as creating equal spaces for women and men to coexist. In a study done in 2015, it was reported that 80% of female workers had been sexually harassed in the workplace. Condemning the shaming of women who have experienced similar situations, South Korean women are also calling for harsher punishments and equal representation between women and men in law enforcement. Believing the issue lies with the containment of harassment and bullying of women in the male dominated judicial system. Reporting that "women comprise only 30% of judges and 4% of police," an increase of women in these fields could provide better results for women's safety in the country. With conflicting data like 76% of men in their 20s opposing feminism compared to the 64% of women in favor of feminism, fixing the gender issue in South Korea is what the government should promote to fix the fertility rate problem internally.

Since South Korea's shift from traditional collectivism to neo-liberalism, it has proven to have both its faults and successes. Succeeding in boosting its economy again with a push into economic planning through anti-natalist policies and slowing credit expansion. The anti-natalist policies would show quick results, with an immediate decline in the fertility rate from 3.43 in the 70s to 1.57 in the 90s. Through family planning incentives encouraging couples to have a maximum of two kids, women were also encouraged to have abortions and use contraceptives to lower the rate. While successful at the time, South Korea would still struggle in its economy with more financial crises hitting it. With the costs of houses rising and the employment rate swirling, these incentives would negatively affect sentiments over raising a family between men and women. As expressed before, South Korean men, frustrated over the shift, would aim their anger toward women over the perceived lack of reproduction and the power dynamics of their roles in society. Believing that women weren't using their roles correctly, South Korean men and women would engage in "gender wars" that would ultimately affect their economy again if not controlled. The emergence of the 4B Movement would be South Korea's only known feminist movement with extreme ideals that push women to not engage in any kind of relationship with men, stemming from the negative sentiments towards women. With the fertility rate already reaching less than one child per woman, the 4B Movement is adamant about continuing its protest until society has progressed to see women as equals to men. Considering that the pay gap between men and women in South Korea is 31%, women within or without the 4B Movement have expressed how difficult it is for them to think about having a child when the costs of living are so high and they don't want to give up their careers.



Because of these challenges, the economy in South Korea will likely see a decrease in the working-age population as the elderly population grows, leading to an increase in labor costs. The lack of workers will hugely affect labor quantity and quality, leading to recession. An issue South Korea is all too familiar with is that if this decline proceeds without any changes, economic output will decrease, and unemployment will grow.

Many experts have watched this decline as South Korea is leading with the worst fertility rate in the world. Seeing how dire the situation is, many believe that South Korea has to do something new to fix it. Opening up immigration to the nation is among the most popular resolutions demographers believe could help with both the fertility rate and the economy. Bringing in young migrants would be productive in bringing in a new set of skills and boosting the birth rate. Knowing that migrants tend to have more children than native-born populations, South Korea's opening of its policies to welcome immigrants could have actual results. With the loosening of immigration policy and affirming greater gender equality amongst men and women, South Korea's economy and population can experience a downfall on both ends for the worse. What was once seen as a solution to the high fertility rate to accommodate the financial crisis has now led to an enormous decline in the fertility rate and possibly the economy. Losing population every year can turn South Korea's once-thriving economy into a losing one, with the population also becoming one of the oldest in the world. Yet if the 4B Movement continues, it'll be one of the most successful movements South Korea has ever seen, thanks to its current result on the nation.

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# KASHMIR: CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRES OF COLONIZATION

W A J I H A C H A U D H A R Y

**I**t has been seventy-five years since the British empire let go of its colonial reigns on the South Asian subcontinent, including its crown jewel of India. From this historic turning point came the birth of two new nations- India and Pakistan- and the ensuing geopolitical and religious tensions between them. These two nuclear armed neighbors leave little peace for Kashmir, who has had to endure years of organized terror and religiously motivated malfeasances, largely fueled by the growing divide between Muslim majority Pakistan and Hindu majority India. Despite Kashmir's cries for independence in recent years, the fight is far from over. This article will highlight key events in Kashmir's decades-long struggle to establish a place for itself in the world, with an emphasis on how religious divisions have shaped its ongoing turmoil.

## I. BLOODY BEGINNINGS

Kashmir remained largely untouched during the decades Great Britain, or the British Raj, ruled over the Indian subcontinent. It had been sold in 1846 to the first Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, and founder of the Dogra dynasty, Gulab Singh Jamwal. It would not be until the partition of 1947 and the formation of the Muslim majority state of Pakistan that the fate of Kashmir was left in limbo. Maharaja Hari Singh, the great grandson of Gulab Singh, initially sought to have his princely state be left independent. However, Kashmir would only see two months of that independence.

In October of the same year, Kashmir would witness the first of many bloody battles over its independence when an armed tribal militia from Pakistan's North-West frontier would invade the state. The cause of this rash attack was the fear that Kashmir would rejoin India, hence this altercation is dubbed the *First Indo-Pakistani War*. Kashmir would immediately turn to India for aid,

which was a decision heavily contested by Pakistan who argued for the state's Muslim majority.

Nevertheless, the Maharaja of Kashmir would sign the Instrument of Accession, which consensually gave all powers of defense, communication, and foreign affairs to India in exchange for the military aid provided. The newly formed United Nations would play a key role in mediating this war. It would curate a special unit, the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan, in order to further investigate this ordeal. The outcome of this established commission would be a ceasefire line in 1949 along with an agreement for a group, the United Nations Military Observer Group, to monitor, control, and maintain order following the ceasefire deal.

The second Indo-Pakistani war would ignite in 1965, sixteen years after the first ended with mediation from the United Nations. The salty dunes between Pakistan's Sindh state, the Arabian sea, and India's Gujarat is Rann of Kutch. In it is Sera Bet, which is home to one isolated Indian military outpost. In April of 1965, Pakistani forces would put Operation

Desert Hawk into effect, releasing a barrage of attacks on the aforementioned military outpost. The purpose of this attack on India's forces was meant to evaluate what Pakistan would face for a potential invasion on Kashmir. The attack lasted from April to the waning days of June. The ceasefire proposed by then British Prime Minister Harold Wilson would go into effect July 1st, 1965, after both countries withdrew their forces and opted to have the disputed territory of Rann Kutch be delimited through a tribunal, the verdict of which would come in 1968.

Peace would only last so long between the two rival nations. The bitter truth of the matter was that before the first skirmish in the Rann ceased, another stratagem had been in the works since May

of that same year. Pakistan was determined to find victory over India one way or the other. The plan? Incite a revolt.

Just a month after the Kutch agreement Pakistan would set in motion Operation Gibraltar, coined after the Muslim conquest of Spain from Gibraltar. Having now seen the weak points from their foe, India, Pakistan had prematurely assumed victory as they sent in an infiltration of seven thousand trained and disguised volunteers into the Indian sect of Kashmir. However, this number is highly disputed, with many sources ranging from five thousand to fifty thousand troops. In any case, the presumption by Pakistan's forces was that they would be able to spark an uprising from the Muslim populace in India's half of Kashmir. This would proceed to backfire horribly as the locals of Kashmir showed no enthusiasm for an insurgency against India, something Pakistani leaders had banked all their hopes on.

Despite this second phase ending in a blunder for Pakistan, both tactically and politically, the masterminds behind the quest to take Kashmir for Pakistan would show no decrease in pace. On the first of September 1965, the second president of Pakistan Ayub Khan would set forth Operation Grand Slam. Led by General Akhtar Malik, Pakistani forces would delve into Jammu and seize the small town of Akhnoor near the ceasefire line (more notably known as the Line of Control). The positioning of this offensive from Pakistan was a calculated move; they believed that if struck from a bone of contention the international border set would not be subject to violation.

With the swift capture of Akhnoor, Pakistan sought to intercept the Indian Army's supply chains which were thought to be reliant on the Akhnoor bridge over the Chenab River; their first misstep in their otherwise foolproof scheme. In actuality, the Indian Army's supply route in Kashmir was through the cities of Udhampur and Rambhan. The only favorable outcome of this for Pakistan was that Indian forces had no way in. Though initial setback in the final phase did not impede Pakistan, who proceeded with unwavering confidence, determined to take Kashmir. However, the very next day, the aggressor nation effectively sealed its defeat when an unexpected change in operational leadership occurred. Instead, Yahya Khan, with the backdrop of his seventh infantry, would assume command in place of General Akhtar Malik. Malik would lament this decision in a letter to his brother two years after the war, stating that, "We lost the initiative on the very first day of the war and never recovered it." With operational commands in disarray, India had ample time to recover and fended off the onslaught of Pakistani attacks. The Indian Air Force held the line in Akhnoor for as long as they could, but the front would inevitably collapse. In the counteroffensive, chairman of the Emergency

Committee of the Cabinet (ECC) and Prime Minister of India, Lal Bahadur Shastri, devised a strategic maneuver to divert Pakistan's focus from Jammu and Kashmir. This plan involved jeopardizing the districts of Lahore and Sialkot, both of which were strategically positioned alongside the Indian border, making them ideal targets to shift Pakistan's attention to its own front. In the early hours of September 6th, 1965, Indian forces made their way towards Lahore. This aspect of the ECC strategy proved ineffective as Pakistan successfully stalled India's assault in just three days. By the ninth the Indians would be driven back entirely, subsequently leading Indian authorities to release their admittance of defeat on this front on the tenth. Amidst the battling on the Lahore front, India's army would release a barrage of attacks on Sialkot and Rajasthan on the eighth. Sialkot would hold out for six days under the leadership of Colonel Tarapore.

Through this bloody slew of back-and-forth attacks, the United Nations keenly watched. Many times, U Thant, Secretary-General of the United Nations, would appeal to both sides in an effort to secure a ceasefire as soon as possible. It began with September fourth's resolution passed by the Security Council which urged both countries to take steps towards ceasing their assailments. India would disregard this and make their advance on the conflicted area. The second resolution would come just two days later on the 6th of September with an added appeal to the Secretary General; "exert every possible effort". The plea prompted U Thant to arrange a trip from September 9th to the 12th to meet with Pakistani President Ayub Khan and his foreign minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Following this appointment, he would convene Indian officials in New Delhi from the thirteenth through the fifteenth. Towards the end of his mission to New Delhi, Security General U Thant would send out identical letters to Ayub and Shastri to conform to a ceasefire deal that would take effect on September fourteenth. This date would be changed to the sixteenth at India's behest to have ample time to consider the proposition.

India put forth their agreement on the conditions that Pakistan retract all arms from India and place no further pressure on India's "...firm resolve to maintain the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country of which the State of Jammu and Kashmir (was) an integral part." Meanwhile, Pakistan attempted to amend the agreement to include its own stipulations, emphasizing that Kashmir was the primary cause of the Pak-Indo conflict and asserting that a resolution could only be achieved through "...a self-executing arrangement for the final settlement of the Kashmir dispute." Essentially, this resolution fell on deaf ears. Much like a parent attempting to mediate between two feuding siblings, the Secretary-General proceeded to issue a second message, reiterating his original point. India once again agreed, Pakistan remained



silent. With nothing to lose from the ceasefire terms, India found acceptance much easier, whereas Pakistan remained frustrated by the lack of progress in resolving the Kashmir dilemma. U Thant was unable to make decisions of this magnitude as they did not pertain to the Security Council's ceasefire decree. International support for a ceasefire kept amounting yet it did little to phase either side. The days following Thant's return to New York were spent pondering with international representatives on what could be done to appease both countries. Waleed Sadi, Jordan's representative to the UN would suggest nipping it at the bud; rearrange the disputed territory of Kashmir. Permanent UN members vehemently opposed this, as no one felt prepared to take on Kashmir. The deliberation would continue during a council meeting on the 22nd of September as Pakistan's Foreign Minister Z.A Bhutto addressed all present. However, in an unexpected development, Bhutto would receive a message from President Ayub Khan in which the leader expressed his agreement to the ceasefire deal, striking down any need for further negotiation. While the ceasefire agreement was unexpectedly reached, it wasn't entirely due to interests in international peace as Ayub would put it. Pakistan had exhausted both ammunition and resources.

Firstly, its political will could not make up for the lack of military horsepower. Secondly, the two superpowers of the time, United States and Soviet Union, were placing a slow burning pressure on Pakistan to accept the deal. The United States along with USSR took neutral positions, bringing Pakistan to no other choice with little support left to fall back on. Pakistan would fulfill its end of the deal and commit to the ceasefire on September 23rd.

In January 1966, the Tashkent Declaration was signed in Uzbekistan by Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri (a day before his death) and Pakistani President Ayub Khan. By doing so the countries agreed to withdraw all troops from one another's territory and return to the relations they both had prior to the second Pak-Indo war.

Kashmir experienced a period of relative peace for the next few years, marked by minor disputes but no significant upheavals. However, this changed in 1971 when civil unrest began to emerge in Pakistan's eastern wing. In the year prior, 1970, a political leader in East Pakistan Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would form the Awami League- 'people's league' - in pursuit of gaining autonomous control over East Pakistan as a sovereign state separate from West Pakistan. And so began the political process. An election took



place and by December 1970, Rahman's party achieved a decisive victory, winning by a landslide. His next step was to draft a new constitution for East Pakistan, a plan that never materialized. Ayub Khan's successor, General Aga Muhammad Yahya Khan, would have Rahman imprisoned on March 25th, 1971. The day before Yahya had declared martial law and thus began the slide into civic disorder in the East.

While many fled into neighboring India, seeking refuge from the terror being rained on East Pakistan, many others suffered from tyranny that many critics amount to genocide. An all out war would be sparked on December 3rd, engaging Pakistan with India as well as its eastern wing. The halting of artillery shipments from the United States put Pakistan on a weaker foundation, leaving them in no place to continue the barrage against both. The war was short-lived as on December 16th, Pakistani Lieutenant General A.A.K Niazi would surrender to Indian commander General S. H. F. J. Manekshaw. The following day a ceasefire agreement was signed by both. By March, 1972 troops from both sides had withdrawn from the newly formed Bangladesh and the Simla Agreement was subsequently signed. In the agreement, both parties pledged to prioritize peace and mutual goodwill. Jammu and Kashmir were mentioned only briefly, emphasizing the importance of respecting the Line of Control.

The last of the four major wars pertaining to Kashmir would be fought in 1999. It would be known as the Kargil war as it was fought in the Kargil district of Ladakh which was then a part of Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistani forces would utilize the harsh weather conditions of the area to carry out their strategic attack on the Line of Control. In the frosty winter of Kashmir Indian troops would roll back the number of patrols until the weather improved. This, as anyone would imagine, left weak points in the UN mandated Line.

In February of 1999, with the support of Kashmiri guerilla fighters and Afghan mercenaries, Pakistan would usurp the abandoned outposts on either side of the line. The guerilla fighters were strategically chosen, as the fighters came from specific militant groups within Kashmir. Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Harakat-ul-Ansar, Lashgar-i Toiba to name a few. The last of these groups was in staunch opposition to unification with India. Rather, they favored union with Pakistan. It has been claimed that Pakistan trained and supplied these extremist militant groups prior to the 1999 war, however Pakistan's government has denied this claim. Temporarily, their activity would go unnoticed largely due to the downsizing of Indian patrols. The actions did catch the attention of Indian military authorities who would assume this was a jihadist operation at first, something that could be easily dealt with. It

wouldn't be until May that traces of Pakistani presence would alert them that this was far greater than a jihadi skirmish.

Known in India as Operation Vijay- 'victory' – the response to Kargil from India was the offensive response and an attempt to, once again, place their Pakistani neighbors behind the Line of Ceasefire. Given that it was mountainous terrain, the Indian army would have to employ their air force to repel intruders in the captured areas of Kargil. Close combat would continue on the ground along with artillery. Diplomatic missions from Pakistan to India in June would yield no satisfactory results as the war continued. By July 11th, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif would announce the fallback of militants in the area. This would come after much international pressure led by the United States. India concluded with regaining full control of the infiltrated areas of Tiger Hill, Tololing, Batalik and Dras sectors and Mushkoh Valley, the genesis of the preliminary blitz. Pakistan had once again fallen deep into its falsely assumed victory and suffered international embarrassment.

The aftermath of this final war over Kashmir would only heighten the level of anxiety around the indigenous populations living within the disputed territories. At minimum 38,000 being displaced or losing their lives to the recurring bombardment according to the Arms Control Center's Pak-Indo conflict timeline. Overnight the Kashmiris would become refugees in their own homeland.

## II. CONFLICTING VISIONS

Kashmir's narrative has largely been shaped by its neighboring nations, which perceive it as a territory to be integrated into their own domains. It's evident that the road to any autonomy will be an uphill battle. One thing that has been made clear in every quarrel following 1947 is Pakistan's determination to unite with Kashmir and India's strict rebuttal to such.

In recent years, Kashmiris have increasingly voiced their perspectives, with some advocating for alignment with Pakistan and others seeking independence through a show of growing separatist movements. The majority of these movements have been led by the Kashmiri Muslim population, who cite the unfulfilled promise of a 1947 plebiscite by India as a primary cause of their discontent.

V.K. Sazawal, a Kashmiri refugee at just fifteen months, cites in the 1995 volume of Asian Affairs, religious tensions as a reason why Kashmir may never see true *azadi*– freedom in his article "The Kashmiri Perspective II." As a Kashmiri he vehemently opposes both countries' views to stake claim over his homeland due to both having religious intent behind their actions. For Pakistan, it

has meant conjoining their Muslim population with itself which means threats of oppression for the sizable Pandit community in Kashmir. The grass on the other side is not any greener, as Sazawal states, “India would like to claim that Kashmir is a test of its ideals as a secular nation, forgetting that in the process it made guinea pigs of the Pandits among a religious majority that could not be entrusted to govern responsibly.” The idea of unification also seems to be entirely out of the question as both sides have faced equal discrimination and prejudice from the overseeing country. The only way it would be a feasible outcome is if independence is guaranteed to Kashmir, but time and time again that has been refuted as well. Each war fought with the underlying motive of assessing Kashmir’s standing has been met with an impasse or stalemate. The United Nations for their part have only enforced the Line of Ceasefire but no significant steps have been taken since. The surrounding nations hold a neutral or self benefiting stance. Sazawal offers his own resolution to the Kashmiri issue which, in short, demands for the Kashmiri people to think and communicate amongst themselves and their communities and form whatever framework they find suitable for their respective regions.

Manav Kumar, in his 2005 issue of the Harvard International Review article, criticized India for their lack of progress in the Kashmir region. Kumar looks to the rise in tourism and promotion of normalcy in the region via the press media propelled by the Indian government to make up for the failings on their end to have Kashmir see any real political and diplomatic progress. Despite two decades having passed since this article was published, the situation remains stagnant as before in Indian occupied Kashmir. According to a 2024 blogpost to the World Kashmir

Awareness Forum, settler colonialism is in the works behind the push for tourism. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s removal of Article 370 and 35A stripped whatever bit of self governance the region had. The article ensured the state could have its own constitution and independence over most matters except defense, foreign affairs, communications, and finance. Outside citizens in India could not purchase land in Kashmir either. This stems from the 370 article prioritizing Kashmiri residents over settlers for job reservations and property rights. With these two gone the region once again came under central control of the Indian government. Finances have been allocated since then for new developments in the area but they are solely for settler affairs. PM Modi has been heavily scrutinized along with his right wing Hindu-nationalist party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for advocating for his own nationalist agenda above the will of the Kashmiri people.

Pakistan for their part has been concerned with the conditions of the Muslim majority in the Jammu & Kashmir region. On

Kashmir Solidarity Day 2021, former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan would address the Azad Kashmir town of Kotli with the following promise; “When you decide on your future, and when the people of Kashmir, God willing, decide in Pakistan’s favour, I want to say that Pakistan will give Kashmiris the right that if you want to be independent or a part of Pakistan,” said Khan. “This will be your right.” The reliance on this long ignored and irrecoverable plebiscite is the only hope many hold onto, but the wielder of this referendum, India, flat out refuses the need to hold a plebiscite. Their reasoning cites Kashmiris involvement in national elections across India, henceforth they are in the Indian Union. Pakistan continues to promote the idea.

Since Modi’s rise to power in 2014, there have been brief talks between the nation’s leaders as to what can be done for the disputed region but they have all been short lived. In August of 2014 India would cancel a meeting with Pakistan when they became aware of the Pakistani Foreign Ministers meeting with separatist leaders in Kashmir. There would be another brief meeting in 2015 but it, too, would lead nowhere. In the period ranging from 2016 to 2018 the LoC has seen many skirmishes and loss of military lives as well as civilians. Amid the rise of Hindu nationalism in India and ongoing political instability in Pakistan, Kashmir’s aspirations for self-determination have once again been relegated to the periphery.

### III. GLOBAL RESPONSES AND INVOLVEMENT

Security remains one of the most contested issues in South Asia, and rightfully so. With two of the world’s most formidable nuclear-armed nations as neighbors and frequent reports of escalating tensions between them, the region remains a focal point of global strategic concern. For years, gunfire and artillery exchanges have been a persistent reality in the mountainous region. In a 2013 special report to the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, writer Eric Margolis details the revolt that remains ever present on the Line of Control. On the other side of the conflict-ridden region lies China, Pakistan’s closest political and military ally. Any military action by India must be carefully calculated to avoid provoking another nuclear-armed power. In a study conducted by U.S Research and Development Corporation presented the estimation that a nuclear battle between Pakistan and India would lead to death at upwards of two million people, continue to injure about a hundred million more, pollute the Indus River and push radioactive elements into the atmosphere which would then orbit the globe. It goes without saying that in spite of all the militarized areas between the two nations, the threat of imminent danger looms ever present. Even a seemingly trivial incident could escalate tensions, pushing both countries toward a full scale confrontation.

External involvement in the Kashmir conflict peaked between the 1960s to the early 2000s, with the United States, China, Britain, and Russia (formerly the USSR) playing the most active roles. These global powers primarily acted as mediators, facilitating ceasefires during periods of heightened tension while regularly avoiding direct intervention in Kashmir's political future. The United Nations Security Council has advocated for referendums and other measures, but India has consistently resisted such efforts. Granting Kashmir the opportunity to seek independence could set a precedent for other regions within India to demand the same, which would pose a significant challenge to its territorial integrity. For instance, the movement for an ethno-religious Sikh state, Khalistan, has recently gained momentum globally due to ongoing tensions between the Sikh community and the Indian government. The shifting alliances between India, Iran, U.S., and Afghanistan highlight the growing imbalance in its negotiations with Pakistan. International involvement is a key component to tipping the scale in either country's favor. The implementation of the internet has launched Kashmir onto the global stage bringing the Free Kashmir movement to the forefront of many netizens online. With the coverage on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza since October seventh, 2023, numerous global conflicts of similar historical and political contexts have also gained visibility, seeking to have their voices heard.

## V. RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND AND MODERN TIES

The exacerbation of the suffering in Kashmir is often diluted down to two groups; Hindus and Muslims. India and Pakistan. Many say the basis of this decades-long feud is the religious differences on which the two nations were founded, leaving Kashmir in limbo with its mixed belief systems tracing back thousands of years. In Hinduism, for instance, there are numerous branches of faith stemming from this polytheistic faith. Shaivism, a sect devoted to Shiva, is a key one as its followers claim its birthplace to be Kashmir. According to Luka, in his original research, "*Hindu-Muslim relations in Kashmir; A critical evaluation*" the term Hindu would come about much later than the religious formations of Hinduism in Kashmir. It would only be coined to refer to non-Muslims around the fifteenth century. This does not mean that attempts at spreading Islam would not occur. In the same research article by Luka, Islam would originally be brought to Kashmir by force through conquests by various Muslim rulers. In 1015, Mahmud of Ghazni would invade but failed to spread Islam. In 1339, Shah Mir would get things rolling by establishing the first Muslim dynasty which would later be propelled further by Emperor Akbar, the unifier of the Mughal Empire. After that it

was a string of forced conversions due to oppressive rulings and Arab traders settling into India, but a certain school of Islam would change the outlook of Islam in Kashmir.

With the introduction of Sufism to Kashmir, Islam would develop more uniquely. Sufism is a more mystical and ascetical sect of the Islamic sects hence why it would appeal to the deeply spiritual people of Kashmir. It seemed to bridge the gap between Hindu and Muslim beliefs. However even with such celebratory and pleasant unions between faiths, later centuries plagued by British colonialism and their divide and conquer strategy would leave Kashmir in sectarian disarray.

## V. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Systemic injustice remains the primary driver of human rights violations across Kashmir. Most records pertaining to these abhorrent events come from the Jammu and Kashmir occupied by India. In an Amnesty International's report Summary of Human Rights concerns in Jammu and Kashmir, it is reported that arrests without proper reasoning are common, with usual victims being young men suspected of being militants. The law given by the Minister of State for Home Affairs assures families that a 24 hour notice of arrest will be given yet the occurrence of this is regarded as highly rare. An act passed by the Indian parliament, "The Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act," has been repeatedly abused to have locals be subject to arbitrary detention. This act is often invoked when someone dares to question the likelihood of J&K remaining under Indian authority.

Torture in the conflicted region is not news. Amnesty International reports many findings of victims subjected to leg amputation as a direct result of continuous torture. The defense is, of course, always 'suspicious militant activity.' Another result of these 'activities' are, as Amnesty reports, "crackdown operations". These often result in death with the victims bodies returned to families without explanation. During the lockdown of August 2019, there were numerous reports of torture and beatings being carried out whilst the phonelines and internet connection had been temporarily severed. Many would be detained without charges and remain in custody following lockdown, for which Indian authorities cite the "Public Safety Act" permitting detention without trial for up to two years.

The role of organizations focused on human rights and related advocacy work has been by far the most notable; keeping records of the findings and violations taking place since Kashmir got absorbed into the Pak-Indo conflict. Amnesty International and the United Nations Human Rights Council have documented reports of abuses particular to the Kashmir region, from

disappearances to torture. While their advocacy has pressured governments and the international audience to address these violations Kashmir has not seen significant development. This is in part due to the Indian government suppressing external involvement, claiming it to be a political interference. This does not mean the world has remained unaware; through digital platforms, these groups have been successful in informing global audiences about the horrific occurrences in Jammu and Kashmir.

## VI. KASHMIR'S HORIZON

When pondering possible solutions to the Kashmir dilemma, many look to the abandoned plebiscite proposal as a first step to stabilizing the region's autonomy. A plebiscite may symbolize democratic choice, but its effectiveness is undermined when the ultimate power to implement its outcome rests in the hands of a greater authority. In the case of Kashmir, any referendum on autonomy or independence would require the approval and cooperation of both India and Pakistan, who have vested interests in maintaining control over the region. True autonomy can only be achieved if both regional and global powers commit to honoring the will of the Kashmiri people rather than employing the issue as a geopolitical bargaining chip.

Though not all is lost. In 2024 Kashmir would see its first assembly election in a decade, and after five years of being under federal control. Voter turnout was extraordinarily high, showcasing the eagerness of Kashmiris to have their voice heard as they elected officials for their own regions. This first show of Kashmiri involvement in politics has been referred to as a referendum, seeing as they have no other means of being involved in their region's affairs. In a broadcast from National Public Radio regarding the 2024 election, many residents reported feeling federal suppression looming overhead. While elections mark a significant moment, fear of reprisal persists, with many citing concerns over their inability to speak openly, dampening the very democratic expression this occasion is meant to restore in the hearts of the Kashmiri people.

National Conference, Kashmir's oldest regional party, would lead in the polls winning 42 of the regional legislature's 90 seats. Omar Abdullah, leader of the NC party, assume the role of

chief minister which has sat vacant for a decade. BJP would win 29 seats in the Hindu majority area of Jammu and none from the Kashmir valley, which is 96% Muslim majority.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Kashmir's struggle has been defined by decades of conflict, external control, and unfulfilled promises of self determination. Since 1947, India and Pakistan have fought over the region, leading

to wars, military occupations, and ongoing political tensions. The revocation Articles 370 and 35A further stripped Kashmir of its autonomy, allowing increased central control and settler expansion which has led to deepening local discontent. Meanwhile Pakistan positions itself as a defender of Kashmir's Muslim majority, however its own political instability limits its influence. International involvement, which was once a key factor in mediating conflicts, has waned and left Kashmir trapped between two nuclear armed neighbors. The region's strategic resources add another layer to the geopolitical stakes while the economic and environmental concerns remain largely unaddressed. Human rights abuses persist with the presence of heavy militarization, arbitrary arrests, torture beyond belief, and suppression of Kashmiri voices.

Despite these challenges, the 2024 legislative elections marked a significant moment, with high voter turnout reflecting Kashmiris' eagerness to reclaim political agency. However, fear of federal suppression remains and the question of the possibility of real change still yields inconclusive results. The only resolution that benefits Kashmir lies in restoring autonomy, reducing militarization on all sides, and allowing avenues for Kashmiris to determine their own fate. Such a goal remains elusive amid competing neighboring interests.

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# RECENT CHINESE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS: TRADE, PARTNERSHIPS, AND TARIFFS

BAYLOR BUECHLER

## INTRODUCTION

During the 20th century, China went from one of the most impoverished countries in the world to a global superpower in a matter of decades, which was spurred by a number of policies to promote economic reform. As recently as 1988, China's GDP was only 43% of that in the entirety of sub-Saharan Africa proving that China was a relatively poor country in the aftermath of the regimes of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. During the Deng regime, there were efforts to de-collectivize rural communes and restore household production which spurred a lot of the economic growth that was seen in China at the time. As a result of these policies, and the fact that the Chinese Communist Party has been an authoritarian force in China, patronage would allow for private businesses that support the CCP to prosper and accumulate a lot of financial capital which would spread across China and there would also be very high investment rates which would just funnel even more money into Chinese corporations and the CCP. Not to mention, over a billion people live in China and the fact that there are so many people that are willing to work hard would just contribute even more to the country's economy, and on top of all of the investments coming into China, there would just be massive economic growth. China would also become one of the largest manufacturing hubs in the world, considering that there are so many people and the Chinese government wouldn't pay their workers very much nor would they have many protections, leading to these Chinese corporations and the government easily being able to mass produce and also profit off of not having to pay as much in wages to their employees. The Chinese Communist Party used authoritarian government and low-wage hiring to

grow their economy at such an unprecedented rate over just a few decades, and this growth is raising a lot of eyebrows all over the world, considering that China could also be playing unfairly to gain an advantage and achieve global economic dominance. China has endured many disputes with many foreign adversaries in the last few decades when it comes to trade, tariffs, and complaints through the World Trade Organization. While China gets a lot of opposition from its biggest rivals - especially the United States, China has been a part of many partnerships from countries such as its neighbors in Japan and South Korea, as well as certain European countries.

## FOREIGN CRITICISMS OF CHINA

It is important to understand that there are many criticisms that foreign countries have that are targeted against the Chinese Communist Party. One of them is that the depreciation of the Yuan relative to other foreign currencies, or Yuan pegging, is a weapon by Beijing against foreign adversaries. These criticisms have labeled China as a currency manipulator, and this practice has contributed to the currency war that is occurring between China and the United States. There are also criticisms that China is devaluing their Renminbi which makes its exports cheaper and more competitive with other countries including the United States, Japan, and several European economies, and there have been devaluations of the Renminbi as early as 1989. All in all, currency manipulation and a cheaper Renminbi could lead to higher inflation resulting in the possibility of more expensive imports and hurting businesses and consumers. The International Monetary

Fund actually prohibits countries like China from gaining advantages through their currency, leading to a lot of controversies surrounding Chinese currency manipulation.

Since China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, they have faced many criticisms when it comes to their compliance with the rules of the multilateral trading system. By the end of 2021, China had been a respondent in 47 WTO disputes, more than any other member except the United States and the European Union. These 47 disputes were across 34 different matters, and only 27 of them were actually completed. The United States was the main complainant for sixteen of these 27 disputes, with the European Union coming at a distant second with only six disputes. Some other countries like Brazil, Mexico, and Canada also filed complaints with the World Trade Organization. These complaints were a result of a plethora of issues, including discriminatory taxes and tariffs, intellectual properties, and their imports and exports. China would comply with these disputes by repealing or modifying laws and regulations, which would remove the illegal subsidies, enhance intellectual property rights, and anything else that was seen as against the rules of the World Trade Organization. China needed to change a lot of laws so they could keep their place in the World Trade Organization, and there are always going to be allegations against the Chinese Communist Party. China has grown rapidly over the last few decades, and the pace of this growth has led to a lot of questions by foreign adversaries including those in the Western World; not just when it comes to the World Trade Organization, but also on issues such as currency manipulation and Yuan pegging. The United States is the main player in these allegations, but that isn't to say this is not an international issue.

## EAST ASIAN PARTNERSHIPS

Some countries act less harsh towards China than others, and two countries that have especially been lenient are its two neighbors that have had a long history of being close to China in many regards: Japan and South Korea. On January 1, 2022, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) was enacted between ten different countries, including China and Japan, before adding South Korea to the partnership just a month later. This partnership was designed to establish an economic partnership that will promote regional trade, investment growth, and greater economic development in East Asia and Oceania. Since RCEP was implemented, the reduction of tariffs in East Asia have greatly benefited trade between China, Japan, and South Korea, and there are expectations that there will be zero tariffs for nearly 86 to 88% of goods and services between China and Japan. This is only expected to make trade easier and less expensive between China and Japan, during a time when relations between the two

countries are beginning to ease. China and Japan are undoubtedly the two largest economies in the Pacific Rim, and Japan being more open to trade with China shows that despite the two countries being quite competitive with each other throughout history, the proximity to China and the centuries-long alliance keep Japan interested in the Chinese market.

A particular industry that is impacted by the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership is the semiconductor industry. Japan and South Korea have always been prime manufacturing destinations for semiconductors, and after the RCEP went into effect in 2022, the Japanese semiconductor trade with China went down from \$11.2 billion to \$10.4 billion and the export share went down, whereas the South Korean figures rose from \$48 billion to \$49 billion and the export share went up. South Korea was always a top semiconductor manufacturer after Japanese and American production went down during the 1990s and 2000s before eventually surpassing both countries in the 2010s. China, Japan, and South Korea have all worked together in building semiconductor technology, and China's main role is on the back end, in that China is primarily focused on the testing and assembly side of things, and is the largest producer of this in the world. As of 2019, China had a 38% share in the world's semiconductor back-end industry. Although Japan and South Korea have historically been very strong in these fields, their economies have dampened a bit and China has really taken over. This could be due to offshoring and outsourcing, and since China is now the largest manufacturer in the world, it makes sense that China would absolutely dominate the semiconductor back-end manufacturing industry.

## EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIPS

Just as there are major economic partnerships with China and its East Asian neighbors, there are also new partnerships emerging between China and many countries in the European Union. It wasn't until 1998 when China and the European Union held their first summit in regards to holding a future partnership, and they have had summits annually since then with few exceptions. It is likely though that such summit never occurred until so late because the European Union is a rather new development, and by 2021, 19 of the 27 EU member countries have established partnerships with China with the other eight feeling that separate bilateral partnerships with other EU countries only hurts the overall solidarity and cooperation between the European Union in regards to China. The comprehensive economic partnerships with China and the larger EU countries, such as France and Spain, are largely concerned with trade, intellectual property rights, technology, and global economic governance. Furthermore, ever since China entered the World Trade Organization in 2001, China

expanded its exports so much that it became the largest trade partner for the European Union overall, while being the third largest export partner and the largest import partner. The EU even overtook ASEAN in early 2022 for that title. The European Union is one of the most powerful economies in the world, especially considering it is composed of large economic powers such as France, Germany, and Italy. With all of those countries working together with one economy and one union, and also keeping in mind that the United States has imposed strong tariffs against China, it is fair to say that the European Union would be the largest trading partner for China. Between the years 2000 and 2020, Germany has led the way by far when it comes to the average bilateral trade value of exports to and from China, with over \$60 billion of German exports to China and over \$66 billion of Chinese exports to Germany. Germany is the largest economy and the most populous country in the European Union and it is also one of the most industrialized and advanced economies in the world. Furthermore, Germany and China have been partners for decades, and usually when two countries form partnerships for decades, it is expected that they will trade with each other more often and at a higher value. Nevertheless, all across the European Union, the value of exports and imports with China have risen. This is due to the partnerships that have emerged between the European Union nations and China in the 21st century, and the fact that China's economy has just grown so dramatically. They are a manufacturing powerhouse with such a massive population, and the European nations want to use their products in the Chinese markets and vice versa.

Although the United Kingdom was formerly a member of the European Union, they left the EU due to Brexit in 2020. The United Kingdom is also another economic and trading partner of China in many regards. The United Kingdom is planning to turn their economy into a global power, and in doing so, they need to invest in the Chinese market. Britain's approach in doing so is joining the Comprehensive Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2021 to make up for the trading losses with Europe after Brexit. The CPTPP covers 11 countries in the Pacific Rim, accounting for 13% of the world's GDP and almost 500 million consumers, and adding the United Kingdom to that would only make this partnership even larger. This pivot is part of a larger effort by its Western allies to counter the aggressive Chinese trading policies and investment practices, and the United Kingdom has always had a lot of interest in the Asian market, through joining the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2015 and pursuing trade deals with East Asian countries during the Brexit process. The United Kingdom has seen potential in this market because of how large it is, and considering that Europe may be less interested in dealing with the United

Kingdom because of their decision to leave the European Union, London will eventually need to cast their eyes elsewhere. At least until Boris Johnson, COVID, and China's national security bill against Hong Kong, Sino-British relations and cooperation have improved. All the while, Britain understands that China's global influence is growing a lot and it is important to work with them and trade with them, because it is such a large market and both the UK and China have large economies. The UK still is a lot less tough on China than many other Western countries, particularly the United States, and there are still some questions as to how Sino-British relations will evolve in the coming years.



### AMERICAN TARIFFS

China's greatest competitor and largest adversary by far is the country that it is trying to surpass when it comes to GDP, technology, and manufacturing capabilities. This country is the United States of America. During the first set of tariffs under the first Trump administration, there were great changes when it comes to China's outward supply chains. The proportion of Chinese exports to the United States decreased in comparison to those to Europe and other countries when the Trump administration imposed tariffs on China back in 2018. This would cost China more money to export goods to the United States as these goods will be more expensive in the United States as a result of the tariffs imposed. With this in mind, it is likely that there will be an even lower proportion of Chinese goods being sent to the United States as it will only be even more expensive than it was before to export goods to the United States. Furthermore, it is probable that there will be a lot of pushback, retaliatory tariffs, and potentially even more trade wars between China and the United States. President Donald Trump initially sparked a trade war between the two countries when he imposed the first tariffs. The consequences are expected to be extremely similar - if not more serious if more



tariffs are imposed. Therefore, China will want to fight back against the United States in a form of retaliation.

Furthermore, American tariffs could create a lot of changes to Chinese businesses and Chinese firms, largely due to the change in market expectations and that there would be a huge level of uncertainty in the economy. Therefore, Chinese firms would be less likely to make large investments in certain projects fearing that they will lose money if the economy continues to decline. Between 2016 and 2019, Chinese firms and greenfield projects shifted investments away from the United States more than any other large country which is likely due to the higher costs as a result of the tariffs that were implemented by the United States. However, countries that haven't been as tough on China including Russia, Brazil, and Vietnam saw more investments by Chinese firms. Essentially, Chinese corporations have divested money and attention from countries that have acted tough against them and imposed tariffs, including the United States and some Western European countries, and have since turned their attention to more allied countries that have been more lenient and willing to trade with China. Such tariffs will also impact Chinese exports. For starters, before the first Trump tariffs in 2018, China accounted for 12.74% of all of the world's exports and the United States was always the largest destination for these goods, accounting for \$478.4 billion and 19.2% of all Chinese exports that same year. Since it is only more expensive for these exported goods to be sent to the United States, China would have to export to other countries with less restrictions on Chinese goods. Furthermore, China could lose a trading partner as the United States would divest from China more than the first Trump administration. China may not want to export as much because it will cost so much more for them to do so. Additionally, reports have shown that the past import tariffs on Chinese goods led to a 35% reduction in the number of goods that were being exported from China to the United States and other countries that have high tariffs on Chinese goods. This reduction by the Chinese could only grow even more, considering that the tariffs will be higher.

However, there is a lot that China can do to respond. Just like they did during President Trump's first trade war in 2018, China can raise tariffs on American-imported goods as a form of retaliation. That is essentially how a trade war works: When one country attacks another by raising tariffs on their imported goods, the target country will fight back by raising tariffs back. Such tariffs are otherwise known as retaliatory tariffs. The main debate over the expected tariffs between the two countries is that China is depreciating their Yuan, and these tariffs could be an effective way to diminish the impacts of Trump's protectionist and unilateralist ideas and policies. Even then, the Chinese accuse the United

States of manipulating their currency as well, which they claim is destroying the international order. Essentially, both countries are accusing each other of doing the same thing because they are each trying to achieve or maintain their global dominance, and when two ideological foils become very competitive with each other, there is going to be a fierce battle between them.

## CONCLUSION

All in all, the growth of China's economy and global influence can not be understated. Different countries may respond in their own ways to it, whether that would be by imposing tariffs on Chinese exports, becoming partners and allies with China, or anywhere in between. Nevertheless, there are questions as to how Chinese international relations will evolve in the coming years, considering that it is relatively unknown as to how much China's economy will continue to grow and governments across the Western world are changing by the minute. There is a chance that the Chinese economy will begin seeing the effects of the old one child policy among other policies that reduce the labor force. Furthermore, Western governments are experiencing some massive shifts and realignments when it comes to certain policies, particularly policies aimed at China. Regardless of what the future may hold, China will always be a massive market for any and all global products, whether they are made in China or not, and the population will always want to receive and trade goods all across the world.

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# MADE IN VIETNAM: FAST FASHION'S SOCIETAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

LILY MARIE MUÑOZ

## I. INTRODUCTION

A young girl wakes up in a hovel at five o'clock in the morning, 30 minutes away from the nearest city. Her electricity is spliced out of a powerline, and she walks to the garment factory, wearing fabrics that cost a month's worth of what she would have to work to pay for. In her line of work, she faces constant sexual harassment, job insecurity, and workers' rights violations. Under extreme pressure to perform, every broken needle means that she will be yelled at, punished, and made to suffer. This is the only industry available to her because consumers have become detached from the labor costs, skill, and time required of garment making.

Across the Pacific Ocean, another girl is shopping online in class. She's searching for the latest micro-trend, mindlessly scrolling through an algorithmically curated feed. As she sorts through an array of barely differentiable leggings, sorted low-to-high in price, she does so with the unspoken expectation that it will arrive at her door before she even gets home.

This is not the story of two individuals, but the story of millions. The makers who endure hours of strenuous labor, are often an afterthought to consumers—if recognized at all. Both are part of a vast, complex international trade system that connects us all, often in ways we don't immediately see or understand. Yet every day, the story plays out the same way.

The average American produced 81.5 pounds of textile waste in 2018, yet many Americans report not knowing where their clothes are produced and have limited knowledge about the fast fashion industry. Over 97% of clothing sold in the U.S. is imported,

with major suppliers being China, Vietnam, Bangladesh, and India. Vietnam is one of the most significant hubs for garment production, being among the cheapest countries to manufacture clothing in, especially after the 2018 rounds of U.S. tariffs on China. After which, there has been an increase in garment manufacturers moving south of the China-Vietnam border. The U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC) reports that between 2013 and 2023, China's share of U.S. apparel imports decreased from 37.7% to 21.3%, while Vietnam's share increased from 10% to 17.8%. This shift is largely attributed to U.S. tariffs on Chinese goods, which incentivized manufacturers to seek alternative production bases in Southeast Asia.

In 2023, the fashion industry produced 97 million tons of waste globally—18 million tons of which were leftover textiles, and 2.5 million tons were chemical waste. The fast fashion industry in particular has emerged as prominent in the global economy, best known for producing heaps of inexpensive, often poor-quality clothing at unsustainable speeds. A significant portion of these garments—as many as three out of five garments produced—are destined for landfills. Additionally, up to 40% of clothing produced this way is never once bought, sold, or worn. When purchased, these articles of clothing inevitably fall apart and are quickly thrown away by consumers who are already seeking the next round of trends. Though the cost to consumers is little, the cost to both the underpaid workers producing fast-fashion style clothing, as well as the environment, is immense.

Currently, Vietnam faces a multitude of climate-related challenges due to its geographic location, history of chemical warfare, and reliance on the garment industry to support its





economy. This article seeks to understand Vietnam's role in this industry and argues that we will see a rise in Vietnamese textile and garment production in the coming years—much to the detriment of its local agriculture, infrastructure, and exploited workers.

## II. CO<sub>2</sub> FOR ME AND YOU!

Carbon emissions refer to the release of dioxide into the atmosphere, usually by burning fossil fuels or consumption of materials. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are produced by corporations and individuals alike, though on vastly different scales with the most commonly statistic cited being that approximately “71% of global greenhouse gas emissions can be attributed to just 100 companies”. Though, as with most widely used phrases, this one tends to get misconstrued, with the truth being that 100 corporations are responsible for 71% of emissions related to fossil fuel and cement production, not 71% of total global carbon emissions. Conversely, the fast fashion industry does contribute heavily to the climate

crisis. It is cited as responsible for upwards of 10% of total, global carbon emissions on top of waste and pollution steadily being produced.

As more emissions are released, greenhouse gases trap additional heat in the earth's atmosphere, and average global temperatures subsequently rise. It is widely recognized that carbon-based production has adverse effects on the environment, including air pollution, habitat disruption, and climate change. This CO<sub>2</sub> release and heat-capture cycle is referred to as the greenhouse effect, and actions carried out by corporations and individuals to enhance the greenhouse effect are called anthropogenic actions.

Garment manufacturing is considered carbon-based production due to a significant portion of the materials used in manufacturing clothes, in particular synthetic fibers like polyester, being derived from fossil fuels, leading to substantial carbon emissions throughout the manufacturing process. Furthermore, the exporting and shipping of these garments often relies on large cargo ships, which play a large part in emission production.



### III. VIETNAM'S ROLE & KEY PRODUCTION HUBS

Vietnam's role in the fast-fashion industry is, unfortunately, to be exploited for cheap labor. In 2019, the minimum wage of a Vietnamese garment worker was \$151 USD per month. That is, \$5.03 per day, astronomically lower than the average \$1,160 a U.S. based manufacturing worker makes monthly at minimum wage. It is even lower than China's minimum wages of roughly \$217 USD per month for garment workers. This wage disparity unfortunately makes Vietnam a premier destination for fast fashion companies based in China looking to find cheaper labor. This puts Vietnam's labor costs on par with Indian and Bangladeshi Garment workers are making even less, with estimates ranging from \$63USD and \$168USD per month, respectively. This much-needed increase in wages was not due to fast-fashion companies' proclamations of sustainability, however. Instead, it was due to an overwhelming shortage of garment workers willing to work for slave-like wages. It is abundantly clear that garment workers in Vietnam do not make a livable wage. Vietnam has a history of industrialization through foreign direct investment, particularly after the socialist economic reforms known as Doi Moi in 1986 following the years of struggle in reunifying North and South Vietnam. These reforms transformed Vietnam into a major manufacturing hub, with textiles and garments being the most recent, dominant industry. However, this rapid growth led to international labor rights violations due to a lack of domestic legal protections, with the most vulnerable workers being migrants, women, and children—all of whom make up a vast majority of garment workers.

Vietnamese clothing manufacturing in urban centers like Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, and Da Nang, power the fast fashion pipeline, housing some of the largest global clothing manufacturing companies. These include Phong Phu Corporation, Hanoi Textile and Garment JSC (HANOSIMEX), Thanh Cong Textile and Garment JSC, Thygesen Textile Vietnam, and many others. They have a broad international clientele, the biggest financiers and importers being the USA, Japan, Korea, China, and countries within the EU.

Ho Chi Minh City has become a key garment manufacturing hub due to its relatively large population of over 9.6 million people. This, in addition to its proximity to the coast, has made importing and exporting costs to North and South America much easier. Binh Duong, a neighboring province, is a microcosm of this, in that it has an abundance of low-cost labor and relatively easy port access. Dong Nai is another province in close proximity that shares similarities with the aforementioned production hubs. However, it garners special mention because it is home to Pou

Chen factories—an industry leader that produces well-known footwear brands like Nike, Adidas, Converse, and countless others. Nike is no stranger to illegal labor practices, as in 2020 the Australian Strategic Policy Institute released a report on Uyghurs—an ethnic minority in China—working in Chinese Nike factories in Taekwang displaying, “highly disturbing, coercive labor practices”.

### IV. FORMOSA LAWSUIT & VIETNAMESE ENVIRONMENTALISM

On a broader scale, there is a significant lack of regulation when it comes to environmentally harmful industries, leading to widespread destruction of ecosystems for the sake of profit. One notable example is Formosa, a plastics and steel manufacturing company in Vietnam, which is responsible for one of the largest environmental disasters in the country's history. In April of 2016, a toxic chemical spill from a Formosa plastics and steel plant off the coast of Ha Tinh province discharged toxic chemical waste, killing fish and causing illness among locals. In the aftermath, nearly 8,000 afflicted Vietnamese citizens filed numerous lawsuits, to which Formosa agreed to pay a lump sum of \$500 Million USD to the Vietnamese government. However, many of these victims have not been compensated to this day.

The long-term impact on biodiversity in the region has yet to be fully understood. The Vietnamese government faced significant criticism for its delayed response, with many accusing it of prioritizing corporate interests over the welfare of the affected communities. This event also sparked widespread protests and calls for stronger environmental protection laws, signaling a shift in public opinion toward greater activism surrounding environmental issues in Vietnam.

### V. GLOBAL CONSEQUENCES & GENDERED IMPLICATIONS

Across the belt of South Asian fast-fashion producing countries, there are countless stories of sexual assault taking place in factories—particularly in Indian garment factories. These are vulnerable women, making very little money, and these countries are similar enough both economically and geographically that it is valuable in comparison to Vietnamese working conditions. The connection to Vietnam, while not direct, lies in the similar patterns of exploitation found across the global garment industry, with vulnerable, underpaid female laborers at the core of production. Testimonies from families of women in India being assaulted and ultimately murdered prove that this is a real threat to women being exploited in the name of the garment industry:

“For months before Kathiravel’s death, her family and co-workers say that Thangadurai was perpetrating a relentless campaign of sexual harassment towards her, which she felt powerless to report or stop.’She said this man was torturing her but she didn’t know what to do because she was so scared of losing her job,’ says her mother, Muthuakshmi Kathiravel.’She was such a good girl, she was the best of all of us. She was always helping me and supporting the family, but wanted to do different things with her life’

Workers at Natchi interviewed by the Observer in the weeks after her murder say ‘Thangadurai was known to be a sexual predator operating with impunity at the factory.’We all knew what he was doing to Jeysare but nobody in management cared,’ says one woman who worked alongside Kathiravel. ‘If she complained she was scared she would lose her job or that men from the factory would visit her family and say she was a troublemaker.’A year later, Kathiravel’s family are still deep in grief. In their home, Kathiravel’s face smiles down at them from a photo on the wall and they say they can never fill the hole she has left behind.

Yet they now believe her death has not been in vain.

World-wide, overt sexualization without consent is something many women are often taught to endure, owing to systems that perpetuate gender inequality and normalize such behavior. These systems include representation in the media, cultural norms, and the failure of institutions to hold perpetrators of sexual violence accountable for their actions. Instead, they place the onus upon women to navigate and resist these harmful dynamics and ultimately criticize them when they fail to do so.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The garment industry, particularly in Vietnam, exemplifies the disturbing intersection of labor exploitation, environmental destruction, and gender inequality. The underpaid, overworked factory workers who produce cheap clothing for consumers across the globe are caught in a cycle of systemic abuse that disregards their humanity and the environment in which they live. While fast fashion has thrived on exploiting vulnerable populations and contributing to immense environmental harm, the consequences of these practices extend far beyond the immediate effects on workers or ecosystems.

Vietnam’s role as a major manufacturing hub for the global garment industry is deeply tied to its history of economic reform and industrialization, but it is also a story of exploitation, where the cost of cheap labor is paid by marginalized communities, the environment, and, increasingly, the workers themselves. The Formosa disaster serves as a harsh reminder of how corporate

interests often outweigh the well-being of local populations, while legal and regulatory systems fail to address these injustices swiftly or adequately. Furthermore, the gendered dimension of this exploitation cannot be ignored. As women continue to make up the majority of garment workers, they are disproportionately affected by not only the physical and economic burdens of their labor but also by the gender-based violence that is endemic in many factories. The exploitation of women in the garment industry mirrors the wider global struggle for gender equality and workers’ rights.

As consumers, it is crucial that we recognize the role we play in perpetuating these cycles of harm and make informed choices that consider the human and environmental cost of the clothing we purchase. Governments, corporations, and international bodies must take stronger action to ensure that both labor rights and environmental protections are prioritized in global manufacturing processes. This is an immense undertaking that calls for collective responsibility if we have any hope of fixing the systems that allow such exploitation to persist-- not only for the workers who produce our garments but also for the environment that bears the consequences of our consumption.

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# CARTELS, CORRUPTION, AND THE NEW LAW

ERIC ROMERO

## INTRODUCTION

**C**artels and corruption. These rampant issues have plagued the Mexican government and its society for decades. Years of corrupt politicians and cartel influence have created an ecosystem of payments for services and support that have granted them the opportunity to control not only government officials but citizens, judges, police officers, and even high-ranking military offices in Mexico. This article will examine corruption, cartel influence, and the recent law enacted by Mexico's judiciary, focusing mainly on the possible outcomes, based on historical precedence. The act of corruption itself has been a toxin that poisons the political landscape of Mexico. Destroying pillars of trust and reliability with the falsehood of a working government, Mexico has endured a long-lasting struggle with corruption since its inception. Moreover, before proceeding, it is vital to define *corruption* as used in this article. Corruption can be defined as any "dishonest or illegal behavior especially by powerful people (such as government officials or police officers)".

## POLITICAL CORRUPTION AND THE PRI

In order to understand the scale and depth of corruption, a key consideration must be recognized. Not only does corruption stem from criminal intervention, but within political parties and governmental systems as well. In Mexico, an example of corruption comes from the longest-reigning party of the Mexican government, *El Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI). The belief amongst domestic and foreign observers was that they were a strong, authoritarian party. The PRI has held power in Mexico for over 70 years, from 1929 to 2000, and is seen as one of the leading factors in corruption in the country. During this time, many party

members and representatives took part in a slew of actions to gain power, money, and citizen support.

In the controversial election of 1988, the PRI's opposing party candidate, *Frente Democrático Nacional* (FDN), Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, claimed that he lost due to a severe case of fraud, arguing that the results should be "annulled". For many years, his claims were denied, not only by the victor, President Miguel de la Madrid, but by his party officials as well. Yet, in a later autobiography, de la Madrid acknowledged the election's fraud, admitting that the election had been stolen. Additionally, de la Madrid notes the lie espoused by the government, regarding computer systems failures. This was done to prevent the public from discovering that de la Madrid was significantly behind in the electoral race. Therefore, in order to maintain the facade of the PRI's electoral lead, "president-elect" de la Madrid preemptively claimed he had won the election. Later on, with the assistance of the National Action Party, they burned the only evidence left of the election: the ballots. Due to the PRI's strategic crafting of Mexico's government system in favor of itself, consisting of the PRI's overwhelming representation in districts and repeated cover-ups, the 1988 election was never disputed by the courts.

Post 1990, a trend emerged of PRI officials caught in acts of corruption. A prominent case of this was brought to the Mexican government in 1995, when Senator Raul Salinas de Gortari, brother of the president at the time, was arrested, tried, and convicted for murder and money laundering. He was accused of plotting the murder of Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu, who was the Secretary General of the PRI at the time and a respected member. He pleaded not guilty but was ultimately found "guilty" and sentenced to fifty years in prison, the maximum amount of time permitted under Mexican law. Following the former Senator's repeated attempts to



appeal the verdict, he eventually succeeded, reducing his sentence to twenty-seven years. The successful appeal resulted after the government's confession that they had paid Salinas' accuser, Massieu's daughter who originally defended Salinas, hundreds of thousands of pesos to claim that the killer was still on the loose. He was also tried for having undocumented receipts for \$114 million (in USD) in a Swiss bank account. The courts are still unable to track where this money originated from and they remain suspicious of the legitimacy of such a large amount held by a politician. This case highlights an example of the rampant corruption within the government, even against their own party members.

To further put the extent of corruption into perspective, in 2024, the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), ranked Mexico 140th in corruption out of 180 countries. This placed them in the 77th percentile for corruption. The CPI score countries on a scale of 100 to 0, with 100 being the least corruptible and 0 being the most corruptible. Mexico has a score of twenty-six, with a five-point downtick from their score of thirty-one in 2023. To note, the CPI is a data-driven indicator, based on the "corruptibility" of a country. It is run by Transparency International (TI), an independent non-governmental organization that works with the European Union (EU), and a multitude of other countries and organizations that track corruption worldwide. Furthermore, TI also looks at the view held by citizens of their respective countries' corruption. They use the "Global Corruption Barometer" as a way to calculate the view of corruption from the citizens. Transparency International took a survey of 17,000 people from eighteen countries between January and March 2019, of the 17,000 surveyed, 1,000 were Mexican. In this survey, 44% of respondents felt that corruption had increased in the last twelve months, and 90% believed that corruption to be a major problem within the government. Alarming, one survey question revealed that 52% of Mexican participants had to pay police officers bribes within the last twelve months. Importantly, TI also found that 50% of the Mexican citizens surveyed were offered bribes in exchange for their vote. From their perspective, disenfranchised citizens seeking to better their government believe change is moving in the wrong direction. The government's inaction and inability to institute progressive change create an ever-growing disconnect between people and government, worsening relations between truly proactive state actors and the average citizen's trust in the system.

## LEADING CAUSES FOR REFORM

As stated above, Mexico and corruption have had a long and closely entangled relationship that holds true to this day. From cartels in foreign countries paying off Mexican Generals and

officials, to politicians abusing their power to funnel illegal funds from criminal dealings. The following section will identify recent cases of corruption to showcase how easily Mexican officials can be corrupted.

## KNIGHTS TEMPLAR CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION

On April 15th of 2014, Mayor Uriel Chavez Mendoza of Apatzingan, a town in the state of Michoacan, was arrested and tried for extortion. Mendoza extorted approximately 20,000 pesos from city councilmen, and gave it to the Knights Templar Organization. Mendoza also faced charges of kidnapping, in addition to fifty counts of other criminal activity involving organized crime. It is important to note that Mendoza was the nephew of this criminal organization's leader, Nazario Moreno (a.k.a. "El Chayo"). Two councilmen, Ramon Santoyo Gallegos and Ricardo Reyna Martinez, went to the Attorney General of Michoacan to make their case. They explained that "Chavez had taken them, along with other councilmen, to a location near the town of Las Bateas, where they were confronted by armed men. There, they were told that their monthly payments would be used for the purchase of arms."

## SEDENA LEAKS

In 2019, a massive media leak, called the "Guacamaya" or "Sedena" leaks, had been dropped to the public. The leak occurred after a group of hacktivists, or Guacamaya, hacked into the Mexican National Defense Department (*Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, Sedena*) database. The Guacamaya went after oil and mining companies in South America. They had accidentally found over four-million documents which "revealed collusion between high-level military officials and the country's cartels". The leak consisted of videos, photos, files, and information revealing collusion efforts by military personnel, government officials, and cartel members. Such acts of collusion included purchases of electoral votes, weapons sales, and information sharing with the cartel.

Many observers believe that Luis Chaparro, a Vice journalist that covered the leak, had been killed following an interview during which he inquired about the forty-three missing student activists. Information from the leaks confirmed the students' murders, and revealed that corrupt military officials assisted in these crimes. Prior to his death, Chaparro commented on the actions of Mexican officials and "how they tried to hide their involvement in the killing". Chaparro additionally pointed out another issue where the "Mexican military was really surveilling the Mexican press when it came to investigating the killings of 43 students in Ayotzinapa."

### ANTI-CORRUPTION PROSECUTORS

Even when efforts have been made to combat the corrupt systems in place using legal means, it still seems to lack the ability to prosecute bad actors. A report from the *Washington Office on Latin America* (WOLA) in 2021, released its findings from interviews between anti-corruption prosecutors and data retrieved in America through the Freedom of Information Act request. This report covers the five states of Coahuila, Jalisco, Nuevo Leon, Sonora, and Veracruz. Some dates included in this report range from 2015 to 2020, while others are from 2019 to 2020. From a total of 6,745 opened investigations, only eighty-six arrest warrants were obtained. Of those eighty-six arrest warrants, there were twenty-two convictions and four acquittals. This translates to a conviction rate of .003% for cases.

The interviewed prosecutors held similar negative beliefs and complaints about the system. One of the major points that they agreed on was the freedom and autonomy to have more control over personnel, budget, and the investigation. They hold this position in hopes to achieve more success in the future, and lessen the ability of authorities to weaken them. However, some action has been taken to try and achieve reforms.

“In a package of proposed legislative reforms, CONAFE seeks to address these issues by establishing anti-corruption prosecutors’ administrative, operational, and budgetary autonomy. It proposes having panels of experts on corruption, human rights, and criminal justice select shortlists of candidates to present to legislators, who would name anti-corruption prosecutors by a two-thirds vote. The prosecutors’ removal would also be by a two-thirds vote, and only for “serious causes” as outlined in Title IV of the Mexican constitution.”

### JUDICIAL REFORM & FEAR

The final point of this article discusses the “New Law”, a newly implemented judicial reform intended to create “semi-democratic” processes. In theory, the new law allows for public elections to be held for all judicial positions within Mexico’s Judicial branch. The intent behind this is to restore citizens’ trust in the judicial system that many lost due to institutional corruption, inefficiency, and inaction.

First, it is important to acknowledge prior processes of the judicial system and the appointment of judges. The Mexican judicial system previously ran on a merit and progression-based system, focusing on career paths with steps that needed to be taken before being able to enter into the seat of a judge. Typically, the path of a prospective judge in Mexico starts with a low-level position such as a junior clerk. Then, one could move into the

position of the notifier. The notifier is responsible for tasks such as all notifications and actions of the court. Finally, one may become a senior law clerk. After achieving the position of senior law clerk, the subject qualifies for the opportunity to become a judge. Every stage during this process requires the candidate to gain sufficient experience for an allotted period of time, whilst completing their training and exams. For example, a junior clerk is required to either work under a senior clerk for a year, or pass an exam, in order to advance to the next stage. Once a senior clerk, one must work tirelessly to gain the necessary experience required to apply for candidacy for a judge position. Following their application, judicial appointments are selected by the Federal Judicature Council.

Since 2019, small adjustments to this selection process have been made to combat gender inequality and promote the inclusion of women in the judiciary. In 2022, with the goal of filling vacant seats for criminal judges, more adjustments were made to the selection process. This was a three step process. The first step was a one-hundred question admissions exam where the top sixty were accepted to continue. The second step was a two month training course at the Judicial school. All who passed would move on to complete the final step. The last step included conducting a hearing on a practical case wherein the candidates must display their abilities, knowledge, and skills relative to their decisions. However, the downfall of this selection process was its “corruptibility”. Situations of corruption in this selection process included efforts by judges to use their power to help employ friends, family, and relatives into the Judicial branch.

A study submitted to the Judicial Council and Ministers of the Supreme Court, showed a connection between five hundred judges and magistrates with connections to family and friends working under them or in a court setting. To put this into perspective, the study claimed that there were over 7,000 employees in the judiciary that work in proximity to relatives. A primary example of this was a situation with a Magistrate from the circuit of Durango who had seventeen members of his family in administrative positions. The first claim states that “of 1,031 positions reviewed in 31 circuits, 501 have relatives, which represents 48.6%.” The study also notes how some smaller states such as Colima where “of the 199 employees, at least 136 have relatives – mainly wives, siblings and children – which represents 68.34% of the total number of positions.”

### THE NEW REFORMS

In the following section, four main changes of the newly reformed Judiciary are identified, and an examination of notable

beliefs held by the Mexican Supreme Court in their analysis of the reformation will be made.

Foremost, the election of judges is no longer through the old system of merit and career path stepping stones is no longer followed for the election of judges. Instead, the new law affirms that judges shall be voted in by the people in their respective provinces, leaving room for fraud and [or] the corruption of the votes. Candidates for Ministers of the Supreme Court, Magistrates of the new Judicial discipline, and the Superior Chamber of the TEPJF are all to be elected officially on a national level:

“For the election of Ministers of the SCJN; Magistrates of the Court of Judicial Discipline, Magistrates of the Superior and Regional Chambers of the Electoral Tribunal of the Judicial Power of the Federation, the requirements set forth in Articles 95, 96, 99 and 100 of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States must be complied with.”

However, the Five Regional Chambers and the Superior Chamber are still to be voted for by two-thirds of the Senate.

From the view of the Mexican Supreme Court, *El Suprema Courte de Justicia de México* (SCJN), this opens pathways to corruption and possible illegitimacy. They argue that because the method of appointing judges is via election, there are no reassurances of legitimacy, unlike the rules prior to the reform, where elections were supposedly based on merit, experience, and knowledge. They additionally argue that because of elections, rather than standards, are being met, there is no guarantee that the judges will be of higher, nor equal quality to that of prior judges. They may not have the proper knowledge to be in the elected position. The Court felt that the system and access to legal means may be harder to attain. Nevertheless, the most important argument made by the Court was that the election of judges has a lower outcome of information and participation, and thus does not justify the legitimacy of the elected officials.

Second, the creation of a new judicial administration is of major concern to the SCJN. The main two arguments for this are: funding and abuses of power. On the first point, with an overhaul and redistribution of power, the OAJ (the Judicial Administration Body) will have a full overview of funding. However, the SCJN believes that their funding must be independent of federal funding per the *International Human Rights Standard*. The second point made by the SCJN noted that the OAJ would be too powerful, highlighting that once the OAJ makes a decision, “no appeal may be filed against them”. Points one and two would both be in violation of the “human rights and international standards”.

Third, the creation of a new judicial disciplinary court does not necessarily guarantee independence and impartiality. Although



the Mexican Constitution and American Convention of Human Rights are recognized in the proceedings, it would be difficult to guarantee fairness and impartiality. The SCJN additionally argued that the ability to influence the outcome of tribunal members' election, takes away the ability for an impartial and fair tribunal. In the Court's view, due to low information and lower turnout in these new elections, voters are likely to turn towards elected party officials to advise their vote choice rather than making informed decisions.

Last, multiple unintended consequences may emerge as a result of the new procedural changes. SCJN lays out three strong arguments for the negative effects these reforms will have on the system itself.

First, enlisting a designated period on a court case holds no precedent, and does not consider the difficulty nor complexity of court cases. By neglecting the reality that court cases are rarely quick, most often the process of the court requires vast amounts of effort and time. The view described by the following quote is held by both the SCJN, and the International Court:

“The adequacy or inadequacy of a time period to resolve a judicial matter is not based on a certain number of months, but on



the review of four criteria: 1) the complexity of the matter, 2) the procedural activity of the interested party, 3) the conduct of the judicial authorities and 4) the effect generated on the legal situation of the person involved in the process.”

Secondly, with a predetermined time limit on a case, if the possibility of punishment is viable for not finishing in the time afforded, it may lead to a lack of detailed analysis or care. One could argue that designating time limits and adding punishments would only help criminals and foster corruption because of the ability to abuse the courts and the timely fashion of proceedings. Lastly, the SCJN held that it is unjust to punish a judge for their inability to finish in the time afforded to them. SCJN states that not only are there “normative and procedural problems that generate delays”, but “problems of corruption and inefficiency” as well, which affects the timely manner in which a case can be taken.

### CONCLUSION: RISKS & OUTCOMES

In August 2024, American Ambassador to Mexico, Ken Salazar, provided a public statement. Based on his experience, he believes that the “popular direct elections of judges are a major risk to the functioning of Mexico’s democracy”, emphasizing the importance of necessary safeguards to stop the possibility of corruption. An important point by Salazar acknowledged the effect on the trade relationships built upon the trust of American investors in Mexico’s legal system. This could upend the relationship as a whole, negatively affecting both countries in the end.

Furthermore, the possible opportunities for control, manipulation, and abuse of the system within the Mexican government, weighs heavily on the officials in office. Many doubt that the new process will be useful or effective. Furthermore, between the influences of cartels, the obvious disregard for law, and the reality of Mexican politics, one could assume that the fall of this system is inevitable. Relative to the possibilities for corruption through the new law, it may be the “perfect” set-up for an authoritarian regime. Parties like the PRI, with its history of fraud and control, could take back power easily, and become the sole political party of Mexico. This possibility would facilitate even greater corruption and hinder the country’s relationships with neighboring countries.

In a country like Mexico, the less fortunate already have low expectations of the government as many have felt the corruption firsthand. One may feel this to be a false positive because the illusion of giving people a choice is unrealistic. At best, the so-called “candidates” are most likely to be individuals with political ties or cartel affiliations that have the money and support to become popular. In this way, they pretend to be there for the

people, but in the end, they are likely to be pawns for a higher power.

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# THE VENEZUELAN 2024 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

A N D R E B A L T A Z A R

“If you don’t want Venezuela to fall into a bloodbath, into a fratricidal civil war, due to the fascists, let’s ensure the greatest success, the greatest victory in the electoral history of our people,” incumbent Nicolás Maduro said to his supporters in July 2024, when they would vote for the next presidential term of six years at the end of the month. The ruling party would later declare him the winner amidst plentiful and sufficient evidence to say otherwise.

Venezuela pays homage to some of the most rampant corruption in modern history, with the Corruption Perception Index in 2023 putting the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), led by Maduro, in the second lowest rank, only outranked by Somalia and tied with Syria and South Sudan. The government is known for officials cooperating with criminals for bribes, losing billions of dollars for the oil industry to fraud and flagrant corruption, and turning a blind eye to human trafficking and illegal trades.

The effects of corruption in Venezuela has led to a government institution that benefits itself, and not the people. Maduro’s past two terms and elections have been riddled with barriers to free media, disqualifying any political opponent that decides to run against him, and blocking voter turnout en masse to ensure that they stay on top of the vote amidst a growing opposition. Nevertheless, the people of Venezuela have voiced dissent against the Maduro administration, to step aside and peacefully allow another to take charge.

On July 28, 2024, Venezuelans banded together, prepared for forced gas station closings and power outages, and drove across the country to vote at obscure polling centers with a couple of machines per a thousand voters. The opposition parties over the 2024 election cycle managed to mobilize people to stand and turn out in the polls together, across the crowded Barrios and

Rurales alike, a gigantic socio-political movement that aimed to democratically and peacefully instill change. And after a quarter-century of a government that has repressed democracy, the cracks were beginning to show, with polling data putting the opposition candidate, Edmundo González Urrutia, far above Maduro.

This election was more hopeful than any other election in the twenty-first century for the Venezuelan opposition. Still, the opposition coalition, the Democratic Unity Roundtable, (MUD) was wary of an unfair election due to a long history of democratic injustice. The last presidential election of 2018 was marked by disqualified or imprisoned opposition candidates that led to a boycott against the election, which ultimately ended with a second Maduro term, but was marred by a voter turnout that dropped from 80.6% in 2012 to 45.7% - about six million people in solidarity.

The candidates as well as the Organization of American States (OAS), composed of the U.S and dozens of Latin American countries denounced the results as illegitimate, triggering a presidential crisis. In 2019, two weeks after Maduro’s inauguration, Juan Guaidó, the new leader of the opposition and head of the National Assembly, the unicameral legislative body, declared himself acting president by the power of the constitution, due to the country being left without a legitimate president (and vice president), leaving him next in succession. By April, Guaidó attempted to sway the Chavez-appointed military officials in a coup attempt and that key members had already joined their efforts, but it inevitably sputtered out.

Guaidó’s government was later dissolved in 2023 due to the opposition losing faith in his leadership. However, the aftermath of the 2018 election and 2019 uprising was the increasing amount of mistrust and the breakdown of negotiations between the PSUV and



MUD. Nonetheless, the 2024 presidential election was different; whilst the former elections were boycotted due to the apparent lack of free and fair conditions, both parties were trying to reach at the minimum a legitimate and recognizable election.

To dispel doubt about the election, independent observers from the Carter Center and the UN were invited beforehand to review the freeness and fairness of the election. As independent observers, they were tasked with observing any faults in the democratic process, to either validate any claims supported by an outsider perspective, or put to rest claims of democratic injustices. In their published findings, both entities could not verify the National Electoral Council's (CNE) ruling after they still have yet to release vote tallies by informal data. In contrast, they legitimized the two-thirds of the vote tally sheets that the opposition gathered, reviewed by exit polls, that showed the opposition's candidate receiving double the votes than Maduro.

The opposition, still wary of the election even with the independent observers and met agreements with Maduro, directed members to gather copies of the tally sheets from the voting stations after they close- their legal right that hasn't been met in previous elections due to "chaos" or disorganization. They brought them over from stations across the country to be properly scanned by a specific machine to ensure the validity of their statements- a collective defeat for Maduro.

The Carter Center reviewed the election process and stated that it did not meet basic international standards of electoral integrity and was not considered democratic. In an official statement, it cited an "environment of restricted freedoms for political actors, civil society organizations, and the media," and a biased CNE. In particular, voter registration, particularly for the migrant population (most politically opposed to Maduro), was affected by short deadlines, a small number of places of registration, and a lack of public information. The Carter Center's statement went as far to call the migrant population "effectively disenfranchised."

During the presidential primary, the Maduro Administration took several measures to disenfranchise the opposition party from running for election offices. Mariá Corina Machado, the former deputy of the National Assembly and current leader of the opposition movement, was their candidate at the forefront, but was disqualified from running after Machado received over 90% of the votes cast for fifteen years due to accounts of fraud and corruption, upheld by the Supreme Tribunal of Justice, Venezuela's highest court, filled with Maduro appointees for two decades now.

Machado is one of the many members of the opposition party to face legal consequences from opposing Maduro. Former Presidential Candidate Henrique Capriles was barred from running for office for the next fifteen years in 2017 due to "administrative irregularities," found by an audit by the Comptroller General, the same title that accused and barred



Machado from running. The order came after weeks of protests of political dissent in the streets, headed by Capriles. Leopoldo López, another prominent opposition leader, was charged with conspiracy after calling for protests in 2014 due to the start of an economic recession and hyperinflation. Internationally condemned as a politically motivated arrest, López faced imprisonment for over five years, only escaping during the 2019 Venezuelan Crisis to the Spanish Embassy in Caracas with his family. He stayed under the protection of the Spanish Embassy for over a year to avoid an arrest warrant from the Supreme Tribunal of Justices, and later escaped the country.

Today, Leopoldo López is the General Secretary for the World Liberty Congress, an international advocate group for pro-democracy movements whose members consist of political refugees from around the world.

The most flagrant abuse of the opposition leaders' legal proceedings was the lack of due process- a chance to defend themselves and argue against the charges. In the hopes of instilling faith into the 2024 elections, Maduro's representatives came together with the opposition to sign the Barbados Agreement, a set of guidelines to follow during the electoral process, it included the right to choose their own political candidates, whomst the PSUV has barred from running after the primaries began.

Despite several setbacks the opposition still agreed to participate in the 2024 elections and put forward an eligible candidate. After winning the primary and then barred, Machado ended up delegating her candidacy to Corina Yoris, who was then unable to register in March, thus appointing Edmundo González Urrutia as the opposition's third and final presidential candidate.

González worked as a diplomat, only abruptly asked to step in after a trip in Europe enjoying retirement. After his diplomacy career, he served from 2009 to 2012 as the opposition party's international representative. In an interview with The Associated Press, González says he has never held an elected office, nor, "participated in partisan politics of positions of elected office". Despite coming into the race only months from July 28, he rose quickly with the help of Machado and the support of the people.

After the election was announced, an arrest warrant was issued for González and he was forced to flee to Spain. He testified that the government forced him to sign a letter accepting his defeat or face the consequences.

As a candidate, González campaigned on addressing the Venezuelan Migration Crisis, aligning with Machado's and the opposition's stance. Over the span of a decade, 7.7 million Venezuelans have left the country, who he hopes to bring back by remedying hardships Venezuelans have endured. The largest

refugee crisis on the American continents, many are fleeing due to food insecurity, lack of running water and electricity, and a corrupt government.

According to the World Food Programme, forty percent of the population faces severe food insecurity. Many lack clean and running water, a problem faced by the late Chavez administration, and it has only worsened due to government turmoil and hyperinflation. While González does not have a concrete plan on solving the Venezuelan Migration Crisis and providing basic necessities, he focused on bringing people together in a time when the country was more divided than ever.

For most Venezuelans, voting for González means defeating Maduro, the most important issue for many. Many have not had the chance to know the newcomer or what he stands for, but are rallying behind him simply because he is not Maduro.

Venezuela's current economy revolves around their oil exports, having reserves totaling 17% of known oil- the largest share in the world. But, due to mismanagement, corruption, and a lack of reinvestment into other revenues, the country still feels the effects whenever the price of oil drops. When the oil price plummeted from \$100 a barrel in 2014 to less than \$30 a barrel in early 2016, the government's reliance on oil that comprised almost two-thirds of its budget, created a national emergency. On top of economic sanctions due to international disdain for human rights infringement, Venezuela spiraled into hyperinflation. In other words, despite being the most resource-rich petrostate in the world, Venezuela has failed to capitalize or create a diverse economy that can insulate itself from the highs and lows of petro economics. And now, citizens have fled the country due to a poor economy and living standards that the government has failed to address.

President Trump has disdain for Maduro, calling him a dictator, and has used economic sanctions to burden his government as did other presidents before him. Still, the U.S. was the second largest importer of Venezuelan oil in 2024 behind China. Trump looks to pressure the PSUV further by imposing additional tariffs on other importers of Venezuelan oil and cutting licenses of American companies such as Chevron that buy heavy crude oil from Venezuela and refine it here. As such, the Venezuelan oil sector will shrink and Maduro's government will see a hit in budget and capability.

If it is like any other previous oil decline such as in early 2016, the people of Venezuela will be hit just as hard as the government, exacerbating a humanitarian crisis even further. Alfred De Zayas, former Independent Expert of International Order for the UN,



denounced the sanctions due to its broad effect on not just the government, but the people of Venezuela.

The U.S. has motives to go against Maduro beyond his democratic injustices. Particularly, the nationalization of oil under state-company PDVSA has gone against private interests of U.S. oil companies. The U.S. has used means ranging from supporting a military coup against Chavez in 2002 to tariffs today that precede the democratic injustices and corruption Maduro has permitted, suggesting an alternative motive such as private interests to have a role between US Foreign Policy and Venezuela.

The reverse effect of the sanctions in Venezuela is the political scapegoating of the U.S. by Maduro. Chavismo supporters that still align with the late Chavez and indirectly Maduro's ideals, believe that the economic turmoil they have faced for the last decade is perpetuated by a cycle of U.S. economic sanctions and interference. Maduro himself denounces the idea of a humanitarian crisis itself, insisting that Venezuela is in a political and economic war with the U.S. He attacks opposition members for being U.S. sympathizers and implying the U.S. is an imperialist state. While there is truth in that the U.S. has negatively impacted the course of Venezuela's economy and democracy, it does not justify actions Maduro takes to sway elections in his favor to stay in power. In that regard, the crisis engulfing Venezuelans today has to do with free and fair elections, a peaceful democratic process, and a government that works towards improving the lives of their people. Any claim that the U.S. is the sole perpetrator behind the political and economic turmoil of the country undermines the ability to address these problems with honesty and a thoughtful understanding.

For many who have decided to stay, their dissatisfaction with their living situation is directed at the Maduro Administration. However, opposition sympathizers are met with backlash from the government. Machado in an interview with PBS recollects the government closing gas stations and jailing those who provide food or lodging.

Nonetheless, the people have done their best to express their dissent through protest. In Caracas and some low-income areas, protests broke out but were brutally repressed. After the election results were announced, largely peaceful protests were met with arrests, twenty-four murders, and other abuses by pro-government armed "colectivo" groups and official authorities. Local human rights organization Foro Penal documented the twenty-four killings, over nineteen hundred political prisoners including one hundred and<sup>1</sup> fourteen children, charged with various crimes from "incitement to hatred" to treason.

According to a shared anonymous testimony shared with BBC News, he accounts running an errand until he was attacked by hooded men, called him a terrorist, planted evidence such as makeshift cocktails and petrol, and took him to a detention center. In Tocarón, he alleges they stripped, beat, verbally abused him, and confined him to a three-by-three meter cell with five others. He described it as a concentration camp where he and others were physically and psychologically tortured, given rotten food, and beaten for asking for a phone call.

The access to a lawyer of their choosing was denied, Gonzalo Himiob, an attorney and vice president of Foro Penal states, "They all have public defenders - the government knows that if it allows access to a private attorney who is not a public official, he or she can document all the due process violations that are occurring."

In total, the Venezuelan government has made a staggering 17,882 politically motivated arrests since 2014, according to Foro Penal. Amongst them, human rights defenders have been attacked and imprisoned, such as Rocío San Miguel and Javier Tarazona, the latter confined to prison since 2021. As the protests have gone on for the last two decades, they have been met with repression and abuses by the government - one of many of the Maduro administration's offenses on democratic freedoms.

In light of insurmountable and undeniable evidence, there is undoubtedly a crisis developing over Venezuela as Maduro assumes a third term amidst losing the election and not releasing precinct-by-precinct data. Not only has he stolen an election, he and those loyal to him have tried to stamp out any opposition through arrests, brutally repressed protests, and barring them from holding office. By suppressing media organizations and dismantling attempts by the opposition to organize on a national level, he has held onto power against the will of the people.

To this day, the fight for a free and democratic Venezuela continues.

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*Ali Alukrafi gets his MA in IR from SFSU*



*Hawa Amiri and Ammar Ansari visiting*



*Jimmy Guzman graduating from UoP*



*Sam-in-Belfast*



*Prof. Morales eulogizing Maureen Moore, Colloquium 2024*



*Two Broads Abroad March 2025*





Katelynn Lyall with Gov. Newsom



Prof. Morales' office vandalized!



Prof. Morales and Aymaan Sumandi



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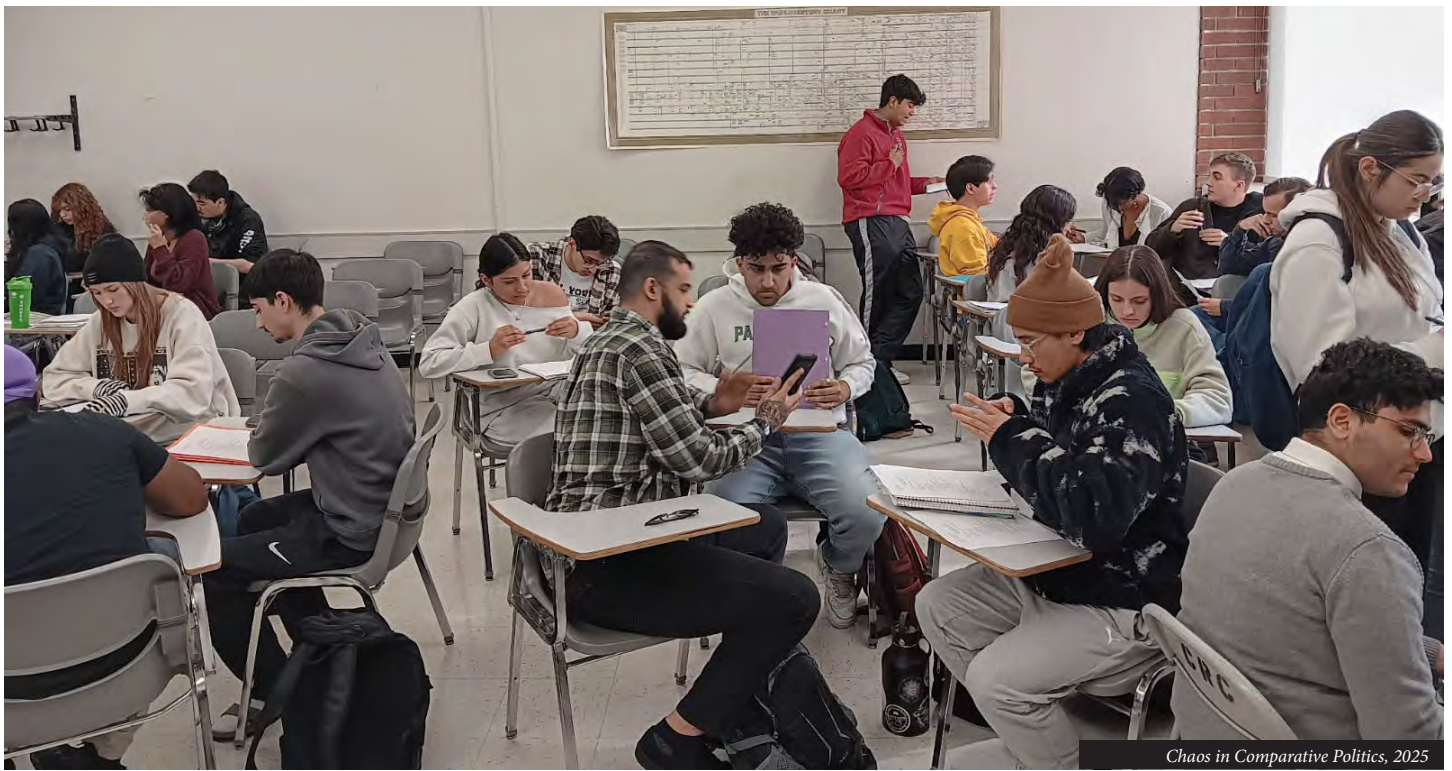


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