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Contact

The Heinz Journal
4800 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
<https://www.cmu.edu/heinz/heinz-journal/>

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Fifteen Last Years of Sino-Latin-American Relations: Political Shifts, Economic Interdependence, and Strategic Evolution

Adriana Lorena Avitia Palma, Francisca Espinoza
and Laura Ospina

Introduction

Over the last fifteen years, Latin America has undergone a significant political transformation, oscillating between left-wing and right-wing governments. These transitions have profoundly impacted domestic policies and external relations, paving the way for global powers like China to expand their influence, particularly during periods of left-leaning governance.

Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, who assumed office in 2013, China has pursued a more aggressive foreign policy agenda, aiming to assert its position as a global leader. This approach has entailed increasing diplomatic engagements with Latin American countries, underscoring China's regional strategic interests. Actions like China's "COVID-19 diplomacy," where vaccines and medical supplies were sent to Latin American countries throughout the pandemic, highlight the significance of the region for China's foreign policy. These actions served public health interests and aimed to strengthen diplomatic ties while mitigating challenges posed by rival powers.

Against this backdrop, this paper examines the multifaceted relationship between China and Latin America, focusing on economic ties, infrastructure development, and defense cooperation. By examining the cases of Mexico and Chile, this study aims to elucidate the complexities, benefits, and challenges inherent in the evolving relationship between China and Latin America.

Overview of the relations

The Latin American political landscape has evolved over the last fifteen years. Countries in the region have shifted from right-wing governments to the left of the political spectrum. For example, by 2011, most countries in the area had a left-wing government. However, by 2018, the region was comprised of mostly right-wing governments. Finally, in 2023, the region had begun to shift left, with Columbia, Chile, and Mexico electing left-wing governments for the first time in fifteen years.

The volatile political scenario in Latin America provided fertile ground for China to establish relationships with governments in the region and project its economic and political model more easily. The Chinese government highlighted political proximity as one of the main areas of potential cooperation between China and the region in two white policy papers—official documents outlining policies, strategies, and areas of focus—on Latin America published by China in 2008. Other areas emphasized in these papers include bilateral trade, investments in production infrastructure, financial assistance, promoting cultural exchange, cooperation in peace and security efforts.¹

These developments align with profound changes in China’s foreign policy under President Xi Jinping, who has focused on positioning China as a global power since taking office in 2013. His foreign policies aimed to align other countries with China’s political, economic, and security interests through a mix of soft, sharp, and hard power.² As a result, China’s interest in the region has grown, and it has strengthened its diplomatic engagement with regional leaders, extending beyond the South-South cooperation framework that dominated relations in previous years.³

One year after becoming president, Xi Jinping attended the China-Latin America and the Caribbean Summit in Brazil, an event at which he gave a keynote speech in which he expressed his desire to build a strong and lasting

*“...Five-in-One new pattern of China-Latin America relations: sincerely trust each other in politics, cooperate with each other for a win-win outcome in economy and trade, learn from each other in people-to-people and cultural exchanges, closely cooperate with each other in international affairs, and promote each other in overall cooperation and bilateral relations, so as to forge a hand-in-hand community of common destiny...”*⁴

Since 2012, Chinese leader Xi Jinping has visited Latin America eleven times.⁵

1 “Full Text of China’s Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean.” The State Council, November 24, 2016. https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2016/11/24/content_281475499069158.htm.

2 Economy, Elizabeth. *The world according to China*. Cambridge: Polity, 2023. Chapter 4.

3 Roy, Diana. “China’s Growing Influence in Latin America.” Council on Foreign Relations, June 15, 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-influence-latin-america-argentina-brazil-venezuela-security-energy-bri>.

4 “Xi Attends Summit with LatAm and Caribbean Leaders.” Full text of China’s policy paper on Latin America and the Caribbean, July 18, 2014. https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2016/11/24/content_281475499069158.htm#:~:text=In%202008%2C%20the%20Chinese%20government,Latin%20American%20and%20Caribbean%20countries.

5 Cimmino, Jeffrey. “China Pairs Actions with Messaging in Latin America. The United States Should Do the Same.” Atlantic Council, February 12, 2024. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/china-pairs-actions-with-messaging-in-latin-america-the-united-states-should-do-the-same/>.

One of the most recent developments in this relationship was China's COVID-19 diplomacy, which involved supplying vaccines and medical supplies to multiple countries in the region, contributing greatly to their response to the virus. Among the main recipients were Chile, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, and Peru. Experts qualify these measures as an effort by the Chinese government to improve its image in the region and curry favor with recipient governments to facilitate the achievement of its strategic interests in the region.⁶ Some suggest that the aid was used to reduce support for democratic Taiwan, in a region where eight of Taipei's fourteen global allies are situated.⁷

Economic relations

Economic engagement has been one of the closest points of China-Latin America relations over the past fifteen years. Latin America's abundance of natural resources and China's growing demand for these commodities, paired with the region's market for Chinese manufactured goods, have driven complementary economic engagement. Following its admission to the World Trade Organization in 2001, China has become one of the region's main trading partners. Latin America's exports to China rose from less than two percent in 2000 to ten percent in 2010. In 2021, trade reached a historic high of \$450 billion and is expected to surpass \$700 billion by 2035.⁸

Although the United States remains the region's main trading partner, China has emerged as the leading trade partner for many South American countries, reflecting its expanding influence in the region. However, unlike the trade surplus Latin America has enjoyed with the United States, its trade balance with China has been consistently negative, as imports exceed exports. The degree of trade dependence varies across the region, with Chile, Brazil, and Peru being the most dependent countries on China, with 34%, 28%, and 28% of total trade. On the other hand, countries such as Mexico, Argentina, and Bolivia have lower levels of dependence.⁹

Much of the trade flow is dominated by primary commodities such as minerals, hydrocarbons, raw materials, and crops such as soybeans. As for imports, the flow consists mainly of manufactured goods. Brazil, Mexico, Panama, Chile, and Argentina are the leading destinations for Chinese exports, and Brazil and Chile are major suppliers of Chinese imports.¹⁰ As of 2023, Beijing has free trade agreements in place with Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Peru. Some experts view this pattern as a regression to the primary commodity model, potentially hampering industrial growth in high-tech sectors.¹¹

Infrastructure, investment, and financing

China has emerged as a significant source of financing for the development

6 Sanborn, Cynthia. "Latin America and China in Times of Covid-19." Wilson Center, October 2020. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/latin-america-and-china-times-covid-19>.

7 Roy, Diana. "China's Growing Influence in Latin America." Council on Foreign Relations, June 15, 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-influence-latin-america-argentina-brazil-venezuela-security-energy-bri>.

8 Ibid

9 Ibid

10 Damares, Lopes Afonso, Suzana Quinet de Andrade Bastos, and Fernando Salgueiro Perobelli. Latin America and China: mutual benefit or dependency?, December 2021. <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/f57b749c-78d5-4e7f-ab05-859fd20db144/content>.

11 Ibid

needs of Latin American countries. The state-owned China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China are the principal Chinese lenders in the region.¹² From 2005 to 2020, these institutions collectively provided a staggering \$137 billion in 117 loans to Latin American governments, surpassing, in several years, the lending of the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the CAF Development Bank combined.¹³ This scale of Chinese financing, though relatively small in most Latin American countries except for Venezuela, underscores the depth of China's economic involvement in the region.

The expansion of the BRI into Latin America as another economic corridor has played a crucial role in financing infrastructure needs in the region. As of today, twenty-one Latin American countries have signed on to BRI. BRI projects in the region encompass sectors that China qualifies as 'new infrastructure' such as 5G technology, electricity transmission, high-speed rail systems, electric vehicles, and data centers.¹⁴ However, critics raise concerns that BRI financing can push Latin American countries into debt traps, sparking worries about debt sustainability in the medium term. Similarly, as in other regions of the world, there are concerns about labor and environmental practices.¹⁵

China's foreign direct investment in the region has been on the rise. By 2021, energy garnered nearly \$94 billion, constituting approximately 34% of foreign investment, while infrastructure accounted for \$26 billion, representing about 42%, and mining received \$2.1 billion, almost 3%.¹⁶ The notable engagement of Chinese construction companies in public tenders across Latin America, leading to the acquisition of numerous significant contracts, carries substantial importance. In 2021 alone, Chinese state-owned enterprises such as China Railway Construction, China Communications Construction, and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) funded projects worth \$11.3 billion in South American countries.¹⁷

China wields significant influence as an investor in various segments of the region's energy sector, covering generation, transmission, and distribution. It holds a dominant position in the solar panel market and plays a substantial role in both onshore and offshore wind markets.¹⁸ For instance, PowerChina is currently engaged in over fifty projects spread across five Latin American nations: Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, and Peru. Moreover, China has emerged as a major investor in the mining industry within Latin America. Between 2018 and 2020, its investments in overseas mining amounted to \$16 billion, with significant

12 Cimmino, Jeffrey. "China Pairs Actions with Messaging in Latin America. The United States Should Do the Same." Atlantic Council, February 9, 2024. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/china-pairs-actions-with-messaging-in-latin-america-the-united-states-should-do-the-same/>.

13 Yovanoff, Jason. "China-Latin America Finance Databases." The Dialogue, May 6, 2021. https://www.thedialogue.org/map_list/.

14 Myers, Margaret. "A Belt & Rough Road?: China-Latin America Relations." Wilson Center, October 28, 2022. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/belt-rough-road-china-latin-america-relations>.

15 Radwin, Maxwell. Chinese investment in Latin America plagues people and nature: Report, March 24, 2022. <https://news.mongabay.com/2022/03/chinese-investment-in-latin-america-plagues-people-and-nature-report/>.

16 "China Regional Snapshot: South America." Committee on Foreign Affairs, November 29, 2022. <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/china-regional-snapshot-south-america/>.

17 Ibid

18 Cimmino, Jeffrey. "China Pairs Actions with Messaging in Latin America. The United States Should Do the Same." Atlantic Council, February 9, 2024. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/china-pairs-actions-with-messaging-in-latin-america-the-united-states-should-do-the-same/>.

ventures in Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile, which collectively possess 56% of the world's lithium resources.¹⁹

Defense, security, and Space Cooperation

China has increasingly deepened its military and defense relationships in Latin America through the sales of arms, military exchanges, and training initiatives, reflecting its strategy to strengthen ties beyond economy and politics.²⁰ From 2009 to 2019, China transferred a total of \$634 million worth of major military hardware to five South American countries – Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela.²¹ Venezuela remains the region's top purchaser of Chinese military hardware. Also, Chinese military leaders visited with their counterparts in Latin America 215 times between 2002 and 2019, with Chile, Cuba, Brazil, and Argentina accounting for more than half of those visits.²²

Argentina has significantly bolstered defense cooperation with China since February 2015, marking a notable expansion beyond prior agreements with Latin American nations.²³ This includes the establishment of the China-Argentina military-operated Observational Station (NAOC) in Neuquen, Patagonia, which is officially intended for civilian and peaceful purposes such as observation and exploration. However, concerns are warranted as Argentina lacks physical oversight of the station's operations, despite China's obligation to inform Argentine authorities of its activities. The agreement also lacks enforcement mechanisms to prevent potential military use of the station, highlighting the potential risks of China's military activities in the region.²⁴

Mexico - China Relations

Overview

Mexico has a population of approximately 127.5 million and a diverse socio-economic landscape. The average life expectancy is 70 years. Economically, it has a Gini coefficient of 0.45, indicating moderate income inequality. The unemployment rate is 3.3%, with a GDP per capita of \$11,496.5. Over 50% of this GDP comes from the service industry, followed by manufacturing. The current inflation rate of 7.9% reflects the rising prices of goods and services.²⁵

19 "China Regional Snapshot: South America." Committee on Foreign Affairs, November 29, 2022. <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/china-regional-snapshot-south-america/>.

20 Roy, Diana. "China's Growing Influence in Latin America." Council on Foreign Relations, June 15, 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-influence-latin-america-argentina-brazil-venezuela-security-energy-bri>.

21 "China Regional Snapshot: South America." Committee on Foreign Affairs, November 29, 2022. <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/china-regional-snapshot-south-america/>.

22 "Hearing on China in Latin America and the Caribbean before the U.S.-China economic and security review commission." united states-china economic and security review commission, May 20, 2021. https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/May_20_2021_Hearing_Transcript.pdf.

23 "China's Military Agreements with Argentina: A Potential New Phase in China-Latin America Defense Relations." China's Military Agreements with Argentina: A Potential New Phase in China-Latin America Defense Relations | U.S.- CHINA | ECONOMIC and SECURITY REVIEW COMMISSION, November 5, 2015. <https://www.uscc.gov/research/chinas-military-agreements-argentina-potential-new-phase-china-latin-america-defense>.

24 Garrison, Cassandra. China's military-run space station in Argentina is a "black box" | reuters, January 31, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN1PP0HQ/>.

25 "World Bank Open Data," World Bank Open Data, accessed May 2, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org>.

Diplomatic Partnerships

Mexico established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in 1972, becoming the second Latin American country. By 2003, China was recognized as a “strategic partner” and became Mexico's second-largest trading partner globally. In 2004, both countries formed a binational commission. This relationship was further elevated during Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to Mexico in 2013, leading to an “integral strategic partnership” focusing on enterprise and investment.²⁶

While Mexico is not officially part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it has continued to explore collaborative opportunities in several areas, including science, technology, and education, such as the 2014 “Agreement of Cooperation in Joint Call on Research Projects on Science and Technology.”²⁷ Both countries are also members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, G-20, and the United Nations and have conducted over 20 high-level visits since establishing diplomatic ties.

China was crucial during Mexico's COVID-19 crisis by providing ventilators and protective equipment. By 2021, Mexico had received approximately 26.5% of its 103 million vaccine doses from Chinese companies Sinovac and CanSino, strengthening their political ties.²⁸

Trade Dynamics

Trade between Mexico and China has increased significantly in recent years. In 2019, Mexico exported \$7.12 billion, about 1.55% of its GDP, and imported \$83 billion, or 18.2% of its GDP, resulting in a trade deficit of \$75.9 billion. By 2023, exports increased to \$10.1 billion and imports to \$114 billion, deepening the trade deficit to \$104 billion. In 2023, China's direct investment in Mexico totaled \$151 million.²⁹

Mexico's main exports to China included copper ores and concentrates, while imports primarily comprised telephones and mobile devices. Approximately 85% of all exported goods originated from five states, including Sonora and Jalisco, and a similar percentage of imports were destined for seven states, including Chihuahua and Nuevo Leon.³⁰

Investment and Infrastructure

Chinese investment in Mexico has been significant, particularly in manufacturing, infrastructure, and communications. In 2021, Chinese companies accounted for 30 percent of foreign investment in Nuevo León, including important projects like the Housfan Industrial Park.³¹ The China Communications

26 Amb Martha Bárcena Coqui | September 28 and 2021, “Why Mexico's Relationship with China Is So Complicated,” *Americas Quarterly* (blog), accessed May 2, 2024, <https://americasquarterly.org/article/why-mexicos-relationship-with-china-is-so-complicated/>.

27 Caroline S Wagner and Denis F Simon, “China's Use of Formal Science and Technology Agreements as a Tool of Diplomacy,” *Science and Public Policy* 50, no. 4 (August 1, 2023): 807–17, <https://doi.org/10.1093/scipol/scad022>.

28 September 28 and 2021, “Why Mexico's Relationship with China Is So Complicated.”

29 “China: Foreign Trade, Investments, Migration and Remittances,” *Data México*, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://www.economia.gob.mx/datamexico/en/profile/country/china-chn>.

30 “China: Foreign Trade, Investments, Migration and Remittances,” *Data México*, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://www.economia.gob.mx/datamexico/en/profile/country/china-chn>.

31 Peter S. Goodman, “Why Chinese Companies Are Investing Billions in Mexico,” *The New York Times*, February 3, 2023, sec. Business, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/03/business/china-mexico-trade.html>.

Construction Company (CCCC), despite being debarred by the World Bank since 2009, has partnered in constructing the first section of the Mayan Train project, with a total investment of \$630 million.^{32 33}

In the communications sector, Huawei announced a \$1.5 million investment in 2014 and was selected alongside Nokia in 2017 to develop Mexico's first 4.5G mobile network.³⁴ Huawei also opened a second cloud data center in Mexico in 2021, increasing its influence in the telecommunications sector amid rising cybersecurity concerns from the United States.³⁵

Several reasons besides nearshoring account for the increase in Chinese investment in Mexico. Manufacturing labor wages per hour in Mexico are considerably lower than in China; between 2019 and 2020, labor wages in China were \$6.5 per hour compared to US\$4.82 in Mexico.³⁶ Additionally, Mexico's young demographic contrasts with China's aging population. These factors, along with lower production costs, have spurred a shift towards manufacturing sectors such as automotive and electronics.³⁷

Effects of China and Mexico relations

The relationship between China and Mexico has deepened through new cooperation agreements, boosting trade and investment. President López Obrador has emphasized the importance of diversifying Mexico's economic relationships to reduce dependence on the U.S. and strengthen ties with China.³⁸

However, Chinese companies face challenges such as adapting to local labor regulations and managing cultural and security risks.³⁹ The trade war between China and the U.S. has created opportunities for Mexico, leading to a 17% increase in U.S. exports of gasoline-powered vehicles totaling \$36.2 billion. Manufacturing activity in Mexico remains robust, with significant investments in industrial construction and enhanced regional content requirements under the USMCA, aiding Mexico in becoming the top trade partner of the U.S.⁴⁰

32 "World Bank Applies 2009 Debarment to China Communications Construction Company Limited for Fraud in Philippines Roads Project," Text/HTML, World Bank, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2011/07/29/world-bank-applies-2009-debarment-to-china-communications-construction-company-limited-for-fraud-in-philippines-roads-project>.

33 "Chinese Companies Interested in Mexico's Southeast," Mexico Business, January 9, 2023, <https://mexicobusiness.news/infrastructure/news/chinese-companies-interested-mexicos-southeast>.

34 "Huawei Invertirá 1,500 Millones de Dólares En México En Cinco Años – El Financiero," accessed May 1, 2024, <https://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/bajio/huawei-invertira-500-millones-de-dolares-en-mexico-en-cinco-anos/>.

35 Ryan C. Berg and Henry Ziemer, "Managing Geopolitical Risk in Mexico's ICT Sector," October 5, 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/managing-geopolitical-risk-mexicos-ict-sector>.

36 bop-admin, "Is Mexico Manufacturing More Cost-Effective Than China When It Comes to Wages?," IVEMSA, October 20, 2020, <https://www.ivemsa.com/mexico-manufacturing-and-china-wages/>.

37 "Reshoring from China to Mexico - How Prevalent Is It Really?," China Briefing News, May 27, 2022, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/reshoring-from-china-to-mexico-how-prevalent-is-it-really/>.

38 "Mexico, China Nod to Stronger Ties as Leaders Agree to Promote Trade and Investment," Reuters, November 17, 2023, sec. China, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/us/mexico-china-main-tain-mutually-beneficial-relationship-lopez-obrador-says-2023-11-16/>.

39 "Mexico vs. China on Manufacturing Risks," Harris Sliwoski LLP, April 3, 2024, <https://harris-sliwoski.com/chinalawblog/mexico-vs-china-on-manufacturing-risks/>.

40 "Mexico Economic Outlook, 2023," Deloitte Insights, accessed May 2, 2024, <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/economy/americas/mexico-economic-outlook.html>

Chile – China relations

Overview

Chile has undergone significant changes over the past decade, both demographically and economically. The population has steadily increased from 11.73 million in 1983 to 19.9 million in 2023⁴¹, while life expectancy has also improved from 57 years in 1960 to 79 years in 2021.⁴² Despite a global fertility rate below the replacement level, Chile has managed to improve its income distribution, with the Gini coefficient dropping from 56.2% in 1987 to 43.0% in 2022.⁴³ The country's per capita income has also grown substantially, rising from \$504 in 1960 to \$15,355 in 2022⁴⁴. Inflation has been managed effectively, stabilizing below 11.4% since 1994 and concluding 2023 at 3.8% by January 2024.⁴⁵

Diplomatic Partnerships

Chile's engagement with China dates back to 1970, when it became the first Latin American country to establish diplomatic relations with China. Chile advocated for China's admission to the World Trade Organization (WTO) starting in 1999 and recognized China as a market economy in 2004. Chile's active participation in APEC, which China joined in 1991 and 1994, has fostered bilateral ties. APEC, established in 1989, is a vital platform for both nations to enhance cooperation.⁴⁶

Trade Dynamics

In 2005, Chile became the first country outside Asia to sign a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China, which was implemented during Michelle Bachelet's presidency in October 2006. In 2017, the free trade agreement was upgraded, increasing the proportion of zero-tariff products to 98 percent.⁴⁷ The significance of these diplomatic and trade relationships has only grown, with bilateral trade reaching \$65.5 billion by 2022, establishing China as Chile's main trading partner for over a decade.⁴⁸

Chile's exports soared to \$98 billion in 2022, with China absorbing 39.4% of them, totaling \$37.2 billion⁴⁹. This underscores China's pivotal role in Chile's

41 "Population million of people - Chile," International Monetary Fund, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/LP@WEO/CHL?zoom=CHL&highlight=CHL>.
<https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/LP@WEO/CHL?zoom=CHL&highlight=CHL>

42 "Life Expectancy at Birth, Total (Years) - Chile," World Bank, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN?locations=CL>.

43 "GINI Index (World Bank Estimate) - Chile," World Bank, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=CL>.

44 "World Bank. 'GDP per Capita (current US\$) - Chile.' World Bank National Accounts Data, accessed May 1, 2024. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=CL>."

45 "Evolución de la Inflación según la Nueva Canasta del IPC," Banco Central de Chile, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://www.bcentral.cl/contenido/-/detalle/evolucion-de-la-inflacion-segun-la-nueva-canasta-del-ipc>.

46 "President Gabriel Boric Received by President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping," Gobierno de Chile, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://www.gob.cl/en/news/president-gabriel-boric-received-by-president-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-xi-jinping/>.

47 "State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. 'Chile and China: Partners in Progress.' January 24, 2024. http://english.scio.gov.cn/m/beltandroad/2024-01/24/content_116961489.htm."

48 "The Dialogue. 'At a Crossroads: China's Post-Pandemic Economic Relations with Latin America and the Caribbean.' Accessed May 4, 2024. <https://www.thedialogue.org/analysis/at-a-crossroads-chinas-post-pandemic-economic-relations-with-latin-america-and-the-caribbean/>."

49 "Goods, Services and Primary Income (BoP, Current US\$) - Chile," World Bank, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.GSR.GNFS.CD?locations=CL>.

export landscape, particularly in copper ore, refined copper, and fruits. Over the past 27 years, exports to China expanded at an annualized rate of 19.5%, establishing it as Chile's largest export destination since 2007.⁵⁰ However, this heavy reliance on the Chinese market also exposes Chile to potential risks associated with changes in China's economic policies or demand patterns.

Meanwhile, Chile's imports surged to \$104 billion in 2022, with China accounting for 23%, or \$26.4 billion, of its imports. This highlights China's indispensable position in Chile's import landscape. While Chile has diversified its import sources, particularly with the U.S., Brazil, and Argentina, China remains a significant contributor.⁵¹ However, overreliance on Chinese imports could expose Chile to supply chain vulnerabilities, especially in critical sectors such as automotive, telecommunications, and technology.

Despite these challenges, Chile has maintained a positive trade balance⁵², reflecting its overall resilience. However, the fluctuating nature of this balance, particularly since 2012, underscores the need for Chile to diversify its trade partners and mitigate risks associated with heavy dependence on any single market, particularly in the face of global economic uncertainties.

Investment and Infrastructure

Over the decade from 2013 to 2022, China invested more than \$13.2 billion in Chile. Chinese FDI in Chile was significant in 2022, totaling \$1.34 billion⁵³, marking a consistent increase from \$126 million in 2012. Chile joined China's BRI in 2018, and cooperation under the BRI framework continues to expand, particularly in the mining and renewable energy sector, as both countries have made green development a core principle for sustainable growth, public utilities, and mining.

As in other Latin American countries, Chinese investment in Chile has been targeted at the energy and infrastructure sectors, where transportation stands out. The introduction of Chinese electric buses has significantly transformed Chile's public transportation. Starting with 100 BYD buses in 2018 and expanding to include 40 Zhong Tong buses in 2023, Chile's fleet had grown to over 2,200 Chinese electric buses by the end of 2023.⁵⁴ This enhancement is part of a broader initiative that includes various strategic projects, such as the development of commuter trains and major highways, with investments ranging from \$33 million to as much as \$2.5 billion for the expansion of the metro system.⁵⁵

In a parallel development, China's State Grid has reshaped the energy landscape in Chile. In 2020, it acquired two major Chilean electricity companies for over \$5.23 billion. This acquisition granted control over the electricity

50 "Trade Profile Between China and Chile," The Observatory of Economic Complexity, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://oec.world/es/profile/bilateral-country/chn/partner/chl>.

51 "Nadie lo mueve: China fue el principal socio comercial de Chile en 2023," *Diario Financiero*, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://www.df.cl/economia-y-politica/comercio-exterior/nadie-lo-mueve-china-fue-el-principal-socio-comercial-de-chile-en-2023>.

52 "Net Capital Account (BoP, Current US\$) - Chile," World Bank, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BN.GSR.GNFS.CD?locations=CL>.

53 "Outward FDI Stock from China in Chile," Statista, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1424149/outward-fdi-stock-from-china-in-chile/>.

54 "China-CELAC Forum. 'Title of the Document.' August 21, 2023. http://www.chinacelacforum.org/esp/zgtmjlbjgix_2/202308/t20230821_11129647.htm."

55 "Investment Overview Between China and Latin America," ICLAC, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://china-latam.iclac.cl/InvestmentCountry>.

supply to 57% of Chilean consumers, marking a significant shift in the national energy landscape.⁵⁶

The solar energy sector has also seen substantial Chinese involvement since 2012, with investments totaling \$1,172.2 million. Notable initiatives include constructing the \$375 million Solar Wing Park and a \$480 million joint venture with Mainstream Renewable Power to establish another central solar park.⁵⁷ In 2023, China supplied 97.12% of Chile's solar panel imports, valued at approximately \$138.76 million, underscoring their pivotal role in the nation's move towards solar energy.⁵⁸

Moreover, China's commitment to bolstering Chile's renewable energy capacity extends to the wind power sector. Significant investments, such as \$420 million for the Taltal Wind Reserve and \$150 million for the Punta Sierra project reflect China's strategic approach to fostering growth and technological advancement in renewable energy within Chile. These projects highlight China's ongoing role in Chile's renewable energy landscape, contributing to local energy production and sustainable environmental practices.⁵⁹

In addition to renewable energy, mining has become a strategic sector for Chinese investments, particularly in lithium production. Over the past decade, China has invested over \$60 billion to control the global lithium supply, securing 60% of the output and 80% of lithium hydroxide production. Despite heavy investment, China relies on lithium imports from Chile, Argentina, and Australia. To mitigate trade and pandemic impacts, China introduced the "Dual Circulation" strategy in 2020 to fortify its domestic market and reduce foreign lithium dependence. This move aligns with an expected fortyfold surge in lithium demand by 2040, crucial for the shift to green energy.

Chile is the leading lithium producer in South America and second globally. Unlike Argentina, which faces legislative and logistical challenges, the country benefits from a supportive legal and infrastructure framework. Significant industry investments include Tianqi Lithium's \$4 billion stake in SQM and further investments from BYD Chile SpA and China Yongqing Technology in local projects, boosting employment and training.⁶⁰

The Chilean government is pushing its National Lithium Strategy, promoting cooperation between public and private sectors to exploit lithium strategically. This includes significant state involvement and fostering private-public partnerships for flexible project implementations. This strategy enhances the lithium industry by balancing economic growth with environmental care and technological advancements. It positions Chile as a critical player in the global lithium market while integrating conservation efforts into its commercial strategies.

From 2000 to 2023, China's steel production rose nearly 700%, increasing its global market share from 15% to 54%. This expansion, supported by state subsidies, has positioned China as a significant player in the global steel market,

56 "InvestChile. 'State Grid: Leader in Electrical Distribution in Chile.' InvestChile, June 2020. https://www.investchile.gob.cl/success_stories/state-grid/."

57 "Investment Overview Between China and Latin America," ICLAC, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://china-latam.iclac.cl/InvestmentCountry>.

58 "Importaciones de Paneles Solares," DataSur, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://www.datasur.com/importaciones-de-paneles-solares/>.

59 "Investment Overview Between China and Latin America," ICLAC, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://china-latam.iclac.cl/InvestmentCountry>.

60 "Investment Overview," Tianqi Lithium, accessed May 1, 2024, <http://en.tianqilithium.com/business/investment.html>

affecting global prices and testing international trade policies. In Chile, the influx of Chinese steel has significantly impacted local industries like the Compañía Siderúrgica Huachipato, which supports 20,000 jobs. Despite a 15.3% tariff on Chinese steel imports, the market faces challenges from cheaper imports, highlighting broader economic issues from global trade imbalances.⁶¹

Conclusions and recommendations

The relationship between China and Latin America has grown significantly over the past few years, bringing significant benefits to both parties. China has gained access to important raw materials and food sources, strengthened its position as a key player in the region, and advanced its global interests in opposition to the United States. Meanwhile, Latin American countries have reaped economic rewards, securing access to credit, addressing infrastructure deficits, and leveraging the competitive dynamic between China and the U.S. to their advantage.

However, it's crucial to acknowledge that this relationship is not without its challenges. Despite the tangible benefits, issues of balance, trust, and transparency persist. Therefore, several recommendations are available for both China and Latin American countries to consider moving forward.

For example, Mexico must focus on enhancing spending efficiency to boost investment in education, and physical and digital infrastructure. With current allocations falling below OECD averages, investing in these areas is critical for fostering economic growth and global competitiveness. In addition, maintaining solid relationships with both China and the U.S. will be essential for effectively navigating the geopolitical landscape.

While Chile's economic partnership with China presents significant opportunities, it also brings forth challenges related to national strategic independence and sovereignty. As Chinese investment in critical sectors like mining and energy continues to drive economic growth, Chile must carefully balance economic advantages with the protection of strategic resources, environmental integrity, and export diversification. It's also important to foster greater transparency in cooperation and prioritize soft power initiatives to build trust and understanding within the region.

Moving forward, both China and Latin American countries must work towards fostering a relationship built on transparency, mutual respect, and collaboration. By addressing existing imbalances and challenges while leveraging opportunities for cooperation, they can build a foundation for sustainable and mutually beneficial engagement in the years to come. China should prioritize forging trust within the region, recognizing its historical ties with the U.S. and the potential for shifts in political and economic alliances. Strengthening soft power initiatives and fostering transparent cooperation will be key in building lasting relations in Latin America.

⁶¹ "Chile Politicians Clamor to Save Steel from Cheap China Imports," Bloomberg, April 3, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-04-03/chile-politicians-clamor-to-save-steel-from-cheap-china-imports?embedded-checkout=true>.

Opinion: *Shelby v. Holder* Has Legitimized Voting Discrimination Efforts

By Sydney-Anne Wilczynski

In 2011, Texas Governor Rick Perry signed SB 14 into law, restricting the acceptable forms of ID voters could present to cast a ballot in elections. The law was initially blocked in *Texas v. Holder* by the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, which found that Texas had failed to prove that the law would not discriminate against minorities. Under SB 14, approximately 600,000 registered voters in Texas would have been turned away from polls because they lacked an acceptable form of ID. Despite efforts to prevent its enactment, SB 14 came into effect in 2013.

Meanwhile, in 2010, Shelby County, Alabama, filed a lawsuit that challenged the constitutionality of Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act. Although the District Court for the District of Columbia and the U.S. Court of Appeals both upheld the law, Shelby County appealed their case to the Supreme Court. In 2013, the Court's ruling in *Shelby v. Holder* struck down Section 4, gutting one of the most effective protections against racial discrimination in voting practices. Without Section 4's coverage formula, Section 5's preclearance requirement became unenforceable, allowing states with histories of voter suppression and racial discrimination to enact new voting restrictions that disproportionately disenfranchise minority voters.

The Voting Rights Act was signed into law by President Johnson on August 6th, 1965. The act banned the use of literacy tests, provided federal oversight of voter registration in areas where less than 50% of the non-white population were registered to vote, and authorized the US attorney general to investigate the use of poll taxes in state and local elections after the practice had already been banned in federal elections with the 24th amendment. Despite weak state and local enforcement of the law, the Voting Rights Act gave African American voters the legal means to challenge voting restrictions and increase voter turnout. In Mississippi, Black voter turnout increased from 6% in 1964 to 59% in 1969.

Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act is widely regarded as the act's most crucial component because it provided a formula for the federal government to identify jurisdictions with histories of racial discrimination. As of 2013, the states that fell under the formula included Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Louisiana,

Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Florida, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, South Dakota, and parts of California.

By declaring Section 4 and the preclearance formula outdated, the Court effectively nullified Section 5 and left previously covered jurisdictions free to pass restrictive voting laws or redraw district maps without federal oversight. In the wake of *Shelby*, states like Texas and Alabama moved swiftly to implement laws that disproportionately impact communities of color, underscoring the persistence of systemic racism in US voting laws.

By 2019, all nine states previously covered by Section 5 had enacted laws making voting more difficult. These laws often came in the form of strict voter ID laws or absentee ballot restrictions, which disproportionately affect people of color. Since 2013, Alabama has emerged as a leader in these anti-voter efforts. Today, more than one in seven Black adults in Alabama is disenfranchised, twice the national average. The state has erected countless barriers to prevent minorities from exercising their right to vote. Following the *Shelby* ruling, Alabama enacted Act 2011-683, requiring voters to present a narrow range of IDs at the polls, including a gun license, Alabama driver's license, state-issued voter ID, passport, military ID, or student ID from an in-state university.

Although Alabama offers free nondriver IDs to voters who lack the appropriate ID to vote, barriers prevent many from obtaining them. Over 30% of voting-age residents live more than 10 miles from the nearest ID-issuing office. Those who live in rural areas that lack access to public transportation find it difficult to access ID-issuing offices. A 2012 study from the Brennan Center of Justice found that driver's license offices in predominantly Black counties were open only once or twice per week. Limited work hours and difficulty accessing these offices prevent many minority voters from obtaining the ID options offered to them. Furthermore, in addition to limited hours, Alabama has closed over 30 of these offices, mostly located in the Black Belt, citing budget cuts.

Voter ID laws disproportionately affect minority voters. Nationwide, 11% of eligible voters lack the IDs required under these strict voting laws; however, among Black voters, the number is more than double, with 25% of African Americans not possessing any form of government-issued ID. Since *Shelby* and the introduction of stricter voting laws, the white-nonwhite voting gap has increased drastically in states that were previously subjected to preclearance. In 2012, the white-nonwhite gap was 7%; by 2022, the gap had grown to 13%. Furthermore, the white-black voting gap has increased every year since *Shelby*; from 2012 to 2022, the gap increased from 3% to 9%.

The ramifications of *Shelby v. Holder* and the surge in restrictive voting laws highlight the urgent need for proactive measures to safeguard minority voting rights. Barriers such as strict voter ID requirements and reduced access to polling locations have worsened historical inequities, disenfranchising significant portions of the American electorate. As conservative states continue to enact these restrictions, the federal government must intervene with strategies to protect vulnerable communities. While nonprofits like Fair Fight have worked tirelessly to defend voting rights, this issue needs to become a priority for Congress. Updating Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act is an essential first step to closing the growing white-nonwhite voting gap.

Fair Fight has led efforts to mobilize voters of color through initiatives like "Hot Call Summer," which aimed to educate voters and train grassroots advocates. They have also focused on empowering college students to verify their

registration and navigate voting barriers. According to *The Hill*, Stacey Abrams and grassroots organizations in Georgia helped register over 800,000 new voters—a testament to the impact of local action.

The League of Women Voters has also played a critical role in protecting minority voting rights through both litigation and education. They have challenged discriminatory voter ID laws, purges of voter rolls, reductions in polling locations, and limits on early voting. Their Vote411 service provides free digital election resources, and in 2020, their efforts were estimated to have protected the rights of over 25 million voters.

The devastating effects of *Shelby v. Holder* have only deepened over the past decade, reinforcing systemic barriers that deny equal access to the ballot. The federal government must act swiftly to restore the Voting Rights Act to its full strength. Updating Section 4's coverage formula is essential, but Congress must go further, ensuring that every American—regardless of race or background—can exercise their right to vote. The time to protect democracy is now before another generation is silenced by laws designed to suppress their voices.

The 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine: A Comprehensive Analysis

Anthony Haynes, Shambavi Bhushan, Sydney-Anne Wilczynski

Introduction

Eastern Europe's history is marked by shifting borders, mixed identities, and contentious claims to land. Amidst this complex backdrop, February 2022 marked a pivotal moment as Russia's invasion of Ukraine thrust the region into the forefront of global attention once again. Since then, conflict has ravaged Ukraine, leaving a trail of destruction and geopolitical implications in its wake. The first section discusses how the 2022 invasion was not an isolated event but rather the culmination of years of Russian expansionist efforts, fueled by rhetoric about historical connections between nations. This paper aims to unpack this assertion by examining how the lack of reaction from the West to the annexation of Crimea in 2014 may have emboldened Russia's actions, ultimately leading to the 2022 invasion.

Firstly, this paper will discuss the historical relationship between Ukraine and Russia to understand the complexities of this conflict. The next section will provide a detailed analysis of the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the unofficial war waged by Russia to discuss tensions preceding the 2022 invasion. This paper will then detail Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the response by the West since then, and how the conflict has impacted geopolitics and trends internationally. Finally, this paper will draw upon its findings to propose actionable policy recommendations for key stakeholders, including the United States, the European Union, and Russia to foster stability and mitigate future conflicts in the region.

Road to Conflict: History of Relations Between Russia and Ukraine

Understanding Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine requires delving into the intricate historical relationship between the two nations. The shared heritage between present-day Russia and Ukraine can be traced back thousands of years to the first Slavic state, Kyivan Rus. In 988 A.D., the grand prince of Kyiv, Volodymyr the Great, accepted the Orthodox Christian faith and was baptized

in the Crimean city of Chersonesus.¹ This pivotal event is widely regarded as the inception of a collective identity, forging a sense of unity between Ukrainians and Russians.

However, the history between these nations is also marked by periods of conflict and domination by external powers. Throughout the centuries, Ukraine has endured the rule of various empires, from the Mongols in the 13th century to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and later the Russian Empire. The Treaty of Perpetual Peace in 1686 delineated spheres of influence, with eastern Ukraine falling under Russian control while western regions remained under Polish dominion.² This division laid the groundwork for subsequent tensions between sects of Ukrainian society.

The Russian Empire annexed western Ukraine in the late 18th century, initiating a period of Russification characterized by policies aimed at suppressing the Ukrainian language and culture. These oppressive policies intensified under Soviet rule in the 20th century, particularly during Stalin's era. The policy of collectivization led to widespread famine, known as the Holodomor, resulting in the deaths of millions of Ukrainians. Stalin's ruthless tactics culminated in importing ethnic Russians to these areas, which altered the demographic makeup of eastern Ukraine, exacerbating existing divisions within Ukrainian society.³

Ukraine gained independence in 1991 after the Soviet Union's collapse, but the legacy of Soviet control persisted, dividing Ukrainians between pro-European and pro-Russian factions. This divide manifested prominently during the Orange Revolution of 2004, sparked by disputed election results and widespread allegations of fraud.⁴

Tensions between pro-European and pro-Russian factions came to a head during the Revolution of Dignity in 2013, triggered by pro-Russian President Yanukovich's refusal to sign an EU integration agreement.⁵ The subsequent ousting of Yanukovich in 2014 led to a more pro-Western government, further straining relations with Russia. President Putin's annexation of Crimea and support for separatist movements in eastern Ukraine reflected Russia's resistance to Ukraine's growing alignment with the West.⁶

The culmination of these historical tensions occurred with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, which was driven by Putin's fears of NATO expansion and a desire to assert Russian influence in the region. This invasion marked a tragic escalation of the longstanding geopolitical struggle between Russia and Ukraine, with profound implications for regional stability and global security.

The 2014 Annexation of Crimea

In November of 2013, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich made the consequential decision to veer away from trade and association negotiations with the European Union and cement ties with Russia by signing a \$15 billion aid

1 Eve Conant, "Russia and Ukraine: The Tangled History That Connects-and Divides-Them," History, February 24, 2023, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/russia-and-ukraine-the-tangled-history-that-connects-and-divides-them>.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

package from Moscow to Kyiv, coupled with a notable reduction of nearly 33% in energy prices.⁷ Ukrainians launched a series of large-scale protests, referred to as the Revolution of Dignity or Euromaidan, against the government's decision to suspend trade negotiations with the West in favor of closer ties to Moscow. The protests culminated in the impeachment of President Yanukovich and increased tensions between Crimea's Russian population and other ethnic groups in the region.⁸ Anti-Euromaidan protests erupted in Crimea, calling for Russian intervention in Ukraine.

In February 2014, a day after Putin put the Russian military on high alert, masked pro-Russian gunmen in Crimea began seizing control over airports, government buildings, and military bases.⁹ Although Putin initially denied any connection between gunmen and the Russian military, the West condemned the Kremlin for orchestrating a military invasion of Ukraine. However, in response to the threat to Russian lives in Crimea, Putin requested that the Russian parliament approve the deployment of Russian forces in the region. On March 1st, the request was approved, and Russian forces were deployed in Ukraine.¹⁰

Russian forces and local pro-Russian paramilitary groups rapidly gained control of the peninsula. Pro-Russian legislators in Crimea convened a session of parliament to elect Sergey Aksyonov, the leader of the Russian Unity Party, as Prime Minister of Crimea. Before 2014, the Russian Unity Party had minimal representation in parliament, having only received five percent of the vote in the 2010 elections.¹¹ Even so, the Crimean parliament ultimately voted to secede from Ukraine and join the Russian Federation.

On March 16th, 2014, a referendum was held in Crimea with 97% in favor of joining with Russia. However, the legitimacy of this outcome was marred by numerous reports of coercion, intimidation tactics, and the presence of armed individuals at polling stations. Furthermore, the banning of journalists from observing the voting process cast a shadow of doubt over the validity of the results, raising questions about the fairness and transparency of the referendum.¹² Kyiv refused to recognize the results and the West responded by imposing sanctions on high-ranking Russian officials and members of the Crimean government. Nonetheless, on March 18th, Putin signed a treaty that officially incorporated Crimea into the Russian Federation. Few countries have recognized the legitimacy of Russia's annexation, while the United Nations affirms that Crimea remains part of Ukraine. According to international law, Russia is an occupying power in Crimea and, therefore, has no legal claims to the region. The annexation of Crimea and the lack of response by the West is a point of pride in Russia; Putin's domestic popularity rose dramatically.¹³

7 Shaun Walker, "Vladimir Putin Offers Ukraine Financial Incentives to Stick with Russia," *The Guardian*, December 18, 2013, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/17/ukraine-russia-leaders-talks-kremlin-loan-deal>.

8 "A 5-Minute Guide to Understanding Ukraine's Euromaidan Protests," accessed April 6, 2024, <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/explainers/understanding-ukraines-euromaidan-protests>.

9 Nigel Walker, "Conflict in Ukraine: A Timeline (2014 - Eve of 2022 Invasion)," August 22, 2023, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9476/CBP-9476.pdf>.

10 "Crimean Elections Russian Style," *OpenDemocracy*, accessed April 6, 2024, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/crimean-elections-russian-style/>.

11 "Ibid."

12 "Crimea - Russian Annexation, Crimean War, Tatar Rule | Britannica," accessed April 2, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Crimea/History>.

13 Ibid

Despite objections to the annexation's legitimacy, the Western world's mild response to Russia did little to deter further aggression. Travel bans, sanctions, and freezing of assets of key Russian officials only resulted in Russia adopting similar sanctions towards the United States and the European Union. The West also unanimously decided to suspend Russian membership in the G8. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov declared the suspension as no great tragedy and that the G8 was simply an informal club, with major decisions made in G20 summits.¹⁴ Former President Trump further undermined this effort when he stated Russia should be readmitted to the G7 in 2018.

Before 2014, bilateral trade with the EU comprised nearly 20% of Russia's GDP.¹⁵ Russia's main sector, energy, was barely impacted due to EU dependence on Russian gas. In 2014, 39% of natural gas imports, 33% of crude oil imports, and 27% of gas consumption in Europe came from Russia.¹⁶ Due to concerns about mutual economic harm, the EU was hampered in its efforts to comprehensively enforce sanctions. Though minor disruptions were affected in Russia, the brunt of losses were felt by nations within the EU.

Although he condemned Russian actions as a violation of Ukrainian sovereignty, Former President Obama dismissed Russia as a regional power attempting to intimidate its neighbors and would not intervene in a local conflict. In response to the annexation, the West adopted a stand-aside policy emphasizing restraint to avoid further escalation.¹⁷ This approach prevented direct military conflict in the short term but had ramifications that paved the way for prolonged conflict in Donbas and the 2022 military invasion of Ukraine.

The 2022 Russian Invasion and Ongoing War

Before the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia endeavored to prevent further Western alignment of Ukraine by presenting a series of demands for 'security guarantees.' These demands included assurances from NATO that Ukraine would never join the military alliance, and that NATO would withdraw troops currently stationed in countries that joined after 1997.¹⁸ In response, NATO expressed openness to diplomatic dialogue between Russia and the West but was unwilling to shut the doors to new members.

After the annexation of Crimea, the Minsk Accords were signed by France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine.¹⁹ These accords were designed to alleviate violence in the region by delineating provisions for a ceasefire through the withdrawal of heavy weaponry and the reinstatement of Ukrainian government control across the conflict zone.²⁰ NATO reinforced its presence in Eastern Eu-

14 "Russia Outcast in G8 Suspension – DW – 03/24/2014," accessed April 6, 2024, <https://amp.dw.com/en/g8-suspended-as-standoff-between-world-powers-and-russia-escalates/a-17517876>.

15 Peter A.G. van Bergeijk, "Economic Sanctions and the Russian War on Ukraine: A Critical Comparative Appraisal" (International Institute of Social Studies, March 2022), <https://pure.eur.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/51751545/wp699.pdf>.

16 "House of Lords - The EU and Russia: Before and beyond the Crisis in Ukraine - European Union Committee," accessed April 6, 2024, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldselect/ld-eu-com/115/11505.htm>.

17 "The West Fails to Learn from Crimea's Ten-Year Occupation | Wilson Center," accessed April 6, 2024, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/west-fails-learn-crimeas-ten-year-occupation>.

18 Matthew Mpoke Bigg, "A History of the Tensions between Ukraine and Russia." *The New York Times*, March 26, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/26/world/europe/ukraine-russia-tensions-timeline.html>.

19 Ibid.

20 "War in Ukraine | Global Conflict Tracker," Council on Foreign Relations, March 6, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/war-in-ukraine>.

rope despite these efforts, deploying four battalions to dissuade potential Russian aggression. Furthermore, in 2018, the U.S. Department of State sanctioned the sale of anti-tank weapons to Ukraine, coinciding with NATO countries initiating a series of air exercises in western Ukraine.²¹

Vladimir Putin's rationale for the invasion of Ukraine ostensibly rested on countering NATO's perceived expansionist policies and efforts to reshape the European security landscape post-Cold War. However, underlying this justification are deeper historical and ideological motivations. Putin has historically cast doubt on the legitimacy of Ukrainian identity and statehood, aligning with a segment of Russian elites who advocate for a shared political destiny among all eastern Slavs. Consequently, some scholars attribute the conflict's origins to these ideological underpinnings.²²

In February 2022, Putin announced a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, targeting military assets and cities across the country. Russia's stated goals were to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine, and end the genocide of Russians in Ukrainian territory. The United States swiftly condemned the attack as unjustified, responding with severe sanctions against top Kremlin officials, alongside providing military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine. Since then, Ukraine has received approximately \$75 billion in aid from the United States.

As of February 2024, Ukraine has made significant territorial gains, reclaiming 54% of previously occupied territory, while Russia retains control over 18%.²³ Despite these successes, Ukraine's counteroffensive efforts have encountered obstacles. Notably, Ukraine has escalated drone attacks on Russian ships and infrastructure in response to the continued bombardment of Ukrainian cities. The toll of the conflict on civilians has been profound, with an estimated 30,000 civilian casualties, 3.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), and 6.5 million Ukrainians fleeing the country.²⁴

Wartime Developments

As the conflict progresses into its third spring, analyzing the primary year-to-year developments is essential to understanding post-war and global security order implications. The most notable development occurred in the earliest months of the war, with the failure of Russian efforts to capture Kyiv and ensure a rapid end to the conflict. The scope and ubiquity of operational inadequacies revealed during this failure signaled to NATO, the United States, and the whole of the global security apparatus that Russia was not wholly the military juggernaut that it purported itself to be.

Early Russian force projection suffered from disjointed logistic trains, systemically degraded command-and-control efficacy due to corruption in the officer corps, and a lack of coordination between maneuver and fire elements fundamental to Russian offensive doctrine.²⁵ Beyond material and structural

www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ukraine.

21 Ibid.

22 Jeffrey Mankoff, "Russia's War in Ukraine: Identity, History, and Conflict," CSIS, April 22, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-war-ukraine-identity-history-and-conflict>.

23 War in Ukraine | Global Conflict Tracker; Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ukraine>

24 Ibid.

25 Hans Petter Midtun, "Why Did the Russian 'Blitzkrieg' Fail?," Stratagem, July 8, 2022, <https://www.stratagem.no/why-did-the-russian-blitzkrieg-fail/#:~:text=The%20answer%20to%20why%20>

degradation, Russian intelligence and civil-military planning were comprehensively misguided in their discernment of Ukrainian capabilities, domestic will towards resistance, and the extent to which the West would contribute to Ukraine's defense.²⁶

Capitalizing upon the closing window for an early Russian victory, Ukrainian forces launched a comprehensive counteroffensive to reclaim Russian-held territories. With surprising alacrity, the Ukrainian forces recaptured Kherson, Kharkiv, and Izyum, and drove Russian forces beyond the Dnipro River, draining Russian combat power and negating their territorial influence. Broadly, this period marks a major strategic defeat for the Russian military.²⁷ The next twelve months of the war proved more militarily contested. Russia ultimately captured the city of Bakhmut at the cost of an estimated 100,000 casualties, 10,000 attributable to the Wagner Group.²⁸ Ukraine's Spring 2023 offensive to recapture Russian-held cities and cripple the continuity of Russian supply lines to Crimea yielded underwhelming progress in contrast to their former campaign. However, the magnitude of Russian casualties wrought during this time contributed to a fracturing in Russian civil-military unity.

Following consistent and comprehensive combat losses, the Wagner Group initiated a mutiny against the leadership in the Kremlin. Under the direction of their leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, Wagner Group forces withdrew from front-line posts and routed towards Moscow.²⁹ Though the mutiny was settled diplomatically, the evident dissonance between political leadership and Russian forces demonstrates another glaring obstacle to Russia's efforts for strategic advancement in the war. Prigozhin and other senior Wagner leadership were killed several weeks later upon the destruction of their aircraft with Russian munitions.³⁰

Western support peaked in 2023 in the form of munitions, intelligence, and integrative diplomatic efforts, which were all essential to Ukrainian longevity throughout the war. In December of 2022, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy spoke before the US Congress asking for a continuation and increase in wartime aid, enabling continued resistance against Russian reserves.³¹ In December of 2023, the European Union hosted promising accession talks with President Zelenskyy, suggesting that Ukraine garnered the cooperative political capital necessary for their admission into the bloc.³²

Power and Polarity: Geopolitical Shifts and Implications

Although the climatic power shifts wrought upon the European continent by Russian political and military leadership are vast, their conglomerate effects

did.and%20a%20bit%20of%20luck.

26 Hans Petter Midttun, "Why Did the Russian 'Blitzkrieg' Fail?," *Stratagem*, July 8, 2022, <https://www.stratagem.no/why-did-the-russian-blitzkrieg-fail/#:~:text=The%20answer%20to%20why%20did.and%20a%20bit%20of%20luck.>

27 CFR.org Editors, "Ukraine's Struggle for Independence in Russia's Shadow," *Council on Foreign Relations*, November 8, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/ukraines-struggle-independence-russias-shadow>.

28 *Ibid*

29 *Ibid*.

30 *Ibid*.

31 CFR.org Editors, "Ukraine's Struggle for Independence in Russia's Shadow," *Council on Foreign Relations*, November 8, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/ukraines-struggle-independence-russias-shadow>.

32 *Ibid*.

are nearly inverse to the Kremlin's intended objectives. The carefully curated reputation of the Russian military as a premier fighting force has degraded into one of prolific infamy, corruption, and a tepid inefficacy.³³ Furthermore, their intention of repulsing NATO from Russian borders and more broadly disheartening the military alliance resulted in unifying and strengthening the alliance to its strongest point in decades.³⁴ Russia's threat to regional security has provided a unifying purpose for the alliance's regeneration at a scale unseen since the height of the Soviet Union.

These security implications echo beyond Europe, fueling the revival of regional power blocs and complicating emerging relationships. In the West, the United States and the European Union have reaffirmed the historical bonds woven through NATO, though this dynamic is admittedly affixed to developments in US domestic politics.³⁵ Conversely, Russia has found a stabilizing ally in China, broadly replacing economic losses attributable to Western sanctions with Chinese trade.³⁶ A core complication includes the arms and oil trade between Russia and India, circumventing many sanctions and enabling Russian war efforts.

Observing the consequences war has inflicted on Ukraine, it will require the nation decades to rebuild, regardless of how the war ends. Assessments from the World Bank indicate that across all infrastructural sectors, damage incurred during the Russian invasion is more than \$152 billion.³⁷ Demographically, it is estimated that 3.7 million Ukrainians are displaced within Ukraine, with 6.5 million refugees fleeing the country since the war's outbreak.³⁸ Despite these solemn figures, the likelihood of NATO membership is becoming increasingly likely, indicating a future defined by Western security cooperation and support for reconstruction.

Extrapolating the significance of these observations to global security, the only certain result of the Ukraine-Russia War is the devolution of the security environment to one more complex and uncertain. As exposed during Russia's June 2022 embargo on Ukrainian grain exports, global systems are fragile and more responsive to regional conflict than their scale would suggest. The absence of Ukrainian grain in many African nations produced conditions reminiscent of those that sparked the 2009 Arab Spring in Tunisia, highlighting the interwoven nature of food security and political stability.³⁹ More revolutionary still though,

33 Robert Dalsjö, Michael Jonsson, and Johan Norberg, "A Brutal Examination: Russian Military Capability in Light of the Ukraine War," *Survival* 64, no. 3, May 4, 2022: 7–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2022.2078044>.

34 Jo Inge Bekkevold, "NATO Is the World's Most Powerful Alliance Right Now," *Foreign Policy*, September 17, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/09/11/nato-alliance-us-europe-russia-geopolitics-china-military-deterrence/>.

35 Jordan Muchnick and William A. Galston, "Democrats and Republicans Have Different Views on NATO and Ukraine," *Brookings*, July 11, 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/democrats-and-republicans-have-different-views-on-nato-and-ukraine/>.

36 Liana Fix and Michael Kimmage, "How China Could Save Putin's War in Ukraine: The Logic—and Consequences—of Chinese Military Support for Russia," *Foreign Affairs*, February 27, 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/how-china-could-save-putins-war-ukraine>.

37 World Bank Group, "Updated Ukraine Recovery and Reconstruction Needs Assessment Released," World Bank, February 15, 2024, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2024/02/15/updated-ukraine-recovery-and-reconstruction-needs-assessment-released#:~:text=The%20RD-NA3%2C%20which%20covers%20damages,agriculture%20as%20the%20most%20affected.>

38 "Ukraine Refugee Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News | USA for UNHCR," n.d., [https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/ukraine/#:~:text=Emergencies&text=There%20are%20nearly%203.7%20million,\(as%20of%20February%202024\).&text=Nearly%206.5%20million%20refugees%20from,\(as%20of%20February%202024\).](https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/ukraine/#:~:text=Emergencies&text=There%20are%20nearly%203.7%20million,(as%20of%20February%202024).&text=Nearly%206.5%20million%20refugees%20from,(as%20of%20February%202024).)

39 Tarek B Hassen and Hamid E Bilali, "Conflict in Ukraine and the unsettling ripples: implications on

have been the paradigmatic shifts in the dynamics of warfare. Ukraine has been the site of the largest land warfare waged on the European continent since World War II; in the 80 years since, technological elements have advanced to include the widespread implementation of unmanned and semi-autonomous systems, disrupting decades of combined arms doctrine.⁴⁰

Policy Recommendations

The United States

Our policy recommendations for the United States consist of three key components. First, the United States must persist in its implementation of sanctions and increase the economic costs of war for Russia. Second, there should be an escalation of military and humanitarian support. Third, leveraging the growing relationship with India presents an opportunity to amplify economic pressure on Russia.

Following the 2014 annexation of Crimea, the United States imposed numerous sanctions on Russia and cautioned that further aggression would lead to additional sanctions and increased security assistance for Ukraine. However, these measures had little effect in deterring the 2022 invasion. In response to Russian aggression, the Biden administration and Congress implemented further sanctions, including additional restrictions on Russian banks, export controls targeting the defense, aerospace, and energy sectors, and a ban on imports of Russian oil and other energy products.⁴¹ Furthermore, the US prohibited exports of luxury goods to Russia, blocked entry of Russian vessels into US ports, and halted new US investments. These sanctions were coordinated with other Western powers such as the European Union, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea. Moving forward, the United States should prioritize actions that impose greater economic costs on Russia. Steps include severing back channels used for illicit funds by enhancing financial transparency in the real estate sector and increasing FinCEN's budget.⁴² Additionally, Congress should pass the *ENABLERS* Act, mandating financial intermediaries to adopt robust due diligence and anti-money laundering standards akin to those used by banks.⁴³

Congress has passed four supplemental appropriations laws, allocating \$89 billion in aid to Ukraine.⁴⁴ The Biden administration has recently proposed an additional \$106 billion to address ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Israel. Military aid has been substantial, including advanced weaponry like the Patriot air defense system and high-performance battle tanks, alongside increased deployment of US troops in Europe. This assistance has been pivotal in enabling

food systems and development in North Africa," *Agriculture and Food Security*, no. 13, April 8, 2024, <https://agricultureandfoodsecurity.biomedcentral.com/counter/pdf/10.1186/s40066-024-00467-3.pdf>.

40 Kristen D. Thompson, "How The Drone War in Ukraine Is Transforming Conflict," *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 16, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/article/how-drone-war-ukraine-transforming-conflict>.

41 "Russia's War against Ukraine: Overview of US Assistance And ...," *Congressional Research Service*, December 20, 2023, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11869>.

42 Hassel, Johan, and Laura Kilbury. "Why the United States Must Stay the Course on Ukraine." *Center for American Progress*, September 13, 2023. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/why-the-united-states-must-stay-the-course-on-ukraine/>.

43 *Ibid.*

44 "Russia's War against Ukraine: Overview of US Assistance And ..." *Congressional Research Service*, December 20, 2023. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11869>.

Ukrainian forces to confront and repel Russian incursions effectively.⁴⁵ Moreover, since February 2022, approximately \$9 billion in humanitarian aid has been dispatched to Ukrainian refugees, with an additional \$6 billion allocated to alleviate humanitarian crises exacerbated by the conflict. Continued provision of military and humanitarian aid aligns with American national security interests and upholds democratic principles, all while minimizing risks to American lives.⁴⁶ The defeat of Ukraine would represent a significant setback for democracy and potentially destabilize the entire region.⁴⁷ Additionally, such an outcome might embolden further Russian aggression and even prompt provocative actions from China vis-à-vis Taiwan.⁴⁸

Finally, we recommend that the United States continue targeting Russia's leading tanker group, Sovcomflot, and leverage ties with India to escalate the economic pressure on Russia. Indian refiners express concerns that sanctions imposed on Sovcomflot for breaching the G7's price cap on Russian oil could impede access to vessels for transporting Russian oil and escalate freight rates.⁴⁹ Consequently, this might erode the discount for Russian oil and potentially reduce India's oil purchases. Despite infrequent purchases of Russian oil before 2022, Russia emerged as India's primary oil supplier in 2023.⁵⁰ Indian officials have indicated that India will only continue purchasing Russian oil if it is priced below the cap.⁵¹ Thus, by raising the costs of procuring Russian oil and fostering deeper diplomatic ties between the US and India, the US can amplify the economic toll of the conflict for Russia.

The European Union

Amid the emergent security landscape and the myriad of political shifts in the foreground, the European Union (EU) must take decisive steps to prepare for the strategic landscape of the coming decades. To posture more effectively, the EU must integrate comprehensive observations of Russian military capabilities and the widespread application of UAS systems that have shifted historically settled doctrine. This includes adjusting maneuver doctrine for decentralized initiative, with a holistically enhanced regional defensive apparatus. Secondly, the EU must apply forethought to the application of its defense funding through meaningful leverage. By bolstering Ukrainian resistance capabilities with munitions and intelligence, NATO members may simultaneously degrade Russian capabilities at minimal investment and preserve broader regional security. Lastly, as the substantiating bloc within NATO, the EU must persist in its efforts to coordinate diplomatic progress throughout the conduct of the war. In doing so, they preserve human security and maintain channels essential for the war's resolution and post-war reconstruction.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Hassel et al. "Why the United States Must Stay the Course on Ukraine."

48 Ibid

49 Nidhi Verma and Florence Tan, "New Sanctions Threaten Russian Oil Sales to India," Reuters, February 28, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/new-sanctions-threaten-russian-oil-sales-india-2024-02-28/>.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

The Russian Federation

Given the complexity of forces at play in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, Russia must take concrete measures to resolve the conflict. First, Russia must immediately stop all military operations conducted in Ukrainian territory and withdraw its military forces. The unilateral suspension of military operations would signal that Russia intends to use diplomatic channels to resolve the conflict in place of further military campaigns. Second, initiating dialogue is important for addressing grievances between participating parties. The magnitude of Russian openness to a ceasefire and dialogue with Ukraine and the West are catalytic elements for finding an appropriate diplomatic solution. Facilitating communication with relevant actors will provide Russia with a central role in the negotiation process. Third, Russia must reaffirm its prior commitment to the Minsk Accords to respect Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. By reaffirming their commitment to respecting international law and norms, Russia can begin to repair relations with the West.

Conclusion

Upon review of the devastation incurred since Russia's February 2022 invasion, it is difficult to envision both the future ahead of Ukraine and how drastically the course of the global security environment has shifted. While Russia frames its operations in Ukraine as culturally and politically justified, Ukrainians strongly identify as independent and are determined to defend this distinction. As the war enters its third year and combat operations have reached a relative stalemate, the likelihood of a diplomatic solution wanes. Even so, within the ashes of this war, it is likely that the determinants of future conflicts will be kindled. To minimize this volatility, all parties must take deliberate action. The United States, the European Union, Ukraine, and Russia itself may yet still seize the opportunity to redirect global security towards a more stable state.

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- “Ukraine Refugee Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News | USA for UNHCR,” n.d. [https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/ukraine/#:~:text=Emergencies&text=There%20are%20nearly%203.7%20million,\(as%20of%20February%202024\).&text=Nearly%206.5%20million%20refugees%20from,\(as%20of%20February%202024\)](https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/ukraine/#:~:text=Emergencies&text=There%20are%20nearly%203.7%20million,(as%20of%20February%202024).&text=Nearly%206.5%20million%20refugees%20from,(as%20of%20February%202024)).
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EU Climate Politics, Agriculture & Democracy

Eder Hernández, Curtis Lee, Seung Gyu Baik

Introduction

From the streets of Paris to the farms of Pomerania, a wave of division washes over Europe, particularly visible through the lens of recent farmer protests challenging European Union (EU) climate policies. This paper delves into the political polarization sparked by climate change and seeks to illuminate the multifaceted challenges faced by contemporary democracies. Initially, we explore case studies from France and Poland to discern how overarching supranational climate initiatives can clash with national environmental perceptions, especially under conservative regimes that portray climate action as a threat to individual livelihoods. Subsequently, the analysis will delve into the currents of populism and polarization. By examining the relationship between environmentalism and populism, we aim to understand the paradox whereby climate policy aimed at the collective good, become sources of division that undermine democratic values woven into the fabric of society. The examination of climate policy and its backlash exposes a pervasive challenge in democracies worldwide, where the rise of populism and extremism from various political factions impedes collaborative problem-solving, undermining the efficacy of democratic governance.

Case Study: France

The intersection of agriculture, climate governance, and democracy in France provides a vignette into understanding how environmental doctrines, originally used as tools for social progress, delimit unity and democracy in the hands of extremists. An example of this is the EU's commitment to conservation through the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy, which requires the restoration of "at least 20% of the EU's land and sea areas."¹ However, this ambitious goal has faced some criticism. In France, the Rassemblement National (RN), France's far-right political party, argues through patriot ecology that only those who have a strong connection to the

¹ "Nature restoration: Council and Parliament reach agreement on new rules to restore and preserve degraded habitats in the EU." *Consilium*, 9 Nov. 2023.
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/11/09/nature-restoration-council-and-parliament-reach-agreement-on-new-rules-to-restore-and-preserve-degraded-habitats-in-the-eu/>

land are best positioned to comment on what “constitutes sound environmental stewardship.”² In the opinion of the RN, farmers and agrarian communities are best suited to govern themselves and the environment. This contrasts the common “leftist monopoly” on ecological issues viewed across the world.³ Therefore, Brussels-designed policies are out of touch with the reality of “true” French identity and the perceived impact that committing to ambitious greenhouse gas reductions has on lifestyle and economy. The RN’s intended impact in their environmental positions is to “reawaken the divide” between urban dwellers and the rural and semi-urban world that makes up the bulk of its voter base.⁴

Environmental discourse in France is fomenting anger that has driven many of the farmer-led protests across Europe.⁵ The onset of protests across France since late 2023 highlights how alienating environmental discourse can be when certain groups are required to bear the burden of changes for national compliance. For example, through the Green Deal, France committed as a signatory to zero out pollution by 2050.⁶ This goal would radically alter how farmers can produce food when they are already feeling financial strain. Farmers cannot rely on tax benefits through the Common Agricultural Policy to subsidize diesel production because funding is being choked by excessive regulation that is linked to green requirements.⁷ On the one hand, the EU is fully committed to climate action, but French localities express disagreement on who should bear the burden of the changes and expenses. Farmers are already on the front line of climate change while under pressure to feed growing populations at affordable prices, yet they are being told they are not doing enough for the environment.⁸

The demand to make France a climate leader currently falls on the shoulders of the farmers who historically have benefitted from complex tax structures, like the Common Agrarian Policy, to subsidize the cost of producing food. France’s environmental ambitions at the national level are being exploited by populists to anger and deunify farmers, and in effect, widen their political base while allowing populist ideology to flourish. This nativist sentiment is further fomented by a discord between the local agrarian economy and the political elite of Paris and Brussels who are out of touch with farmers being asked to do more to mitigate greenhouse gas reductions. The patriot ecology of France’s far-right, according to Venus Bivar, is rooted in hyperlocal ecology that asks French citizens to reject overarching environmental governance because it erases native French identity.⁹

2 Bivar, Venus. “The Patriot Ecology of the French Far Right.” *Environmental History*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2022, pp. 618–624.

3 Ibid.

4 Guillo, Clément. “The New Political Divide: France’s Far Right Wants to Exploit Environmentalism.” *Le Monde*, 24 Aug. 2023. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/environment/article/2023/08/24/the-new-political-divide-france-s-far-right-wants-to-exploit-environmentalism_6105898_114.html

5 Bivar, Venus. “The Patriot Ecology of the French Far Right.” *Environmental History*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2022, pp. 618–624.

6 Razzouk, Nayla, Kim Chipman, Lyubov Pronina, and Pratik Parija. “Farmers’ Revolt Threatens Election Year Upsets Around the World.” *Bloomberg*, 13 Feb. 2024. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2024-02-13/french-farmer-protests-global-spread-of-unrest-threatens-elections>

7 Trompiz, Gus, and Sybille De La Hamaide. “Why Are French Farmers Protesting?” *Reuters*, 29 Jan. 2024. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/why-are-french-farmers-protesting-2024-01-29/>).

8 Chahuneau, Louis. “Why French farmers are up in arms: fuel hikes, green regulation, EU directives.” *France24*. 23 Jan 2024. <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20240123-why-french-farmers-are-up-in-arms-fuelhikes-green-regulation-eu-directives>

9 Bivar, Venus. “The Patriot Ecology of the French Far Right.” *Environmental History*, vol. 27, no. 4,

For many decades, French identity and pride have been found in the food systems that contribute both to the cultural and national indemnity of France. The environmental facet of France, however, is challenging the once well-respected livelihood of farmers. Many farmers across the countryside are angered to be framed as the culprits of exorbitant greenhouse gas emissions that make it challenging to comply with environmental regulations France has signed onto, like the UN Kunming-Montreal global biodiversity framework agreed at the 2022 UN biodiversity conference (COP15).¹⁰

The agrarian class pushback has been effective in rethinking the extent to which these broad and rigid EU climate policies should extend. In January 2024, France's Prime Minister Gabriel Attal said French President Emmanuel Macron would push to exempt French farmers from rules requiring them to set aside part of their arable land to foster biodiversity.¹¹ Macron and his Cabinet members have tried to portray themselves as sympathetic to the farmers, as the RN, headed by Marine Le Pen, attempted to capitalize on farmers' discontent ahead of the European election in June 2024.¹² However, the sincerity of this support should be scrutinized given that France had Presidential elections in June 2024. French farmers, like 55-year-old Eric Foucault reflect on how "Politicians only want to get elected, so they are latching onto the farmers' movement. The right-wing parties, the environmentalists — everyone is piling in."¹³

Now that extremists like Le Pen in France and Douda in Poland have a stake in environmental discourse, they have a stake in the climate policy debates that were once under the remit of liberals, giving them a dangerous newfound sense of legitimacy.¹⁴ As competing economic blocs across the world like Mercosur in Latin America challenge the livelihoods of French farmers, the government in France is under pressure to appease a small, but important population in the country.¹⁵ While farmers contribute to only 2% of GDP in the EU, their clout and arguments are valid when assessed under the rural bias towards EU agreements.¹⁶ "Although only nine million out of almost 400 million voters in Europe work in agriculture, they are a vocal and influential bloc that attracts the sympathy of many on a continent where a nation's identity is often tied to the food it produces."¹⁷ For this reason, it's important to reflect on how environ-

2022, pp. 618–624.

10 "Nature restoration: Council and Parliament reach agreement on new rules to restore and preserve degraded habitats in the EU." *Consilium*, 9 Nov. 2023. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/11/09/nature-restoration-council-and-parliament-reach-agreement-on-new-rules-to-restore-and-preserve-degraded-habitats-in-the-eu/>

11 Leali, Giorgio, and Victor Goury-Laffont. "French farmers' fury over red tape and fuel tax." *Politico*, January 26, 2024, 8:14 PM CET, www.politico.eu/article/france-farmers-protests-fuel-tax-cut-red-tape/.

12 *Ibid.*

13 Razzouk, Nayla, Kim Chipman, Lyubov Pronina, and Pratik Parija. "Farmers' Revolt Threatens Election Year Upsets Around the World." *Bloomberg*, 13 Feb. 2024. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2024-02-13/french-farmer-protests-global-spread-of-unrest-threatens-elections>

14 Bivar, Venus. "The Patriot Ecology of the French Far Right." *Environmental History*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2022, pp. 618–624.

15 *Le Monde* with AFP. "French PM offers protesting farmers key concession on diesel tax." Published on January 26, 2024, at 6:26 pm (Paris), updated on January 26, 2024, at 10:34 pm. Accessed 2024. www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2024/01/26/french-pm-offers-protesting-farmers-key-concession-on-diesel-tax_6469014_7.html.

16 Razzouk, Nayla, Kim Chipman, Lyubov Pronina, and Pratik Parija. "Farmers' Revolt Threatens Election Year Upsets Around the World." *Bloomberg*, 13 Feb. 2024. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2024-02-13/french-farmer-protests-global-spread-of-unrest-threatens-elections>

17 Pronczuk, Monika, and Claire Moses. "Labeled Climate Culprits, European Farmers Rebel Over

mental governance frames its key requirements to combat climate change. One of the few reliable safety nets that farmers could rely on, the CAP, is now being reworked with legislative and regulatory restrictions that enforce environmental compliance to receive funding. The French government must have a fundamental understanding that by disabling farmers to fulfill consumers basic needs, the focus to protect the environment becomes perverse in priorities. Leaders across the EU need to find climate solutions that reflect an equitable burden of compliance across all voting blocks, not just the farming community, or else they risk alienating an important base that can prop up dangerous leaders who are sympathetic to their needs.

Case Study: Poland

Poland's recent transition from a right-wing, conservative government to a comparably liberal-leaning government has specific implications for Polish climate policy and international relations. The change in political power and House majority from the Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) to the Civic Coalition (*Koalicja Obywatelska*, KO) highlighted the ideological differences between the two parties and their stances regarding climate policy, particularly concerning Poland's heavy reliance on coal-fired energy. Aligning Poland's energy policies with those of the European Union (EU) is not without lingering challenges, opportunities, and potential polarization. Drawing on recent political developments and public sentiments, the role of increased democratic participation through voting is imperative by materially shaping policy directions and political power, as evidenced by the Polish electorate's support for politicians willing to enact more progressive climate policy than the previous right-wing leaders.

The Prime Minister of Poland, Donald Tusk, transitioned into power in December 2023. His party, the Civic Coalition, won a majority in the Polish Lower House of Parliament in October 2023. The Civic Coalition is a centrist, liberal conservative, and pro-European political party.¹⁸ The party proactively engages in international politics aligned with the EU's policies, such as energy transition to renewables.¹⁹

Conversely, the president of Poland, Andrzej Duda, is now in the second term of his presidency, following the Law and Justice Party gaining a majority in 2015. The Law and Justice Party is an anti-federalist, national conservative political party. It regularly employs a 'Poland first' stance in both local and regional politics, with some elements of nationalist populism.²⁰

Currently, the president represents a conservative ideology, while the prime minister represents a liberal ideology. According to Politico, both sides have been aggressively undermining each other using heavily polarized political verbiage.²¹

New Standards." The New York Times, August 26, 2023. Updated August 28, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/26/world/europe/europe-farmers-climate-change.html>.

18 Rydgren, Jens. 2018. *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. p. 574. ISBN 978-0-19-027455-9.

19 Maguire, Gavin. 2023. "Review of Europe's Clashes over Coal May Extend Well beyond Poland." Reuters, June 20, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/europes-clashes-over-coal-may-extend-well-beyond-poland-2023-06-20/>.

20 Smith, Alan G. 2016. *A Comparative Introduction to Political Science*. Rowman & Littlefield. p. 207. ISBN 978-1442252608.

21 Kosci, Wojciech. 2024 "Political Uproar in Poland after Duda Pledges to Sign Kremlin Commission

Moreover, President Duda from the conservative Law and Justice Party signed a controversial bill creating a commission to investigate and remove “Russian spies” among Polish politicians.

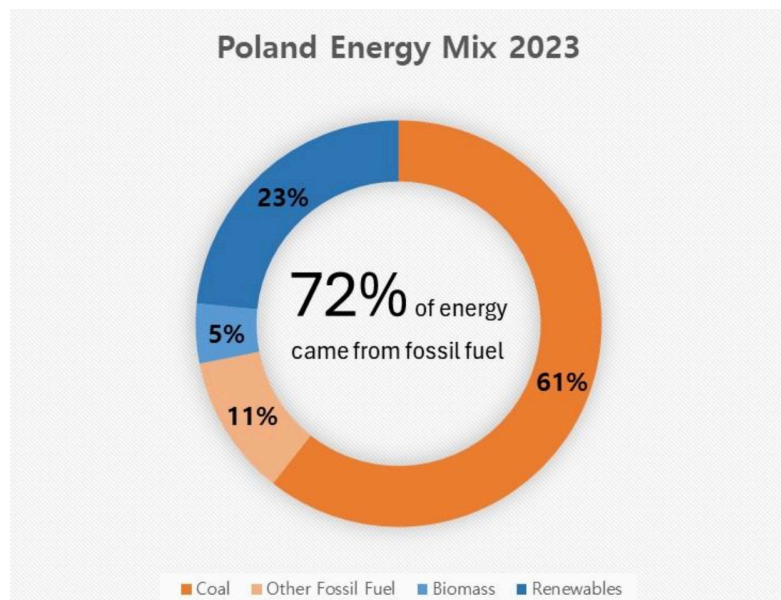


Figure 1: Poland's Energy Mix in 2023

Prime Minister Donald Tusk, from the liberal Civic Coalition, claimed that the Law and Justice Party is evoking a “civil war,”²² and that the Civic Coalition is currently trying to “purge” people associated with the Law and Justice Party, and completely roll back the consequences of its work.²³ This transition demonstrates the contrasting ideological orientations between the Law and Justice Party and the Civic Coalition administration and has significant implications for Poland’s climate policy and the regional foreign policy.

Specifically, the country’s heavy reliance on coal-fired energy is a central issue surrounding this transition. Poland has the biggest dependency on coal in all of Europe. Sixty-one percent of energy comes from coal alone, and 72% of energy comes from fossil fuel.²⁴ Under the previous PiS administration, skepticism towards EU climate initiatives prevailed, with concerns raised about the perceived threat to Poland’s energy security and the livelihoods of coal miners – mirroring conversations in the United States regarding renewable energy.

Also, the EU has been subsidizing Poland for being a backup plan in the

Law.” 2023. POLITICO. May 29, 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/politics-election-poland-andrzej-duda-russia-law-donald-tusk-pis-civic-platform/>; Kosc, Wojciech. 2024. “Poland’s Political War Heats Up.” 2024. POLITICO. January 15, 2024. <https://www.politico.eu/article/polands-political-war-heats-up-duda-tusk-pis/>.

22 Ibid.

23 Kosc, Wojciech. 2024. “Poland’s Political War Heats Up.” 2024. POLITICO. January 15, 2024. <https://www.politico.eu/article/polands-political-war-heats-up-duda-tusk-pis/>; Picheta, Rob. 2023.

“Poland’s Law and Justice Party Loses Power after Eight Years of Authoritarian Rule.” CNN. December 11, 2023.

24 “Power production breakdown in Poland 2023, by source.” February 26, 2024. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1236356/poland-distribution-of-electricity-production-by-source/>.

event that renewables do not mitigate climate change. Subsequently, the right-wing nationalists were hoping to maintain this partnership, although it is not completely aligned with the EU’s climate change policies. The Law and Justice Party took the EU’s transition agenda to the EU Court of Justice in July 2023 in an attempt to nullify it.²⁵

However, the ascension of the Civil Coalition government signals a paradigm shift towards a more progressive stance on climate change, as evidenced by pledges to phase out coal and realign with EU climate policies. The new government led by Donald Tusk is going to significantly reverse the work of the previous government by completely removing coal from its energy mix.²⁶

The increased voting turnout rate in the 2023 election had a direct effect on this change. Considering the electorate demographics, a large portion of voters in the 18-29 age group and the 50-59 age group expressed their commitment to democracy by exercising their suffrage.²⁷

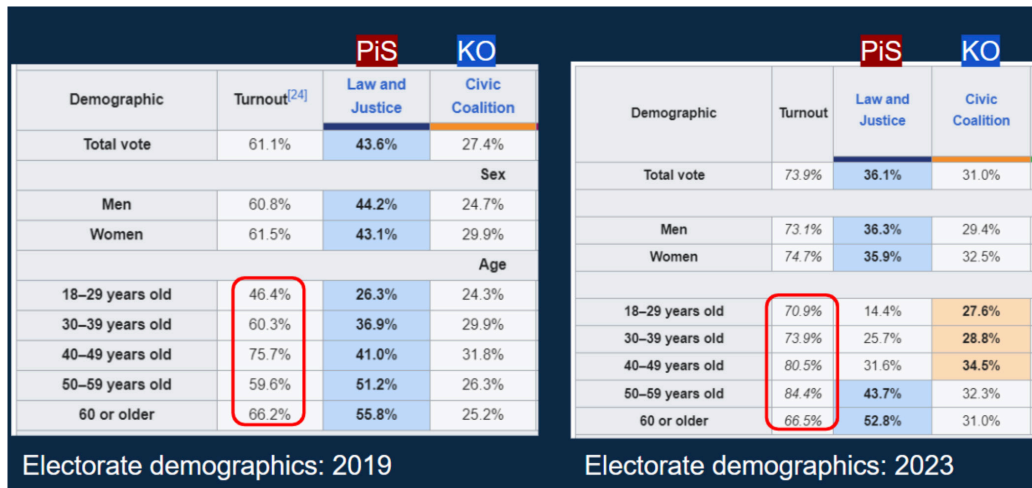


Figure 2: Electorate Demographics of Polish Parliamentary Elections 2019 & 2023²⁸

The Polish people’s collective exercise of suffrage despite populist, polarized politics, has created a meaningful transition of power that shows what the people want – a sustainable and progressive future.

The divergent online reactions from the Polish population reflect the deep-seated polarization permeating society. While conservatives express appre-

25 Abnett, Kate. 2023. “Poland asks EU’s top court to cancel three climate policies”. Reuters. August 28, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/poland-asks-eus-top-court-cancel-three-climate-policies-2023-08-28/>

26 Abnett, Kate and Strzelecki, Marek. 2024. “Exclusive: Poland to withdraw court cases against EU climate policies” Reuters. February 2, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/poland-withdraw-court-cases-against-eu-climate-policies-sources-2024-02-02/>; Weise, Zia. 2024. “Poland Presses for Ambitious 2040 EU Climate Target, Signaling U-Turn.” POLITICO. January 15, 2024. <https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-climate-change-2040-europe/>.

27 “Wybory Parlamentarne 2023.” October 16, 2023. TVN24. <https://tvn24.pl/wybory-parlamentarne-2023/wyniki-sondazowe>; Papazoski, Zuzana. 2023. “Major Voter Turnout in Poland’s 2023 Parliamentary Elections.” National Democratic Institute. October 31, 2023. <https://www.ndi.org/publications/major-voter-turnout-poland-s-2023-parliamentary-elections>.

28 “2023 Polish Parliamentary Election.” Wikipedia, March 11, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_Polish_parliamentary_election.

hension about potential energy insecurity and dependency on foreign sources,²⁹ liberal factions celebrate the prospect of aligning with EU climate objectives.³⁰ Essentially, this polarization underscores the broader societal divisions exacerbated by partisan politics and the significance of democratic engagement of voting in shaping policy directions and political power.

The increased voting turnout rate in the 2023 election had a direct effect on this change. Considering the electorate demographics, a large portion of voters in the 18-29 age group and the 50-59 age group expressed their commitment to democracy by exercising their suffrage.³¹

The Polish people's collective exercise of suffrage despite populist, polarized politics, has created a meaningful transition of power that shows what the people want – a sustainable and progressive future.

Climate Policy and Democracy

Considering politics in the context of climate change, climate policy, and agricultural regulations shines an interesting light on the multifaceted challenges modern democracies face. This framework combines the essential elements and characteristics to understand democracy and some of the challenges it is facing in our world today. Firstly, the issue of climate change highlights the challenges hindering global collaboration to an extent that is unmatched by many other international issues. For example, the Kyoto Protocol and its efforts to facilitate reductions in greenhouse gas emissions of developed nations accentuates the necessity of global collaboration, yet its effectiveness was curtailed by the absence and withdrawal of significant emitters, such as the United States and Canada.³² This phenomenon of partial participation highlighted a pivotal challenge for democratic societies: the imperative nature of unanimous commitment across all sectors of society, including governmental and non-governmental actors, in service of sustainable environmental policies. The Paris Agreement addressed some of the challenges of the Kyoto Protocol by striving for more inclusive and comprehensive commitments from both developed and developing countries. However, nations are still facing numerous challenges in navigating the different stakeholders and opinions, as seen from our case studies.³³ This encumbrance reinforces the critical need for democratic systems to navigate the complexities of implementing policies that exchanges immediate sacrifices for long-term benefits. A dilemma of this nature in the global arena of climate change amplifies the implications of actions (or inaction) of one nation.

29 Janulewicz, Lukasz. "The Coal Debate in Poland: Key Trends on Social Media." June 24, 2021. ISD. Accessed March 16, 2024. https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/the-coal-debate-in-poland-key-trends-on-social-media/.

30 Kleczka, Jessica. 2023. "Can Poland's New Government Wean the Country off Coal?" Euronews. October 24, 2023. <https://www.euronews.com/green/2023/10/24/we-have-our-future-why-climate-campaigners-are-celebrating-polands-election-result>.

31 "Wybory Parlamentarne 2023." October 16, 2023. TVN24. <https://tvn24.pl/wybory-parlamentarne-2023/wyniki-sondazowe>; Papazoski, Zuzana. 2023. "Major Voter Turnout in Poland's 2023 Parliamentary Elections." National Democratic Institute. October 31, 2023. <https://www.ndi.org/publications/major-voter-turnout-poland-s-2023-parliamentary-elections>.

32 Grunewald, Nicole, and Inmaculada Martinez-Zarzoso. "Did the Kyoto Protocol fail? An evaluation of the effect of the Kyoto Protocol on CO2 emissions." *Environment and Development Economics* 21, no. 1 (2016): 1-22.

33 Ibid.

Moreover, the struggle to unify diverse stakeholders towards common environmental goals illuminates broader questions about democracy's capacity to address problems necessitating immediate costs for future gains.³⁴ As democracies worldwide grapple with these issues, the global discourse on climate policy offers a unique lens to differentiate how different democracies respond to such polarizing topics. Thus, the dialogue connecting climate change, climate policies, and the role of agriculture within this framework sheds light on the immediate environmental stakes and serves as a barometer for assessing the health, responsiveness, and adaptability of democratic institutions in the face of global challenges.³⁵ This ongoing conversation provides a fertile ground for examining current democratic trends, offering insights into how the guardrails of democracy respond to such challenging problems.

The rising tide of populism, as it unfolds across European nations, is often invoked to critique the backlash against climate initiatives. Populism, at its core, seeks to amplify the voice and power of ordinary citizens, seeking reform in lieu of revolution. However, populism in contemporary democracies is often characterized as dangerous. Detractors contend that populist leaders may veer toward authoritarianism, challenging the legitimacy of their adversaries, commandeering democratic institutions, and eliciting extremist fervor to consolidate loyalist bases.³⁶ This stance is informed by the historical ascents of autocrats like Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, and strongmen such as Hugo Chavez, alluding to concerns that exploiting societal divides can reinforce a cycle of polarization.³⁷

Moreover, populism is critiqued for engendering an "us versus them" worldview, drawing a line between the "common people" and "political elites." Such binaries make room for radicalism while eroding shared respect for democratic norms, imperiling the guardrails of democracy.³⁸ With that understanding, climate policy is just one demonstration with the backdrop of populist movements in contemporary democracy. The issue sheds light on the degradation of norms and demonstrates how these divisions can fracture democracies and prevent us from tackling the issues at hand.³⁹ Yet, it is essential to recognize that the essence of democracy is to incorporate, not mute, the array of diverse opinions of citizens. While populism and its strategies may threaten the stability of democratic systems, its inherent foundations cannot be invalidated nor neglected. Democratic systems were constructed with impartiality to navigate through the spectrum of societal disagreements and hence, should focus on protecting democratic norms that yield productive discourse. Essentially, efforts should be made by all members of society to understand both sides of the aisle rather than further exploiting disagreements.

Considering both sides of the climate policy debate exposes the challenges of balancing environmental stewardship and economic vitality.⁴⁰ On the one

34 Bäckstrand, Karin, ed. *Environmental Politics and Deliberative Democracy: Examining the Promise of New Modes of Governance*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2010.

35 Purdy, Jedediah. "The Politics of Nature: Climate Change, Environmental Law, and Democracy." *Yale Law Journal* 119 (2009): 1122-59.

36 Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. *How Democracies Die*. Crown, 2019.

37 *Ibid.*

38 Roberts, Kenneth M. "Populism and Polarization in Comparative Perspective: Constitutive, Spatial and Institutional Dimensions." *Government and Opposition* 57, no. 4 (2022): 680-702.

39 Ginsburgh, Victor, Sergio Perelman, and Pierre Pestieau. "Populism and Social Polarization in European Democracies." *CESifo Economic Studies* 67, no. 4 (2021): 371-404.

40 Purdy, Jedediah. "The Politics of Nature: Climate Change, Environmental Law, and Democra-

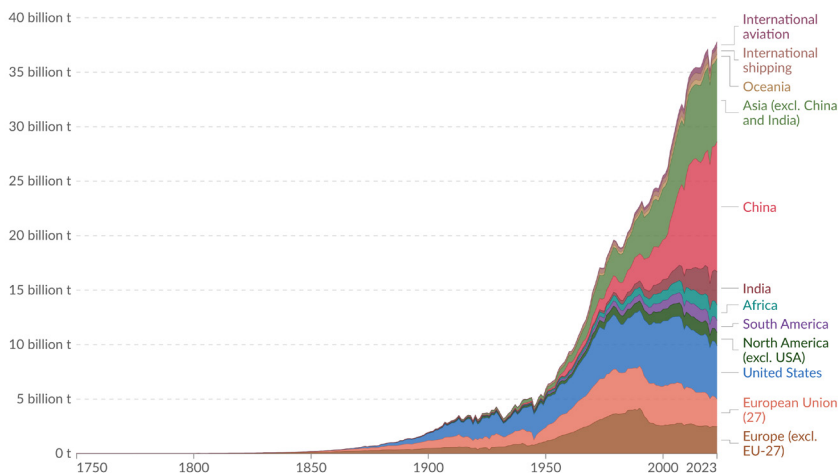
hand, the reliance on fossil fuels, pesticides, and other conventional practices remains prevalent in our global society due to their reliability and cost-effectiveness.⁴¹ These methods have supported large-scale agriculture and fueled industrial growth, powering economies even amidst global instability, such as wars and conflict, when energy security becomes a paramount concern.⁴²

However, economic growth often correlates with increased energy consumption, and traditionally, this occurrence has meant an increase in carbon emissions and environmental degradation. Proponents of stringent climate policies assert that the long-term sustainability of society is in jeopardy if we persist with these environmentally harmful practices.⁴³ They highlight the urgency of pivoting toward alternative energy sources and sustainable farming techniques to preserve ecosystems already showing signs of significant change.

Critics of rapid policy shifts argue that the drastic reduction of emissions, if reliant on current technologies, may impose high economic costs both nationally and individually. They cite the potential for job losses in traditional energy sectors, increased costs of goods due to more expensive production processes, and the disruption of established industries.⁴⁴ This stance emphasizes a pragmatic approach, calling for a gradual transition that allows for economic adjustment and technological innovation.

Annual CO₂ emissions by world region

Emissions from fossil fuels and industry¹ are included, but not land-use change emissions. International aviation and shipping are included as separate entities, as they are not included in any country's emissions.



Data source: Global Carbon Budget (2024) OurWorldinData.org/co2-and-greenhouse-gas-emissions | CC BY

1. Fossil emissions: Fossil emissions measure the quantity of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emitted from the burning of fossil fuels, and directly from industrial processes such as cement and steel production. Fossil CO₂ includes emissions from coal, oil, gas, flaring, cement, steel, and other industrial processes. Fossil emissions do not include land use change, deforestation, soils, or vegetation.

Figure 3: Annual CO₂ emissions by world region⁴⁵

cy." Yale Law Journal 119 (2009): 1122-59.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Huber, Robert A., Tomas Maltby, Kacper Szulecki, and Stefan Četković. "Is populism a challenge to European energy and climate policy? Empirical evidence across varieties of populism." Journal of European Public Policy 28, no. 7 (2021): 998-1017.

44 Ibid.

45 "Annual Co₂ Emissions by World Region." Our World in Data, December 12, 2023. <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/annual-co-emissions-by-region>.

Both sides grapple with the unpredictable nature of climate change mitigation. The exact timing and nature of the positive impact that climate policies might have are difficult to forecast, complicating policy planning and risk management. Advocates for aggressive climate action assert that the potential benefits—averted climate disasters and preserved natural resources—are worth the uncertainties. Conversely, opponents caution against precipitous actions that could destabilize economies without guaranteed substantial environmental benefits.

Conclusion

Delving into history can serve as a compass, warning, and guide as contemporary democracies sail through turbulent, polarized waters. The Ancient Greek city-state of Athens, often cited as a bastion of early democratic principles, grappled with its own profound divisions during the Peloponnesian War from 431 to 404 BC—a war framed not merely as a clash of states, but as an ideological battle between oligarchs and democrats.⁴⁶ The conflict is chronicled in detail by Thucydides, an Athenian historian and general. His narrative captures the erosion of democratic principles, like mutual toleration and institutional forbearance, documenting instances where reasonable discourse from opponents was not only disregarded by those wielding power but was also actively neutralized to prevent its influence. Thucydides notes the growth of authoritarian characteristics where “anyone who held violent opinions could always be trusted, and anyone who objected to them became a suspect.”⁴⁷ These historic observations resonate with the current state of our democracies, where the intensity of populist rhetoric often drowns out moderate dialogue and casts suspicion on those advocating for restraint, mirroring the ancient Athenian struggle with maintaining democratic integrity amid internal strife.

The climate debate, emblematic of the polarization affecting our democratic institutions, is just one among many issues highlighting their vulnerabilities. It is a microcosm of the broader democratic challenges we face, reflecting the urgent need for dialogue and compromise in policymaking. By learning from the past and leveraging modern tools for problem-solving, we can fortify the democratic norms essential for progress. This reinvigoration of democratic principles could pave the way for more unified, effective action in addressing not only climate change but also other pressing global issues.

46 Trite, Lawrence A. “Democracy and War.” *The Greek Polis and the Invention of Democracy: A Politico-cultural Transformation and Its Interpretations* (2013): 298-320.

47 Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Translated by Richard Crawley. Courier Corporation, 2017.

Resilient in the Face of Adversity: A Comprehensive Exploration of Syria's Past, Present, and Future Resilience in the Face of Conflict, Adversity, and Resolution

Bayan Sairafi

Executive Summary

This research paper offers a comprehensive overview of the conflict in Syria, covering its history, demography, and current state. It examines key events such as French colonization, the foundation of the Ba'ath Party, Syrian coups by Ba'ath party, the Hafez Assad dynasty, and economic development. The paper also delves into issues such as corruption, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Hama massacre of 1982. The paper highlights the extreme violence of the Assad regime and its willingness to use force against its citizens. The massacre is considered one of the most brutal events in modern Middle Eastern history and is still remembered today as a symbol of the Assad regime's willingness to use extreme violence against its citizens.

The paper then moves on to the events of 2011, when the Syrian Revolution erupted and eventually led to the civil war that continues to this day. It covers the emergence of the Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS/ISIL), as well as the situation of Syrian Kurds. The paper also analyzes Russia's involvement in Syria, driven by multiple factors, including a desire to counter Western interference in the region, a strategic interest in maintaining influence in the Middle East, and domestic political considerations. The paper

concludes by arguing for a conflict resolution approach that prioritizes peace, stability, and accountability for human rights violations committed by the Syrian regime. It emphasizes the need for a concerted effort by all parties involved and the international community to work towards a lasting solution for peace and stability in Syria.

Abstract

The memories of Syrians are haunted by twelve years of anguish as they have been subjected to arrests, tortures, disappearances, and massacres at the hands of the oppressive regime. Even attempts to escape have resulted in the treacherous sea swallowing many. Half of the Syrian population lives in a state of either asylum or displacement, while the remaining half struggle to make ends meet below the poverty line. The country is now under the military, political, and economic control of three major powers, namely Iran, Russia, and the regime itself, leading to a complex and challenging situation for its people. This paper provides an overview of the conflict, its effects on the Syrian people, and the country's current state. It argues for regime accountability for human rights violations committed against civilians to achieve peace and stability in Syria. It also emphasizes the need for a joint effort by all parties involved and the international community to work towards a lasting solution for peace and stability in Syria.

Syria

Situated on the Mediterranean Sea, Syria is a stunning Middle Eastern country that shares borders with neighboring countries such as Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine. With its history dating back to the Bronze era, Syria has been home to human settlements for thousands of years due to its abundant water resources that enabled agriculture and fostered sustainability and prosperity in the region. Over time, Syria has been ruled by various empires, including the Assyrians, Babylonians, Romans, and Ottomans, resulting in a diverse cultural mix that sets it apart from other nations in the region.

Today, Syria is home to a wide range of ethnic and religious groups, including Muslims (Sunni/Shiite), Alawites, Druze, Christians, Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds, Yezidis, and Turkmen, with Sunni Muslims being the majority among the various minority groups.

Demography of Syria

Syria's demography makeup is a complex interplay of ethnicity, religion, and recent migrations. As of 2023, the country's population stands at 18 million people. According to the CIA World Factbook, most Syrians - 87% - are Muslims, with Sunni Muslims representing the largest group at 74%. The remaining 13% consists of Shi'a Muslims, who follow either the Alawite (11%), Ismaili (1%), or Twelver Imam (0.5%) sects. Christians account for 10% of the population, while Druze, Jews, and atheists comprise the remaining 3%.

Due to the ongoing internal migration movement, it is difficult to designate a specific geographic area to a particular ethnic or religious group. However, a general Sunni majority is concentrated in the main governorates of Damascus, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, Raqqa, and Daraa. In contrast, Alawites are primarily concentrated in the mountainous areas of the coastal Latakia Governorate and

are the largest minority group. Christians, primarily residing in Aleppo, also populate various regions across the country.



Figure 1: Map of French Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon and the states created in 1922

French Colonization and Independence

In the aftermath of World War I, the world witnessed the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, which left the region in a state of chaos. The French and British officials secretly brokered the Sykes–Picot agreement, which divided the Ottoman Empire into spheres of influence soon colonized by the West. This arrangement led to a great resentment in the Middle East, as the native people in the region were subjected to foreign rule. In 1920, the Allied supreme convened the San Remo conference in Italy, granting France a mandate over Syria.¹ The mandate was intended to help rebuild Syria and prepare its people for independence. However, the French mandate led to the division of Syria into four states: Jabal al-Druze, Damascus, Aleppo, and the Alawite State. This division was met with outrage by the Syrian population, who saw it as a violation of their sovereignty. The Alawite minority, however, supported the decision to divide Syria and have their independent state. This support demonstrated to the French that the Alawites were a reliable ally.

In 1936, France decided to withdraw from Syria, leading to the reunification of the divided states under the banner of the Republic of Syria.² Syria gained independence as a parliamentary state in April of 1946.³ However, establishing stability in the country proved to be a challenging task that took several years.

Foundation of the Ba'ath Party

Initially, the Ba'ath ideology emerged as a secular concept that aimed to unify the Arab nation into a single state. In 1947, a group of Syrian intellectuals, led by Michel Aflaq, Salah al-Din al-Bitar, Jalal al-Sayyid, and Wahib al-Ghanim, established the "Arab Ba'ath Movement." Later, the movement merged with the "Arab Socialist Party" led by Akram al-Hourani, becoming the "Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party" in 1952.⁴ The party adopted the slogan "One Arab nation with an eternal message" and called for Arab unity, symbolized by the flag of the Great Arab Revolt in 1916. On March 8, 1963, a group of Ba'athist officers, including Hafez al-Assad, Ahmed al-Mir, Abdul Karim al-Jundi, Muhammad Omran, and Salah Jadid, seized power in Syria, all of whom belonged to minority sects.⁵ In 1958, Gamal Abdel Nasser formed a union between Egypt and Syria. However, he dissolved all political parties in Syria, including the Ba'ath party.⁶ The Ba'ath party opposed the union and lobbied for its dissolution. When Nasser dissolved the union in 1961, Jadid and Asaad established the "Military Committee" to seize power from the existing government. However, this effort was unsuccessful, resulting in the disbandment of the military committee. Instead, a civilian-led faction within the Ba'ath Party, led by Amin al-Hafiz, took power in Syria in 1963. Salah Jadid and Hafez al-Assad, however, continued to play significant roles in the Ba'ath Party and Syrian politics in the years to come.

The 1963 Syrian coup, led by the civilian faction of the Ba'ath Party, saw Amin al-Hafiz take power in Syria.⁷ The coup followed a period of political instability in Syria, including the 1961 dissolution of the United Arab Republic (the union between Egypt and Syria), as well as a series of coups and counter-coups that had plagued the country since its independence in 1946. Al-Hafiz's coup was seen as a victory for the civilian wing of the Ba'ath Party, which had been engaged in a power struggle with the military wing led by Salah Jadid and Hafez al-Assad. Al-Hafiz, who had previously served as the interior minister in the government of President Nazim al-Qudsi, was seen as a compromise candidate who could bring stability to the country.

Once in power, Hafez quickly moved to consolidate his authority. He declared a state of emergency and suspended the constitution, dissolved political parties, and established a one-party state under the Ba'ath Party. Al-Hafiz's government also implemented a series of socialist policies, including nationalizing industries, land reforms, and establishing a welfare state. Despite these efforts, al-Hafiz's rule was not without challenges. In 1966, a military coup led by Salah Jadid and Hafez al-Assad ousted al-Hafiz from power, marking the beginning of a new era of Ba'ath Party rule in Syria.⁸Top of Form

The rising of Hafez Assad

In 1966, Hafez Assad became the defense minister in Nur Al-Din Alatasi's administration. However, a conflict arose between Assad and Salah Jadid over various political issues, notably the defeat of 1967. This conflict eventually led to Assad's overthrow of Alatasi's administration in November 1970, known as the "Corrective Movement."⁹ Assad seized power and imprisoned his longtime companions, placing Jadid under house arrest before imprisoning him.¹⁰ Jadid remained in Mezzeh Prison in Damascus for 23 years until his death on August 19, 1993.¹¹

Soon after taking power, Assad implemented a new constitution that included Article 8, stating that “The Baath Party is the leader of the state and society,” which has served as a cover for Syria’s rule for over fifty years.¹² The party used resounding partisan slogans promoting unity, freedom, socialism, and Arabism to justify its rule. However, during the Syrian revolution, these slogans were exposed, particularly with the party’s direct involvement in suppressing peaceful demonstrators.

The Assad Dynasty

There is controversy and conflicting opinions regarding the origins of the Assad family. However, all sources agree that the family is of non-Syrian origin. According to an Iraqi historian Ezzadin Mustafa Rasool, Jamil Assad -brother of Hafez Assad- denied being from Sinjar and told Rasool that the Assad family is of Kurdish origin, specifically Yarsani, and their origins are from Khanaqin, a city on the Iranian-Iraqi border. During an interview, Jamil also confirmed to Rasool that the Assad family had another surname before it became Assad. Most historians believe that their original surname was “Al-Wahsh” family, which translates to “the monster” in Arabic.¹³ Despite the ambiguity surrounding the origin of the family and conflicting information, the question remains of how a non-Syrian family has been ruling Syria for half a century, and how they have maintained their grip on power.

Hafez Economic Development

Economic development in the first decade of Hafez Asad’s reign witnessed a quantum leap in the modern history of Syria. Starting with industrial,, construction, and oil sector development and the implementation of the Euphrates project, known as the Euphrates Dam. The living conditions improved across the country, especially in Damascus, the capital, which obtained the largest share of the state’s resources, with efforts focused on improving conditions of the governorates and combating corruption and smuggling between Lebanon and Syria. Despite al-Assad’s good intentions to some extent and his sharp intelligence in devising appropriate policies, the translation of economic ideas and policies into practical plans and their implementation through executive projects were faltering. The reason hinges on two possibilities: either the type of advice provided by the economic advisors or that the advice was appropriate. However, the political leadership did not consider it and neglected it for its interest.

Corruption

Corruption has been a persistent problem in Syria since the rule of the Assad family continuing to this day. According to Transparency International’s 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index, Syria ranks 178 out of 180 countries in the world, with accusations of widespread bribery, embezzlement, and cronyism within the Syrian regime.¹⁴ The ongoing conflict in the country since 2011 has only exacerbated these issues, with reports of corruption and looting by various armed groups and individuals. The international community has responded by imposing sanctions and restrictions on the Syrian regime and its supporters to combat corruption and human rights abuses. Corruption has had a detrimental impact on the Syrian economy, as the regime’s cronyism and favoritism towards loyalists in business have led to inefficiencies, reduced competitiveness, and a lack

of innovation. This economic stagnation has contributed to feelings of hopelessness and frustration among the Syrian population, driving demands for reform.¹⁵

The Muslim Brotherhood

The role of the intelligence services emerged intensely, and all its branches interfered in public life. As for the campaigns of arrest and intimidation, they affected leftists and those belonging to the “Iraqi Baath” or Baathists from the remnants of the “Salah Jedid”. The period we are tackling, we are certain, from our knowledge of the nature of power, that Hafez’s intelligence service was keeping him informed of the activity of the Muslim Brotherhood. Certainly, the activities of the fighting vanguard were known to the intelligence services because it is not reasonable for people to pass on news within communal. For example, a training camp for the fighting vanguard in the forests, and the intelligence services were not aware.

The challenge of the Muslim Brotherhood shifted into the open at the end of the 70s as they took their Sunni sectarian position to attack the regime headed by Assad as “Alawite rule.”¹⁶ They also disputed the regime’s claim that secularism is nothing but another crime that reflects the heresy and disbelief of the Alawites. The Ba’ath Party was achieving an unprecedented rise, especially among the Sunnis, since the 50s, which provoked the Brotherhood and escalated their hostility to the Ba’ath. The confrontation between the secular Ba’ath Party and the religious “Muslim Brotherhood” movement was as if it were an unavoidable fate. Since the exit of the “Syrian Social Nationalist Party” in 1955 and the weakening of the “Communist Party” during 20 years of coups after independence, especially since the 1963 coup, the Brotherhood remained a major opponent.¹⁷

The Hama Massacre 1982

whenever the Hama massacre is mentioned, Rifat Assad, Hafez’s brother, is immediately associated with it. Indeed, the title “Butcher of Hama” has become one of his nicknames. Rifat held accountable for the Tadmor Palmyra Prison massacre on June 27, 1980, which was led directly by his son-in-law, Major at the time, Moin Nassif. The scenes of corpses and human remains continued in the neighborhoods of the city of Hama following the massacre, stuck in the memory of many who lived through it and recounted its details to various media and human rights outlets around the world. At the beginning of February 2, 1982, tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery of the Syrian regime army and the Defense Brigades militia affiliated with Rifat surrounded the city, besieging it with human beings and cutting off the electricity.¹⁸ Before attacking the city and sweeping it on the ground, the thousands of regime soldiers intensified the artillery shelling which killed, according to estimates from reports, between 20,000 and 40,000 civilians, in addition to causing a large amount of destruction and devastation that befell the city’s neighborhoods and buildings.¹⁹

After exhausting the city, soldiers and militiamen stormed Hama, killing everyone who objected their way under the pretext that they were pursuing members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Eyewitnesses report that during the massacre, the regime’s soldiers gathered the neighborhood residents inside the municipal stadium, and then fired at them with machine guns, resulting in more

than 1,500 people to fall victim to this field liquidation.²⁰ No neighborhood, house, or basement was spared from the regime's cannons and mortars, just as no child, elderly, or woman was spared from this horrific massacre.

Did the Brotherhood fall into the trap set by Hafez? Perhaps, considering Hafez outwitted The Muslim Brotherhood with cunning and malice. It should not be ignored, in any way, that Assad tightly controlled all joints of authority, which gave him the capability to control any organized uprising against his regime. The Hama massacre was the harvest of what Assad began since his intervention in Lebanon. There was a distinct division among Syrians, especially regarding the perception that the sectarianism of the Brotherhood was predominant. This view, however, overlooks the differences between a genuinely sectarian organization and an authority like Assad's, which, despite controlling the state, should not inherently be sectarian. The role of Rifat, highlighting the varying levels of responsibility, cannot be ignored in this context.

The scale and horror of the Hama massacre indicate that it was premeditated. Siege forces encircled the city for a month, killing nearly forty thousand people, and hideously abusing the survivors.. Atrocities cannot be a response to the violence of the fighting vanguard, which was limited in its capabilities. The massacre was deliberately planned to be so terrifying that it would remain unforgettable, serving not only to intimidate Syrians but also to deter any future rebellions, but also to gain the loyalty of others who are willingly or unwillingly involved. The massacre is still present because of the absence of justice and the ongoing practice of using massacres as a means to secure loyalty..

From Hafez to Bashar

Bashar succeeded his father, Hafez, as the President of Syria after his death in June 2000. His rise to power was marked by what some consider an unlawful seizure of power through constitutional changes. In 2000, the Syrian parliament amended the constitution to lower the minimum age to become president from 40 to 34, the age of Bashar at the time. This change enabled him to run for office and ultimately win the presidential election in July 2000, in which he was the only candidate.²¹ The legitimacy of the constitutional changes and the election have been contested by some Syrians and the international community, who have criticized them as undemocratic.

Furthermore, Bashar al-Assad was not even a member of the ruling Ba'ath Party's Regional Command, which traditionally controlled the presidency, until his father's death. He was quickly appointed as the head of the party and the military, consolidating his power, and sidelining potential rivals.²² Many viewed the transition of power from father to son as a continuation of the authoritarian regime rather than a genuine democratic process. The lack of political and electoral competition, as well as the absence of freedom of expression and assembly, further reinforced the perception of Bashar al-Assad's ascent to power as illegitimate. The events that followed Bashar al-Assad's election only heightened concerns over the nature of his rule. The government continued its crackdown on political opposition and dissent, and civil society activists were arrested and imprisoned.

Regime Repression 2000-2011

Despite the horrifying results of the Hama Massacre, the regime managed to escape the repercussions. Thus, the regime continued to extend its power to commit more crimes and human rights violations against civilians. The regime of Hafez, the father, who committed the massacre of Hama and shed the blood of nearly 40,000 people, is not much different from the regime of Bashar the son.

From 2000 to 2010, the Syrian government, led by President Bashar al-Asad, was widely criticized for its human rights record. The government continued restricting freedom of expression, association, and assembly and cracked down on political opposition and dissent. Arbitrary arrests and detentions were common, and torture and ill-treatment of prisoners were widespread. In 2004, the regime passed Law 49, which allowed for the arbitrary confiscation of property and the expulsion of residents from their homes, particularly in areas considered to be politically disloyal. The regime also imposed economic restrictions, including price controls and restrictions on imports and exports, which contributed to widespread poverty and unemployment.²³

Human rights organizations documented cases of forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, often carried out by security forces or pro-government militias. The government enforced strict control over the media, leading to widespread censorship and self-censorship. It faced criticism for its handling of minority groups, notably the Kurds, and for failing to be accountable for previous human rights violations, such as the 1982 Hama massacre. Overall, the period of 2000-2010 was marked by a lack of progress on human rights issues in Syria, with the government continuing to engage in widespread violations and repression of fundamental freedoms.²⁴

Syrian Revolution 2011 Eruption (Arab Spring)

In December 2010, a young man self-immolated by setting fire to himself after he was fed up with the dictatorship in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia. Mohammad Bouazizi did not know that his action would ignite a revolution that was about to spread throughout the region.²⁵ In Daraa, Syria, the revolution started with fifteen adolescents painting a pro-democracy graffiti, “Your turn, Doctor” referring to Bashar. Those children and many who were not involved were arrested and tortured by the security forces. Most pessimists would not have believed that the Syrian regime’s brutality would reach the level of killing children and mutilating their corpses. However, the incident of Hamza al-Khatib (13 years old) in the early days of the revolution caused global outrage, human rights, and international criticism of Bashar’s regime. The Canadian newspaper *Globe and Mail* reported the tragic condition of Hamza’s body in graphic detail: “His jaw and both knees were shattered, his flesh was covered in cigarette butt burns, his penis had been cut off. Other injuries appeared similar to those of electric shocks and whipping with a cable.”. His death caused widespread outrage and became a symbol of the brutality of the Syrian regime’s crackdown on peaceful protests. The image of his mutilated body circulated widely on social media and became a rallying cry for the Syrian opposition.²⁶

2011-2012: The Escalation of the Syrian Revolution

Peaceful demonstrations started in Daraa and became organized and systematically schemed. The regime security forces backed these demonstrations by shooting directly at the demonstrators, and Mahmoud al-Jawabra was the first person killed in the Syrian revolution. However, the call for demonstrations continued with the increase in public frustration and anger when they felt the intransigence of the regime and the stigmatization of the people of Daraa with armed gangs. Daraa demonstrations spread outside it and swept through the Syrian provinces one after the other. Consequently, the intensity of repression and ferocity increased by the regime, which deployed all its security and military forces to suppress the demonstrators with various tools and methods of repression and violence. They committed dozens of massacres and crackdowns on peaceful demonstrators. Among these massacres are in Daraa, Baniyas, Al-Bayda, Homs, Tremseh, and the countryside of Damascus. Subsequently, these massacres began to take a sectarian aspect through videos, deliberately leaked by the regime to coerce the demonstrators to shift the peaceful rebellion into armed conflict.²⁷

End of Peaceful Protests and Beginning of Civil War

As the conflict continued, it turned into a full-blown civil war, with various factions vying for control of territory and resources. The Syrian crisis created a lush environment for the growth and polarization of armed and radical conflicts governed by ethnic and sectarian affiliations to spread. Military formations appeared under several names, prominently the Free Syrian Army (FSA)/Syrian National Army. Military operations against the regime's army began to spread throughout different provinces. The voices of the demonstrators were absent, to be replaced by the whistling of bullets and the roar of cannons.²⁸

Here, the Syrian revolution shifted from the stage of peaceful demonstrations to armed conflict, leading to disastrous ongoing civil war. Syria has become an arena of battles to impose control between several local, regional, and international forces. The humanitarian situation also deteriorated rapidly, with millions of Syrians displaced from their homes, widespread destruction of infrastructure, and an estimated half a million people killed. The situation has reached a devastated homeland and besieged people in the worst disaster in modern times.²⁹

Al-Nusra Front

Al-Nusra Front, an armed jihadist group led by "Abu Muhammad al-Julani," appeared in Syria in late 2011. During the first period of its emergence, Jabhat al-Nusra for the People of the Levant was able to mobilize a wide popular circle around it. Nevertheless, it soon lost it because it was accused of affiliation with Al-Qaeda in Iraq due to the history of its founder, Abu Muhammad Al-Julani, who was a member of Al-Qaeda in Iraq. After the outbreak of the crisis in 2011, he declared his opposition to the Syrian regime, expanding his activities to reach many Syrian governorates, especially in Idlib, Deir ez-Zor, and Aleppo. In 2012, it was classified by the United States as a terrorist group.³⁰

Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS/ISIL)

In 2013, the Islamic State emerged in Syria when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the unification of the Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State, creating the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS/ISIL). This announcement was rejected by the leader of Al-Qaeda, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, who saw that the Al-Nusra Front leads the jihadist action in the Levant. At the same time, the Islamic State is present in Iraq only without having any roles in the Syrian arena. This position aroused a dispute between Al-Baghdadi and al-Julani, and resulted in the migration of many fighters from the Al-Nusra Front to ISIS. This migration significantly weakened the Al-Nusra Front's combat capabilities compared to those of ISIS.³¹

It should be noted that the emergence of extremist groups like the Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State (ISIS) was not the sole reason for the escalation of the Syrian conflict into a full-blown civil war. The conflict was already complex and multifaceted, with various factions and actors involved, including the Syrian government, opposition groups, foreign powers, and other non-state armed groups.³²

However, the involvement of these extremist groups, particularly ISIS, added another layer of complexity and brutality to the conflict. Their extremist ideology and tactics, including the targeting of civilians, ethnic and religious minorities, and other opposition groups, further contributed to the radicalization and polarization of the conflict. Additionally, the presence of ISIS also provided a justification for foreign powers to intervene in the conflict, further exacerbating the violence and prolonging the war.³³

Syrian Kurds: from oppressed to organized militias

The Kurds have suffered from exclusion, marginalization, and the failure to obtain their civil rights to nationality and education during the era of Hafez. With the advent of Bashar to power, the suffering of the Kurds increased, who sought the occurrence of the revolution as an outlet that could help attain their goals. The Kurdish parties began to organize into two coalitions, namely the General Council of the Kurdish Alliance, which includes two parties, the Kurdish Progressive Democratic and the Kurdish Democratic Unity Party, which is devoted to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) led by Abdullah Ocalan. Its activities are represented in northeastern Syria, while the second coalition is represented by the Kurdish Political Council, which includes nine parties. The regime attempted to gain the support of the Kurdish opposition, aiming to neutralize them and keep them away from the rebellion due to the politically dynamic nature of the Kurdish region. Also, because of their robust alliance with the Kurdistan region of Iraq, which means securing strategic depth.³⁴

The Kurds have played a significant role in the Syrian civil war. They have sought greater autonomy and rights within Syria, and their participation has shaped the conflict in several ways. In the early stages of the conflict, the Kurds in Syria remained largely neutral, focusing on protecting their areas and avoiding being drawn into the conflict. However, as the war progressed, the Kurds began to assert their presence and pursue their political goals. In 2012, the Kurds established their autonomous regions in northern Syria, primarily in Afrin, Kobani, and Jazeera. They established their own governance structures and security forces, which were separate from the Syrian government and rebel groups.³⁵

The Kurds also formed their own military force, the People's Protection Units (YPG), which played a critical role in the fight against ISIS. The YPG, along with the Women's Protection Units (YPJ), were praised for their effectiveness in fighting ISIS on the ground and were a key part of the U.S.-led coalition's efforts against the group. However, the Kurds' increasing power and autonomy have also made them a target of other groups in the conflict. Turkey has been involved in military operations against Kurdish forces in Syria, seeing them as a threat to its security due to their links to Kurdish groups in Turkey.³⁶

Russia's Role and Interests in the Syrian Conflict

Syrian-Russian relations have a long-standing history characterized by significant stability. Syria was one of the first countries recognized by the Soviet Union after its independence, and they established diplomatic relations. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia's foreign policy was driven by pragmatism and realism focused on Russian national interests. This approach reflects in their position on the Syrian war, where Russia holds political, economic, military, and strategic interests. If the Syrian regime falls, Russia stands to suffer significant losses on all these levels.³⁷

Russia has consistently supported the Syrian regime since the start of the crisis, rejecting any foreign interference in Syria's internal affairs and opposing any calls for the removal of the Syrian President from abroad. Russia has also continued to provide weapons under previously concluded contracts. It has opposed any military intervention aimed at changing Syria's political structure, considering it to be a matter for the Syrian people only. Russia has provided economic, political, and military support to the Syrian regime since the opposition advanced significantly in 2015, leading to the regime's loss of the entire province of Idlib and the city of Raqqqa.³⁸

Russia has made political contributions and initiatives to solve the Syrian crisis by sponsoring and hosting several conferences. These conferences began with the Geneva 1 conference in 2012 and continued until the Geneva 6 conference in 2017, with the Sochi conference in 2018 representing a Russian attempt to deal with the Syrian crisis unilaterally by liquidating the international Geneva track. However, the Syrian opposition, the United States, France, and the United Kingdom boycotted the Sochi conference.³⁹

The Russian Role in The Stagnation of the Syrian Conflict

The Syrian has reached a certain level of stagnation in recent years, in the sense that it has become increasingly protracted and intractable. As mentioned in the previous section, Russia has provided military, economic, and political support to the Syrian regime, which has enabled the regime to withstand the opposition's advances and regain control of several key areas in the country. It also contributed to the stagnation of the Syrian conflict. One of the critical ways Russia has contributed to the stagnation of the conflict is through its military intervention. In September 2015, Russia initiated an air campaign in Syria to target terrorist groups and also assisted the Syrian regime in regaining territory lost to the opposition. The military intervention significantly tilted the balance of power in favor of the Syrian regime and helped to stall the opposition's advance.⁴⁰

Moreover, Russia has actively sponsored and hosted several international conferences to resolve the Syrian crisis. These conferences have included the Geneva peace talks, the Astana talks, and the Sochi conference. Russia has used these platforms to promote its interests in the region, including maintaining the Syrian regime in power and countering Western influence. Furthermore, Russia has vetoed several United Nations Security Council resolutions aimed at holding the Syrian regime accountable for its actions, including the use of chemical weapons against civilians. Russia's veto power has effectively blocked any meaningful international action against the Syrian regime and has contributed to the conflict's ongoing stagnation.⁴¹

Russian Motives in Syria: a more in-depth analysis

Russia's motives in Syria are complex and multifaceted. Some of the key motives are:

- 1. Protecting its strategic interests:** Russia has long-standing ties with Syria and considers it a critical strategic partner in the Middle East. Russia maintains a naval base in the Syrian port of Tartus, which provides access to the Mediterranean Sea and allows it to project its naval power in the region. Russia's military intervention in Syria aimed to protect its strategic interests and ensuring the survival of the Syrian regime, which is a crucial ally in the region.⁴²
- 2. Countering Western influence:** Russia views the Syrian conflict as part of a broader geopolitical struggle with the West. Russia opposes Western-backed regime change efforts and views them as a threat to its sovereignty and security. Russia's intervention in Syria aimed to counter Western influence and secure its presence in the region.⁴³
- 3. Combating terrorism:** Russia has portrayed its intervention in Syria as a fight against terrorism, and it has framed its support for the Syrian regime as part of a broader effort to stabilize the region and combat extremist groups. Russia has also sought to position itself as a key player in the global fight against terrorism and to enhance its international standing as a result.⁴⁴
- 4. Economic interests:** Russia's involvement in Syria also has economic dimensions. Russia has sought to maintain its arms sales to the Syrian regime, and it has also been involved in rebuilding efforts in areas that the regime has recaptured. In addition, Russia has sought to exploit Syria's natural resources, including its oil and gas reserves.⁴⁵

Conflict Resolution Approach: An Overview

Conflict resolution approach refers to the methods and strategies used to address and resolve conflicts or disputes between individuals, groups, or nations. It involves finding a peaceful and mutually acceptable solution to a problem or disagreement, achievable through various means, such as negotiation, mediation, arbitration, or using force as a last resort. The primary goal of conflict resolution is to reduce or eliminate the conflict's underlying causes and to prevent its recurrence. It requires understanding the underlying issues, interests, and needs of all parties involved and developing a solution that satisfies those interests while avoiding further harm or escalation. Conflict resolution approaches can

vary depending on the context and nature of the conflict. For example, conflict resolution may involve informal conversations or formal mediation sessions in a workplace setting. In international conflicts, conflict resolution may require the involvement of third-party mediators, the use of economic sanctions or diplomatic measures, or even military intervention.⁴⁶

Effective conflict resolution requires the ability to communicate effectively, understanding diverse perspectives, and employing problem-solving techniques. It also involves building relationships, trust, and understanding between parties and promoting a culture of dialogue and cooperation rather than aggression or violence. Conflict resolution approaches can be broadly categorized into three main types: nonviolent communication, negotiation and mediation, and arbitration and litigation.

Nonviolent communication involves using communication techniques to resolve conflict peacefully and constructively. It focuses on developing empathy and understanding between the parties involved, promoting mutual respect, and creating a safe space for open and honest dialogue.⁴⁷

Negotiation and mediation involve a third party acting as a neutral facilitator to help parties reach a mutually acceptable solution. The mediator or negotiator may help parties identify their underlying interests, facilitate communication, and propose feasible solutions.⁴⁸

Arbitration and litigation involve using a third-party authority to make a binding decision on the conflict. Arbitration involves a neutral third party who listens to both sides of the conflict and decides, while litigation involves a court or other legal system to resolve the dispute.⁴⁹

In addition to these approaches, several other strategies can be used for conflict resolution, such as collaborative problem-solving, conflict coaching, restorative justice, and peacekeeping operations. Effective conflict resolution requires a range of skills, such as active listening, empathy, problem-solving, communication, and negotiation. It also involves understanding the underlying causes of the conflict, identifying common interests, and working towards finding mutually acceptable solutions. Conflict resolution can be a challenging process, especially in situations where there is a history of violence or where the parties involved have deeply entrenched positions. However, successful conflict resolution can lead to greater understanding, improved relationships, and a more peaceful and stable society.⁵⁰

Conflict Resolution: Towards Syria, Peace, stability, and accountability

Resolving the Syrian conflict requires a comprehensive, long-term approach that addresses its underlying causes and promotes sustainable peace, stability, and accountability. Achieving this goal involves implementing a combination of political, economic, and social measures in a coordinated and sustained manner. The Norwegian Center for Conflict Resolution (NOREF) has identified several crucial components necessary for achieving this objective, including:

- 1. Inclusive dialogue and negotiations:** NOREF advocates for inclusive dialogue and negotiations that involve all parties to the conflict, including representatives of the Syrian government, opposition groups, and civil

society organizations. Such negotiations should focus on finding a political solution to the conflict, addressing the root causes of the conflict, and ensuring the participation of women and other marginalized groups. Inclusive dialogue can help build trust, reduce tensions, and facilitate cooperation between conflicting parties.⁵¹

2. **Humanitarian access and assistance:** NOREF emphasizes ensuring humanitarian access and assistance to all those in need, including those living off the control of the regime areas and those displaced by the conflict. Achieving this demands collaborative efforts from all conflict parties and adherence to international humanitarian law. Ensuring access to humanitarian aid is a fundamental obligation under international humanitarian law, and it is essential that all parties to the conflict respect and facilitate it.⁵²
3. **Transitional justice and accountability:** NOREF highlights the importance of transitional justice and accountability for human rights violations committed during the conflict. This includes holding perpetrators accountable for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious crimes, as well as addressing the needs of victims and promoting reconciliation and healing. The pursuit of justice can help restore the rule of law, promote reconciliation, and prevent future violence.⁵³
4. **Security sector reform:** NOREF suggests that security sector reform should be an integral part of any post-conflict reconstruction efforts in Syria. This includes demobilizing and reintegrating former combatants, establishing effective and accountable security institutions, and promoting the rule of law and human rights. Transforming the security sector can help build trust between the government and citizens, reduce the risk of violence, and prevent the reemergence of conflict.⁵⁴
5. **Economic recovery and reconstruction:** NOREF emphasizes the need for economic recovery and reconstruction efforts that prioritize the needs of the Syrian people and promote sustainable development. This includes creating jobs, providing essential services, and rebuilding critical infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and water and sanitation systems. Economic recovery can help create jobs, improve living standards, and reduce the risk of future conflict. It is important that economic recovery efforts are designed to benefit all Syrians and that they are sustainable in the long term.⁵⁵

NOREF's proposal recognizes the complex and multifaceted nature of the Syrian conflict. It proposes a comprehensive approach to address the root causes of the conflict and promote lasting peace, stability, and accountability. The proposal highlights the importance of inclusive dialogue, humanitarian access and assistance, transitional justice and accountability, security sector reform, and economic recovery and reconstruction. Each component is critical for building trust between conflicting parties, reducing tensions, promoting reconciliation, and preventing the resurgence of conflict.

However, when we refer to the regimes' accountability, it lacks the evident accusation of the regime in disturbing any peace talks or resolution to the conflict. The accountability of the Syrian regime refers to holding the govern-

ment and its officials responsible for human rights violations and war crimes committed during the Syrian conflict. The Syrian government has been accused of numerous human rights abuses, including the use of chemical weapons, extrajudicial killings, torture, and enforced disappearances. The international community, including the United Nations, has repeatedly called for accountability and justice for these crimes. Transitional justice mechanisms, such as prosecutions and trials, are essential to ensure accountability for these crimes.⁵⁶

The international community has taken some steps towards accountability for the Syrian regime's actions. For example, the UN established the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) in 2016 to collect, preserve, and analyze evidence of human rights violations and war crimes committed in Syria. IIIM is also responsible for preparing cases for prosecution in national, regional, or international courts. However, the Syrian government has refused to cooperate with international efforts to investigate and prosecute human rights violations, which complicates efforts to hold the regime accountable.⁵⁷

Accountability for the Syrian regime's actions remains limited. The ongoing conflict, as well as geopolitical considerations, have also complicated efforts to hold the regime accountable. Despite these challenges, efforts towards accountability and justice for the Syrian people remain crucial for achieving lasting peace and stability in Syria. Despite the challenges, efforts towards accountability and justice for the Syrian people remain crucial for achieving lasting peace and stability in Syria. The accountability of the Syrian regime is a major step in addressing the root causes of the conflict and ensuring that human rights are respected and upheld in the country.

Syrian Future—Synopsis analysis of the conflict

It is difficult to precisely predict the future of Syria, as the conflict is ongoing, and the situation is constantly evolving. However, many experts and analysts agree that the road to a stable and peaceful Syria will be long and challenging. One scenario is that the conflict will continue for years, with periodic escalations in violence, until it reaches a stalemate. This might result in a fragmented Syria, with different factions controlling various parts of the country. In this scenario, the Syrian government could retain control over the central and western parts of the country, while opposition groups and Kurdish forces could control the north and east.

Another scenario is a negotiated settlement to the conflict, with all parties agreeing to a power-sharing arrangement and establishing a transitional government. This process may involve the drafting of a new constitution, the holding of elections, and the creation of new institutions to govern the country. However, reaching a negotiated settlement would require the cooperation of all parties involved in the conflict, and significant support from the international community. Regardless of the scenario, rebuilding and reconstruction efforts will be necessary to repair the damage caused by the conflict. These efforts will demand substantial investment, both from within Syria and the international community. Additionally, addressing the needs of the millions of displaced Syrians, including providing shelter, healthcare, education, and employment opportunities, will be necessary.

The future of Syria will depend on the ability of all parties involved in the conflict to set aside their differences and work towards a common goal of peace and stability. It will also depend on the support of the international community's

support, both in terms of humanitarian aid and efforts towards finding a political solution to the conflict.

Conclusion

The history of Syria is complex and tumultuous, marked by colonization, dictatorship, economic development, corruption, and political repression. The regime's brutal crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood and the Hama massacre of 1982, which claimed thousands of lives, set the stage for the current conflict. The eruption of the Syrian Revolution in 2011, part of the Arab Spring, and the subsequent emergence of extremist groups such as Al-Nusra Front and ISIS/ISIL further complicated the situation. The involvement of Russia, which has played a significant role in the Syrian conflict, has also contributed to its complexity. However, despite these challenges, there is hope for a peaceful and stable future for Syria. Achieving this requires a concerted effort by all parties involved and the international community, focusing on a lasting solution that emphasizes accountability for human rights violations and fosters peace and stability in the country.

The Syrian conflict has caused immense suffering and devastation for the Syrian people over the past decade. The memories of those affected by the conflict are filled with pain, trauma, and loss. The oppressive regime has committed countless human rights violations, leading to the displacement and asylum of half of the Syrian population while the remaining half struggle to survive in poverty. The country is now under the control of three major powers, making the situation complex and challenging for its people.

To achieve lasting peace and stability in Syria, there is a need for accountability and justice for the human rights violations committed by the regime. Transitional justice mechanisms, such as prosecutions and trials, are essential to ensure accountability for these crimes. Additionally, addressing the needs of victims and promoting reconciliation and healing is also important. All parties involved and the international community need a concerted effort to work towards a lasting solution for peace and stability in Syria. The people of Syria deserve to live in a country that is free from violence, oppression, and human rights abuses. Our collective responsibility is to support their efforts towards a better future and ensure that their suffering is not forgotten.

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