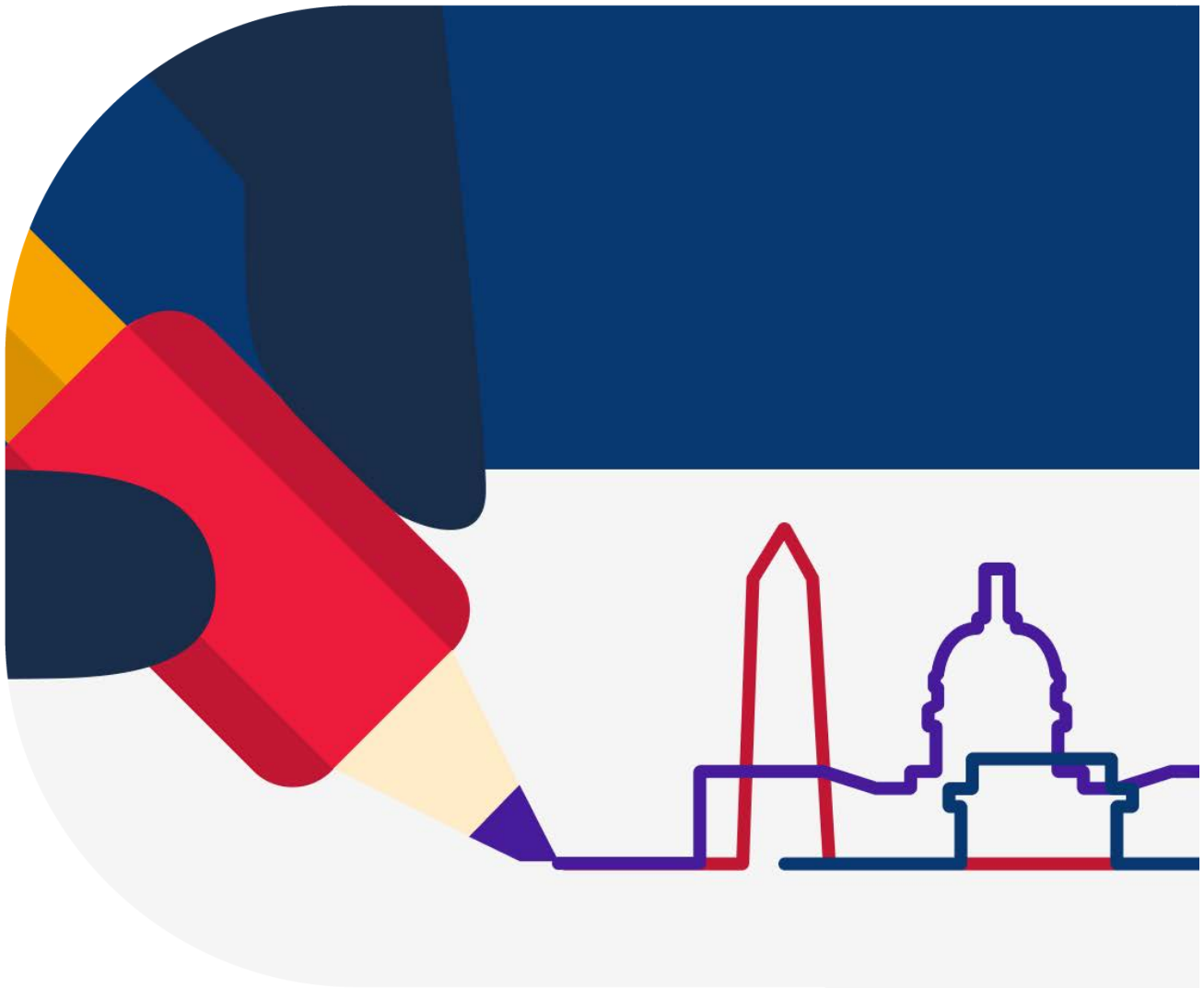




Carnegie Mellon University
Journal for Politics and Strategy



Autumn 2021

Volume 6, Issue 1

Featuring the original research of Carnegie Mellon University's
Washington Semester Program Spring 2021 cohort

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www.cmu.edu/ips/jps
ISSN: 2328-9295

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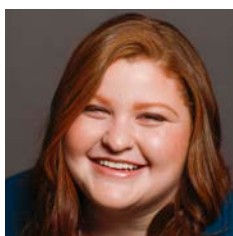
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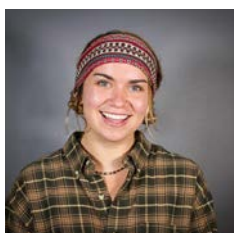
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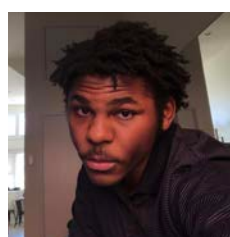
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Letter from the Editor-in-Chief

Dear Reader,

I am pleased to introduce the latest issue of the Journal of Politics and Strategy, sponsored by Carnegie Mellon University's Institute for Politics and Strategy (IPS). I should also take this opportunity to introduce myself as the incoming editor-in-chief. My predecessor John J. Chin as well as IPS Interim Director Mark Kamlet have both been highly encouraging and I'm grateful to them both.

Since the publication's founding in 2013, each issue has included undergraduate research submitted in response to a call for submissions. In this issue, the featured articles all come from a single source, the 2021 spring student cohort of Carnegie Mellon University's Washington Semester Program. These thirteen students spent a semester living, studying and interning in our nation's capital. The result of their experiences – both individual and collective – can be seen in the array of policy perspectives and topics chosen for in-depth study. The articles presented here focus attention on international and domestic issues, from security to transportation, and from vaccine diplomacy to democracy promotion at home and abroad. Indeed, the topics reflect the breadth of research interests of Carnegie Mellon's diverse student body.

Thank you to all the students whose work is featured here and to JPS founder Dr. Kiron Skinner for her vision of promoting the work of our students. Our talented student graphic designer Yoshi Torralva once again provided an expert cover image and thanks as well to my JPS colleagues Emily Half and Bill Brink for advice, editing, and expertise. At CMU and at the Institute for Politics and Strategy, our heart truly is in the work.

Sincerely,
Abby W. Schachter
Editor-in-Chief

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Covid-19 Vaccine Diplomacy: Redefining the Post 2020 World Order

ARIANNA GARCIA GUERRERO

There are many words synonymous with the year 2020 such as pandemic, COVID-19, lockdown, and variant. All evoke the same feelings of dread and sadness worldwide. Amidst such commonly shared emotions regarding the coronavirus outbreak, there is one phrase, not as commonly known, that has slowly crept into recent political dialogue and that has the potential to shape geopolitical relations around the world for the next decade: vaccine diplomacy.

Vaccine diplomacy is defined as “almost any aspect of global health diplomacy that relies on the use or delivery of vaccines and encompasses the important work of the GAVI [vaccine alliance], as well as elements of the WHO, the Gates Foundation, and other important international organizations.”¹ At its most basic, vaccine diplomacy is the strategic use and distribution of vaccines as a means of creating influence in other countries or of strengthening and improving diplomatic relationships as a whole.

Not only does vaccine diplomacy provide a country with the means of creating a form of producer-consumer dependency among other nations but it can also lead to the formation of collaborative relationships among historically opposed countries.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, nations have raced to be the first to produce a vaccine, the first to actually distribute the vaccine, and the first to reach widespread recognition for their efforts². A situation that would naturally call for unity, has actually led countries to compete for global predominance in light of a worldwide vulnerability. By looking at the efforts pushed by Russia, China, and the US, we can get a more focused understanding of how COVID-19 vaccine distribution has already begun to shift perceptions of historical global relationships and the implications this may have in the future.

Vaccine diplomacy, although a seemingly new term, has in fact existed for some time. Given its relevance to the larger scope of global health diplomacy and its more specific relevance to vaccine science diplomacy -- defined as “a unique hybrid of global health and science diplomacy”³ -- vaccine diplomacy has been part of multiple events throughout history. The larger term of global health diplomacy has had various meanings historically, which can be categorized into three main subsets of interaction: “core diplomacy, formal negotiations between and among nations; multistakeholder diplomacy, negotiations between or among nations and other actors, not necessarily intended to lead to binding agreements; and informal diplomacy, interactions between international public health actors and their counterparts in the field.”⁴

1 Peter J. Hotez, “Vaccine Diplomacy”: Historical Perspectives and Future Directions,” PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases, June 26, 2014, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4072536/>.

2 “The COVID-19 Vaccine Race,” Gavi: The Vaccine Alliance, May 2021, <https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/covid-19-vaccine-race>.

3 Ibid.

4 Peter J. Hotez, “Vaccine Diplomacy”: Historical Perspectives and Future Directions,” PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases, June 26, 2014, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4072536/>.



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All three explain the various types of negotiations drawn up by world leaders in their quest to distribute the vaccine. These various levels of engagement demonstrate the evolution of the concept of diplomacy, over time.

Diplomacy is no longer just about verbal expressions and dialogue, but about the successful collaboration of experts in different disciplines in order to jointly solve pressing global health issues. The fruit of this collaboration redefines the core of what diplomacy will look like in the future and is what allows vaccine diplomacy to serve as a form of humanitarian intervention.⁵ As global health diplomacy and science diplomacy grow more intertwined, the joint development of life-saving vaccines becomes all the more possible and the delivery and distribution of those vaccines gets streamlined. The faster a vaccine can be produced, the faster it can be sent out, the greater the aid that can be offered, the greater the global impact, and thus the greater the recognition. This careful calculation is what makes vaccine diplomacy such a useful “soft power tactic.”⁶

The first signs of vaccine diplomacy date to the creation of the first vaccine in 1798. During that year, English physician Edward Jenner discovered that by inoculating people with cowpox, smallpox could be prevented. Given the deadliness of the epidemics caused by smallpox at the time, the discovery of this vaccine gained worldwide recognition.⁷ By the beginning of the 1800s, the smallpox vaccine was already widely available across England and France. In 1801, more concrete signs of vaccines being used as diplomatic tools began to emerge when Dr. Edward Gantt vaccinated Native American diplomats, who were visiting Washington DC, against smallpox.⁸ Throughout the 1900s, this diplomatic momentum was kept in motion and resulted in one of the most widely recognized moments of vaccine diplomacy.

The virologist Dr. Albert Sabin traveled to the USSR and formed a sustained collaborative relationship with two Soviet virologists. This partnership led to the creation of a prototype oral polio vaccine that would be tested on some 100 million people, mostly children within the Soviet bloc countries.⁹ This exchange of ideas and scientific findings paved the way for one of the most unprecedented partnerships between these two enemy countries. The partnership managed to remain positive despite the various proxy wars that the two were inflicting upon each other.

The more the relationship between the USSR and the US developed on this scientific front, the greater the breakthroughs they made. The Soviet Union pioneered a freeze-drying technique for the smallpox vaccine which allowed for around 450 million doses to be dispersed in support of the global smallpox eradication campaign being carried out in developing countries. The successful and unprecedented collaborative relationship between these two countries led them to work together, “on what remains the most successful vaccination program in human history,”¹⁰ completely eradicating smallpox. The partnership achieved between two historically enemy countries amid Cold War times shows the resiliency and effectiveness of vaccine diplomacy for responding to global health needs, independent of national gains.

After almost two years of undergoing a deadly global pandemic and with the global death toll for

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Michael Leigh, “Vaccine Diplomacy: Soft Power Lessons from China and Russia?” Bruegel, April 27, 2021, <https://www.bruegel.org/2021/04/vaccine-diplomacy-soft-power-lessons-from-china-and-russia/>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ J. Diane Pearson, “Medical Diplomacy and the American Indian: Thomas Jefferson, the Lewis and Clarke Expedition, and the Subsequent Effects on American Indian Health and Public Policy,” *Wicazo Sa Review*, Spring 2004, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1409489>.

⁹ Stephen Mihm, Kairvy Grewal, Raghav Bikhchandani, and Himani Chandna, “World Badly Needs Vaccine Diplomacy, That’s the Lesson from Polio & Smallpox,” *ThePrint*, May 05, 2021, <https://theprint.in/opinion/world-badly-needs-vaccine-diplomacy-thats-the-lesson-from-polio-smallpox/652522/>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

COVID-19 exceeding four million,¹¹ the need for mass vaccination programs becomes all the more important in order to return to a more “normal” future. Russia has spearheaded much of the dispersal of its vaccines especially in more underdeveloped countries but not without major setbacks. Russia currently has only one publicly available vaccine which is Sputnik V, named after the world’s first satellite “Sputnik” produced during the Cold War space race,¹² and two emergency-use only vaccines: “EpiVacCorona, produced by the Vector Institute in Novosibirsk, and CoviVac, from the Chumakov Centre in St. Petersburg, known for its collaboration with US scientist Albert Sabin on the polio vaccine during the Cold War.”¹³

Sputnik V, which is reported to have a 97.6 percent efficacy rate,¹⁴ has been promised at a cost of less than \$10 for international consumers thereby making it a more accessible and affordable alternative for international consumers. The Russian Direct Investment Fund, which is in charge of the distribution of the vaccine, says it has signed contracts with more than 12 manufacturers in ten countries to produce around 1.4 billion doses and 29 countries have allegedly approved Sputnik V for emergency use.¹⁵ Despite the fact that it has not yet been approved by the European Medicines Agency, already 57 countries have authorized it due to its low cost and easy storage. Given the varied relationships between EU countries and Russia, the credibility and validity of the vaccine has been highly questioned, with some arguing that the lack of concrete information about Sputnik V could pose a risk to human lives.¹⁶ The lack of EMA approval has not stopped many EU countries from signing on with the Russians and has created a division among the member states and several highly contentious debates. In one of the biggest political scandals caused by the vaccine, Igor Matovic, the Slovakian prime minister, formally resigned after signing a secret deal to purchase dozens of doses of Sputnik V vaccines despite lacking the approval from his colleagues.¹⁷ The crisis led around six other cabinet members to resign and led many opposition parties to accuse Matovic of mishandling the pandemic more generally. The pushback concerning Matovic’s decision exemplifies the EU’s response towards Russian vaccine ventures. On one side, there is a general disinformation campaign to discredit the Russian jab and on the other are the people who support the import of the vaccine. Opponents of Matovic’s decision stated that the Russian government was using its vaccine as a “hybrid war tool” while Matovic defended his actions stating that the Russian vaccines are “reliable” and that they are the only solutions available to ameliorate the slow domestic vaccine rollout. This specific case highlights the general discrepancy in approach towards the Russian vaccine which has created divides in what were previously tight-knit EU countries.

Russia’s ventures into the European Union have been staggered with some deals signed and others rejected. Russia has allegedly sent the vaccine to Serbia and Montenegro at the same time that Croatia began talks to acquire Sputnik V. The Croatian health minister also authorized the vaccine without awaiting the EMA’s approval.¹⁸ Austria, after expressing similar needs, led talks of acquiring the vaccine and openly accused EMA of being slow to approve the Russian

11 “Coronavirus Cases,” Worldometer, 2021, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>.

12 Chelsea Gohd, “Russia Names Its 1st COVID-19 Vaccine ‘Sputnik V’ after Space Race Triumph,” Space.com, August 11, 2020, <https://www.space.com/russia-names-coronavirus-vaccine-sputnik-v.html>.

13 Chris Baraniuk, “Covid-19: What Do We Know about Sputnik V and Other Russian Vaccines?” The BMJ, March 19, 2021, <https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.n743>.

14 “Russia’s Sputnik V Covid-19 Vaccine Shows 97.6% Efficacy,” Pharmaceutical Technology, 2021, <https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/russia-sputnik-v-efficacy/>.

15 Chris Baraniuk, “Covid-19: What Do We Know about Sputnik V and Other Russian Vaccines?” The BMJ, March 19, 2021, <https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.n743>.

16 Jon Henley, “Is Russia’s Covid Vaccine Anything More than a Political Weapon?” The Guardian, April 30, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/apr/30/is-russias-covid-vaccine-anything-more-than-a-political-weapon-sputnik-v>.

17 Ibid.

18 Talha Ozturk, “Croatia May Get Russian Virus Vaccine without EU Nod,” Anadolu Ajansı, March 3, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/croatia-may-get-russian-virus-vaccine-without-eu-nod/2163653>

jab. The severe fragmentation and inconsistency of the EU's response highlights the reality that smaller member states in the EU often lack the power to combat the influential operations of larger players such as Russia and China.¹⁹

Where anti-Russian sentiment exists, countries have turned to China, as was the case with Poland, or they have opted to suffer through their own slow production. German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas has expressed concern over China and Russia's overbearing presence in these NATO-abiding regions and has called for greater unity stating, "Our multilateral solutions must succeed, if we don't want to lose our ground to those who argue that authoritarian regimes are better at dealing with a crisis like this."²⁰ These calls for unity amidst growing disintegration show that in face of need and domestic production insufficiency, the EU is not as unified as it once may have been. The vaccine diplomacy has revealed the potential of "soft power" in separating seemingly tight-knit communities of countries. It has also shown that when domestic initiatives to develop antidotes or other equipment are weak, there is often no other alternative left but to turn to "stronger" nations.

Despite this larger European Union debate, Russia's vaccine diplomacy has met other pushback. The Brazilian government banned the import of Sputnik V citing safety concerns and multiple news outlets have condemned Russia for sending the vaccine to reassert its global influence in areas where it has historically struggled to exert its power.²¹ Despite the level of outreach Sputnik V has been able to garner, the increased demand has not been met with equal levels of production. This has forced Russia into outsourcing production to China as a means of satiating global need.²² The united front created by these two countries has thus been perceived as a threat by the West and a means of covering as much ground as possible with their vaccines especially in areas where they would gain greater influence. The powerful pair has already been able to supply more than 70 countries with their doses and their efforts have even prompted US' strategic partners in the Middle East to approach them for vaccines.²³ While these moves may appear benign, many leaders in the US and the EU have accused the two countries of aggressive sales tactics, lack of transparency, and of undermining trust in other vaccines.²⁴ Both countries, however, given their rocky relationship with the West, have much to gain from these forms of "soft power diplomacy" to rebuild their credibility abroad.

Their increased global outreach raises the questions: what happened to the United States? Why hasn't it gotten involved? The US, which has produced three vaccines to date (Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson), has manufactured less than a quarter of the world's total supply of vaccines, with even less exported to other countries.²⁵ The reluctance to export surplus coronavirus vaccines or to engage in foreign manufacturing of the jabs, has left the United States vulnerable to criticism. What was at one point seen as a protective measure to ensure complete domestic vaccination, is now seen as selfish isolationism. Only after a substantial push from humanitarian groups, did the US begin to share its limited stockpile of AstraZeneca vaccines with other countries.²⁶ Many people have claimed that exporting the shots before securing complete domestic rollout would only create pushback among Americans themselves and might

19 Tim Gosling, "Russia and China Are Exploiting Europe's Vaccine Shortfalls," *Foreign Policy*, March 31, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/31/russia-china-vaccine-diplomacy-slovakia-europe-eu-slow-rollout/>.

20 Ibid.

21 David Biller, "Brazil Regulator Rejects Sputnik Vaccine; Russia Cries Foul," *Associated Press*, April 27, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/health-global-trade-brazil-russia-business-b92f2914cc338beb44e594b6472cf42f>.

22 Huizhong Wu and Daria Litinova, "Russia Turns to China to Make Sputnik Shots to Meet Demand," *Associated Press*, May 03, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-europe-russia-china-coronavirus-b041b3ad9d699de25a05c8f7ebcb4eb9>.

23 Yasmeen Serhan, "Here's How Russia and China Are Helping the U.S.," *Defense One*, April 14, 2021 <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2021/03/heres-how-russia-and-china-are-helping-us/173014/>

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

send the message that global predominance comes before domestic health concerns. However, the consequences of not doing so have the potential to undermine the global image of the United States as a leader willing to offer scientific, technological, and diplomatic assistance to countries in need.²⁷ The slow rollout would also mean greater chances of the emergence of variants and an inability to reach herd immunity worldwide. Many world leaders have stated that the longer vaccines are “sequestered” the greater the chances of a “vaccine apartheid” where favoritism, self-interest, and personal gain come before the actual widespread distribution of the antidote. In order to truly engage in substantial vaccine diplomacy, the US would benefit from fulfilling the needs of countries that have rejected the Russian vaccines (such as Brazil) or to provide their versions of the antidote to areas that have suffered from Chinese vaccine efficacy failures (such as the UAE).²⁸ This reach, although limited, could fill in the gaps where other countries have failed to extend their diplomatic aims and could give the United States a future “leg-up” in their own vaccine ventures.

Amid the growing criticism against countries such as Russia and China for their vaccine diplomacy endeavors and the constant disinformation campaigns being undertaken, it is important to ask: does it matter? Does it matter who the shots come from? Does it matter why they are being sent? Does any of it matter if what’s being offered can provide the world with a semblance of the “normality” it so desperately hopes to return to? For many of the EU leaders, the act of collaborating with Russia and China on this front is nothing more than a simple business deal. As Michael McFaul, former US ambassador to Russia, puts it, “We grossly exaggerate the payoff you get from trying to play geopolitics with humanitarian crises...It doesn’t do any good to say that China or Russia are using their vaccines to undermine our interests if you don’t have something else to offer.” This statement shows the power of vaccine diplomacy as the perfect method of humanitarian intervention that can fill the void that domestic instability, slow production, and need, have widened. The United States’ unwillingness to engage earlier on in this endeavor means that the space was left open for other countries to step in and offer aid even if their motives were not all that altruistic. The debates formed around vaccine diplomacy reveal that at the core of the argument is a question of whether public health concerns should ever become politicized and if the two can even be separated to begin with.

Although still caught up in the midst of a current vaccine diplomacy era, the lessons gathered from this time are many and widespread. As many analysts note, global collaboration and coordination are essential in order to combat global health crises of this magnitude going forward. COVAX, the COVID-19 vaccine coalition sponsored by the World Health Organization, is one of the clearest examples of progress towards this objective.²⁹ Despite the fact that favoritism and selective distribution still remain, this type of partnership could prove fruitful in the long run when facing another pandemic. As with smallpox, the greater the collaboration, the faster the output, and the closer society gets to eradicate the disease. As COVID-19 has shown, competition, multilateralism, and scientific cooperation are important tools that have the potential to shape the relationships between countries and boost their domestic vaccine production. The regional dynamics formed during the past year and a half, due to vaccine diplomacy, also shed light on the behaviors that might be adopted in the changing world order of the future. The United States’ disengaged and isolationist approach,

27 Eliza Browning, “Initiatives and Benefits of the United States’ Vaccine Diplomacy,” *BORGEN*, April 18, 2021, <https://www.borgenmagazine.com/vaccine-diplomacy-2/>.

28 Michael B. Greenwald, and Michael A. Margolis, “Can Vaccine Diplomacy Shape a New World Order?” *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, December 2, 2020, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/can-vaccine-diplomacy-shape-new-world-order>.

29 Hung Tran, “What Vaccine Nationalism and Diplomacy Tell Us about Future Pandemics,” *Atlantic Council*, March 23, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/what-vaccine-nationalism-and-diplomacy-tell-us-about-future-pandemics/>.

Russia's rapid competitive and ambitious stance, China's swift supportive position, and Europe's disintegrated and sluggish response, all demonstrate particular approaches to a crisis that could be indicative of similar dynamics in the future. Even China's delayed response about the onset of the virus shows just how much communication, transparency, and dialogue is needed in order for countries to be allowed the time to develop contingency plans.³⁰

The coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent vaccine diplomacy have set in motion tremendous global shifts and have exposed the very real inadequacies and rifts that exist within society. In the face of a crisis this large and deadly, we have seen how weak domestic coordination has led to the establishment of dependent international relationships.³¹ The European Union, historically known for the strength of the collaboration among its member states, has been exposed as a fragile collective of independently-minded countries in face of Russian-Chinese vaccine diplomacy endeavors. With leaders divided between need and anti-Russian sentiment, their decision to accept life-saving vaccines from other countries has become highly politicized. It is no longer just about saving lives, the coronavirus pandemic has become about influence and power.

How a country responded to the present crisis says much about its ability to respond to other pressing global events in the future. The US' decision to break away from its position as a global leader and as a scientific collaborator could affect its diplomatic negotiations throughout the next decade and risk its influence in underdeveloped countries in the years to come. While Russia and China might very well reap the benefits of their widespread vaccine diplomacy initiatives, both could also find themselves incapable of living up to the promises they have made.

The increased criticism and accusations against Russia and China for engaging in these soft power tactics, ignore the fact that these countries have provided aid in areas of need and secured those deals earlier than the United States. Vaccine diplomacy, therefore, is not just a humanitarian intervention, it isn't just another term synonymous with 2020, and it isn't just a phase in the general evolution of the world. Vaccine diplomacy has emerged as a mirror revealing a new world order.

A world order in which the United States takes a disengaged stance, where Russia and China surge to the top as global scientific collaborators, and where the European Union's former ties have disintegrated into a coalition of member states each with their own individual agendas and beliefs. Vaccine diplomacy has revealed the danger of weak domestic pandemic responses, the balance between need and anti-Russian sentiment, and the risk that comes from choosing to disengage from the global community.

Vaccine diplomacy has redefined diplomacy itself, from being all about dialogue and conversation to becoming the balanced integration of multiple spheres of expertise and intelligence. The reality of another outbreak should not be foreign, but rather a condition of an evolving world that must be confronted with adequate measures and preparations. Coming out of the pandemic, vaccine diplomacy should return to what it once was back in 1798; the undisturbed, unpoliticized, and genuine exchange of knowledge and ideas for the preservation of human life.

30 Michael B. Greenwald and Michael A. Margolis, "Can Vaccine Diplomacy Shape a New World Order?" Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, December 2, 2020, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/can-vaccine-diplomacy-shape-new-world-order>.

31 Ibid.

Great Power Competition: Chinese Economic Expansion

SAMUEL KIM

One of the great realizations following the dramatic events of 2020, is the role of China as a great power. It has grown into a state that has the ability to exert its influence on the international stage. The coronavirus pandemic has revealed that even the most developed nations such as the United States may not always be the most effective in finding solutions to unexpected problems, despite having the greatest resources and technological advancements at its disposal.

As the United States and the rest of the world slowly transitions out of the coronavirus pandemic, the United States must face the challenge that China's vast economic expansion poses, and how it informs China's position in the field of great power competition.

One contributing factor to China's standing as a great power is the state's economic expansion, which includes two core strategies: the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). These two movements establish China's status as a great power because they expand the state's international spheres of influence while also forging economic ties to strategic locations across the globe.

The Belt and Road Initiative is touted by analysts as one of the largest infrastructure and investment projects in history. The BRI, calling back to its historical namesake of the Silk Road, is a massive infrastructure project stretching from East Asia to Europe, launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013.¹ Aimed at bolstering the status of the Chinese Yuan and "breaking the bottleneck of Asian connectivity," the BRI would involve creating a network of power plants, railways, highways, and ports to telecommunications infrastructure, fiber-optic cables, and smart cities.² More than sixty states, spanning two-thirds of the world's population, have signed onto the initiative, and the initiative is projected to have spent around \$1.3 trillion by 2027.³

The BRI has gained traction in multiple states because it serves as an alternative, more accessible source of funding for state infrastructure projects. Historically, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund supplied the majority funding to state operations. However, states have recently discovered the bureaucratic process of applying for this aid is slow and cumbersome. Not only that, the amount of aid available is not nearly enough to fund the desired projects of scale.⁴ China's BRI comes as a solution to these frustrations, as China has the perfect set of political motivations and economic resources to be in its particular position. Specifically, the advent of the BRI provides China the opportunity to step away

1 Andrew Chatzky, James McBride, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative," *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 28, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 David Dollar, "Understanding China's Belt and Road Infrastructure Projects in Africa," *Brookings Institution*, September 2, 2019, <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/understanding-chinas-belt-and-road-infrastructure-projects-africa/>



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from the United States' influence and utilize the vast excess resources in its infrastructure and development industries.

The underlying incentive for the BRI is an attempt to counter the US' "pivot to Asia" efforts. Initially conceived by Hillary Clinton and then furthered by the Obama administration, the "pivot to Asia" efforts were an attempt for the United States to play a more assertive role in Asia.⁵ As time progressed, the Obama administration shifted its posture such that it was raising its diplomatic voice at China.⁶ From China's perspective, these gestures gave credence to the idea that the United States is concerned about protecting its status as the global dominating power while also attempting to prevent China's ascension. China's implementation of the BRI is a way to subvert the US' attempts to disrupt its rise to power, while also gaining new allies across the globe, thus strengthening its influence. Specifically, the BRI affords China the opportunity to develop new investment opportunities in strategic international locations, foster export markets, and boost Chinese incomes and domestic consumption, all of which are outside the scope of its relations with the United States.⁷

The BRI allows China to make use of its economic standing in particular industries and regions to create a cohesive union. China's infrastructure and development industries have been under-employed and the economy has had a surplus in savings.⁸ With these resources, the BRI affords China the opportunity to boost global economic links to its own previously neglected western regions such as Xinjiang.⁹ China can then facilitate economic development in these areas to secure long-term stable energy capacities from Central Asia and the Middle East through trade routes which are outside US control.¹⁰

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership is often cited as the second pillar of China's economic expansion. The RCEP is a trading bloc that features regulations on intellectual property, telecommunications, financial services, e-commerce and professional services, and includes ten Southeast Asian states, with big-name players such as South Korea, China, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.¹¹ The RCEP's members comprise a third of the world's population and roughly 29 percent of the world's GDP.

The RCEP is designed to eliminate export tariffs for member states over the next twenty years, and was signed in hopes of spurring efforts to recover from the coronavirus pandemic.¹² At the time of signing, member states already had existing free trade agreements (FTAs) with each other. Yet these states often face tariffs despite having FTAs because some parts of a product have been produced in a different state. For example, a product made in Indonesia with parts from Australia would be subject to tariffs in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) zone as a result of these complex FTAs because the product contains parts from another state. Before the RCEP, this made sustaining global supply chains difficult and harder to navigate.

The RCEP aims to alleviate these difficulties by treating all member states' products equally under a concept labeled "rules of origin." Now, the same product made in Indonesia

5 Kenneth G. Lieberthal, "The American Pivot to Asia," *Brookings Institution*, December 21, 2011, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-american-pivot-to-asia/>.

6 Ibid.

7 Larry Hanauer, Lyle J. Morris, "Chinese Engagement in Africa: Drivers, Reactions, and Implications for U.S. Policy," *RAND Corporation*, 2014, p. 73–88, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt6wq7ss.13>.

8 David Dollar, "Understanding China's Belt and Road Infrastructure Projects in Africa," *Brookings Institution*, September 2, 2019, <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/understanding-chinas-belt-and-road-infrastructure-projects-africa/>

9 Ibid.

10 Andrew Chatzky, James McBride, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative," Council on Foreign Relations, January 28, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/background/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>.

11 "RCEP: Asia-Pacific Countries Form World's Largest Trading Bloc," *BBC News*, November 16, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54949260>.

12 Ibid.

with parts from Australia would be treated equally and not be subject to tariffs, thus incentivizing members to look within other member economies and supply lines for parts. The RCEP is projected to increase the global national income to \$186 billion annually by 2030 and add 0.2 percent to the economy of its member states with analysts estimating the partnership will benefit South Korea, China, and Japan the most.

China's economic push via these two movements are a means of strengthening its identity and solidifying its statecraft and thus are important considerations when discussing its status as a great power. The potential economic and political gains that China may reap from these two programs can serve to accelerate it beyond the current status quo, and granting China the opportunity to use these advantages as leverage for power and influence.

Analyzing the BRI, it is apparently quite popular in the developing world, mainly among states that are currently

involved, yet the opposite is true in developed states. The reason is that the involved developing states view the BRI as an opportunity to boost economic growth and fill in much-needed infrastructure gaps.¹³ Critics in developed nations, however, point out two faults within the program: its lack of transparency and the possibility that the BRI facilitates China's export of its authoritarian model and serves as a cover for its desire to expand its global influence and power.¹⁴

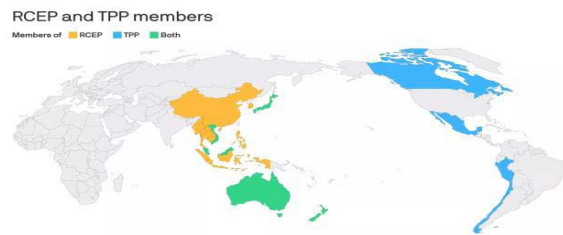


Figure 1: This map, which displays all the states involved in both the RCEP and the TPP, demonstrates a shift in China's effort to fill the economic power vacuum left by the noticeable absence of the United States. The majority of states involved in one or both trade agreements exist within the ASEAN zone. Source: Axios

Developing nations' criticism that the BRI lacks transparency stems from the fact that it is difficult to find information on specific projects, including key details such as the amount loaned out to states, the terms of these loans, the selection process for the contractors of the individual projects, and what environmental and social risks are involved.¹⁵ In fact, some opponents argue their criticisms are justified because the funds China lends out are low-interest loans as opposed to aid grants. Combined with the lack of transparency, this allows China to set the financial terms of their investment with little to no pushback.

The RCEP and its economic benefits also hold considerations for China's status as a great power. While it is obvious that the RCEP boosts the GDP of its member states, the United States is notably absent from this trade bloc. Considering the fact the RCEP is the first time China has signed a regional multilateral trade pact, China's distancing from the United States through this measure could be interpreted as an attempt to establish an economic identity separate from the United States as its largest exporter of goods.¹⁶

China's decision to join the RCEP is a response to the US' efforts at agenda-setting, as

13 Larry Hanauer, Lyle J. Morris, "Chinese Engagement in Africa: Drivers, Reactions, and Implications for U.S. Policy," RAND Corporation, 2014, p. 73–88, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt6wq7ss.13>.

14 Lloyd Thrall, "In China's Expanding African Relations," *RAND Corporation*, p.9–20, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt15zc655.9>.

15 David Dollar "Understanding China's Belt and Road Infrastructure Projects in Africa." Africa Portal. Brookings Institution, September 2, 2019. <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/understanding-chinas-belt-and-road-infrastructure-projects-africa/>

16 Lisandra Flach, Hannah-Maria Hildenbrand, Feodora Teti, "The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement and Its Expected Effects on World Trade," *Intereconomics*, 56, no. 2 (March 1, 2021), p. 92–98, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10272-021-0960-2>.

the RCEP provides similar benefits and expands China's influence in the ASEAN region, while simultaneously denying United States the spheres of influence it was trying to achieve via the Trans-Pacific Partnership before President Trump pulled out of the agreement. Moreover, China is projected to experience some of the largest tariff cuts out of the members of the RCEP, meaning that it will continue to expand its economic influence in the ASEAN region as its barriers to entry for resources and global supply lines continuously lowers.^{17 18}

In order for the United States to maintain its status on the international stage and check China's further ascension, it must first and foremost maintain a diplomatic strategy. Because China's economic expansion is a core component of its ascension to power, the United States can simply take efforts to match this expansion with its allies and in areas of strategic interests. This can be accomplished in two ways: reentering the TPP and encouraging the World Bank to aid in more infrastructure funding or directly providing aid to states' projects.

Reentering the TPP is the most important step the United States can take in matching China's economic expansion efforts. The absence of the United States in the TPP left a power vacuum that was quickly filled by China via the RCEP.¹⁹ Should the United States reintroduce itself as a member of the partnership, it has the opportunity to offer itself as an economic power to counterbalance or cooperate with China. Because the TPP offers the same protections and benefits as the RCEP, the United States reentering the partnership would grant it the same economic benefits as China with the RCEP, such as the reduction of tariffs. This in turn would allow the United States to pursue economic moves that would match China's for the same cost. This would also serve to strengthen existing bilateral trade agreements with partner states.

Another diplomatic strategy the United States can pursue to match Chinese economic efforts is encouraging the World Bank to aid in more infrastructure funding or directly provide funding to states' infrastructure projects in the same way the BRI has. States have increasingly turned to the BRI as a means of acquiring more financial aid for their infrastructure projects more easily. This is not a statement in support of China, but rather each individual state making a set of decisions that best supports their own interests. As such, should the United States provide another option for funding for these states through their own initiative or provide more funding to the World Bank and the IMF and to loosen the bureaucratic processes needed to gain access to this funding, the United States can continue to match China's efforts to increase its economic presence.

The BRI and the RCEP programs demonstrate China's willingness and resolve to elevate itself to great power status. The United States and its allies must deeply examine these economic developments and, judging China's true intentions, analyze the effect on the political and economic relationships of the numerous states involved. When formulating a response to China's economic moves, the best approach is to maintain a diplomatic stance and match China's efforts in order to maintain the pace of nurturing and maintaining diplomatic ties with other states, while gaining influence in those respective regions. The United States should also create a strategy such that it is properly equipped to engage in any sort of confrontational interaction with China. Ultimately, in order for the United States to maintain its competitive advantage and global status on the international stage, it must be agile enough to respond to China's economic advances.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Inkyo Cheong, Jose Tongzon, "Comparing the Economic Impact of the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership," *Asian Economic Papers*, 12, no. 2 (Summer 2013), p. 144–70, https://doi.org/10.1162/ASEP_a_00218.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Biosecurity Risks and Vulnerabilities in the Post-2020 World

SKYLAR POLLOCK

The global spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) since early 2020 has demonstrated how modern societies remain vulnerable to biological threats. By mid-December 2020, the world suffered 172 million cumulative cases and accounted for 3.83 million deaths.¹ As a globalized phenomenon, the Americas and Europe felt the pandemic's impact at greater magnitudes, accounting for 85 percent of new cases and 86 percent of deaths globally.² Although uncertainty remains surrounding the origins of COVID-19, the novel virus clearly shows the detrimental effects and impacts pathogens can forge on our globalized society.

This article examines biosecurity risks and vulnerabilities in the post-2020 world. As the world seeks to recover, the attractiveness of biological weapons, highlights sectors with biological vulnerabilities, and identifies new threats. It is imperative to understand the biosecurity and bioterrorism vulnerabilities revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Fortifying institutional mechanisms and existing industries will prove necessary to combat the weaponization of biological components to maintain the international order and peace worldwide.

Attractiveness of Biological Weapons

New biological threats must be discerned from the COVID-19 pandemic. While biological weapons are considered weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), they differ in the decentralized nature of the attacked environment and can spread over an uncontrolled period. Harmful pathogens travel quickly in an interconnected twenty-first century world. Great power competition promotes scientific and biological advances that may “permanently alter the national security landscape and their uses for offensive and defensive purposes.”³ As this interstate rivalry motivates and accelerates biotechnology research and scientific innovation, barriers to the development of biological weapons decrease.

The extensive research and progress made for understanding the human genome provides vulnerabilities for nefarious actors to take advantage. Due to an understanding of the way the human genome differs, in which genetic variation can express physical differences among individuals, synthetic biological agents may be developed to target specific populations. Weaponized biological agents provide lethal means of dispersion, surmounting national boundaries and fortified security measures that can leave broad populations vulnerable, including important elements of national security apparatuses, such as high-level government and military officials.

1 “WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard,” *The World Health Organization*, June 15, 2021, <https://covid19.who.int/>

2 “Weekly Epidemiological Update – 15 December 2020,” *The World Health Organization*.

3 Joanna Rozpedowski, “Bio-Security in the Age of Global Pandemics,” *Global Security Review*, April 20, 2021, <https://globalsecurityreview.com/bio-security-in-the-age-of-global-pandemics/>



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In October 2020, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley and senior Pentagon officials were required to quarantine after a colleague tested positive for COVID-19.⁴ National leaders themselves may be vulnerable to illness; US President Donald Trump, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, among many others, contracted the novel coronavirus in 2020. The ability of biological weapons to reach powerful individuals poses possibilities for hindering the regular functioning of government institutions as well as weakening a state's ability to respond in times of war or emergency.

Several advances in the field of biology, biotechnology, and synthetic technology have increased the access and likelihood of weaponizing a biological agent due to the diffusion of knowledge among individuals and accessibility via the Internet. In addition to scientific progress, the costs of artificially creating biological agents have decreased significantly, and thus will decrease the expertise and equipment costs necessary to create such agents. According to Ernst & Young, "the first sequencing of the human genome required 13 years and US\$3 billion; today, it takes a week and US\$600."⁵ Coinciding with the decreased barriers to entry, the interest of synthetic biology by layman is increasingly growing and has become known as "biohackers," who seek to biologically alter their own bodies. Untrained scientists and non-state actors can seek to weaponize biological agents without truly understanding the underlying scientific implications.

Biological weapons can confound traditional deterrence strategies, impeding a state's ability to harden defenses. The traditional two-pronged approach to successful deterrence rests not only on a state's ability to credibly threaten a powerful, punishing response, but also relies on the ability to identify the perpetrator to punish wrongdoing. Biological weapons can be attractive due to their ability to deliver a nonattributable payload, blurring the certainty needed to designate a retaliatory response.⁶ While global leaders have politicized and attributed Chinese responsibility to the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, the difficulty to prove intent or malice reduce the ability to provide a clear response. This explicit difficulty of attribution may create an appeal for the use of biological weapons by future actors.

Institutional Vulnerabilities

Recognizing the need for international oversight and cooperation on the dangers of biological weapons, the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) went into effect in 1975.⁷ Supplementing the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which prohibited the use of biological and chemical weapons following the deployment of poisonous gases and chemical agents in World War I by multiple nations,⁸ the BWC prohibits the "development, production, acquisition, transfer, stockpiling and use of biological and toxin weapons."⁹ While the Convention serves to uphold an institutional norm against the use and proliferation of biological weapons among its member states (currently comprising of 183 states), it is far from perfect.

4 Barbara Starr and Zachary Cohen, "Senior Pentagon leadership quarantining after exposure to coronavirus, CNN, October 6, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/06/politics/pentagon-leadership-self-isolating-coronavirus/index.html>

5 John de Yonge, "How the COVID-19 Outbreak could provide Synbio's Breakout Moment," *EYQ*, May 6, 2020, https://www.ey.com/en_us/covid-19/how-the-covid-19-outbreak-could-provide-synbios-breakout-moment

6 Elizabeth L. Stone Bahr, "Biological weapons attribution a primer," *Naval Postgraduate School*, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/3483>

7 "Biological Weapons Convention," *United Nations Office for Disarmament*, <https://www.un.org/disarmament/biological-weapons/>

8 "Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare (Geneva Protocol)," *U.S. Department of State*, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/isn/4784.htm>

9 "Convention on the Prohibition of the Development Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction," *Audiovisual Library of International Law*, <https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/BWC-text-English-1.pdf>

The BWC serves as the first international treaty to ban an entire class of weapons, although it fails to provide a verification or investigation mechanism, like those of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and Chemical Weapons Convention, for state compliance. Without any formal mechanism to investigate compliance violations, the BWC loses much of its ability and remains something more akin to a “gentleman’s agreement.”¹⁰ As posited by defense neorealists, including Kenneth Waltz, states may seek their survival by ensuring a balance of power by countering another state from becoming too strong.¹¹ Observing state noncompliance or violations may incentivize other states to proliferate or further develop a biological weapons program in order to ensure its national security and wellbeing. Without a formal mechanism to ensure BWC compliance, member states lack the incentives to uphold the treaty and may only further perpetuate violations to the BWC.

Following the global COVID-19 outbreak, many questioned the origins and the possible release of the harmful biological pathogen by China. While China’s participation in the BWC began in 1984, various US defense and intelligence reports held the understanding that China maintained its biological weapons program from the onset of its BWC commitment, in violation of their treaty responsibilities. Chinese noncompliance remained an issue of concern for the past four decades and even consumed great time in a 2019 US Senate hearing on Biological Threats to U.S. National Security.¹²

In addition to China, Russia has historically defied BWC member obligations and secretly continued its biological and chemical weapons programs. In August 2020, Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was poisoned with Novichok, a Soviet-era nerve agent, presumably employed by senior Kremlin officials.¹³ As great power competition continues to disrupt the current international order, the development of biotechnology and biological weaponry is expected to increase. In early April 2021, allegations emerged over the possibility that the US is developing biological weapons along borders of China and Russia.¹⁴ As biological weapons programs continue to go unchecked by the BWC, further development, uses, and hostilities over biological weapons will continue to grow and present challenges to the global security environment.

While ensuring BWC compliance has been challenging for decades, the long-term and global implications observed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic may call greater attention to, incentivize actors, and enhance biological weapons activities.

Economic Vulnerabilities

Observing the international community’s pandemic response over the last year provides insight into how the world might react in the event of a biological weapons incident, and shows how much national insecurity and economic havoc can be wrought by biothreats.

Addressing the macroeconomic implications of a biological attack, nations may seek to take advantage of vaccine diplomacy and global assistance. The cost of developing, producing, and distributing vaccines places a tremendous burden on a nation, which many developing nations cannot afford. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States spent more

10 Lukas Trakimavicius, “Is Russia Violating the Biological Weapons Convention?” *Atlantic Council*, May 23, 2018, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/is-russia-violating-the-biological-weapons-convention/>

11 Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), pg. 4

12 Claudia Adrien, “Chinese biotechnology Dominates U.S. Senate Hearing on Biological Threats,” *Homeland Preparedness News*, November 21, 2019, <https://homelandprepnews.com/countermeasures/40093-chinese-biotechnology-dominates-u-s-senate-hearing-on-biological-threats/>

13 “Russia Responsible for Navalny Poisoning, Rights Experts Say,” *UN News*, March 1, 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086012>

14 Brendan Cole, “Vladimir Putin’s Adviser Says U.S. is Developing Biological Weapons Near Russia,” *Newsweek*, April 8, 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-china-nikolai-patrushev-vladimir-putin-biological-weapons-1581896>

than \$9 billion on purchasing vaccines,¹⁵ more than double Haiti's federal budget.¹⁶ Especially if the United States does not, other nations may seek to increase their global influence, dependence, and power by providing equipment and vaccine support to financially weak nations. In early 2021, India, encouraged by its "Neighborhood First" policy, seeking to bolster relations within its immediate region, began providing COVID-19 vaccines to its neighbors – selling or securing over 19 million doses.¹⁷ While India continues to suffer from the pandemic, it seeks to reinforce its regional influence and control within Southeast Asia.

Healthcare Response Challenges

At the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, hospitals and the medical community experienced drastic shortages in the personal protective equipment (PPE) necessary for providing essential healthcare while combatting the risk of exposure and spread of the virus. In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that 89 million medical-grade masks, 76 million examination gloves, and 1.6 million goggles were required for the pandemic response monthly.¹⁸ In the United States, stockpiles of PPE fell to dangerously low levels due to the medical community's lack of foresight for crisis planning and management. Over the last three decades, health systems in the United States shifted to just-in-time (JIT) inventory management to increase efficiency and decrease inventory costs.¹⁹ While this management system provides great benefits financially in normal times, it exacerbated the unavailability of inventory in times of emergency. US hospitals lacked essential stockpiles and necessary, long-term supply chains that connect local manufacturers to produce inventory quickly when needed.²⁰ Working under equipment constraints, healthcare workers began reusing single-use PPE or did not wear the appropriate PPE when tending to patients to conserve the dwindling stockpile, decreasing the effectiveness to protect oneself the spread of the virus.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the United States' and international community's vulnerability of the PPE supply chain to a biological attack. A potential aggressor's decision processes rests upon a cost-benefit analysis, in which the expected benefits of an attack must exceed its expected costs. Deterrence by denial seeks to deter an action by making it "infeasible or unlikely to succeed, thus denying a potential aggressor confidence in attaining its objectives."²¹ PPE acts as a primary bio-defense asset, as it seeks to minimize the spread of contagious pathogens, thus reducing, or denying, the harm an actor's actions can achieve and its subsequent benefits. The inadequate stockpile of needed defense to contagious biological agents can have grave implications for deterrence and defense strategies. The PPE supply chain breakdown highlights the international community's biodefense mechanisms and inability to defend oneself through deterrence by denial.

15 Karen Weintraub and Elizabeth Weise, "Federal Spending on COVID-19 vaccine candidates tops \$9 billion, spread among 7 companies," *USA Today*, August 10, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2020/08/08/feds-spending-more-than-9-billion-covid-19-vaccine-candidates/5575206002/>

16 Onz Chery, "Haitian government sets \$3.7 billion budget for 2021 fiscal year," *The Haitian Times*, October 1, 2020, <https://haitian-times.com/2020/10/01/haitian-government-sets-3-7-billion-budget-for-2021-fiscal-year/>

17 Sohini Bose, "The Dynamics of Vaccine Diplomacy in India's Neighbourhood," *Observer Research Foundation*, June 15, 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-dynamics-of-vaccine-diplomacy-in-indias-neighbourhood/>

18 "Shortage of personal protective equipment endangering health workers worldwide," *The World Health Organization*, March 3, 2020, <https://www.who.int/news/item/03-03-2020-shortage-of-personal-protective-equipment-endangering-health-workers-worldwide>

19 Bill C. Kinney and Stephen B. Symonds, *Just-in-Time Inventory Management: Application and Recommendations for Naval Hospital, Oakland*, (California: Naval Postgraduate School, 1992), <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a261824.pdf>

20 Bruce Y. Lee, "Why Mask, Gown, PPE Shortages Persist, Even Though Manufacturers Want to Help," *Forbes*, January 18, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucelee/2021/01/18/why-mask-gown-ppe-shortages-persist-even-though-manufacturers-want-to-help/?sh=395c45a66de2>

21 "Michael Mazarr J., *Understanding Deterrence*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE200/PE295/RAND_PE295.pdf p 2

Social Vulnerabilities

The social implications of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of a digitally connected society to a biological weapons incident. As the world becomes more technologically dependent and reliant on the dissemination of information online, the US and the globalized community is becoming increasingly susceptible to truth decay, “the erosion of trust in and reliance on objective facts in political debate and civil discourse about public policy.”²² The information overload online, 24-hour news cycle, and ability for any individual to spread their own thoughts as truth can perpetuate the spread of misinformation and disinformation. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the spread of falsified information created a rift between the scientific community and vast parts of the public sphere.

The spread of disinformation and misinformation and its ability to take hold has posed vulnerabilities to a biological weapons attack because it further erodes public trust for the government, as national leaders appear to be lacking control of the situation. The spread of multiple and inconsistent narratives eroded officials’ ability to create a consensus among its citizens and has further prolonged the pandemic and propagated the spread of the virus. This affects future deterrence efforts because it reveals an overall lack of trust and clarity needed to combat a harmful biological agent. Emerging in 2021 world, the anti-vaxxer movement gained traction throughout the creation and rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine. Non-compliance to recommended health measures can further impede a nation’s biodefense. Nefarious actors may view the public’s vaccine hesitancy and inability to comply with official’s recommendations as a potential weakness in a defense plan to curb the effects of a biological attack quickly and effectively.²³

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how biological incidents can perpetuate political and institutional distrust within the preexisting status quo of a nation, facilitating the push of marginalized individuals to seek refuge elsewhere. The increased use of social media throughout 2020 has added 316 million users, totaling to 5.22 billion unique mobile users,²⁴ increases the threat of spreading falsified information.

While the post-2020 world brings optimism surrounding the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, a dialogue about remaining biosecurity risks is vital. While the advancement and use of biological weapons is prohibited among most states, its lack of enforcement, coupled with the potential to inflict harm in numerous industries around the world, provides accessibility and appeal. To fortify the global security environment, the vulnerabilities and biosecurity risks must be assessed, intuitional design of the BWC must be reconsidered, and defense organizations must work tangentially with the public sector to minimize industry weaknesses.

22 Jennifer Kavanagh and Michael Rich, *Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of the Facts and Analysis in American Public Life*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), pg. 2

23 Regan Lyon F., *The COVID-19 Response has Uncovered and Increased Our Vulnerability to Biological Warfare*, (Military Medicine, 2021), pg. 2

24 Dave Chaffey, “Global Social Media Research Summary 2021,” *Smart Insights*, March 11, 2021, <https://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/>

Canary in the Coal Mine: The Need to Center Arctic Indigenous Voices amidst Great Power Competition

GRETA MARKEY

Each year since 1981, the Arctic has lost an average of 15 thousand square miles of solid ice cover, roughly the size of Switzerland.¹ Continued glacial melt coupled with an international relations framework of great power competition (GPC) will establish the Arctic as a hub for accumulating commercial, civilian, and military power; however, ice loss also threatens the well-being of indigenous cultures, current Arctic infrastructure, and the rest of the world. Politically, the Arctic Region consists of eight “Arctic States” – Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States. But what foreign policy conversations often fail to account for is the half million indigenous people living on circumpolar land who are essentially experiencing their culture melt away.

Twentieth century coal miners would bring canaries with them into their mines. Canaries were more vulnerable to carbon monoxide than the miners, so these birds acted as early indicators of this dangerous, life-ending toxin. An ill canary signaled immediate evacuation of the mines, and a dead canary meant it was even too late for some of the miners. Arctic indigenous communities are the canaries in a global coal mine. Throughout global history, larger, more powerful countries have taken advantage of the resources and positioning of indigenous land. Today, indigenous communities are threatened from two fronts: climate change and the focus on great powers in their region. Weak governance frameworks that lack climate change resilience leave native populations even more exposed to globalized, competitive exploitation.

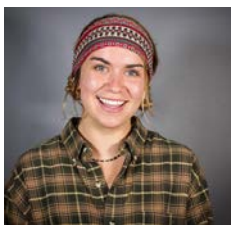
A global focus on great power objectives threatens and underrepresents indigenous cultures in regional and global discussions. This article outlines the history of Arctic indigenous populations, how they are threatened by climate change and GPC, and why governing bodies need to focus on native perspectives and land-management rights when making decisions about the future of the Arctic. Native populations are the true stewards of the Arctic. Their traditional ecological knowledge and management skills are critical to preserve and protect this region.

History of Indigenous Populations in the Arctic

The Arctic refers to all land and ocean north of the Arctic Circle plus the Aleutian Islands, the Bering Sea, and Portions of W. Alaska.² Within this region, there is land cover (a majority of which is permafrost-topped tundra), permanent sea ice cover, and seasonal sea ice cover. While indigenous populations have connected with and lived off this land from as early as 2500 BC, the Arctic has been of little global interest until the past two centuries.

1 “Arctic Sea Ice News & Analysis,” *National Snow & Ice Data Center*, updated April 6, 2021, <http://nsidc.org/arcticseaicenews/>.

2 Brian L Sittlow, “What’s at Stake with Rising Competition in the Arctic?” *Council on Foreign Relations*, May 1, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/whats-stake-rising-competition-arctic>.



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Most Arctic discourse is focused on Arctic indigenous populations as a whole, but in fact more than 40 culturally distinct ethnic groups live in the region, including the “Nenets, Khanty, Evenk and Chukchi in Russia, Aleut, Yupik and Inuit (Iñupiat) in Alaska, Inuit (Inuvialuit) in Canada and Inuit (Kalaallit) in Greenland.”³ Arctic populations began to climb in the 1950s and 60s because of increased indigenous healthcare and the discovery of vast natural resources.⁴ Larger urban hubs – often located near major resourcing infrastructure – have become more popular, but native Arctic populations tend to live in smaller, peripheral villages. Since the end of the Cold War, Arctic population growth has slowed. In places like the Russian Arctic, populations are actually decreasing, and this trend may continue as climate change and GPC renders previously stable communities less inhabitable.

In 1996, the eight Arctic states created the Arctic Council to promote common goals and harmony within the region, though it specifically excludes military dialogue. Within the council, six groups representing indigenous voices have permanent participation roles.⁵ Even though indigenous representatives still have no actual vote on procedural matters, the roles ensure them a seat at the table. Moreover, the Arctic Council lacks law-making and enforcement capability, more often acting as an advisory council as opposed to a governing body.⁶ Nevertheless, this council is valuable for its unique honoring of indigenous input and omission of militarized conversation.

Climate Change in the Arctic

The Arctic is warming at roughly twice the rate of the rest of the globe, resulting in a decreasing amount of sea ice cover and permafrost. This melting opens up more channels for travel in the region, but also poses risks for the ecosystem and the indigenous populations who rely on ice cover. Even the most conservative estimates of warming predict Arctic temperature changes above five degrees Fahrenheit by 2050, which will most likely force certain indigenous communities to relocate.⁷ For communities not displaced, glacial melt makes traditional travel routes inaccessible and poses a risk for infrastructure previously built on frozen land. Moreover, a depleted stock of seafood from overfishing and oceanic change will lead indigenous populations to rely on less nutritious, more expensive, imported perishables, further destroying their culture and perpetuating global nutrition inequity.⁸

Melting ice cover will render the region more economically and politically significant, as oil and gas stores become accessible.⁹ At the same time, the negative effects of warming may pose risks for the U.S. economy.¹⁰ The Arctic acts as a global heat sink, or “refrigerator,” where air and water are cooled and distributed to the rest of the world¹¹. A warming of the Arctic atmosphere and Ocean may affect this circulation, which can harm global ecological services. As permafrost melts, methane is also released from the underlying carbon-rich peat, which may create a positive feedback loop of global warming.¹²

3 “Arctic Indigenous Peoples,” *Arctic Centre University of Lapland*, <https://www.arcticcentre.org/EN/arcticregion/Arctic-Indigenous-Peoples>.

4 “Arctic Indigenous Peoples,” *Arctic Centre University of Lapland*.

5 Elizabeth Mayer, “Establishing the role of Permanent Participants on the Arctic Council: How Arctic Indigenous groups gained recognition on the Arctic Council,” *University of Washington*, January 31, 2019, <https://jsis.washington.edu/news/establishing-the-role-of-permanent-participants-on-the-arctic-council-how-arctic-indigenous-groups-gained-recognition-on-the-arctic-council/>.

6 “Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic,” *Grid-Arendal*, <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=2228ac6bf45a4cebafe1c3002ffef0c4>.

7 “Climate Change in the Arctic,” *National Snow & Ice Data Center*, 2021, https://nsidc.org/cryosphere/arctic-meteorology/climate_change.html.

8 “Arctic Indigenous Peoples,” *Arctic Centre University of Lapland*.

9 Lawson Brigham, “The Russian Maritime Arctic: Region of Great Change in the 21st Century,” *The Wilson Center*, April 6, 2021.

10 Rostin Benham, et al., “Managing Climate Risk in the U.S. Financial System,” *U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission*, 2020.

11 “Climate Change and Security in the Arctic,” *Center for Climate and Security*

12 “Climate Change in the Arctic,” *National Snow & Ice Data Center*.

Arctic indigenous communities that are most affected by ice melt contribute almost nothing to Arctic climate change. In fact, many countries who have major seats in determining the outcome of this changing region are the most responsible for warming. This hypocrisy is not lost on native arctic tribes. In 2005, the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment noted massive changes in Arctic ice cover.¹³ This same year, the Inuit population of Canada and Greenland filed a petition to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR), blaming the United States for failing to decrease CO2 emissions.¹⁴ IACHR did not specifically proceed with this petition, though they did begin to link climate change with human rights.¹⁵

Great Power Competition in the Arctic

Arctic climate change occurs within the framework of global competition between China, Russia, and the United States, each with their own interests in the region.¹⁶ Although the Arctic has historically been peaceful and demilitarized, during the Cold War, the Arctic became a strategic zone in the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union (USSR). The USSR positioned much of their nuclear deterrent capabilities in the Arctic. While the creation of the Arctic Council in 1996 signaled US-Russian regional de-escalation, the Arctic has since gained renewed coverage in resourcing, trade, and military potential.¹⁷

The Northern Sea Route (NSR), a Russian-dominated shipping route, can reduce Europe-to-China transport times by 40 percent.¹⁸ Previously accessible for only three to four months out of the year, ice coverage loss is making the NSR available for much longer. Even if the NSR never rivals other international routes like the Suez Canal, China is interested in developing the NSR into a 'Polar Silk Road' (PSR), part of their 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI). While China's push for the PSR seems to align with other powers' goals in the region, there are concerns that the PSR is a grey zone tactic to extend China's influence and control into the north.¹⁹

International fishing, hard minerals, fossil fuels and freshwater all exist in abundance in the Arctic. Many countries are positioning themselves to benefit from the NSR as a cargo route into the Arctic rather than a trade route or passage. Russia expects their destination cargo industry in the Arctic to reach 75 million tons per year by 2025 – a 300 percent increase from 2019²⁰ – to set their natural gas production on par with Qatar and the United States. Where US resourcing in the Arctic accounts for less than 1 percent of their GDP, the Arctic contributes to about 20 percent of Russian GDP.²¹ As a result, Russia has a much larger incentive to promote resource extraction in the Arctic, and inversely they will probably oppose any measures to limit it.

Russia is also rebuilding its military presence in the Arctic, and other countries, including the United States, Canada, and Norway, have expanded Arctic military training.²² Whether for resource protection or nuclear deterrence, more Arctic activity creates uncertainty around each state's intentions. A poorly defined governance structure in the region exacerbates this uncertainty, leaving populations vulnerable to grey zone tactics. Even though it is in each

13 "Arctic Climate Impact Assessment," Working Group of the Arctic Council, 2005.

14 Charlotte Luke, "the Effects of Arctic Warming on Indigenous Communities," *Earth.org*, February 11, 2021, <https://earth.org/effects-of-arctic-warming-on-indigenous-communities/>.

15 "Inuit Petition and the IACHR," *Campaign Update, Center for International Environmental Law*.

16 "Great Power Competition," The Wilson Center, 2021, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/issue/great-power-competition>.

17 Andreas Østhagen, "Geo-Strategic Competition in the Arctic: What Next?" *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung*, <https://www.kas.de/documents/272774/272823/Østhagen+Studie.pdf/742910f6-fcce-613d-add6-712d100dea52?version=1.0&t=1599727616835>.

18 "Climate Change and Security in the Arctic," Center for Climate and Security, 2021.

19 Østhagen, "Geo-Strategic Competition in the Arctic: What Next?"

20 Brigham, "The Russian Maritime Arctic: Region of Great Change in the 21st Century."

21 Brigham, "The Russian Maritime Arctic: Region of Great Change in the 21st Century."

22 "Climate Change and Security in the Arctic," Center for Climate and Security.

state's best interest for the Arctic to remain peaceful, increased military presence establishes the Arctic as a region of increasing tension.

Indigenous Inequity created by GPC

The current focus on GPC in policy circles – and thus American, Chinese, and Russian arctic capabilities – diverts attention from the vulnerabilities of underrepresented populations. “Competition isn’t a strategic goal,” says Daniel Nexon, a professor in Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service. “It’s a means to an end. The decision to compete with another great power should always be over something specific; it should center on ... how the specific objective contributes to long-term goals.”²³

While increased activity in the region does not directly oppose native objectives, the most important Arctic voices are being stifled by bigger, louder, dirtier states. Infrastructure development in the Arctic, like access to broadband, may connect and amplify indigenous voice; however, they must not be instituted without the consultation of the communities.²⁴ Indigenous populations have strong connections to the land, which means their economic and cultural health are most sensitive to large shifts in resource accessibility. As larger countries continue to export capital from less-developed regions without assurance that these regions are equitably managed, globalization can lead to exploitation.

Ninety five percent of the world’s indigenous population live in developing countries,²⁵ and often, their cultures and traditions directly oppose the appetite of consumer-fueled resourcing. Powerful countries have a history of harming native communities for capital. This history of exploitation for economic and political advantage must not be disguised or validated by GPC.

How Governing Bodies Should Adapt

Since 2005, activity within the Arctic region has increased tremendously, yet governing bodies have failed to establish policies that account for such a drastically changed environment. Arctic governance should be reevaluated, as “increased commercial activity [will] strain the monitoring and enforcement [capabilities] of existing regulatory agreements.”²⁶ In 2016, The International Maritime Organization revised their Polar Code to more extensively monitor shipping operations in polar waterways.²⁷ Other regulatory agencies and governing bodies should follow suit, particularly when it comes to resourcing legislation. The Arctic Council is the current and most relevant advisory committee within the Arctic, and while it has created a few binding agreements, strong governing strategies are necessary to hold players accountable.²⁸

Because the Arctic warms more quickly than the rest of the world, Arctic native experiences serve as early and accurate indicators of failing ecological, economic, and political structures. Indigenous place-based knowledge of ecological cultivation is invaluable to Arctic management regimes. Governing bodies must adapt to promote indigenous stewardship in their decision-making. The Wilson Center Polar Institute proposed a body to carry out international objectives within the Arctic, which it calls SILK for “scientific knowledge, Indigenous knowledge,

23 Robert Farley, “Welcome to the All-Consuming Great Power Competition,” *The Diplomat*, February 23, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/02/welcome-to-the-all-consuming-great-power-competition/>.

24 Tina Pidgeon, “Building the Broadband Bridge between Arctic Providers and Peoples,” *The Wilson Center, Polar Institute*, March 8, 2021, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/no-1-building-broadband-bridge-between-arctic-providers-and-peoples>.

25 Erica-Irene Daes, “The impact of globalization on Indigenous Intellectual Property and Cultures,” <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/news/speeches/impact-globalization-indigenous-intellectual-property-and-cultures>.

26 “Climate Change and Security in the Arctic,” Center for Climate and Security.

27 “International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters (Polar Code),” *International Maritime Organization*, <https://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/Pages/Polar-default.aspx>.

and local knowledge.”²⁹ SILK acknowledges a governmental obligation to promote the input of scientific, indigenous, and local knowledge to support equitable and inclusive policymaking.

International bodies must also provide displaced indigenous populations with resources, autonomy, and input into place-based action plans. Insufficient, short-term aid has previously been a solution to looming Arctic degradation. Governments and agencies must

“International bodies must also provide displaced indigenous populations with resources, autonomy, and input into place-based action plans.”

strategize to provide long-term financing for community development or more focused aid for individual resettlement.³⁰ When it comes to countering GPC, a majority of government funding goes toward defense. In reality, this funding may be more effectively allocated toward addressing the human-security issue rather than escalating the military-security one.

Conclusion

The Arctic indigenous population, in terms of climate change and the resurgence of GPC, is an ill canary in a global coal mine. This irreplaceable region experiences global warming more than twice as fast as the rest of the world, and indigenous populations are losing their land and traditions. The instability of native populations in the Arctic should serve as a warning for the negative effects of climate change and preoccupied foreign policy on periphery populations around the world. GPC as a strategy harms and devalues the voices of indigenous populations within the Arctic. Governing bodies must therefore work to validate, refocus, and collaborate with these voices if they hope to combat the largest global and regional effects of a warming planet.

29 Betsy Baker, “Smart as SILK: An innovative advisory body for implementing the knowledge- based requirements of the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement,” *Wilson Center, Polar Perspectives*, April 2021, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/Polar%20Perspectives%204.%20Smart%20as%20SILK_0.pdf.

30 Fran Ulmer, “Addressing Dramatic Changes in the Bering Strait Region Requires Governance Adaptations,” *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School*, 2020.

Declining Perception of US Institutions Among International Students? A Look at Potential Trends

TZE LING NG

According to an article in the Washington Post, there was a clear and drastic decrease in international students in the 2020-2021 academic year.¹ Some education experts, such as Allan Goodman, head of the Institute of International Education, believe that this is an isolated phenomenon that will pass with the pandemic.² However, the fact that new enrollments of international students in the United States have been falling since 2015 suggests that this might be more than just another casualty of the Covid-19 pandemic. Are international students perceiving the United States less favorably as a destination for higher education?

The United States has enjoyed tremendous popularity as a destination for higher education over the past few decades, consistently attracting the greatest number of international students. In recent years, however, there has been a steady decrease in the number of new enrollments of international students, at the undergraduate and graduate level, which suggests US institutions might not have the allure they once did. This stands in stark contrast with similar “competitor” countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia which have seen spikes in enrollment over the same period.

This article will review some of the data publicly available, theoretical models of decision-making that international students may be utilizing, as well as discuss potential reasons for the decline.

Decreasing Enrollment of New International Students

There was a 43 percent decrease in new enrollments of international students in the United States during the 2020-21 academic year, from the 2019-20 academic year.³ Part of the decline is certainly a direct result of the pandemic, as more than 40,000 students have deferred their enrollment to enroll in a future term.

However, enrollment of new international students in the United States has been decreasing since 2016, after more than a decade of healthy growth. In the fall of 2017, there was a 6.6 percent decrease in new student enrollment, though that decrease stabilized at 0.9 percent for 2018 and 2019.⁴

1 Miriam Berger, “The Pandemic has damaged the appeal of studying in the United States for some international students,” The Washington Post, July 23, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/07/23/coronavirus-international-students-united-states-enrollment-reputation/>.

2 Kavitha Cardoza, “Enrollment By International Students in U.S. Colleges Plummets,” NPR, December 2, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/02/912669406/enrollment-by-international-students-in-u-s-colleges-plummets>.

3 Julie Baer and Mirka Martel, “Fall 2020 International Student Enrollment Snapshot Survey,” Institute Of International Education, 2020.

4 Jodi Sanger and Julie Baer, “Fall 2019 International Student Enrollment Snapshot Survey,” Institute of International Education, 2019.



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Nonetheless, it must be understood that enrollment is not necessarily a direct or best reflection of the perception of US institutions. Decreasing enrollment could stem from fewer applications (which might suggest declining perception), but from US colleges accepting international students. Unfortunately, that data is not as publicly available, as it would require individual institutions to divulge their application data. It could also reflect the overall number of international students decreasing, though that does not seem to be the case, as currently available data shows a steady increase in the number of international students globally each year.⁵

Decision-Making Models

There are three main types of models used to explain students' decision-making regarding their choice of institution of higher education.⁶ This includes economic models, sociological models, and information processing models of student choice. Each of these models can be applied to international education. Furthermore, this analysis will highlight a model that was designed specifically for international students.

Economic Models of Student Choice

The basis of the economic models is a cost-benefit analysis. These models suggest that students are using the costs related to their studies (both real costs and opportunity costs) and weighing them against the benefits of the degree. Such costs would include, but are not limited to, tuition, as well as visa application, travel, and other expenses associated with living in a foreign country. Benefits would include future job prospects and expected earnings.⁷

The tuition costs of a four-year degree at an American university, both public and private, has more than doubled in the past 20 years, significantly outpacing inflation.⁸ Given that many institutions have strict restrictions on the amount of financial aid international students can receive, this means that they often bear the full brunt of such costs.

The focus on future employment also means that international students are increasingly drawn towards programs that promise work-study opportunities such as internships. Even factors like graduation date, which can affect the student's place in line for work visa applications, can play a big role in their ultimate decision.⁹

Sociological Models of Student Choice

Sociological models consider the students' background in making the choice for higher education. This includes aspects such as family background (socioeconomic status), academic ability, school counsellors, self fulfilment, motivation, and personal goals. The model also takes into account the influence of friends and families on the student's choices during the decision-making process, which has been empirically proven to be a crucial factor for international students.¹⁰

As mentioned above, the costs of studying in an international institute are hefty. The application process itself can also be complex, with each school having their own set of

5 "International Students," Migration Data Portal, 2020, <https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/international-students>.

6 Jonathan Peter Ivy, "Choosing Futures: Influence Of Ethnic Origin In University Choice", *International Journal Of Educational Management* 24, no. 5 (2010), doi:10.1108/09513541080000449.

7 Richard Chapman, "Toward a Theory of College Choice: A Model of College Search and Choice Behavior", University of Alberta Press, Edmonton, 1984.

8 Briana Boyington and Emma Kerr, "20 Years of Tuition Growth at National Universities", *US News*, 2020. <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/paying-for-college/articles/2017-09-20/see-20-years-of-tuition-growth-at-national-universities>.

9 Aisha Labi, "What do International Students Want? Jobs", *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 21, 2010, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/what-do-international-students-want-jobs/>.

10 Anil Tan. "College Choice Behaviors of International Students.", *SAGE Open*, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244015618995>.

requirements. As a result, international students must have the resources to navigate the systems, whether through their personal relationships or their schools before they can even apply.

Information Processing Models of Student Choice

The information processing models combine both the economic and sociological models to attempt to replicate the application process that international students go through. This includes the choice of going to university, going to university overseas, and then selecting a program or institution. One model proposed the decision-making be conceptualized as a five-stage process which starts with the identification of a problem which needs a solution, followed by the search for information, an evaluation of alternatives, selecting an institution and finally evaluating the institution.¹¹ Interestingly, studies have found that students of different national origin go through different stages of the decision-making process, or experience them in a different order.¹²

An information processing model proposed by Cubilo, Sanchez, and Cervino (2006), was designed specifically for international education. One of the major factors they considered was the image of the destination country. They drew upon marketing research, as higher education is often studied as a service provided. In the process of product evaluation, country image is assumed to be the first source that consumers consider, since the attitude of consumers towards the products or services are related to their stereotypes about the country of origin. This is supported by studies that show that country image influences the evaluation of a product or service much more than other variables.¹³

The Importance of International Students

Why does it matter if international students think less of the United States as a study destination? As it turns out, it matters quite a bit.

Diversity on College Campuses

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, students must develop global cultural skills to succeed. International students provide different perspectives and cultures to the college campus, both inside and outside the classroom. A study from Duke University found that the presence of international students on campus provided domestic students the opportunity to encounter new ideas and perspectives that were sharply different from their own.¹⁴ The study concluded that interaction with their international peers correlated positively with acquisition of general education, leadership skills, and intellectual development, in part due to increased willingness to question and challenge their existing beliefs. The study also found that cohorts that had higher levels of international student enrollment had significantly higher levels of interaction with them, which led to greater development of the three personal attributes mentioned before. While the study stresses that the presence of international students on campus alone is not enough to bring about interaction between domestic and international students, it is an important prerequisite in increasing diversity on the college campus.

As colleges increasingly realize how important diversity is to the central mission of their institutions, they, and every other entity interested in improving the college experience,

11 Felix Maringe and Steve Carter, "International students' motivations for studying in UK HE: Insights into the choice and decision making of African students", *International Journal of Educational Management* 21, no. 6 (2007), doi:10.1108/09513540710780000.

12 Suh Li Phang, "Factors influencing international students' study destination decision abroad", University of Gothenburg, Sweden, 2013.

13 José María Cubillo, Joaquín Sánchez, and Julio Cerviño, "International Students' Decision-Making Process," *International Journal of Educational Management*, 20, no. 2, (2006).

14 Jiali Luo and David Jamieson-Drake, "Examining the Educational Benefits of Interacting with International Students", *Journal of International Students* 3, no. 2, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v3i2.503>.

should invest more in attracting international students.

Cultivating Top Global Talents

It would be a sham to host a US tournament with only US teams and call its victors the World Champions. Similarly, for US colleges and universities to be able to legitimately call themselves world class institutions, they must attract and cultivate talent from all over the world. This means ensuring that their student body represents a diverse range of countries.

“It would be a sham to host a US tournament with only US teams and call its victors the World Champions. Similarly, for US colleges and universities to be able to legitimately call themselves world class institutions, they must attract and cultivate talent from all over the world.”

A successful global knowledge economy hinges on its attractiveness to global talent. Indeed, one study found that the competition for global talent should begin during higher education, particularly when it comes to international education.¹⁵

Contributions to the Economy

International students studying at American universities and colleges contribute significantly to the national economy. According to NAFSA: Association of International Educators, international students at U.S. colleges and universities during the 2019-2020 academic year contributed \$38.7 billion to the U.S. economy. This comes from various sources, including, tuition fees, rent, and other living expenses. It also includes the scientific and technical research they help support, the jobs they create, and myriad other avenues.

International students are particularly important to the STEM industries. International students make up a disproportionate amount of the full-time graduate students in electrical engineering (81 percent), computer science (79 percent), and civil engineering (59 percent).¹⁶

The United States relies on such engineers and scientists to remain on the cutting edge of innovation. This is one of the reasons the Obama administration decided to implement a 24-month extension of OPT for students graduating with a STEM degree that makes it easier for them to stay in the United States to work.¹⁷

Projection of Soft Power

Soft power, as defined by Joseph Nye, was a form of non-coercive power that a state could leverage to “get others to do what they otherwise would not”. He suggested that it would consist of cultural, ideological, and institutional power.¹⁸ As a popular destination for higher education, the United States has the opportunity to shape and influence the next generation from other countries and is implicitly setting the norms across the globe. International students act as informal diplomats, developing trust with their host country, which can also lead to future visits and business interactions.

15 Jeanine Hermans, “High Potentials: A CEO Perspective”, Journal of Studies in International Education, 2007, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315307304187>.

16 Cardoza, cit.

17 Brendan O'Malley, “International students key to US lead in innovation”, University World News, October 14, 2017, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20171014060817300>.

18 Eric Li, “The Rise and Fall of Soft Power”, Foreign Policy, August 20, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/20/the-rise-and-fall-of-soft-power/>.

The United States leads in another measure of soft power; the number of current world leaders (heads of governments and heads of states) who chose to be educated in another country. The United States can claim a total of 62 world leaders educated in the United States, giving it a narrow lead over the United Kingdom, which has educated 59 world leaders.¹⁹ This is important because studies have shown that personal contact with the United States shapes individuals' dispositions toward it.²⁰ By having more world leaders, and not just leaders in the political sphere, who have influence and power, sympathetic to the United States due to their personal experiences, is certainly beneficial.

Discussion and Future Research

There appears to be a downward trend in the reputation of US universities and colleges among international students. However, according to the most recent data, the claim cannot be decisively proven. Future research should investigate application data from US schools to establish if there is a trend of international students being rejected at a higher rate from US institutions. Polling data among prospective international students, as well as international students already in the United States would also be an important avenue for enhancing the picture. Finally, future research should also aim to delineate the trends of undergraduate and graduate students, as each demographic has vastly different needs and serves different purposes to the institutions, as well as to the United States as a whole. It is important to carry out this research and identify potential pitfalls in the current system, to avoid losing out on the benefits that international students bring with them, as global competitors ramp up their recruitment efforts.

19 Martin Armstrong, "Where World Leaders Were Educated", Statista, September 5, 2019, <https://www.statista.com/chart/19249/soft-power-where-leaders-educated/>.

20 Nathan Urban and Ariel C. Armony, "How the US benefits when it educates future world leaders", The Conversation, May 31, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/how-the-us-benefits-when-it-educates-future-world-leaders-95999>.

America's Modern Sharecropping: The Student Loan Debacle

EMILY DUBOIS AND ETHAN RHABB

Sharecrop (v)

1. *(of a tenant farmer) cultivate (farmland) giving a part of each crop as rent.*¹
2. *a type of farming in which families rent small plots of land from a landowner in return for a portion of their crop, to be given to the landowner at the end of each year.*²

Today, 44.7 million Americans collectively owe 1.71 billion USD in student loan debt.³ Out of 17.5 million undergraduate students in 2019 about 69 percent took out loans. The amount of the loans varied depending on the type of university (public, non-profit, for-profit), with the average student graduating with \$32,600 across the board.⁴ Meanwhile, about 54 percent of graduate students take out loans, but somehow account for more than half of America's collective student debt while only accounting for about 13 percent of its population.⁵ According to the U.S. Department of Education, about 20 percent of borrowers are in default.⁶ A default is a failure to repay a debt, including interest or principal, on a loan or security that is more than 270 days past due.

Disparities

Women bear the burden of nearly one-third of this total collective student loan debt. The Brookings Institution notes that, while black college graduates owe \$7,400 more on average than their white peers when attaining their bachelor's degrees, "over the next few years, the black-white debt gap more than triples to a whopping \$25,000."⁷ By the fourth year following graduation, their debt is almost double that of their white peers. To put it into perspective, for those born in the early 1980s, there are a greater number of white Americans from the richest 10 percent of the income distribution who went to college than all Black Americans combined today. These are borrowers who are usually able to make their payments. Meanwhile, the burden

1 "Definitions of Sharecrop," Lexico.Com, Oxford University Press, 2020, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/sharecrop>.

2 History.com Editors, "Sharecropping," HISTORY, June 7, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/sharecropping>.

3 "U.S. Student Loan Debt Statistics for 2021," Student Loan Hero, January 7, 2021, <https://studentloanhero.com/student-loan-debt-statistics/>.

4 Ibid; Celia Miller, "College Enrollment & Student Demographic Statistic," EducationData, June 7, 2019, <https://educationdata.org/college-enrollment-statistics>.

5 Adam Looney, "The Student Debt Burden and Its Impact on Racial Justice, Borrowers, and the Economy," Brookings Institution, April 13, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/the-student-debt-burden-and-its-impact-on-racial-justice-borrowers-and-the-economy/>.

6 "Default Rates," Studentaid.gov, <https://studentaid.gov/data-center/student/default>.

7 Judith Scott-Clayton and Jing Li, "Black-White Disparity in Student Loan Debt More than Triples after Graduation," Brookings Institution, October 10, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/black-white-disparity-in-student-loan-debt-more-than-triples-after-graduation/>.



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sits differently on the shoulders of the less financially mobile: “low-income students who receive Pell Grants graduate with an average of \$31,000 in student loan debt – \$4,500 more than their peers who did not receive Pell Grants.”⁸

When borrowers are consistently *not* able to make their payments, the issue of defaulting rears its ugly head. Borrowers who default on loans face penalties that are often debilitating to financing a well-rounded life. A default can inhibit a borrower’s ability to secure necessities reliant on their financial records like an affordable home or car insurance, and they also leave borrowers’ bellies exposed to more liberal government action over their income, assets, or benefits. The issue rears its head again for those that do not make it to graduation day, a considerable demographic often overshadowed even though “more than half of students who enroll in college don’t complete a degree.”⁹

The outbreak of the novel Coronavirus has made a bad situation both better and worse. As part of America’s pandemic relief measures, created under the CARES Act defaults were halted. Prior to the upheaval, 11.1 percent of student loans were 90-days-plus delinquent or in default. Monthly student loan payments were also halted — prior to the repayment moratorium, the average payment was \$300.¹⁰ On March 30, 2021, the COVID-19 emergency relief measures were expanded to defaults on federal student loans made through the Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program.

America’s current practice of student loans is a tried and true residual of sharecropping.¹¹ Historian Ian Ochiltree argues that sharecropping emerged because “the planters and landowners, weakened by war, politically emasculated by Reconstruction, and rendered insolvent without emancipation with compensation - were not strong enough to enforce the type of labor settlement of their former slaves that they desired.”¹² Sharecropping provided the means for white Americans to contain and continuously dehumanize Blacks despite the “confines” emancipation imposed on them. Following emancipation, Blacks weren’t able to own land, per the discriminatory laws and lending practices that arose after the end of the Civil War. In 1910’s Georgia, for example, more than 40 percent of white farmers owned land, compared to Black farmers’ seven, while more than fifty percent of them worked as sharecroppers or wage workers. With sharecropping, white landowners echoed slavery, this time hoarding the profits of Black workers’ agricultural labor under the pretense of mutual business, and trapping them in generation-spanning cycles of poverty and debt.

For black Americans, sharecropping advertised independence and entrepreneurship, with croppers able to obtain land, tools, livelihood all on a schedule. In the *Journal for Southern African Studies*, Ochiltree documents the aftermath of emancipation, noting how “these attempts

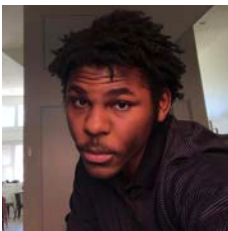
8 “Free College, Cancel Debt,” Bernie Sanders Official Website, <https://berniesanders.com/issues/free-college-cancel-debt/>.

9 Ibid.

10 “U.S. Student Loan Debt Statistics for 2021.”

11 Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War Two* (Icon Books Limited, 2012), <https://books.google.com/books?id=2v-BYWrl9IC>.

12 Ian Ochiltree, “Mastering the Sharecroppers: Land, Labour and the Search for Independence in the US South and South Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, no. 1 (2004): pg. 43.



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to restore families and redirect their labor to serve the needs of the household rather than the planter, were integral to the self-sufficiency that freed people sought from sharecropping.”¹³ Farmers would rent, loan, or lease land and equipment to the farmer at high prices, with the “expectation” being for them to offset those costs with the revenue of their crop, optimally with profit. Instead farmers would fall into so much debt that they would not be able to use their loaned assets to repay the amounts they owed. Oftentimes, farmers would knowingly provide them poor land, sowing failed harvests for the sharecroppers and reaping the fruits of someone else’s labor for themselves. Sharecroppers could find themselves bound to that property, with no choice but to take out more loans to try to work their way out. Sharecropping fell from prominence in the 1940s, subdued by the onset of the Great Depression and ruled out thanks to mechanization. But with 1.71 billion USD to its new name today, it hasn’t lost its fire.

How Did We Get Here?

Discriminatory and racist policies—those borne both from the post-emancipation-Jim Crow era and more recent decades—have been shown to be key inhibitors to the building of generational wealth in black families, a hindrance exacerbated by disparities in employment and educational opportunities and benefits. Any policy that mirrors sharecropping is one of those discriminatory and racist policies. To require a student to pay a portion of their income to a student loan agency for the majority of their working life—all for the purported “privilege” of going to college—is to parallel the leech-like nature of sharecropping. High interest rates, unscrupulous landlords, and unpredictable harvests stand the test of time, translating into high interest rates, unpredictable job opportunities, and unscrupulous landlords, and wages and public benefits that fail to satisfy the demand for regular loan payments today.

As sharecropping pulled on the heartstrings with tunes of reclaiming independence, colleges and universities beat a drum of zeal and appeal, pandering to students’ insecurities and application processes with barrages of emails, texts, pamphlets, and ads. A focus group in Florida examined the fervent advertising campaigns employed by local for-profit universities, noting the disproportionate enrollment of black, single parent, and older students, and their “intense advertising and personal recruiting; quick, frictionless enrollment; flexible scheduling; and the lack of entrance requirements,” all subverting the daunting word “cost.”¹⁴ Schools like these often advertise further borrowing after the fact, too. Instead of loaning a student money outright, they offer the chance to attain a tool that will get you that loan’s value and more: a degree, often touting lofty ideals of ease and affordability. Meanwhile half of defaulters never completed a degree, even though households without a degree only account for eight percent of student debt. As we already know, however, the issue spares nobody, with wages that successful graduates do manage to attain often failing to satisfy the demand for yearly loan payments, both timelines and value-wise. With defaulting, the punitive nature of repayment failure then sets debtors up for an endless cycle, one not unlike the cycle sharecroppers faced when they couldn’t break even on an annual crop. According to Pew Charitable Trusts, twenty-five percent of people who restored their loans to good standing ended up defaulting again within five years.¹⁵ The nature of repayment is also far from the loaners’ conveyed ease-of-procedure during initial advertisement, fraught with misinformation and borrowers who fall off their payment path being “relentlessly pursued by debt collectors, charged interest on interest and exorbitant

¹³ Ian Ochiltree, pg. 44.

¹⁴ Robin Howarth and Robert Lang, “Debt and Disillusionment - Stories of Former For-Profit College Students as Shared in Florida Focus Groups,” Center for Responsible Lending, August 2018, <https://www.responsiblelending.org/sites/default/files/nodes/files/research-publication/crl-florida-debt-disillusionment-1-aug2018.pdf>.

¹⁵ Sarah Sattelmeyer, “Student Loan System Presents Repayment Challenges,” Pew Charitable Trusts, November 6, 2019, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2019/11/student-loan-system-presents-repayment-challenges>.

collection fees, and have vital safety net resources taken until the debts and collection fees are fully paid off.”¹⁶

Student loan repayments are scheduled to resume on January 31, 2022. However, despite the enactment of the CARES Act, a majority of borrowers have not seen a significant level of support. According to a survey by Student Loan Hero, a company under the loan agency Lending Tree, 85 percent of those who took advantage of the freeze failed to see an increase in savings. Another 55 percent of borrowers were unsure if they would be able to regularly make payments once forbearance ends while about an equal amount felt they would either be able to make only the first payment or none at all (26 percent and 29 percent respectively).¹⁷ While this is based on data collected in December 2020 under the assumption that forbearance would end in January 2021, not much has changed since then, from the state of economic security to student loan policies.

There are a wide variety of proposed long-term solutions to the debt crisis and the resulting disparities. Three of the most popular proposals are as follows:

Biden’s Plan: On April 28, 2021 President Biden introduced the American Families Plan in order to make education more financially accessible and the access to these resources more equitable. While the plan needs first to be passed by Congress in order to be enacted as a law, the plan would provide at least four additional years of free education, though not all not in the post-high school institutions as many have advocated for.¹⁸ Biden’s plan of universal, free access to two years of college education can be seen as an introductory compromise to more well-known college accessibility proposals that were a primary topic of debate during the 2020 presidential election campaigns. Biden’s plan focuses on free education while stating that he would be “prepared to write off the \$10,000 debt but not \$50 [thousand], because [he doesn’t] think [he’ll] have the authority to do it.”¹⁹ Forgiveness up to \$50,000 tends to be the most popular type among Democrats, with fewer preferring up to \$10,000. Republicans do not appear to be open to the idea of student loan forgiveness in any form.²⁰

Universal Forgiveness Plan:

The plan of universal loan forgiveness for all Americans regardless of the borrower’s background or income level was popularized by Senator Bernie Sanders during his presidential campaigns. Recognizing that one-time forgiveness isn’t enough, the “College for All Act” as proposed by Senator Sanders and Representative Pramila Jayapal would provide free access to community college for every person in the country and eliminate tuition and related fees at public postsecondary institutions for families making up to \$125,000.²¹ This would encompass nearly 80 percent of families and provide at least \$48 billion per year for the previously stated initiatives for equitable access to postsecondary education.²²

16 “Open Letter to Secretary of Education John B. King,” National Consumer Law Center, August 17, 2016, <https://www.student-loanborrowerassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/ltr-sec-king-race-student-debt.pdf>.

17 Rebecca Safier, “Student Loan Payments Set to Resume, but 55% Can’t Afford Them,” Student Loan Hero, January 6, 2021, <https://studentloanhero.com/featured/student-loan-relief-covid-2021/>.

18 “Fact Sheet: The American Families Plan,” The White House, April 28, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/state-ments-releases/2021/04/28/fact-sheet-the-american-families-plan/>.

19 Joseph Biden and Anderson Cooper, “CNN Presidential Town Hall with Joe Biden,” CNN, February 16, 2021, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/210216/cnnt.01.html>.

20 Megan Leonhardt, “We Asked More than 500 Congress Members about Student Loan Forgiveness—Here’s What We Found,” CNBC, April 22, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/04/22/student-loan-forgiveness-where-members-of-congress-stand.html>.

21 “College for All Act Introduced by Jayapal and Sanders,” Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal (blog), April 21, 2021, <https://admin-jayapal.house.gov/2021/04/21/college-for-all/>.

22 “Free College, Cancel Debt,” Postsecondary education includes public colleges and universities, tribal colleges, community colleges, trade schools, and apprenticeship programs.

Income Based Plans:

Income-Based student loan forgiveness is the most variable of the proposed systems. Income cut-offs and the amount to be forgiven often change depending on who is proposing the specific initiative, however, like Senator Sanders, Senator Warren's Income-Based student loan forgiveness plan was popularized during her 2020 presidential run. In her inopportunistically titled proposal, "My Plan to Cancel Student Loan Debt on Day One of My Presidency," Senator Warren outlines a tiered debt cancellation policy based on income where gradually, the more you earn, the less debt will be forgiven. Borrowers earning up to \$100,000 annually would be eligible for a maximum benefit of \$50,000, while those making between \$100,000 and \$250,000 would receive incrementally less. Those with annual income exceeding \$250,000 would not be eligible for any forgiveness.²³

Solutions like Biden's skim the surface of the borrowers' plight with a wide net, attempting to undertake a variety of measures geared to bypass partisan scrutiny rather than sustainably address the student loan and accessible education issues. With this wide but shallow focus, too many critically affected Americans fall through the holes. Meanwhile, universal loan forgiveness, while easy on the ear, is actually regarded as one of the worst options.

Full forgiveness of existing student debt would cost more than the cumulative amount spent on programs like unemployment insurance, or the Earned Income Tax Credit, or food stamps over the last 20 years. And in contrast to those targeted programs, the beneficiaries of student loan forgiveness would be vastly richer, whiter, and better educated.

While universal forgiveness is flawed by design, more palatable solutions like Senator Warren's still cut at the corners of principle, too. Many income-based solutions do not actually address the issue of lifelong, debilitating, debt, only further enabling the toxic qualities of educational financing. While confining borrowers' loan debts within a seemingly manageable package, they often enable the sharecropping-esque trend of working with loans over one's head for a substantial part of a borrower's life.

All in all, America's educational loan-financing scheme is a modern corporate plantation, another system built on the backs of those who get the short end of the stick. When that mountain of a debt system crumbles, the ones on the bottom will be the first to bear its burden.

²³ Elizabeth Warren, "My Plan to Cancel Student Loan Debt on Day One of My Presidency," Warren Democrats, <https://elizabeth-warren.com/plans/student-loan-debt-day-one>.

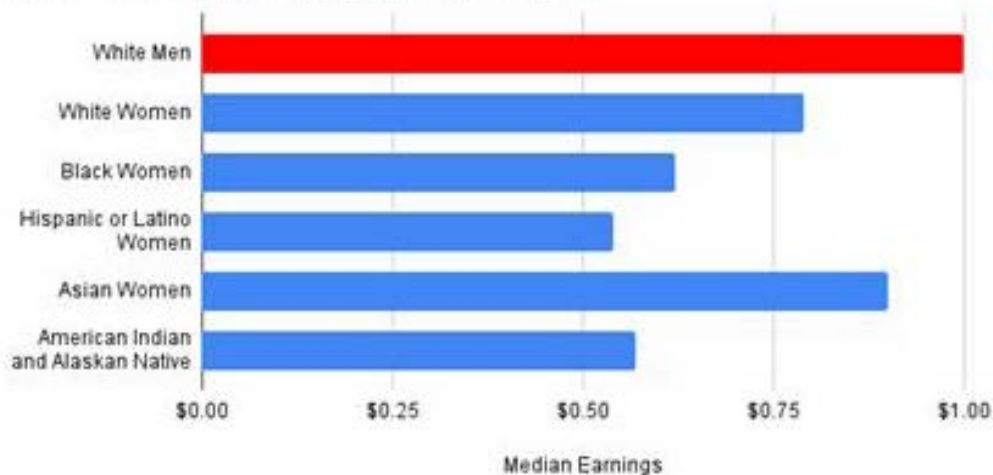
The She-Cession: For Now, or Forever?

DAPHNE KASS

"Feminism has never been about getting a job for one woman. It's about making life more fair for women everywhere. It's not about a piece of the existing pie; there are too many of us for that. It's about baking a new pie." -- Gloria Steinem¹

In November 2020 the American people elected the first female vice president. A month later the American Economy lost 140,000 jobs. According to CNN, all of them were held by women.²

Figure 1: Comparing 2018 median earnings of full time, year-round workers by race/ethnicity and sex



Credit: Center for American Progress

This moment of incredible progress for women was tarnished by enormous losses in the female labor force due to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We have been left to wonder why the pandemic exacerbated gender inequality in the workforce and what policies are necessary

¹ Gloria Steinem, "Wrong Woman, Wrong Message," Los Angeles Times, September 4, 2008, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2008-sep-04-oe-steinem4-story.html>.

² Annalyn Kurtz, "The US economy lost 140,000 jobs in December. All of them were held by women," CNN, January 8, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/08/economy/women-job-losses-pandemic/index.html>.



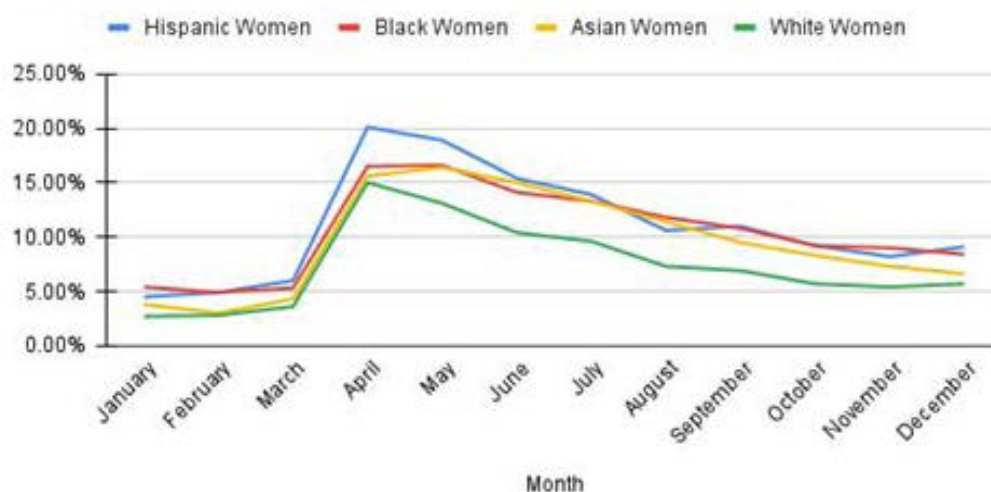
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to combat this injustice. While there were numerous factors that led to the she-cession --the term coined by Dr. C. Nicole Mason referring to the recession in which more women have been affected³ -- it is evident the US lacks the social infrastructure to support and work towards gender equity.

The new administration, therefore, needs to take advantage of this moment in time and implement policies that will support American women and their families and empower them to pursue any path they desire in life. The United States should invest in a social infrastructure that addresses persistent inequalities because gender equality will benefit the US economy and society.

Gender equity policies in the United States need to be updated because there has been minimal progress in recent years. While the election of Vice President Harris is momentous, it is not indicative of the general movement towards gender equity. Women, particularly women of color, still earn significantly less money. The left-of-center Center for American Progress states that according to “most recent Census Bureau data from 2018, women of all races earned, on average, just 82 cents for every \$1 earned by men of all races.”

Figure 2: 2020 unemployment rate, by race or ethnicity, for women ages 20 and over



Credit: Center for American Progress

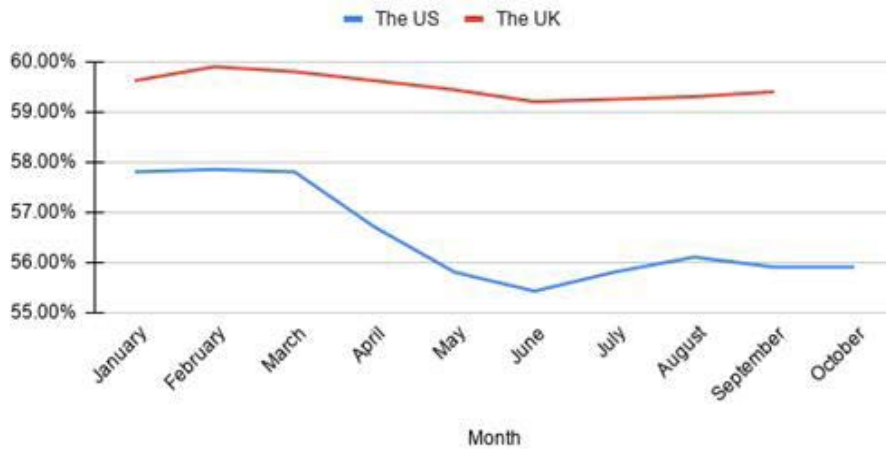
So despite the fact that a Black and South Asian woman was elected to the second highest office in the US, there is still a significant wage gap. The Center for American Progress adds that the primary causes of the wage gap are differences in industries or jobs worked, differences in years of experience, differences in hours worked, and discrimination.⁴ All of these factors have led to the enduring wage differences for men and women.

Moreover, there has been very little progress in recent years. According to The Hamilton Project of the liberal Brookings Institution,

3 Alisha Haridasani Gupta, “Why Some Women Call This Recession a ‘Shecession,’” *New York Times*, May 9, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/09/us/unemployment-coronavirus-women.html>.

4 Robin Bleiweis, “Quick Facts about the Gender Wage Gap,” March 24, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2020/03/24/482141/quick-facts-gender-wage-gap/>.

Figure 3: Female Labor Force Participation Rate in 2020
(Percent)



Credit: Peterson Institute for International Economics

between 1962 and 2000, women's labor force participation—defined as the percentage of women ages 16 and older either working or actively looking for work—increased dramatically, from 37 percent to 61 percent...However, beginning in 2000, the positive trends slowed and even reversed: women's participation fell from 60.7 percent in 2000 to 57.2 percent in 2016.⁵

While policies influenced by the women's rights movement resulted in significant progress, it is clear that to get further, current policies are insufficient. Failure to support women in the labor force were then exacerbated by the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Policies to help women in the work force need to be improved because their failures led to the she-cession. While the response to the pandemic was devastating for the entire American economy, it was particularly bad for women. According to the Center for American Progress, "Over the course of the first 10 months of the pandemic, women—particularly women of color—have lost more jobs than men... Overall, women have lost a net of 5.4 million jobs during the recession—nearly 1 million more job losses than men."⁶ Women and particularly women of color experienced the brunt the economic loss during 2020. The primary reason is that the industries hit hardest by the pandemic are ones dominated by women. "As Americans stopped traveling and staying at hotels," the Center for American Progress explains, "attending live entertainment, and eating out at bars and restaurants, employees in the leisure and hospitality industry—53 percent of whom were women—saw the greatest job losses, accounting for nearly 2 in 5 jobs lost in the recession."⁷ As female dominated industries struggled, the US economy experienced a tragic loss of female involvement in the labor force. Moreover, women of color

5 Diana Boesch, "When Women Lose All the Jobs: Essential Actions for a Gender-Equitable Recovery," February 1, 2021, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/es_10192017_decline_womens_labor_force_participation_blackshanzbach.pdf.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

lost significantly more jobs.

However, this loss was not inevitable. “Between January-March and April-June, 2020, the average female labor force participation rate, the percent of women either employed or actively looking for work, in the United States fell dramatically from 57.7 percent to 55.4 percent. By contrast, over the same time period, female participation in the UK labor force fell only slightly, from 59.8 percent to 59.2 percent,” Reports the Peterson Institute for International Economics.⁸

In summary, the US lost significantly more female jobs than the UK despite the similarities as nations. So rather than blaming the response to the pandemic, it is important to look at the underlying policies that both caused the she-cession and led to the stagnation of progress in female labor force participation since 2000. Once the problem is understood, progress can be made.

Policy Solutions to Improve Gender Equity in the Work Force

“The first problem for all of us, men and women, is not to learn, but to unlearn,” Gloria Steinem has said.⁹ The United States needs to improve gender inequities in the workforce because helping women accomplish their goals will benefit the US economy and society. The Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institution states that “estimates suggest that the economy is \$2.0 trillion, or 13.5 percent, larger than it would have been had women’s participation and hours worked remained at their 1970 levels.”¹⁰ Women are an essential part of the American economy and a source of potential growth for the country as a whole. “In order to facilitate economic growth in the United States, policies should be directed toward enabling and encouraging women to participate in the labor force,” Declares the Hamilton Project.¹¹

Numerous sources have outlined comprehensive plans for policy changes to accomplish this goal. The Center for American Progress proposes some short-term solutions. As well, the authors break down their proposal into three categories: Creating a robust care infrastructure, ensuring fair and equal wages and quality benefits, and creating stronger workplace protections.¹²

A robust care infrastructure is needed because the lack of comprehensive childcare limits female access to the workforce. The lack of comprehensive childcare during the pandemic further exposed this gaping flaw in the American social system. The US is significantly behind other comparable nations in terms of childcare. It is time that this country makes child-care affordable and effective. This includes providing federal assistance to help families pay for care as well as funding to ensure care-workers have fair pay, workplace benefits, and protections.¹³ Additionally, all workers need access to permanent, comprehensive paid family leave, medical leave, and earned paid sick leave¹⁴ so that everyone can have the time off that they need, and women are not penalized for being perceived as needing more paid leave. While effective policies for equal wages, equal benefits, and workplace protections are an ongoing policy process, these

8 Simeon Djankov and Eva Zhang, “Female labor force participation has been more resilient during the pandemic in the UK than in the US,” December 15, 2020, <https://www.piie.com/research/piie-charts/female-labor-force-participation-has-been-more-resilient-during-pandemic-uk-us>.

9 Gloria Steinem, “A New Egalitarian Life Style,” August 26, 1971, <https://www.nytimes.com/1971/08/26/archives/a-new-egalitarian-life-style.html>

10 Sandra E. Black, Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, and Audrey Breitwieser, “The Recent Decline in Women’s Labor Force Participation,” October 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/es_10192017_decline_womens_labor_force_participation_blackschanzenbach.pdf.

11 Ibid.

12 Diana Boesch, “When Women Lose All the Jobs: Essential Actions for a Gender-Equitable Recovery,” February 1, 2021, accessed April 25, 2021, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/es_10192017_decline_womens_labor_force_participation_blackschanzenbach.pdf.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

changes are achievable.

Second, policymakers need to push for fair and equal wages, quality benefits, and to create strong workplace protections because the current policies are insufficient in order to help women. These goals will require a more extensive and lengthy process of policy reform.

"We'll never solve the feminization of power until we solve the masculinity of wealth." -- Gloria Steinem¹⁵

Biden's Plan for 2021 and beyond.

President Biden's current policies for gender equity are insufficient. His 2020 platform states:

As President, Biden will pursue an aggressive and comprehensive plan to further women's economic and physical security and ensure that women can fully exercise their civil rights.¹⁶

The platform then expands into various categories, including improving economic security, expanding access to health care and tackling health inequities, helping women navigate work and families, ending violence against women, and protecting and empowering women around the world. Meanwhile, since entering office he has yet to live up to these goals.

As well, Biden's current policy strategy for women is insufficient because it focuses primarily on paid leave. Biden has taken two significant steps towards helping women, however. The first was by forming a White House Gender Policy Council. "According to the Biden transition team, 'the council will help guide and "coordinate government policy that impacts women and girls' across a variety of issues, including racial justice and economic security, and work in cooperation with other White House policy councils," the Hill reported.¹⁷ While this seems like a good measure, thus far minimal action has come from the council.

The second step Biden proposed towards helping women is his "American Families Plan." This proposal has a lot of positive improvements like paid leave, affordable childcare, and cheaper education.¹⁸ However, to date, these changes remain in the planning stage.

During Biden's campaign, he pledged to build America back better. The she-cession set back women in the workplace, but the country was already failing to give women equal opportunities. The she-cession will dictate the path of the next generation of women. Either policymakers will step up to fight for gender equity, or the nation's women, families, and economy will suffer. Now is the time to build back better, the young people of this country are watching.

15 Gloria Steinem, "A New Egalitarian Life Style," August 26, 1971, <https://www.nytimes.com/1971/08/26/archives/a-new-egalitarian-life-style.html>

16 The Biden Agenda for Women, "Battle for the Soul of the Nation, Biden Harris Democrats, <https://joebiden.com/womens-agenda/>.

17 Aris Folley, "Biden, Harris announce formation of White House Gender Policy Council," January 19, 2021, <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/534893-biden-and-harris-announce-formation-of-white-house-gender-policy>.

18 "Fact Sheet: The American Families Plan," Statements and Releases, The White House, April 28, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/28/fact-sheet-the-american-families-plan/>

The Biden Administration's Strategy for Restoring Faith in Democracy at Home and Abroad

ZACHARY LEE AND NICHOLAS MURPHY

In the past year, an unprecedented 73 countries, about 75 percent of the world's population, have witnessed some amount of democratic erosion.¹ This is due to a plethora of reasons (many relate to COVID-19 and many being on recent social phenomena). And when we look at all of the things that lead to where we are today, the year 2005 deserves the spotlight. Since that year, there's been a steady in erosion of democracy across the globe.

This past year, we've seen at least 40 governments around the world take advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to further concentrate their executive power. Many countries endure different struggles because of the pandemic, both economic and social. According to Carnegie Mellon University Assistant Teaching Professor Ignacio Arana,

An important relatively recent global phenomenon has been the rise of populist authoritarians, who can be left-leaning or right-leaning. Left-wing populist authoritarians thrive when there is income inequality and poverty that they can exploit to gain support. Right-wing populist authoritarians grow when there are ethnic and cultural tensions, especially against immigrants and minorities. That is what has happened in the US and in Western European countries in the last years.²

However, it is important to note that modern history has seen multiple waves of democratization and autocratization. Because these trends follow historical patterns, we do not believe that there is cause for concern. We predict that as time goes on, there will continue to be more waves, but overall, the number of democracies will continue to expand. And yet, there has also been some erosion of democratic institutions in the United States, with some blaming the Trump administration in particular.³ What does this mean for President Joe Biden's term in office?

The Biden administration has developed a three-pronged strategic proposal in response to the challenge: rebuilding our democracy and democratic coalitions; supporting the US position in the global economy, and actively responding to global threats.

The administration's strategy -- entitled "The Power of America's Example"⁴ -- is based on the idea that our own democracy must be strengthened before democracies across the

1 Repucci, Sarah, and Amy Slipowitz. "Democracy under Siege." *Freedom House*, freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege.

2 Arana, Ignacio. Nicholas Murphy and Zachary Lee. Personal interview. May 12, 2021.

3 Klaas, Brian, "Opinion: The Five Ways President Trump Has Already Damaged Democracy at Home and Abroad," *Washington Post*, April 1, 2019, www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/04/28/the-five-ways-president-trump-has-already-damaged-democracy-at-home-and-abroad/.

4 "Build Back Better: Joe Biden's Jobs and Economic Recovery Plan for Working Families," *Joe Biden for President*, August 6, 2020, <https://joebiden.com/build-back-better/>



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globe can be supported. It is multifaceted and all three prongs work in tandem to achieve the administration's goals.

To carry out the first prong, President Biden seeks to empower traditionally marginalized groups and promote social equity. This includes reforming our public education system to eliminate racial and economic inequities, altering how the criminal justice system operates, and restoring the Voting Rights Act. These proposed actions would, in theory, free these traditionally marginalized communities from many of the institutional roadblocks that prevent them from achieving the same degree of success as more privileged groups. Once the roadblocks have been removed, these traditionally marginalized groups would be able to fully participate in all aspects of our democracy, allowing our democracy to operate as it ideally should.

In addition to empowering these groups, the plan also includes various institutional safeguards, such as greater transparency requirements for election campaigns, the devotion of greater resources to protect election systems, and the institution of strict anti-corruption policies for all in the administration.

These measures make significant strides in addressing the issues American democracy currently faces, but it is arguable that more needs to be done. For example, Biden's plan includes no measures to tackle the issue of gerrymandering, which many attribute to the source of much of today's electoral inequalities. Biden's strategy does not need to completely cure our democracy, but it cannot afford to let some of the biggest offenders off scot free.

"Our own democracy must be strengthened before democracies across the globe can be supported."

The second prong of the Biden administration's strategy to reassert American leadership and promote democracy across the globe is to support our country's position in the global economy. The first part of this effort is to support the American middle class. Biden proposes approaching this issue by increasing access to affordable healthcare, raising the minimum wage to \$15, and investing in clean energy to create jobs. Biden specifically addresses the issue of the middle class because of its sheer size; the middle class is, inherently, the largest economic class of Americans. Their vitality is a significant determinant of American competitiveness in the global economy.

The second part of this prong is to support innovation. Our world is constantly changing and it is important to keep up with technological advancements to stay competitive. The Biden strategy focuses on proposed investments in a variety of high-tech concepts such as quantum computing, AI, and 5G. These kinds of investments are necessary to ensure that the United States stays competitive in an economy that is increasingly defined by these kinds of technology.

The final prong of the administration's strategy is to put America in the driver's seat of addressing global issues. This includes renewing and revamping several arms control treaties, working with the rest of the world to tackle climate change, and elevating diplomacy in



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modern interstate relations. The main idea is to address the administration's concerns that the United States has turned towards isolationism over the past few years. It also contributes to the administration's goal of promoting democracy across the globe.

No plan survives first contact with the enemy, however. Consequently, the administration is facing a number of obstacles that stand to significantly halt its progress. One such obstacle is Congress.

"Biden's strategy aims to reduce China and Russia's global influence."

While President Biden technically has all that he needs to execute his strategy in the legislative branch, his current Congressional margins are slim. And while the executive order can be an effective tool, it often comes with significant political cost; a cost that Biden won't want to pay readily.

In addition to the current the legislative balance of power, it is common for the president's party to experience losses in midterm elections. And with the Democrats already facing such thin margins, it is likely that the administration will find it harder and harder to execute their strategy beyond the Congressional midterm elections scheduled for 2022. To circumvent this issue, the administration needs to either dilute its goals and action items or it needs to strike significant compromises with Republicans.

Another obstacle the Biden administration will face is great power competition. The United States is no longer the sole world power that it was after the fall of the Soviet Union. China and Russia in particular have become military and economic powerhouses to the point that the United States has to address their influence. And unfortunately for the Biden administration, neither of our rivals in this great power competition are particularly open to the idea of democracy. So while internal conflict poses a problem for the administration's domestic plans, pushback from China and Russia prevent the United States from transforming domestic progress into international results.

China and Russia stand to serve as significant obstacles to the administration's plans for a few reasons. Most importantly, Biden's plan actively seeks to restrict their operations. Additionally, Biden is pushing for more comprehensive arms control treaties including the New START Treaty. While Russia does gain something from these treaties, it is unlikely that Russia or China would keep agreeing to measures that keep reducing their self-defense capabilities.

Biden's strategy aims to reduce China and Russia's global influence. If China and Russia allow the Biden administration to spread democracy unchecked, the number of countries they share values with would decrease. Since shared values are a common basis for soft power, China and Russia's influence would decrease in turn. Great power competition requires countries to form alliances and partnerships, and that task becomes harder for China and Russia if Biden's democracy promotion goes unchecked.

From a historical perspective, the world has seen multiple waves of democratization and autocratization. There's considerable consensus that the third and most recent wave of democratization took place in 1974. And as we have experienced an alarming rate democratic erosion around the world, some scholars are beginning to claim that the third wave of authorization started as late as 1993. According to Anna Lührmann and Staffan I. Lindberg, "Democratic breakdowns used to be rather sudden events – for instance military coups – and relatively easy to identify empirically. Now, multi-party regimes slowly become less meaningful in practice making it increasingly difficult to pinpoint the end of democracy." Democratic erosion has become the new threat to civil societies, making autocratization much

more gradual than what it used to be.⁵ Because of the nature of the new wave autocratization, it can be expected to see more democratic erosion and more democratic breakdown in the near future.

Additionally, there is data showing how democracy promotion has always been on an upwards trend despite the waves of autocratization. Even now, the number of democracies in the world is higher than before. And as there are more waves democratization, it's only natural for a wave of autocratization to follow, and yet another wave of democratization after that. "As more middle classes grow richer in numerous countries, they will demand more political rights and civil liberties from authorities."⁶

Idealistically, it could be possible that there would come a time where autocratization, or at least the correlation between autocracies and human rights abuses, won't exist. Of course, this is a future that's not easy to imagine as there are many obstacles in the way.

A more realistic future would probably look like a world where the waves of democratization and autocratization are much less significant as the world progresses towards an equilibrium -- a world with a fixed balance of democratic and autocratic interests. There will still be conflicts and regime changes, but not nearly as many. While we hope that the idealistic future is tangible, we can't ignore the chaotic nature of international relations and plan accordingly.

5 Lüthmann, Anna and Staffan I. Lindberg. "A third wave of autocratization is here: what is new about it?" *Democratization*, 26:7, 1095-1113, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2019.1582029. Mar. 1 2019

6 Arana, Ignacio. Nicholas Murphy and Zachary Lee. Personal interview. May 12, 2021.



A Post-2020 Look at Transportation: A more sustainable, equitable, and resilient future

RIMSHA AHMED AND VASILISA GORBOLSKAYA

The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic in March 2020, upending lives and livelihoods everywhere and especially in cities that served as frontlines of the crisis. Transportation is one area where preferences have shifted dramatically as people spend more time outdoors exploring their cities. Furthermore, the pandemic has highlighted pre-existing transit inequalities and the vulnerability of car dependency in the United States.

As public transit shut down in 2020, lower-income individuals were disproportionately affected. According to the National Equity Atlas data, in 2017 only 6 percent of white households did not have access to a car, compared to 19 percent of black households.¹ Those dependent on buses and trains were unable to commute to work because they didn't have access to a car or to alternate means of transportation. With government enforced lockdowns, travel demand across all modes dropped sharply. In a matter of weeks, road traffic declined approximately 50% in the United States.²

At the same time, lockdowns resulted in those who could exploring new ways of commuting. Bike sales skyrocketed and more people began to take advantage of scenic routes and bike lanes. Many cities temporarily shut down streets, naturally creating pedestrian friendly areas and encouraging individuals to find new ways of getting around — whether walking, biking, or other micro-mobility options. The year 2020 resulted in a dramatic shift in American transportation preferences — a shift that serves as a valuable lesson for building more sustainable, equitable transportation infrastructure models in the United States. A new momentum for car-free transportation emerged and it is an opportunity we cannot let go to waste. Moving forward, this means investing in transportation that is more inclusive and inherently sustainable. Options would include funding transportation infrastructure that expands public transit as well as improves walking, biking, and other micro-mobility options.

Inequity and other Public Transit Challenges

In the first quarter of 2020, transit ridership was on the rise, but took a big hit with the spread of novel coronavirus. According to current estimates, ridership declined by 53.3 percent across the nation according to the American Public Transportation Association.³ Despite such a decline, US cities proved flexible with reshaping public transit by catering to the needs of

1 “Car Access: National Equity Atlas,” Car Access | National Equity Atlas, https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Car_access/#/?breakdown=2.

2 Lucy Budd and Stephen Ison, “Responsible Transport: A Post-COVID Agenda for Transport Policy and Practice,” Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trip.2020.100151>.

3 Skip Descant, “After a Devastating Year, Transit Is Adapting to the Future,” GovTech, March 23, 2021, <https://www.govtech.com/fs/after-a-devastating-year-transit-is-adapting-to-the-future.html>.



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communities. For example, some cities deployed new buses to serve as mobile Wi-Fi spots. This approach to transit results in a more sustainable, equitable, and convenient transportation model combining funding from both private and public sources, and making public transit competitive with single-occupancy vehicles. It will take time for transit to ramp back up to pre-pandemic scale. This in turn, provides a window of opportunity to create more flexible, less rush-hour focused, and equitable transportation. Therefore, Joe Biden's allocation of \$85 billion towards public transit is a necessity. Even today, 45 percent of Americans do not have access to public transit, despite at least one conventional transportation mode-- railway systems, bus lanes, and subway systems--being present in communities across the US.⁴ To address problems of aging infrastructure, decades of underfunding, and lack of consistent maintenance, a backlog of \$176 billion in transit investment is estimated, which is projected to grow to more than \$250 billion by 2029.⁵

Public transit envisioned by the Biden administration is supposed to accommodate specific community needs with overarching goals to "improve accessibility, mitigate traffic congestion, enhance air and water quality, conserve fuel, reduce carbon emissions, encourage a more equitable transportation system, help sustain economic development, and promote more sustainable communities."⁶ There are many more benefits to investing in public transit: assisting elderly and disabled individuals with mobility, making work and other service accessibility to low-income individuals and those without access to cars, as well as providing an alternative to car use, therefore, reducing congestion and travel time.

Recently, transit agencies have also started entering partnerships with mobility providers, such as transportation network companies and bike or scooter share, generally known as Mobility on Demand (MOD), have expanded a conventional definition of public transit. Over the last decade, the number of micro-mobility trips, bike or scooter share options, rose from roughly 320,000 to nearly 1 billion.⁷

The Road beyond Covid

With millions of Americans working from home, roads have shifted from being a means of commuting to and from work to spaces for people and community. Long commutes to work have become short grocery store runs. In the long lists of changes that have occurred due to COVID-19, how people move around their towns and cities has been one of the most notable shifts — and one that is meant to stay.

The automobile has become an important part of American culture but has also created many

4 "Transit, ASCE's 2021 Infrastructure Report Card," American Society of Civil Engineers, March 25, 2021. <https://infrastructure-reportcard.org/cat-item/transit/#:~:text=Public%20transit%20is%20essential%20to,have%20no%20access%20to%20transit>.

5 Ibid.

6 "Policy Statement 494 - Public Transportation," American Society of Civil Engineers, July 11, 2020, <https://www.asce.org/issues-and-advocacy/public-policy/policy-statement-494---public-transportation/>.

7 "Transit, ASCE's 2021 Infrastructure Report Card," American Society of Civil Engineers, March 25, 2021, <https://infrastructure-reportcard.org/cat-item/transit/#:~:text=Public%20transit%20is%20essential%20to,have%20no%20access%20to%20transit>.



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negative externalities regarding the safety of both our people and environment. During the pandemic, although there might have been fewer cars on the roads, emptier streets didn't equate to a safer experience for pedestrians. A report by the Governor's Highway Safety Association (GHSA) on driving fatalities found that in the first six months of 2020, pedestrian fatalities per billion vehicle miles traveled increased by 20 percent.⁸ The same GHSA report indicated that drivers struck and killed more people of color--further reinforcing the need for racial equity to be the centerpiece of comprehensive city and street planning.

A study by the National Association of City Transportation Officials shows that black people are 82 percent more likely than their white, non-Hispanic, counterparts to be in a lethal car accident.⁹ These statistics underscore the need for safety of the people and environment to be a core to the U.S. transportation system. The Biden administration's "American Jobs Plan" plans to do just that.

Cities must prioritize city planning to be pedestrian-friendly to not only encourage more green modes of travel, but also foster racial equity. The COVID pandemic has introduced more people to the joys of walking and biking -- meaning that more people likely will be out on sidewalks, crosswalks, and roads. Federal transportation funding needs to be allocated to our streets to meet this newly found demand.

Slow Street and Complete Street programs are designed to limit traffic on certain residential streets and allow them to be used as a shared space for people traveling by foot or by other micro-mobility options (that includes biking, scootering, skating, etc.). On Slow Streets, signage and barricades are placed to minimize vehicle traffic, prioritizing pedestrians.¹⁰ Complete Streets are streets made for everyone and are designed to prioritize the safety, comfort, and access for all people who use the streets. Complete Streets have no set design and respond to community needs and context and may include wide sidewalks, bike lanes, bus lanes, and accessible public transportation stops.¹¹

These streets are especially the underprivileged whose needs have systematically not been met through traditional transportation planning approaches--ones that design around cars, not people. At their core, both Slow Streets and Complete Streets programs are about re-evaluating our streets and designating more land to pedestrian and micro-mobility travel than cars. These programs are critical infrastructure that garner support from a wide range of neighborhood demographics and empower the previously underserved on our streets.

With more street focused programs, demand for transportation alternatives such as biking can increase, and we have already seen it increasing. During periods of lockdown, cycling increased by 16 percent across the US, with higher growth on the weekends (+29%) than on weekdays (+10%). This smaller increase during the weekdays is most likely due to the overall decline in all modes of travel due to lockdowns and travel restrictions.¹² Nonetheless, clearly the demand for cycling has increased and evidently requires an increase in government measures and robust policies to accommodate and encourage this demand. In many instances, expansion and improvement of existing cycling infrastructure have been already included in some city

8 Fran Kritz, "Despite Fewer Cars on the Road, Pedestrian Fatalities Are Up During COVID," Verywell Health, April 12, 2021, <https://www.verywellhealth.com/pedestrian-fatalities-rise-covid-driving-5176250>.

9 Social Ink, "Modernizing Federal Standards: Making the MUTCD Work for Cities," National Association of City Transportation Officials, May 13, 2021, <https://nacto.org/program/modernizing-federal-standards/>.

10 Ben Barnett, "Slow Streets Program," San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, May 12, 2021, <https://www.sfmta.com/projects/slow-streets-program#:~:text=On%20these%20Slow%20Streets%2C%20signage,during%20the%20COVID%2D19%20pandemic>.

11 "What Are Complete Streets?" Smart Growth America, December 2, 2020. <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/program/national-complete-streets-coalition/publications/what-are-complete-streets/>.

12 Ralph Buehler and John Pucher, "COVID-19 Impacts on Cycling, 2019–2020," *Transport Reviews*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01441647.2021.1914900>.

plans. COVID-19, however, accelerated that implementation due to increased public demand and change in travel preferences.

Many cities already implemented street programs to maintain the cycling and pedestrian momentum that started during the pandemic and create safe spaces for walking and bicycling. New York City exploited the crisis to completely reimagine the city's streets. In March 2021, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced that the Department of Transportation (DOT) would launch the nation's largest Open Streets program — a program dedicated to designating roadway space to pedestrians and cyclists. Last March, at the start of the pandemic, New York City briefly experimented with a small car-free pilot program on a handful of blocks in four of the five boroughs. The program was cut short in April 2020 due to police staff shortages. If proper investments in these street infrastructure models is made, police staff wouldn't be necessary and the streets would be self-sufficient, safely functioning.

Similarly, in Oakland, California, the new "Slow Streets" program made 74 miles of neighborhood streets off-limits to cars and converted them to safe spaces for pedestrians. The city's extensive plan was to deal with the isolation that came with the coronavirus by creating more outdoor space and safer corridors for essential travel by foot, bike or other micro-mobility options.

Infrastructure Bill Provides Hope

Studies have shown that proper investments in street programs and public transit can help American road users safely navigate and reclaim their streets. A growing number of transportation equity advocates have been pushing for President Biden to include a greater focus on Vision Zero policies in the United States.

During COVID-19, this movement ramped up to provide more socially distanced essential commute and now that movement has created a new demand. People want more agency over their streets. They want to feel safe enough to travel around their cities by foot, bicycle, scooter, skateboard, or any other form of micro-mobility.

On March 31, President Biden introduced the 'American Jobs Plan,' calling it "an investment in America," and an aim to create millions of jobs, update infrastructure, and make the US a more competitive nation on a global scale.¹³ The US was ranked 13th for the overall infrastructure quality rating, however, despite being high on the list, decades of underinvestment have led to aging, crumbling infrastructure across the nation.¹⁴ The Biden administration is planning to invest \$621 billion into transportation infrastructure. Biden is aiming to allocate \$80 billion towards updating Amtrak's railway system, \$85 billion towards public transit funding, and \$115 billion to modernize bridges, highways, roads, and streets in most need of repair.¹⁵ Biden's "Build Back Better" plan is looking to invest into "high-quality, zero-emissions" public transit options as well as infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists in every city with more than 100,000 residents.¹⁶

When we discuss the problems associated with cars and transportation, we tend to think about accidents, traffic jams, or air pollution. Less frequently do we consider how much

13 "FACT SHEET: The American Jobs Plan," The White House, May 4, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/state-ments-releases/2021/03/31/fact-sheet-the-american-jobs-plan/>.

14 Ian Duncan, "Here's How U.S. Infrastructure Compares to the Rest of the World," Washington Post, April 30, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2021/04/30/us-infrastructure-ranking/>.

15 Javier Zarracina, Joey Garrison, and George Petras, "Joe Biden Wants to Spend \$2 Trillion on Infrastructure and Jobs. These 4 Charts Show Where the Money Would Go," USA Today, April 6, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/politics/2021/04/01/2-trillion-infrastructure-bill-charts-detail-bidens-plan/4820227001/>.

16 "The Biden Plan to Build a Modern, Sustainable Infrastructure and an Equitable Clean Energy Future," Joe Biden for President, August 5, 2020, <https://joebiden.com/clean-energy/>.

sheer *space* cars take up in American cities. Most cities dedicate about 50-60 percent of their land to vehicles— a rather inefficient and wasteful plan. Due to the pandemic, some American cities experimented with adjusting that balance and the results were successful.¹⁷ This past year, transportation preferences shift drastically as people started spending more time exploring their cities outdoors. The pandemic created a new momentum for car-free transportation, and this

“The pandemic created a new momentum for car-free transportation, and this provides an unprecedented opportunity for positive change. This would mean investing in transportation that is more inclusive and inherently sustainable.”

provides an unprecedented opportunity for positive change. This would mean investing in transportation that is more inclusive and inherently sustainable. Options would include investments in transportation infrastructure that expand public transit and improve walking, biking, and micro-mobility options. The infrastructure bill reinforces that shift from investments of bridges, highways, and roads to streets that foster community and environmental well-being.

Instead of investing into expansion of current highways and roads, the government should focus on investing in public transit and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure by leveraging funding provided through the Biden administration’s proposed infrastructure legislation, which looks headed for passage by the Senate.

Historically, car-centric planning has maximized road space at the expense of pedestrian facilities. Now is the right time for federal transportation infrastructure planning to shift its priorities towards forward-looking transportation investments aimed at serving people and the environment — measures that would actively reduce traffic, pollution, and promote equitable communities. This vision cannot be met until transportation policies begin to prioritize healthy, sustainable options like walking, cycling, and public transit.

While the United States slowly returns to more normal life it’s the perfect time to create a better integrated transportation system that accounts for specific needs of the communities it serves. Abolishing car-centric transportation planning better serves all transportation users by creating a more integrated, multimodal transportation system with choices and accessibility for all. The government needs to take the lead on shifting toward more reliable, equitable, and sustainable infrastructure.

¹⁷ Jack Stewart, “Cities Are Experimenting with More Space for People, Less Room for Cars,” Marketplace, May 20, 2020, <https://www.marketplace.org/2020/05/19/cities-are-experimenting-with-more-space-for-people-less-room-for-cars/>.

Opinion: Health Crisis Means People of Color Fighting a Two-Front War

LISA OGUIKE

To be a person of color in the United States of America is to fight battle after battle with their counterparts, law enforcement, politicians, school systems and the one exception should be the health sector. In this vein, one can imagine being a person of color amidst a global pandemic, is adjacent to fighting a two-front war with nothing but an aspirin as ammunition. People of color have been subjected to a number of social and systemic inequities for many years when it comes to healthcare issues. Inequities that have put many people from ethnic minorities in increased risk of getting sick and dying from various outbreaks.

Socioeconomic and political determinants have had a history of preventing these groups from having fair access to health care. Today, a growing body of research shows that some racial and ethnic minorities around the US have been disproportionately affected by the current coronavirus pandemic. High levels of poverty have made them less likely to get access to healthcare which in turn has significantly affected their quality of life¹. People of color in the United States have been severely affected by health crises broadly, but even more so in the wake of COVID-19. And disproportionate vaccine responses have affected people of color nationally.

Demographic background

The longstanding disparities in health and healthcare facing people of color in America has been a major issue for some time now. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) aimed to help reduce these disparities, but studies prove that there is still a long way to go before the problem is solved. For example, the high prevalence of disease and a higher mortality rate among people of color as a group represent a high number of people with underlying conditions such as diabetes, heart diseases, HIV/AIDS and cancer². These diseases put them at a very high risk of getting affected by opportunistic disease outbreaks like the coronavirus and cholera. Data shows that although people of color have a relatively younger population when compared to white people, they are more likely to have an underlying health condition, making them extremely vulnerable to diseases like the coronavirus.³

Another reason for the disproportionate effects of diseases on people of color is discrimination. Research shows that a number of people of color who are past the age of 60 have endured some form of racial abuse and discrimination that could potentially lead to chronic

1 Olivia Pham et al., "Latest Data on COVID-19 Vaccinations Race/Ethnicity," *KFF* (blog), May 12, 2021, <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/latest-data-on-covid-19-vaccinations-race-ethnicity/>.

2 Delan Devakumar et al., "Racism, the Public Health Crisis We Can No Longer Ignore," *Lancet* (London, England) 395, no. 10242 (2020): e112–13, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)31371-](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31371-)

3 Samiya A. Bashir, "Home Is Where the Harm Is: Inadequate Housing as a Public Health Crisis," *American Journal of Public Health* 92, no. 5 (May 2002): 733–38.



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stress. And when compared to white people, people of color and other ethnic minority groups have a higher probability of being uninsured and therefore at a higher risk of not getting access to medical access⁴.

Increased risk

Rates of morbidity and mortality for people of color is higher than white Americans.⁵ A general claim posited is that the declining health of people of color is a result of individual lifestyle, rather than being a consequence of fundamental inequities in society and our healthcare system. For example, a healthier lifestyle can be achieved in theory through a balanced diet, incorporation of exercise as well as access to adequate healthcare. Our social strata afford an unfortunate volume of POC inability to front the bill of a healthier pallet, even more so better quality healthcare; all this combined with the inability to make time for recreational exercise due to demanding jobs--are a recipe for this community's disaster. An additional factor working to their detriment is health exposure, considering "people of color account for 43% of all essential workers"⁶ and are without necessary protection. With so much already working against them, it can be expected that in a pandemic that affects every facet of life they would bear the brunt of its impact.

As was clearly emphasized by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, "COVID-19 has unequally affected many racial and ethnic minority groups putting them more at risk of getting sick and dying from COVID-19"⁷ According to early data collected on the prevalence of the coronavirus, African Americans made up 29% of the total number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the country.⁸ Additionally, in the District of Columbia, African Americans accounted for more than 55% of the total number of coronavirus deaths in that city. In Louisiana, 32% of the population is made up of African Americans, by the end of April, 70% of the people who had succumbed to the disease in the state were African Americans. Similarly, in Illinois people of color make up about 40% of the whole population. They made up about 48% of the total number of people confirmed to have the virus and about 56% of the total number of covid-19 related deaths by the end of April 2020⁹. This trend can be observed in most parts of the country. In sum, a higher percentage of African Americans are affected by the virus and an even higher percentage die from it compared to other American demographics.¹⁰

Disproportionate distribution of vaccines

People of color are less likely to access vaccines compared to their white counterparts due to barriers to effective access as well as vaccine hesitancy.¹¹ There is some evidence that minimal access to vaccines among people of color are due in part to their having higher uninsured rates as well as other structural barriers.

4 Eva Clark et al., "Disproportionate Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Immigrant Communities in the United States," *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases* 14, no. 7 (July 13, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pntd.0008484>.

5 Kristin J. August, PhD and Dara H. Sorkin, "Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Exercise and Dietary Behaviors of Middle-Aged and Older Adults," *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, March 2011, pg. 245–250, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3043172/>.

6 Catherine Thorbecke, "Heroes or hostages?: Communities of color bear the burden of essential work in coronavirus crisis," *ABC News*, May 22, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/Business/heroes-hostages-communities-color-bear-burden-essential-work/story?id=70662472>.

7 CDC, "Community, Work, and School," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, February 11, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html>.

8 Pham et al., "Latest Data on COVID-19 Vaccinations Race/Ethnicity."

9 Pham et al.

10 CDC, "Community, Work, and School," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, February 11, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html>.

11 Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo, Maya Petersen, and Diane Havlir, "Taking Vaccine to Where the Virus Is—Equity and Effectiveness in Coronavirus Vaccinations," *JAMA Health Forum* 2, no. 2 (February 18, 2021): e210213, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamahealthforum.2021.0213>.

The first and most pertinent barrier is the number of people of color who are uninsured. As stated earlier, people who are not insured have a lower probability of access to care due to the high cost. Although today the percentage of people of color who have health insurance has increased, statistics still indicate they lag behind in terms of vaccination against COVID-19.¹² It is important for our health sector to incentivize community leaders to encourage vaccination efforts from their delegations and constituents. People are more likely to take this step when validated and pushed by members they know and in whom they trust.

“Although today the percentage of people of color who have health insurance has increased, statistics still indicate they lag behind in terms of vaccination against COVID-19.”

The second structural barrier relates to historic racism and ongoing discrimination against people of color. Although empirically it may be that discrimination has decreased in comparison to past decades, African Americans are still left behind when it comes to matters of health. According to a recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation people of color and especially African Americans have been less likely to receive the coronavirus vaccine compared to white people, despite it being free. Though the vaccine has been deemed safe for use by scientists around the world, many people of color still cite safety as their reason for avoiding the vaccine.¹³

The majority of the people who cited safety concerns around the vaccine were mostly above the age of 50; a population that, historically, experienced the full wrath of racism and hate from white supremacists. In the same survey, at least seven in ten people of color felt that race-based discrimination in the health sector still existed. These results were not surprising because many surveys in the past have shown that people of color often claim negative treatment at the hands of healthcare professionals.

Recommendations

As it pertains to the pandemic, preventing racial disparities in vaccine rollout is of heightened importance as we work toward the goal of herd immunity. It is however proving quite difficult as these barriers faced by many people of color from accessing health care, remain rampant. If the government is to tackle the problem of disproportionate distribution of vaccines, it will have to find solutions for the aforementioned underlying barriers like lack of insurance. Additionally, the government must ensure that the distribution of the vaccines is carried out in an equitable manner giving priority to the most vulnerable groups like the elderly, people with underlying conditions, and people of color¹⁴. If these challenges go unaddressed, a lasting impact on our ability to tackle this pandemic can be expected to continue, especially the level of distrust among people of color.

12 Bibbins-Domingo, Petersen, and Havlir, “Taking Vaccine to Where the Virus Is—Equity and Effectiveness in Coronavirus Vaccinations.”

13 “A Framework for Equitable Allocation of Vaccine for the Novel Coronavirus | National Academies,” accessed May 14, 2021, <https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/a-framework-for-equitable-allocation-of-vaccine-for-the-novel-coronavirus>.

14 Helene D. Gayle and James F. Childress, “Race, Racism, and Structural Injustice: Equitable Allocation and Distribution of Vaccines for the COVID-19,” *The American Journal of Bioethics: AJOB* 21, no. 3 (March 2021): 4–7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2021.1877011>.

Journal for Politics and Strategy

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