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Letter from the Editor

After a two-year hiatus, the Global Studies Society at Temple University is thrilled to bring you the third publication of *MUNDI*, the Global Studies Program's undergraduate academic journal. The Spring 2024 edition of *MUNDI* presents papers written in completion of the Capstone Seminar in Global Studies course at Temple University during the Spring 2023 and Fall 2023 semesters. Spanning across disciplines, between continents, from past to present, and present to future – this publication contains a wide array of subject matter and perspectives that underscore our journal's global theme.

I would like to thank all the following people: Sanjoy Chakravorty, the Director of the Global Studies Program, for not only his support during the editing and publication process of this edition of *MUNDI*, but especially for his support and guidance during my undergraduate career. Danielle Scherer, the Assistant Director of the Global Studies Program, for her support in revamping and advising the Global Studies Society this year – the only reason this publication was possible. The entire editorial board for their dedication and hard work, as this could not have been done without any single one of them. Max DeFlicht, for designing a magnificent cover. Finally, I would like to thank our readers who choose to engage with the scholarship our authors have worked so hard to produce, as it is this engagement that facilitates the spread of ideas in an ever-changing world.

As I complete my undergraduate career, my role as editor in chief has allowed me to reflect on my journey with immense gratitude and pride. That I was entrusted by Director Chakravorty, Assistant Director Scherer, and my fellow editors to manage this publication was a great privilege. My name is attached to not only my own entry, but to the incredible work of four other exceptional authors. For this, I am honored. On behalf of the Spring 2024 editorial board, I am proud to present the 3rd edition of *MUNDI*.

Yours,
Tyler G. Hugo
Editor-in-Chief of *MUNDI*

ARTICLES

The Gradual Collapse of the Venezuelan Petrostate and Its Regional Consequences

Janelle S. Vuong

Fall 2023

Abstract: *State collapse weakens its overall geographic region by creating an enhanced risk of instability, social unrest, and potential conflict. This paper details the complete history of the Venezuelan petrostate and its gradual but undeniable decline that resulted in the economic, political, and humanitarian crisis that occurred between 2014 to 2019. In wake of its collapse, Latin America was affected greatly by the Venezuelan refugee crisis generated as a result, and Venezuelan citizens' humanitarian need. As a result of Venezuela's collapsed healthcare infrastructure, the regional weakness of preventative care against infectious diseases was exacerbated and created a profound health epidemic. This revealed state weaknesses on a regional scale. This paper will prove the profound regional consequences that state collapse imposes through the story of the Venezuelan state, its collapse, and the crisis generated as a result.*

INTRODUCTION

The story of Venezuela is a narrative that demonstrates the shortcomings and failures of the petrostate. Some experts claim that Venezuela is an example of “one of the worst cases of Dutch Disease in the world” (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019). To explain how Venezuela arrived at its multifaceted economic, political, and humanitarian crisis that resulted in over 4.5 million Venezuelans leaving the country by the end of 2019, Venezuela's history as a petrostate will be examined as well as its weaknesses (“Venezuelan Displacement” 2). The severe conditions of the crisis have created one of the largest mass migrations globally and economic collapses outside of war in the last fifty years which impose a

justified reason of concern for international relations (Labrador and Merrow 2019; Third Way 2019, 2). Venezuelan refugees have migrated to neighboring countries in need of humanitarian and medical assistance, which has increased perceptions of socioeconomic strain on state governments as well as fueled anti-Venezuelan xenophobia, enhancing the risk of instability and conflict throughout the region. As will be discussed later in this essay, the regional consequences of infectious disease as a result of the Venezuelan petrostate's collapse through the 2018 measles epidemic proves the theory that state failure has profound, and often harmful, regional consequences.

THE DEFINITIONS OF STATEHOOD, STATE FAILURE, REFUGEES, AND THE PETROSTATE

To understand the concepts of state fragility and failure, I will discuss the existing definitions for statehood and state failure in this section, in relation to Venezuela. These definitions will allow readers to better understand the conditions in which states collapse, and ultimately, the weaknesses behind the Venezuelan petrostate that led to its economic crisis of 2014 to 2019. Following this, definitions of “refugee” will be discussed, as well as the theoretical reasonings for the regional consequences of state collapse. The final definition will then regard the petrostate and how this term relates to Venezuela.

DEFINITIONS OF STATEHOOD

There are a variety of definitions for what constitutes a healthy and stable state. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development defines statehood in terms of “security, representation, and welfare” (Gentili 2009, 10). The International Rescue Committee defines statehood in terms of how well domestic systems take care of their citizens’ well-being and how effective they are in times of conflict (IRC 2021). Gravingholt labels functional statehood as “authority, capacity, and legitimacy” (Gravingholt 2012). A state in these terms will be able to exhibit effective authority over its citizens, have the capacity to maintain peace and order, as well as have legitimate rule. We will explore later how Venezuela does not fit these requirements. Other countries considered to have gaps in these areas are Yemen, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Afghanistan (Carment and Samy 2012, 107). Stein Eriksen defines statehood as such:

The state's primary purpose is to provide public goods like security, the protection of property rights, justice, or public health. Depending on the exact definition, welfare issues like access to education, basic social services, opportunities for participation and the rule of law can also be considered part of the state's core functions (Eriksen 2011).

This definition is similar to that of Richard Blanton et al., who believe that the heart of good governance is its ability to keep society balanced and provided for. “Good government, past or present, is premised on checks on power, a distribution of voice, ways to police corruption, equitable fiscal financing of the state, limits on greed...” (Blanton et al. 2020). Blanton et al., Eriksen, and Gravingholt all share similar beliefs that states should do the following: maintain legitimacy and justice, effectively take care of and represent their citizens, and provide some form of welfare and law to the nation. In summary, an effective state should have the capability to successfully govern itself and its people. Through these definitions of statehood, one can begin to understand the elements that constitute a failing or collapsed state.

DEFINITIONS OF STATE FAILURE

A failed state is a political institution that demonstrates ineffective governance, some form of corruption on the social, political, or economic level, and unjustly uses its power in a way that harms its citizens. Gentili argues that at the core of a failed state lies its inability to solve the socio-economic issues that its people face. She believes that the failed state consists of “...the deregulation of the labor market, unemployment, low wages, worsening conditions of housing and work” (Gentili 2009, 11). These states demonstrate severe or detrimental poverty, vulnerability, and

destitution for populations across the country, both in rural and urban environments. Failing states exhibit a growing inequality of access to basic resources for the majority of the population. Simultaneously in these conditions, governments often demonstrate extreme polarization or fragmentation, an overt disregard for human rights, and exert severe political repression upon the people and anyone who “opposes” their rule (Gentili 2009, 11). To simplify the definition of state failure, it is the consequence of corruption, abuse of power, and poor governance, resulting in a collapsed state.

To further elaborate on varying definitions of state fragility, failings, or collapse, this paragraph will demonstrate an array of arguments on state failure that relate to our contemporary and historical understanding of Venezuela. The work of Blanton et al. details “moral lapses” in government leadership as leading to a decline in citizen faith, engagement, and taxation, as well as state legitimacy and their ability to effectively govern and control crime and political opposition (Blanton et al. 2020). What can be described as “moral lapses” connects to themes of political repression, human rights violations, undemocratic means of governance, corruption, and general violence. The perceived abandonment of the peoples’ values by the government harms the institution’s sovereignty and authority within its borders as the people grow to distrust and resent the state. This internal political instability grows to create a fragile state. Carment and Samy mark state fragility similarly, through weak governance, lack of economic sustainability, and internal social or political conflict. “Fragility is generally a result of the interrelated aspects of poverty, conflict, and stability” (Carment and Samy,

2012). These elements of economic weakness and political inadequacy as well as internal sociopolitical conflict are all incredibly relevant to understanding the contemporary crisis in Venezuela.

Overall, the similarities that one can see in state failure across each of these definitions is a state that is not fulfilling its responsibilities of social welfare, public service, and security to the people. Other elements of state fragility that are relevant to the situations in Venezuela are high emigration rates, state delegitimization, and the creation of refugees (Iqbal and Starr 2008, 317). The concept of state failure demonstrates detrimental inadequacies of economic and political governance, weakness in legitimacy and sovereignty, and a disregard for citizens on a political or humanitarian level. As states fail systematically, large amounts of their population begin to leave the country to meet the needs that their governments failed to provide for. Many of these migrants are considered refugees, and their migration crisis has profound impacts on the surrounding region.

DEFINITIONS OF REFUGEES

According to Salehyan and Gleditsch, a refugee is:

Anyone who flees a country of origin or residence for fear of politically motivated harm... Thus people who flee conditions of general violence, such as civil or international wars and the breakdown of political regimes, in addition to those escaping direct government persecution are considered to be refugees (2006, 341).

Most refugees are fleeing countries where internal conflicts become incredibly violent and the state’s attempts to subdue them are ineffective. Salehyan and Gleditsch also mention the “government

purges of political opposition groups” that refugees attempt to escape from, which is applicable to the political repression and mass detainment that occurred in Venezuela (2006, 341). For Astri Suhrke, what differentiates refugees from migrants is their demand and need for asylum and relief from crises. Many statistical analyses confirm that political repression, change in political structure, civil wars, famine, and economic deterioration are all important predictors of flight (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006, 338). Yet above all other reasons for migration, Suhrke stresses violence as the most pivotal “precipitating factor” to refugee crises.

Suhrke defines two categories of conflict that create environments that refugees leave: conflicts of state formation and conflicts of state order (1993, 220). Conflicts of state formation include the expulsion of “undesirables” from society through ethnic cleansing or genocide, and violence based on religious or racial differences. Conflicts regarding state order include social issues based on class inequality, questions of state legitimacy and revolts for a new political order. This type of conflict involves authoritarian rulers, repressed populations, the mass killings and jailings of political opponents, and the widespread exodus of citizens (1993, 220). This description is quite similar to the conditions of the Venezuelan crisis of 2014 to 2019. Yet, to understand the multifaceted hardships occurring during the gradual decline of the Venezuelan petrostate, we must first define what a petrostate is, its shortcomings, and how this suits Venezuela’s contemporary framework.

DEFINITION OF A PETROSTATE AND ITS SHORTCOMINGS

A petrostate is a government with the following characteristics: state income is highly reliant on the export of fossil fuels, an elite minority shares the majority of economic and political power within the country, institutions are weak and unaccountable, and corruption is far-reaching (Cheatham et al. 2023). Petrostates are vulnerable to a concept labeled “Dutch Disease”, which is when a government develops an “unhealthy dependence on natural resource exports to the detriment of other sectors” (Nelson 2018). The following information in this section relating to the petrostate draws on the arguments of Cheatham et al (2023).

A resource boom, in Venezuela’s case, oil, draws in significant amounts of foreign capital and investment in that country’s economy. This appreciates the local currency (increasing the international buying power of the bolivar), and the state is now able to afford more imports with ease. Due to the oil industry’s high profitability, this gives an incentive for the state to draw investment and attention away from other domestic economic sectors, leaving the state’s export industry unbalanced. In these environments, agriculture and manufacturing industries receive less government attention, despite being the two most important industries for domestic growth and international trade. As other economic sectors such as these begin to fade or weaken, unemployment rises, creating a greater need for social services.

The government then invests more in subsidies and social welfare programs, which require government spending money generated from oil revenues, enhancing the country’s dependence on oil income. As the domestic economy grows increasingly

reliant on oil exports, that state becomes highly vulnerable to the unpredictable and fluctuating swings of global oil prices and “capital flight”. Capital flight refers to when investors rescind their foreign capital from an industry when that commodity is at risk of depreciating. In addition to the threat of economic instability and collapse should oil prices sink, the “resource curse” of the petrostate severely impacts governance.

As a petrostate grows its ability to rely on export income for its main source of revenue, the importance of local taxes and relationships with citizens declines. As a result of this, petrostates create weak ties between its citizens and government, which can create further detachment, distance, and misrepresentation in government as citizens grow to become more disengaged with politics. In combination with political and economic factors, experts say that Venezuela fits the archetype of the “failed petrostate” with the following conditions: a history of oil dependence, falling economic production and revenue when oil prices decline, tremendous debt and hyperinflation, and a growing autocracy as the general population becomes less engaged with politics. We will see in later chapters of this essay how this is confirmed, but first, we must discuss Venezuela’s 20th-century history of economics and politics to see how the Venezuelan petrostate was formed to understand how that has contributed to the 21st-century crisis.

THE HISTORY OF THE VENEZUELAN PETROSTATE 1922-2014

The history of the Venezuelan Petrostate began when geologists first discovered oil in Venezuela in 1922. When

oil was first “struck”, it was reported to have generated more than “100 thousand barrels per day” (Cheatham et al. 2023). “Annual production exploded during the 1920s, from just over a million barrels to 137 million, making Venezuela second only to the United States in total output by 1929” (Cheatham et al. 2023). Oil in Venezuela was discovered under the dictatorship of General Juan Vicente Gomez, who ruled between 1908 to 1935, and welcomed foreign investors and companies into the country to aid in oil production (Cheatham et al. 2023). According to Robert Rapier (2019), most of Venezuela’s oil reserves come from the Orinoco Belt, which contains extra-heavy crude oil that is immensely difficult and expensive to produce, hence the importance of international investment. The Orinoco Belt holds about 1.2 trillion barrels of oil resources. This is not to be confused with oil reserves, as oil resources include both discovered, undiscovered, recoverable and unrecoverable oil deposits (Rapier 2019; Baranski 2022)¹. Yet even if an oil deposit is deemed feasible for oil production, the process is costly.

Therefore, throughout the 1920s, General Gomez invited international oil companies like Exxon, Mobil, BP, and Chevron to invest in the development of these reserves through infrastructure and technology to create fossil fuel exports (Rapier 2019). Yet, as the country grew to become more reliant on oil exports, it fell ill to “Dutch Disease”, as defined earlier in this essay. By 1935, the Venezuelan economy was booming; the Venezuelan bolivar had greatly appreciated yet all other domestic sectors of production were diminished as oil grew to account for over 90% of total

¹ Reserves refers explicitly to deposits of fossil fuels deemed “technically and economically feasible” to extract (Baranski 2022).

exports (Cheatham et al. 2023). As long as oil prices were high, the Venezuelan economy was thriving, and Venezuelan oil was in high demand internationally. “In the 1950s and 1960s, Venezuela was one of the 20 wealthiest countries in the world in per capita income” (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019). Oil rents in the 1940s helped to enforce Venezuela’s oil wealth as foreign oil companies were required to concede at least half of their profits to the Venezuelan state. Within five years of this law, Venezuela’s GDP had increased sixfold (Cheatham et al. 2023). However, as this boom continued, the country’s dependence on oil deepened.

Oil played an instrumental role in restructuring the Venezuelan economy, and continued to play a pivotal role in politics for the rest of the century. When Venezuela elected its first democratic government through the Punto Fijo Pact of 1958 after a series of military dictatorships, a representative of almost every major political player in Venezuelan society agreed that oil profits were one of the most political factors to consider and that oil revenue was to be controlled by the state (Cheatham et al. 2023). In 1960, Venezuela became one of the founding members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and their status and wealth continued to rise (Cheatham et al. 2023). Meanwhile, oil rents had increased to 65% revenue and by the 1970s, the world had entered another oil boom. Oil production reached an all-time high in 1970 as Venezuela produced 3.8 million barrels per day (Rapier 2019). In 1976, President Carlos Andrés Pérez created the first state-owned oil company in Venezuela, *Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA)* “...to oversee all exploring, producing, refining, and exporting of oil” (Cheatham et al. 2023). PDVSA agreed to partner with foreign oil

companies as long as the state held 60% equity in joint ventures, and these partnerships allowed oil businesses to run with minimal government regulations (Cheatham et al. 2023). For about fifty years, the Venezuelan state experienced a state of economic success and prosperity.

Between the years 1970 to 1985, Venezuela experienced a decline of over 50% in oil production when global oil prices plummeted in the 1980s (Rapier 2019). The Venezuelan petrostate, reliant on oil to keep its government afloat, suffered greatly and was not able to pay back its debts nor keep up with soaring inflation rates. This was due to the massive overspending carried out by the Venezuelan state during the 1970s oil boom. Its citizens had grown accustomed to foreign goods and luxuries during the height of Venezuela’s economy, and to keep up with high demand, the state undertook massive debt to fulfill this, expecting to be able to pay it back with projected oil revenue that did not arrive (Rapier 2019). In 1989, President Peréz launched a economic package of severe neoliberal policies prescribed by the International Monetary Fund in exchange for a financial bailout of international debt (Cheatham et al. 2023).

These severe neoliberal policies removed government subsidies of basic goods, cut back on many state-funded social services and prompted deadly riots across the nation. Amidst this political turmoil, a military officer named Hugo Chavez gained public popularity after an attempted military coup in 1992. He would go on to later win the 1998 presidential elections due to his popularity and his promises to reduce national inequality and poverty (Cheatham et al. 2023). By the time Hugo Chavez was elected president, the Venezuelan petrostate had recovered economically. In 1997, Venezuela sought to

deepen foreign investment and international influence and by 1998, Venezuela's oil industry recovered to nearly its former peak, with 3.5 million barrels per day (BPD) (Rapier 2019). With the turn of the century, arrived Hugo Chavez's plans for political and economic reformation, which he named *Chavismo*.

When analyzing Venezuela's economic crisis between 2014 to 2019, one can look to Hugo Chavez. His policies in the late 1990s to early 2000s had long standing consequences which directly contributed to the gradual collapse of the Venezuelan petrostate. His nationalization of private industry as well as the socialization of an economy highly dependent on a fluctuating commodity with few alternative economic sectors to fall back on would leave the country in a hyperinflated, impoverished state with a collapsed oil industry by the end of his extended term in 2013 (Third Way 2019, 2)².

Between 1999 to 2014, Chavez spent \$716 billion in oil revenues from PDVSA to fund his *Chavismo* agenda in social programming (Third Way 2019, 2). Despite generating over \$300 billion in oil revenue in from 2004 to 2008, the state still accrued large amounts of debt under Chavez to fund social programs in addition to imports and subsidies (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019). Nelson (2018) states: "Chavez borrowed against future oil exports, running budget deficits in nine of the years he was in office (1999-2013). Venezuela's public debt more than doubled between 2000 and 2012, from 28% of GDP to 58% of GDP." Massive debt, petroleum dependence, as well as an inefficient nationalization of private

industry would all have negative consequences for Venezuela's future.

Chavez won the 1998 election on the promise to share the country's oil wealth with the people, guarantee food security, deliver state-funded social services, and more (Benzaquen 2017). "The state provided cheap loans, subsidies, numerous jobs, and free public services, and made sure that an overvalued currency made imported goods accessible" (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019). During the oil boom of the 2000s, the Venezuelan petrostate drew in considerable amounts of profit. "Between 1999 and 2015, the Venezuelan government earned nearly \$900 billion from petroleum exports, with about half (\$450 billion) earned between 2007 and 2012 (Chavez's second term)" (Nelson 2018). The petroleum revenue allowed the nation to afford imported luxuries, as well as necessities like food, medicine, (which gave reason to not produce these products domestically) and subsidize the prices of basic goods. As most basic consumer goods that citizens relied on were imported and funded by oil revenues, they also became dependent on oil. In 2008, 93% of Venezuelan exports were oil, meaning that the majority of the country's GDP was being maintained by petroleum (Benzaquen 2017). Meanwhile, non-oil domestic industry under Chavez grew to be heavily restricted, underfunded, and noncompetitive compared to imports in terms of quality and pricing. When the country eventually cut imports when oil prices declined again, Venezuela's domestic industry was not strong enough to provide

² Cheatham et al. (2023) sums up Chavez's presidency concisely: "While his costly "Bolivarian missions" expanded social services and cut poverty by 20 percent, he also took

several steps that precipitated a long and steady decline in the country's oil production, which peaked in the late 1990s and early 2000s."

for the entire state (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019).

How did Chavez's presidency impact private industry negatively and eventually the oil industry as well? Increased state regulations for domestic production under Chavez's administration stifled local industry. Many private industries were seized by the government for state control yet were poorly managed. Under Chavez, the number of private companies dropped from 14,000 in 1998 to 9,000 in 2011 (Nelson 2018). Lack of effective management, as well as sufficient expertise, would later weaken other economic sectors that were not oil in Venezuela. Private industries that remained faced additional issues as the government enacted currency exchange controls in 2003 with the state being the sole administrator of U.S. dollars in the country (Benzaquen 2017). Companies struggled to obtain the U.S. dollars needed to import raw materials and machinery as government administrations operated at inefficient speeds. This dampened domestic industries' ability to produce goods locally at sufficient rates and incentivized many to close down or turn to the black market to obtain USD at quicker speeds, even if sold at inflated prices (Benzaquen 2017). In addition to this, the country's oil industry would also lose massive amounts of technical expertise under Chavez's reign.

Between 2002 to 2003, 19,000 experienced PDVSA workers were fired as a result of the oil industry strike and replaced by government loyalists (Rapier 2019). Not long after this, Chavez began subsidizing oil in 2005 to political allies until 2013. This dwindled oil reserves and more than doubled government debt (Cheatham et al. 2023). With the lack of experience being highly present in Venezuela's petroleum industry, oil production began to decline by

the end of 2007 (Rapier 2019). Experts say that Chavez failed to adequately invest the funds needed to continue developing the country's oil as well as support other factors of industry as alternative sources of domestic income. Instead, Chavez risked investing in increasingly expensive and unsustainable social programs that were highly dependent on oil revenue, leading to damaging consequences in the present (Rapier 2019). The story of Chavez's economic and political legacy brings us to the current crisis in Venezuela that arrived shortly after Chavez died in 2013. The crisis involves economic mismanagement, humanitarian neglect, political repression, and an extreme exodus of Venezuelans from the country in the years 2014 to 2019.

THE CURRENT CRISIS IN VENEZUELA 2014-2019

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

During the middle of 2014, global oil prices plummeted, and with it, Venezuela's economy deteriorated (Cheatham et al. 2023). Yet what makes this crisis different from previous oil lulls, is the impact of Chavez's policies, political corruption, humanitarian abuses under both Chavez and Nicolás Maduro, and a systemic failure of the Venezuelan state. Oil output in Venezuela declined drastically across the 2010s having detrimental consequences for Venezuela's economy and people. The first portion of this section will describe the current economic crisis through charts exhibiting data from the International Monetary Fund. The consecutive portions will then discuss the political and humanitarian aspects of the crisis. A disclaimer is necessary to state that official data on the socioeconomic and

humanitarian status of the Venezuelan population has been largely unavailable or sparse from 2014 onwards due to possible government repression or lack of collection of national statistics that has made data on the situation limited, missing, or possibly much smaller than the actual numbers at hand (Page and Broner 2020).

The following chart expresses the 8 key indicators of Venezuela’s economic crisis.

Table 1: “Venezuela’s Economic Crisis: Key Indicators” (Nelson 2018).

Table 1. Venezuela’s Economic Crisis: Key Indicators

Indicator	Pre-Economic Crisis (2013)	Latest Data (**2016 or **2017 Forecasted)	% Change
Exports of goods	\$82.7 billion	\$27.0 billion ^a	-67%
Imports of goods	\$62.9 billion	\$21.4 billion ^a	-66%
GDP, constant prices, Venezuela’s national currency, the bolivar	62.2 billion bolivares	41.2 billion bolivares ^a	-34%
GDP per capita ^a	\$17,980	\$11,290 ^a	-37%
Inflation, % change in prices ^b	57%	1,133% ^a	1,888%
Unemployment, % of population	7.5%	26.4% ^a	252%
Government deficit, % of GDP	14.1%	18.5% ^a	31%
Government reserves	\$21.5 billion	\$10.0 billion ^c	-53%

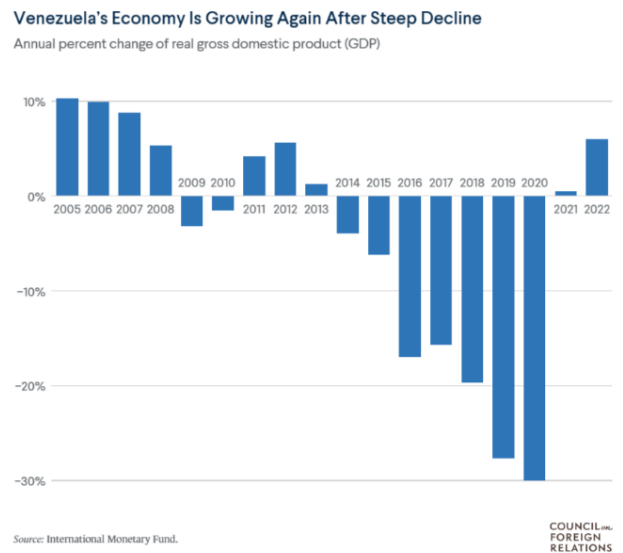
Source: IMF World Economic Outlook, International Financial Statistics, and Direction of Trade Statistics Databases, accessed December 18, 2017.

Notes:

- a. International dollars (adjusted for purchasing power parity); see Notes in Figure 1.
- b. End of period consumer prices.
- c. Data is for the fourth quarter of 2013 and the third quarter of 2017.

This table gives us an overview of how different key factors in Venezuela’s economy changed as a result of its crisis. The following figures will depict a closer look at each of these factors. Figure 1 depicts the annual change in Venezuela’s GDP from 2005 to 2022. What is particularly notable is the decline of GDP that occurs in the years 2014 to 2019 during the economic crisis. The negative percentage change peaks in 2020, most likely due to the financial impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on international economies, however for this research, we will be focusing explicitly on the years 2014 to 2019 for the Venezuelan crisis.

Figure 1: “Annual Percent Change of Venezuela’s GDP” (Cheatham et al. 2023).



In 2019, Venezuelan and Ausman stated that GDP loss is reportedly higher than what is reported outside of the country and claimed GDP loss to be 50%. In Figure 2, one can see that GDP per capita fell from 7,110 USD in 2014 to 2,620 USD in 2019, a nearly 40% decline (IMF 2023).

Figure 2: “GDP per capita of Venezuela” (International Monetary Fund 2023).

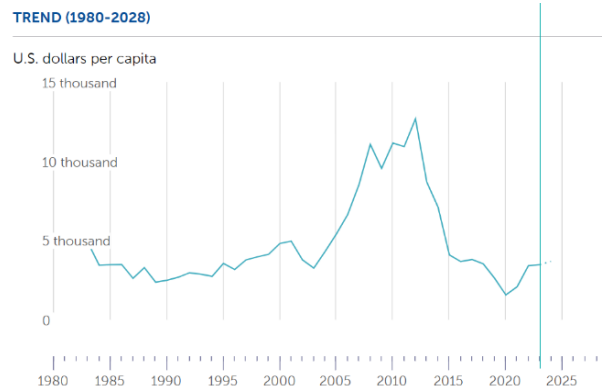
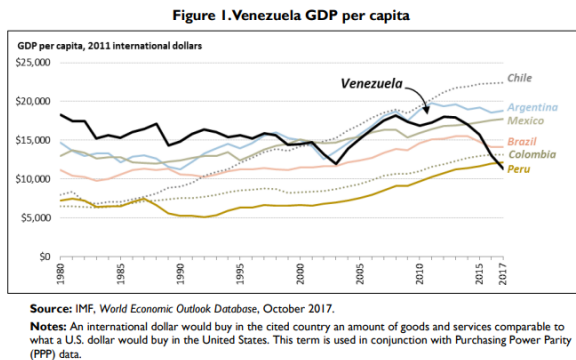


Figure 3: “How Venezuela’s GDP per Capita compares to the Latin American Region” (Nelson 2018).



Regarding the absolute purchasing power of Venezuelan currency in Figure 4, it was reported by the IMF to be 18.21 thousand in 2014 and to 8.17 thousand by 2019, an approximately 45% decline.

Figure 4: “Purchasing Power Parity of Venezuela” (International Monetary Fund 2023).

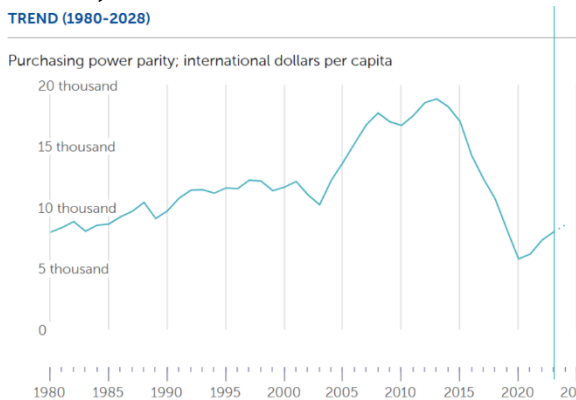


Figure 5: “Venezuela’s Declining Oil Output” (Cheatham et al. 2023).

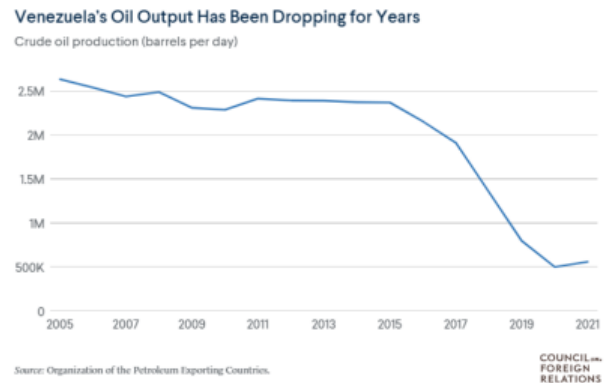


Table 2: “Venezuela’s inflation rates” (International Monetary Fund 2023).

Years	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Inflation %	62.2	121.7	254.9	438.2	65.37	19.91
					thousand	thousand

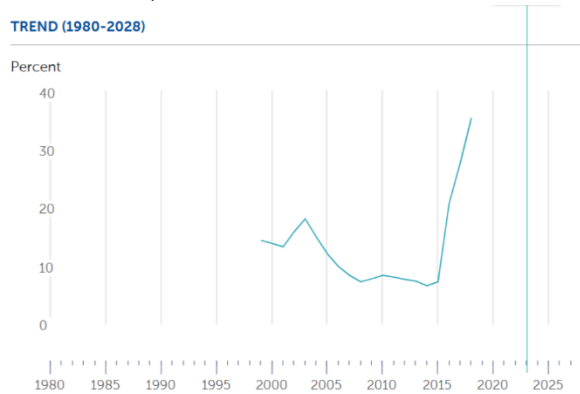
Despite the already immense rates of inflation reported by the IMF, there are some discrepancies as to the exact quantity of inflation in Venezuela. Cheatham et al. state that: “annual inflation skyrocketed to just over 130,000 percent in 2018” (2023). Venezuelan and Ausman claim that the inflation rate was approaching 500,000% in 2019 (2019). Whether this is a sign of the severity of the economic crisis in Venezuela or a lack of consensus on numbers reporting the situation, the fact of the matter is that inflation rates in Venezuela have become incredibly high between the years 2014 to 2019.

In conjunction with hyperinflation, unemployment had dramatically increased. Table 3 and Figure 6 describe the percentage of those unemployed in the existing Venezuelan labor force between the years 2014 to 2018. After 2018, the Venezuelan government was no longer reporting data on the national unemployment rate (International Monetary Fund 2023).

Table 3: “Venezuela’s Unemployment Rate” (International Monetary Fund 2023).

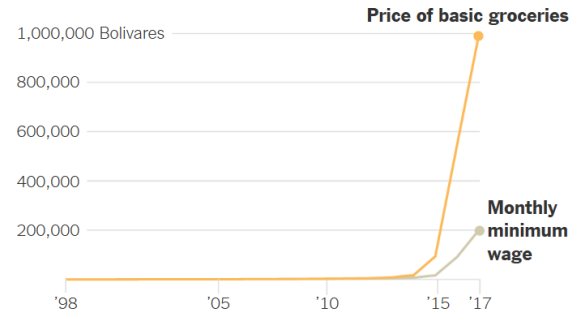
Year:	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Unemployment Rate:	6.7	7.4	20.9	27.9	35.6

Figure 6: “Unemployment Rate of Venezuela” (International Monetary Fund 2023).



The mismanagement of the country’s oil wealth under Chavez created an economic system that was no longer able to support itself when oil prices dropped after his administration. The history of Venezuelan economics depended solely on a fluctuating and unreliable commodity, resting the fate of its citizens well-being upon petroleum revenue. When left with no alternative source of income, when the petrostate inevitably failed, public healthcare, employment, and access to food and medicine all dramatically declined (Puglie 2019). As Maduro was left with an immense budget deficit in the wake of Chavez’s economic legacies, Maduro cut the social services, subsidies, and imports necessary to keep its citizens cared for (Benzaquen 2017). When the scarcity of food, employment, and medicine, was paired with the hyperinflation created by Maduro’s regime, the country entered freefall.

Figure 7: “The Disparity between Grocery Prices and the Monthly Minimum Wage in Venezuela” (Benzaquen 2017).



By The New York Times | Sources: CENDAS-FVM, Sary Levy, professor at the Central University of Venezuela | Minimum wage includes monthly food ticket | Measure for basic groceries based on the National Institute of Statistics’ monthly nutritional requirement for a family of five | As of May 2017

In 2017, the cost of groceries was reported to be five times the minimum wage (Benzaquen 2017). “In mid-2018, a dozen eggs cost the equivalent of two weeks’ pay in a minimum wage job” (Faiola et al. 2018). While Johns Hopkins University admits that official data is largely unavailable, they suggest that “nearly the entire population is food insecure and that acute malnutrition among children is reaching crisis levels in vulnerable populations” (2019).

Meanwhile, hospitals across the country are facing widespread closure due to the declining quality of facilities and mass shortages of medicine, clean water, sanitation tools, and electricity (“What is Happening?” 2022). Shortages of food, water, fuel, medicine, and jobs because of economic turmoil have caused social unrest. Protestors in 2017 demanded international food aid and early presidential elections; yet, this resulted in 3,600 arrests and more than 90 deaths (Benzaquen 2017). Unfortunately, protests against the state and demand for change have only been met by the state with repression and violence.

THE POLITICAL CRISIS

Under Chavez's regime, the following was common: infrequent negotiations with opposition parties, loyalists given access to top-level positions across government and industry, an uneven electoral system, and laws being invoked to penalize the opposition but rarely to sanction the government (Gonzalez 2019, 42). Chavez's "Bolivarian Revolution" sought to restructure the very foundation of Venezuelan politics, yet instead, it reestablished the foundations of authoritarianism (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019). With the growth of authoritarian rule came the "corruption of law, education, human rights, economics, health, housing, transportation, and systematic infrastructure" (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019). Under the Chavez administration, the lines between the state, the political party, and the government were intentionally blurred, creating more space for the president to expand his political power (Gonzalez 2019, 42).

Presidential powers were extended, the National Assembly weakened, term limits were abolished, independent press outlets were eliminated, and Chavez used intimidation tactics and price controls to nationalize the private sector completely, granting him almost complete economic control over the country (Cheatham et al. 2023; Gonzalez 2019, 42). Chavez prosecuted journalists, shut down television stations at will, aggravated media deemed "unloyal", and controlled many facets of media throughout his presidency (Gonzalez 2019, 42). According to Cheatham et al., Maduro would later on eliminate the freedom of the press and assembly in Venezuela, following in Chavez's footsteps (2023). In 2007, Chavez nationalized the telecom and electricity industries as well as replaced most of his

cabinet, 1/3 of it being former military officers (CFR 2023; Gonzalez 2019, 42). Political favors were common during Chavez's reign as he continued to enhance autocracy within the government by placing loyal supporters in government positions around the capital and in opposition territories across the country, even if these individuals did not have much prior political experience (Gonzalez 2019, 43).

In addition to having broad military support, being a former officer himself, Chavez instituted a civilian militia named the "Operations for the Liberation of the People" in Venezuela in 2005, which included 2 million individuals ready to fight "against foreign invasion" and to "safeguard" the Bolivarian Revolution (the term Chavez used to describe his political regime) (Gonzalez 2019, 43; CFR 2023). These became known as *colectivos* and were pro-government vigilante groups that participated in local government and received state support. However, criminal groups often took advantage of this system in order to gain local control and in exchange acted as the government's intelligence and security services as well as the distributors of the state's social programs (Gonzalez 2019, 43). This form of local espionage, surveillance, and corruption continued under Maduro's rule.

Certain experts believe that Maduro "consolidated power through political repression, censorship, and electoral manipulation" (Cheatham et al. 2023). This claim is not unfounded as in the face of severe economic crisis and social unrest in 2014 to 2019, Maduro has escalated repression and used military forces against protestors with deadly force (Gonzalez 2019, 44). This includes the presence of police brutality and the beatings of civilians, citizen disappearances, the arbitrary detainment and prosecution of

those deemed political opponents and critics, as well as acts labeled as crimes against humanity carried out by the state (Cheatham et al. 2023). At the “minor level”, those who publicly speak negatively about the government are liable to face death threats, forced resignation of employment, physical assault, and the destruction of personal records like birth certificates or other national records (Sarta 2019). Meanwhile, under Maduro, the *colectivos* have been acting as local armed groups that carry out the bidding of the state, including executing extrajudicial killings.

Colectivos have been granted “full reign” over their local territories by the government to fully police and control (Gonzalez 2019). The *colectivos* are responsible for the extrajudicial killings of 5,287 individuals in 2018 and almost 2,000 in just the first four months of 2019 (Cumming-Bruce 2019). Non-government-affiliated Venezuelan groups claimed that the “death squads” were responsible for more than 9,000 murders in 2018 and 2019 (Cumming-Bruce 2019). Often these victims are labeled as “possible threats” to the government, and on the state’s behalf, the *colectivos* carry out orders to execute citizens (Cumming-Bruce 2019). They are known for manipulating crime scenes to look as if victims were “resisting arrest” and as if “force was required”. In addition to the commonality of extrajudicial killings under the Maduro regime, arbitrary arrests and full-scale systems of torture have been discovered as well.

Through interviews with 250 people, the United Nations has “...identified a chain of command that works to silence, discourage, and squash opposition to the government” (Paúl 2022). According to Enderson Sequera, the Maduro administration has proven to be “an authoritarian regime that

is capable of murder, torture, and persecution to stay in power” (Paúl 2022). High-profile political opponents like opposition leader Leopoldo López have been arrested on the vague grounds of “inciting violence through subliminal messages” and sentenced to prison for 14 years (Gonzalez 2019, 43). Lesser-known opponents or critics, like smaller government officials, journalists, or activists, have been found subject to routine physical and sexual assault, mutilation, electric shock, asphyxiation and other cruel and unusual forms of torture while being held in government detainment centers (Paúl 2022). Before an individual’s arrest or assassination, the United Nations investigative team discovered that their name would be found on a list of targets created by the government, with most of them being civilians. The government would then surveil these targets, occasionally “bug” their phones, then plant “evidence” on them and arrest these individuals without a warrant, essentially kidnapping them (Paúl 2022).

In addition to the severe atmosphere of political repression, economic corruption has been exemplified by Maduro’s administration by embezzling over \$300 billion between 2013 to 2019 (Third Way 2019, 2). Furthermore, Maduro has taken advantage of the current food crisis to use as political leverage. To get a starving population to vote for him again in 2018, Maduro placed food distribution centers right next to polling stations; citizens were concerned that if they did not vote for him, they would not have access, so Maduro won the 2018 election with 68% of the vote (Third Way 2019, 4). However, 54% of the total population abstained because they did not see the election as free and fair, and the United States as well as 53 other countries refused to recognize Maduro’s government

as democratic and legitimate; meanwhile, mass protests across the nation were met with military repression (Third Way 2019, 4). Juan Guáido declared himself the legitimate leader and president of Venezuela in 2018, yet until 2019, Maduro continued to hold office (Third Way 2019, 4). The political crisis in Venezuela has continued to exacerbate humanitarian conditions.

THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

We have mentioned within the economic and political crisis of Venezuela the nationwide shortage and inaccessibility of medicine and food. This section will dive deeper into the implications for citizens' health and mortality. The healthcare system gradually collapsed from 2014 to 2019. This had been due to the shortage of medicine, potable water, regular access to electricity, basic sanitation products, and the significant emigration of healthcare personnel as a result of deteriorating working conditions (Johns Hopkins 2019). The same has occurred to the nation's food system. Venezuela relied on imports for most of the country's sustenance, yet by the beginning of 2016, food imports decreased by 67% in favor of federal debt payments (Aponte and Martínez 2018). In addition, domestic food production had been falling since 2008 under Chavez. By the time the country came to rely on domestic food production, this industry was already severely weakened (Doocy et al. 2019).

In addition, preventative health measures like mosquito control and vaccinations have nearly buckled, bringing about the rapid growth of infectious diseases in the country (Johns Hopkins 2019). The conditions facing a vulnerable, impoverished, and unvaccinated population led to Venezuelan citizens being highly susceptible to infection. "Infectious

diseases thrive under the conditions of poverty, crowded living arrangements, and malnutrition that many Venezuelans face" (Page and Broner 2020). More than one million malaria cases were reported in 2018 and according to Venezuelan and Ausman, and the shortage of medicine paired with government corruption has allowed the inflow of poor-quality medicines to enter the country, inadequately addressing cases of disease (2019). This swell in infectious diseases in Venezuela had detrimental consequences for the region which will be discussed later in this essay.

For now, to further investigate the domestic situation of Venezuela's health care and humanitarian needs, we will look at the following information provided by Johns Hopkins University (2019):

Infant mortality rose by 63 percent and maternal mortality more than doubled from 2012 to 2016. Since 2016, outbreaks of measles and diphtheria have spread throughout the country and into neighboring countries. From 2016 to 2017, the country had the largest rate of increase of malaria in the world, with the number of cases growing to 414,527. Tuberculosis cases increased by 68 percent between 2014 and 2017. Only about 10 percent of HIV patients are receiving their prescribed antiretroviral treatment. There are widespread outages of birth control. Shortages have led to a black market where birth control pills cost 14 times the minimum monthly income. Ninety-eight percent of physicians in Venezuela believe the health-care crisis was the worst in 30 years and nearly three quarters believe that working conditions in public hospitals violate physician ethics and human rights.

In addition, over 30,000 doctors have left the country in the past decade, and a third of hospitals have entirely no access to potable water (“What is Happening?” 2022). 85% of medicines are unavailable or scarce and the vulnerable population continues to rise (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019). “The vulnerable population includes over 140,000 cancer patients, 300,000 with cardiological diseases, 300,000 chronic patients (i.e., Parkinson’s and hemophilia), and 79,000 people with HIV, who stopped receiving treatment since 2016 or receive it intermittently” (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019). The electricity crisis that hospitals face is another example of the state’s failure and inability to sufficiently provide for their domestic institutions:

The national electricity system collapsed on March 7, 2019, after 15 years of mismanagement, underinvestment, and corruption.

Successive blackouts began on March 7 and left the country without electricity, water, functioning hospitals, public transportation, and communications critical for payment system operations (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019).

As power outages continue frequently and unpredictably, some Venezuelans say that this is an example of a state unable to meet even its country’s basic needs. The electricity crisis is closely tied to the state’s growing health crisis.

The nongovernmental organization, Doctors for Health, states that in only four months in 2019, more than 1,500 patients died due to a lack of supplies (Puglie 2019). As a result of these precarious and depleted conditions, many hospitals across the country have closed or are operating at very limited capacity (Page & Broner 2020). Doctors report that water shortages can last from “weeks to months” and that most hospitals do not have the capacity for “x-

rays, laboratory tests, intensive care beds or units, and respirators” (Page and Broner 2020). In addition to a declining healthcare system, the Venezuelan people are facing severe poverty and acute malnutrition, with children and pregnant women being most vulnerable to the latter (Johns Hopkins 2019).

According to Doocy et al. (2017), 87% of households lived in poverty (a nearly 40% increase from 2014), 80% were food insecure, nearly 90% reported that they did not have sufficient income to purchase food, and about 64.3% of the population claimed to lose weight, the average weight loss being 11.4 kilograms among adults (2019) (UNICEF 2016). Attested by Benzaquen: “9.6 million people eat two or fewer meals a day and 93% of people cannot afford food” (2017). The IRC reported that 14% of all children under the age of 5 were suffering from acute malnutrition and 57% of pregnant women were in states of being malnourished (“What is Happening?” 2022). According to the Venezuelan Society of Childcare and Pediatrics, 72% of children arriving for emergency care did not come to address illness, but instead “dietary deficiencies” (Doocy et al. 2019). Between 2011 to 2013, pediatric hospital admissions for acute malnutrition ranged from 180 to 220. After the crisis in 2014, annual admissions surpassed 300 per year, peaking in 2017 with over 600 cases (Schuyler 2002).

Before the economic crisis in Venezuela, child malnutrition rates were not nearly as severe, and according to Sistema de Monitoreo, cases have tripled since 2014 (Doocy et al. 2019). According to the Venezuelan Health Ministry, child mortality has dramatically increased (Sarta 2017). Table 4 demonstrates the United Nations’ varying projections for the number

of children impacted by acute malnutrition as a result of the crisis.

Table 4: “United Nations’ Projections for Venezuelan Children with S.A.M for 2017 and 2018” (Doocy et al. 2019).

Table 2. Caseload projections of Venezuelan children with acute malnutrition (United Nations (UN); UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), 2018b; US Census Bureau).

Population Estimates	Acute Malnutrition Prevalence Rate	Projected Acute Malnutrition Caseload, Children 6–59 mos.
2017 Population Estimate	31,977,000 Pre-crisis	4.1% ¹¹ 109,380
Crisis Emigration (since 2015)	2,300,000 Moderate	5–9.9% 133,390–264,110
2018 Projected Population ^a	30,877,000 Serious	10–14.9% 266,780–384,163
2018 Children 6–59 months ^b	2,667,800 Critical	>15% >400,170

Children are massively impacted by this health and food crisis, and these two elements are the driving factors for emigration, particularly for families, as later discussed in this essay. As for pregnant women, a 2018 survey found that 38% of this group had acute malnutrition and 29.1% were anemic (Landaeta-Jimenez 2018). In numerous ways, the future generations of Venezuela are being severely impacted by this modern crisis.

The food crisis correlates with Venezuela’s political misadministration through the government’s program of CLAP (Comite Local de Abastecimiento y Producción) boxes, which is the distribution of food supplies throughout the country as relief. State insufficiency is demonstrated through the irregular disbursement of these necessary food distribution boxes, with boxes not being delivered for months at a time to 54% of families (Doocy et al. 2019). State corruption is exemplified through the conditional and political access of CLAP boxes, as “identity cards”, which exhibit an individual’s voting history, are required to be shown and “approved” in order to be

eligible to receive these (Doocy et al. 2019).

The systematic economic failure of the Venezuelan petrostate, the severely violent and undemocratic political repression present, and the growing humanitarian crisis have all contributed to a collapsed state. The largest consequence of this is a population unable to have their most basic socioeconomic and humanitarian needs met nor their voices heard in government. Due to the drastic and desperate situations in which many Venezuelan citizens live, millions of people have left the country, resulting in the Venezuelan exodus. This refugee crisis is immense in scale and the main driving factors for migration have been the lack of food and medical care as well as the extremity of violence, poverty, and political repression (Labrador and Merrow 2019). The majority of Venezuelan migrants have moved to neighboring Latin American and Caribbean countries. With their displacement has come the transmission of the regional effects of state failure, particularly elements of instability and increased risks of conflict.

THE VENEZUELAN EXODUS

“As of October 2019, 4.5 million Venezuelans have fled the country. This population is estimated to grow to 5.4 million by the end of 2019 and 7.5 million by the end of 2020” (“Venezuelan Displacement” 2019, 2). At the beginning of 2019, it was estimated by the United Nations that one in every ten Venezuelans have left the country (Third Way 2019, 2). Within the population of those displaced includes vulnerable demographic groups such as the elderly, children, disabled individuals, and pregnant women, and a large portion of those emigrating are families with small children (“Venezuelan Displacement” 2019, 2). A disclaimer is

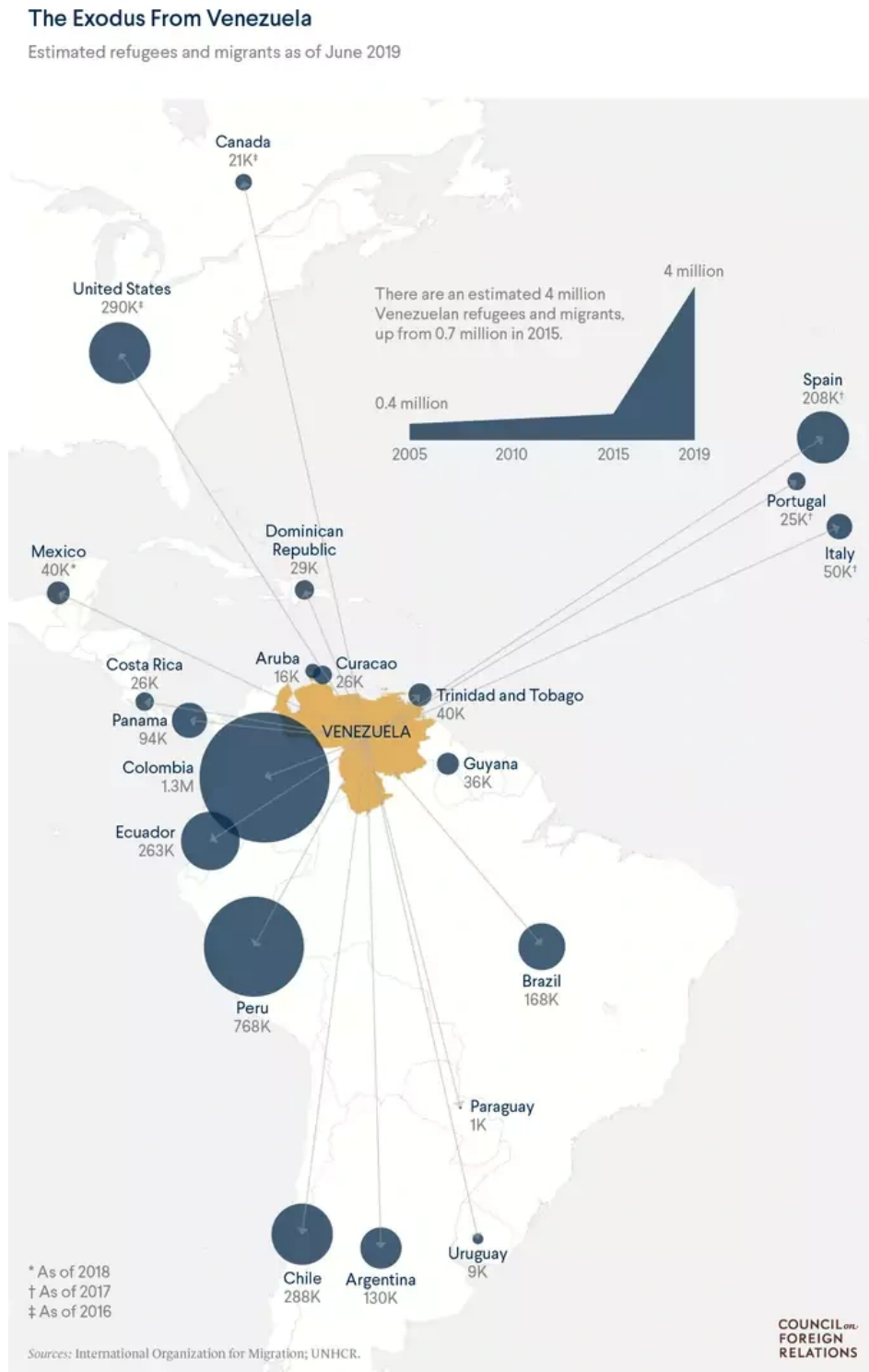
necessary to state that many of the international organizations referenced in this section do not clearly distinguish between refugees and migrants when referring to displaced Venezuelans, but consider their experiences to be shared and similar.

Where are the displaced going? What are their conditions like during travel and once they finally arrive at their destinations? Do their situations improve once they leave the country? According to Labrador and Merrow, “Approximately eight out of every ten Venezuelan migrants stay in Latin America and the Caribbean, while most of the remainder settle in North America and Southern Europe” (2019). As of 2019, Colombia hosts 1.4 million Venezuelan refugees (a 3,490% increase from 39,000 in 2015), Peru holds 860,900, Chile has 371,200, Ecuador 330,400 and Brazil hosts 212,400 Venezuelan refugees (“Venezuelan Displacement” 2019, 2). Yet, the majority of Venezuelans lack the documentation necessary to enter legally or stay for a prolonged period for most of these states. Due to this, they “are not guaranteed access to basic rights” (“Venezuela Crisis” 2023). Figures 8 and 9 show the amount of Venezuelan refugees in various Latin American countries between 2017 to 2018, and June 2019.

Figure 8: “Top Destinations for Venezuelan Migrants and Refugees between 2016 to 2018” (Third Way 2019, 3).



Figure 9: “The Exodus from Venezuela”
(Labrador & Merrow 2019).



Some changes to note between these two charts is the increase in Venezuelan refugees and migrants from 2018 to 2019 in Colombia, Peru, Chile, Panama, and Brazil. Colombia experienced a nearly 450,000 increase. Peru's was over 400,000. Chile's was over 180,000. Panama's was over 18,000 and Brazil's was over 118,000. These numbers show the immense scale of the Venezuelan refugee crisis and how the Venezuelan population is being dispersed across the entirety of Latin America.

During their intercontinental transit, the conditions that traveling Venezuelans face are adverse; over 50% reported risks while traveling ("Venezuelan Displacement" 2019, 2). "They travel hundreds of kilometers over days and weeks...Many suffer from exhaustion and illness" ("Venezuela Situation" 2023). Individuals experience injuries or severe blisters due to travel and face severe exposure to the elements, with many dying due to cold exposure ("Venezuela Situation" 2023). In addition, they experience a shortage of necessities like food, shelter, sufficient medical care and emotional support, as many citizens report experiencing severe trauma as a result of the current state of affairs in Venezuela (Page and Broner 2020). Even upon reaching their destinations, refugees may find cities or countries not accepting migrants, which means they then have to continue traveling by foot to the next location. Those who choose to enter illegally may find themselves at risk of being subjected to human trafficking to being recruited into a local armed group ("Venezuelan Displacement" 2019, 2).

All of the following information references the UNHCR ("Venezuela Crisis: Aid, Statistics, and News" 2023). As for those who are able to settle in neighboring states, they are still exposed to "heightened

risks of exploitation, trafficking, violence, discrimination and xenophobia" ("Venezuela Crisis: Aid, Statistics, and News" 2023). Many continue to live in severe conditions of poverty, overcrowded and unsanitary housing conditions, homelessness, and in states of moderate hunger.

Half of all refugees and migrants [from Venezuela] in Latin America and the Caribbean cannot afford three meals a day and lack access to safe and dignified housing. To access food or avoid homelessness, many Venezuelans resort to survival sex, begging or indebtedness (2023).

Many families take on debts to afford housing or sufficient access to food and remain at risk of exploitation and eviction. Political instability and economic hardship remain omnipresent throughout the region and the perceived increased competition for employment and social welfare that Venezuelans may impose to locals of neighboring states fuels sentiments of xenophobia and anti-Venezuelan discrimination. This has led to limited access to social services, jobs, schools, and other public spheres. Lack of sufficient legal documentation leads individuals to be more vulnerable to less-protected forms of income as well and leads to an increase of Venezuelan presence in the informal job sector. "Currently, the Venezuelan population is twice as likely to be unemployed as the local population and 93 percent with jobs work in the informal sector. Among Venezuelans, 78 percent identified a job as their greatest need." ("Colombia" 2022). This growing sentiment of social unrest and the perception of growing instability in the country as a result of Venezuelan refugees by locals, has led to different states in the region reversing their once-welcoming refugee and

migration policies (“Venezuelan Displacement” 2019, 2). In addition to enhanced feelings of social unrest and threat of internal conflict between locals and Venezuelan migrants, the collapse of Venezuela’s state as well as its healthcare infrastructure has had profound socioeconomic and medical consequences on the region.

THE REGIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF VENEZUELA’S STATE FAILURE

The two principal consequences for the region by the collapse of the Venezuelan petrostate and its humanitarian and migratory crisis has been the perceived socioeconomic strain this has imposed upon neighboring countries as well as a widespread medical crisis. The following section will detail the effects of the Venezuelan refugee crisis upon neighboring states, specifically Colombia as it has received the largest influx of Venezuelan migrants, and how their economy has been affected. The subsequent section will analyze the regional outbreak of infectious diseases stemming from Venezuela’s collapsed healthcare infrastructure and migratory dilemma.

THE REGIONAL SOCIOECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF VENEZUELA’S COLLAPSE

According to the International Rescue Committee (IRC), many Latin American countries receiving Venezuelan migrants, have already been experiencing their own economic hardships, armed conflicts, and stretched state capacities (2022). Prior to Venezuela’s collapse, neighboring states were already meeting complications regarding the provision of socioeconomic welfare to their local populations (Third Way 2019, 2). When large influxes of populations are combined with finite

resources, stagnant GDP growth, and underfunded public education and healthcare systems, this increases the region’s likelihood for instability and conflict (“Venezuelan Displacement” 2019, 1). Colombia alone holds “over 2.5 times as many Venezuelans as Germany does Syrians, with only eight percent of Germany’s GDP” (“Colombia” 2022). To summarize, regionally, Latin America was already struggling in multiple capacities, and did not have the secure socioeconomic or political foundation to effectively provide for Venezuelan migrants, which in turn, created heightened sentiments of xenophobia and competition by citizens of neighboring states.

Within Colombia, some citizens have perceived Venezuelans as competitors for job markets, social welfare, and medical attention, in addition to critiquing Venezuelans as the culprit for declining economic conditions in their state (IRC 2019). During the peak of the Venezuelan migration crisis, the following occurred in Colombia: “Real wages dropped 3-6 percent due to an increase in migration. National poverty rates did not decrease from 2017 to 2018 (for the first time since 2002)”, in addition to population adjustments costing Colombia approximately \$1.5 billion in public services (“Colombia” 2022, 2). Colombia has not been the only neighboring state where socioeconomic conditions were exacerbated as a result of the disaster in Venezuela.

Declining economic conditions and social support for migrants has occurred in both Ecuador and Peru, and as a result, they have introduced enhanced restrictions for migration, such as passport requirements, criminal record certificates or simply discontinuing short-term stays within their borders (IRC 2019). The requirement of a legal document like passports or criminal

record certificates more than halved official entries into Ecuador in just three months in 2019 (IRC 2019). What makes this requirement difficult is that it is hard to obtain a passport or legal document in Venezuela, as the state is unreliable and slow in its administration and that it is too expensive for most Venezuelans to afford (IRC 2019). Due to these requirements, illegal entries have increased by almost 30%, intensifying the risks of sexual and gang violence or exploitation that Venezuelans may face during and after their migratory journeys (IRC 2019). The Venezuelan state collapse and refugee crisis has had a significant impact on the region economically as well as socially, and as social unrest begins to grow in the face of xenophobia, regional crisis factors like instability and conflict become more likely in the near future.

DISEASE AS A REGIONAL CONSEQUENCE OF STATE FAILURE

With the collapse of the Venezuelan petrostate came the downfall of its healthcare system. Contractions of highly infectious diseases, like malaria, measles, and diphtheria spiked considerably following Venezuela's state failure (Venezuelan & Ausman 2019; Faiola et al. 2018). The mass movement of hundreds of thousands of potentially infected Venezuelans seeking medical and humanitarian aid exacerbated the spread of disease throughout the region and magnified Latin America's preexisting weakness of vaccination programs (Faiola et al. 2018). Outbreaks of infectious diseases overtook not only Venezuela, but Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru; with elements of economic, social, and medical crisis dispersed throughout the region (Faiola et al. 2018). According to the Pan American Health Organization, the

Americas was the first region in the world to eliminate measles, yet vaccine shortages and the breakdown of Venezuela's healthcare both contributed to the surge of the Latin American measles epidemic in 2018 that spread to over 14 countries (Page and Broner 2020).

While already under capacity to address the healthcare needs of a healthy domestic population, Latin American healthcare systems were unable to contain the measles epidemic before it spread to hundreds of thousands of individuals. In February 2018, one Venezuelan child contracted measles while crossing the Brazilian border; by October, more than ten thousand individuals were infected in the Amazonas state alone and evolving at a rate of 170 patients a week (Faiola et al. 2018). The immensity of the outbreak left thousands hospitalized and strained an underprepared and overwhelmed regional healthcare system. Meanwhile, between 2014 to 2017, malaria cases in the Latin American region more than tripled, with 406,289 cases existing in Brazil in 2017 alone (Faiola et al. 2018). Authorities from both Brazil and Peru have claimed the increase in migrant flows to have greatly contributed to these growing outbreaks of measles and malaria. Diphtheria ravaged the region as well with over 1,000 cases reported between 2016 to 2018, particularly affecting border regions in Colombia with a fatality rate of 14.7 % (Jamaica Observer 2018).

Due to the medical crisis, regional sentiments of anger and social instability grew in response to Venezuela's state failure and incapacity to care for its own citizens. This mindset led to the widespread discrimination and maltreatment of Venezuelans across Latin America and more closed border policies. Despite migration restrictions, regional vulnerability was exposed through porous

borders, the widespread transmission of disease, the weakened capacity of hospitals, and sparse preventative healthcare programs.

CONCLUSION

The weakness of a petrostate lies in its extreme reliance on oil revenues for the socioeconomic fate of the country. The policies of Hugo Chavez at the turn of the 21st century had long standing consequences that weakened Venezuela's ability to veer away from oil, ultimately leading to the state's collapse when global oil prices plummeted in 2014. Maduro's poor political and economic choices exacerbated a nation in an already precarious state and worsened the political and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. In terms of humanity, economics, and politics, the Venezuelan people were neglected, impoverished, repressed, and suffering. As a tenth of the Venezuelan population fled their home country to neighboring states in search of relief and aid, the region as a whole felt the consequences of state failure through increased risks of social unrest, economic instability, and the widespread health epidemic. The spread of disease fully bared the region's weakness in vaccination programs and states' capacities to contain disease. This builds upon the theoretical framework that state failure often occurs in regions that are already exhibiting weakness and instability, and the limited state capacities of Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru demonstrated this argument, as well as the extensive susceptibility of Latin American citizens to preventable contagious diseases. As demonstrated by this paper, through the story of the Venezuelan petrostate, its shortcomings and its eventual failure, state collapse imposes profound and often detrimental

consequences for the region, as seen by the events discussed in Latin America.

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The Curse of a Colonial Institution, not Resources: Colonialism and Kleptocracy in the Congo

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Abstract: *The Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) immense natural resource wealth and stunted economic growth and poverty cause many to deem it "resource cursed" – a theory used to describe states with abundant natural resources and negative development outcomes. This theory is said to materialize through several mechanisms, but its presentation is widely understood to be conditionally reliant on the strength of institutions, and further critiques point to an insufficient consideration of history. So, what else might explain the DRC's development shortcomings? This paper contends that if the resource curse is conditional on institutions, then the institution itself is the curse, not the resources. Critiques of institutional conditionality and historical understatement are blended to argue that institutions traceable to the colonial era are the primary cause of poor development outcomes in the DRC. A qualitative historical analysis tracing the Congo's institutional history reveals that the extractive institution was established in the colonial period and perpetuated by subsequent domestic political leaders and foreign influence in the form of neo-colonialism. These factors, not natural resource abundance, are found to be the root cause of the negative development outcomes experienced by the DRC. Understanding the crucial role of institutions in the DRC's development encourages greater attention to their role elsewhere and could help shape how scholars and policy-makers approach development globally.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Some would say the Congo is the site of a tragic coincidence. Technology has made enormous leaps during the past two and a half centuries, and while these leaps have improved the quality of life for many, they have too often served as a precursor to suffering in the Congo. First, it was the Industrial Revolution that created the steamboat and provided European "explorers" with a path to central Africa. Next, the development of the automobile created immense demand for rubber needed to make tires – a resource abundantly and conveniently available in the region. During the First World War, copper deposits in the

Congo were exploited to produce bullet casings. During the Second World War, the uranium used in the atom bombs detonated in Japan was also sourced from the Congo. The 21st century birthed the smartphone, and vital to its production are the so-called 'conflict minerals' of tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold – all of which are found in the Congo (Van Reybrouck 2010). The DRC has been and remains one of the world's largest industrial diamond producers (International Trade Administration 2022). Today, in a story that has come full circle, the Congo provides a resource critical to modern automobile manufacture – cobalt. As the green energy

movement pushes electric vehicles (EVs) to the foreground, the rechargeable lithium-ion batteries that are necessary for EVs rely on the cobalt that the DRC supplies.

At the center of this story seems to be resources, and despite their natural resource wealth, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is one of the five poorest nations in the world and is suffering from an ongoing humanitarian crisis (World Bank 2023). The juxtaposition of poverty and slow or lackluster development alongside resource wealth is not unique to the Congo, as other states with abundant natural resources have also suffered from adverse outcomes – a phenomenon coined the “resource curse.”³ The resource curse theory describes the negative outcomes experienced by these states abundant in natural resources and posits several mechanisms that cause this phenomenon. This theory, however, is widely understood by scholars to be conditional on the quality of the state’s institutions. Moreover, much of the resource curse scholarship underplays the significance of states’ history and fails to acknowledge country-specific nuances, as seminal studies tell a story beginning in the 1970s following decolonization in many of these states.⁴ These critiques are foundational to understanding that the root of poverty and stunted economic growth in the Congo is and always has been its institutions.

This paper builds off a claim made by Morrison (2013) where he states: “...put simply, if oil’s effect is conditional, there is no curse. If there is a curse to be discussed, it regards a country’s institutions, not its natural resources” (1122).⁵ I blend the critiques of institutional conditionality and

historical understatement to advance the following argument: The resource curse in the DRC is instead a curse rooted in the extractive institutional model established under King Leopold II of Belgium and upheld by subsequent domestic political leaders and neo-colonialism. That is, the negative experience of the Congo despite its natural resource wealth is the path-dependent outcome of colonial institutional establishment and the actions of kleptocratic domestic leaders and neo-colonial forces that sought to uphold this institution.

This argument is articulated through a historical analysis of institutional formation during the colonial period and the tracing of institutional characteristics in the DRC from then to now. Within the tracing of this history, I explain the mechanisms that facilitated institutional persistence. I argue that the economic model that sought to move natural resources from the colony to a foreign power during colonial times has persisted. This paper does not confine itself to the consideration of a single resource, as I argue that the extractive institutional model exists above any single resource and contend that the quality of institutions is the core cause of poverty and slow economic growth in the Congo.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows: II) Background about the DRC’s current conditions; III) A review of the literature regarding the resource curse, inclusive and extractive institutions, and neo-colonialism; IV) An analysis of the historical events that established and maintained an extractive political (and

³ Also known as the “poverty paradox” or the “paradox of plenty.”

⁴ Pointed out by Mukoyama (2020).

⁵ While this study examines the effect of oil, the logic remains consistent regardless of resource.

thus, economic) institution in the DRC. This section is divided into six subsections:

- i.* Extractive institutional establishment under the Congo Free State (CFS) from 1885 to 1908
- ii.* The first institutional continuation which describes the transition from the CFS to the Belgian Congo and their rule from 1908 to 1960
- iii.* Institutional preservation which describes how the Congolese independence movement failed to rid the country of its extractive institutions
- iv.* The second institutional continuation during the Mobutu dictatorship from 1965 to 1997
- v.* The third institutional continuation under Laurent Kabila from 1997 to 2001
- vi.* The fourth intuitional continuation beginning with the rule of Joseph Kabila in 2001 and continuing with the establishment of Chinese mining companies in the DRC that persist today

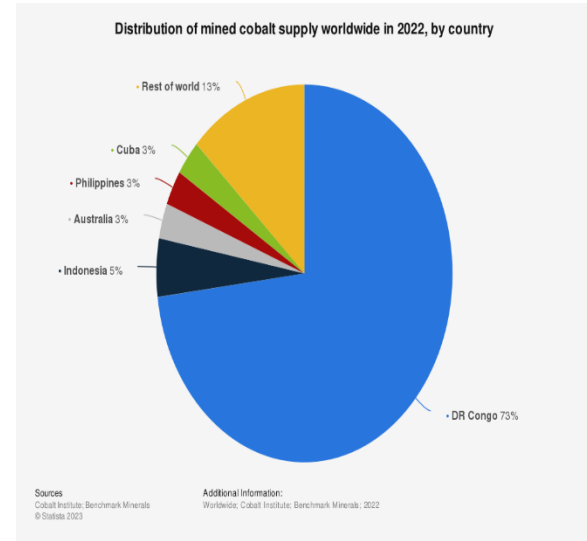
Section V concludes and includes a discussion of limitations and directions for future research.

II. BACKGROUND

The DRC is the source of multiple primary commodities critical to the global economy – most notably cobalt. In 2022, nearly three-quarters of the global cobalt supply came from the Congo (Statista 2023, see Figure 1). This level of production is a product of increasing demand that has generated a corresponding increase in production (see Figures 2 and 3). The DRC also produces 3.7 million carats of industrial diamonds annually – the sixth highest globally. Collectively, the mineral riches of the DRC are immense (estimated to be worth tens of trillions USD), with the nation also providing copper and gold to the global market (International Trade Administration 2022). To say that the

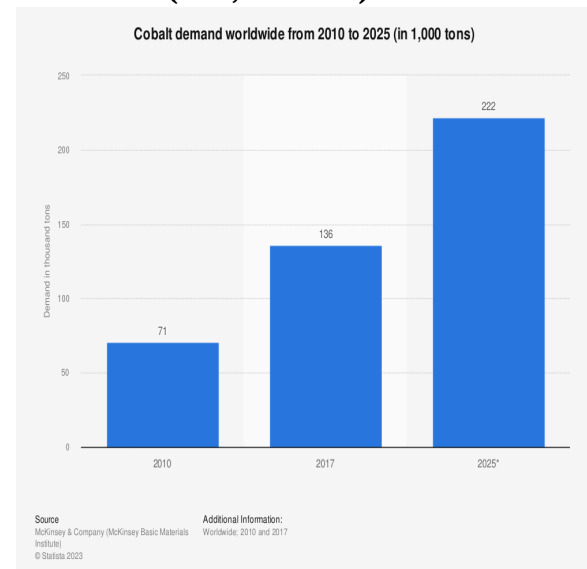
Congo is key to the global economy would be an understatement.

Figure 1. Distribution of mined cobalt supply worldwide in 2022, by country



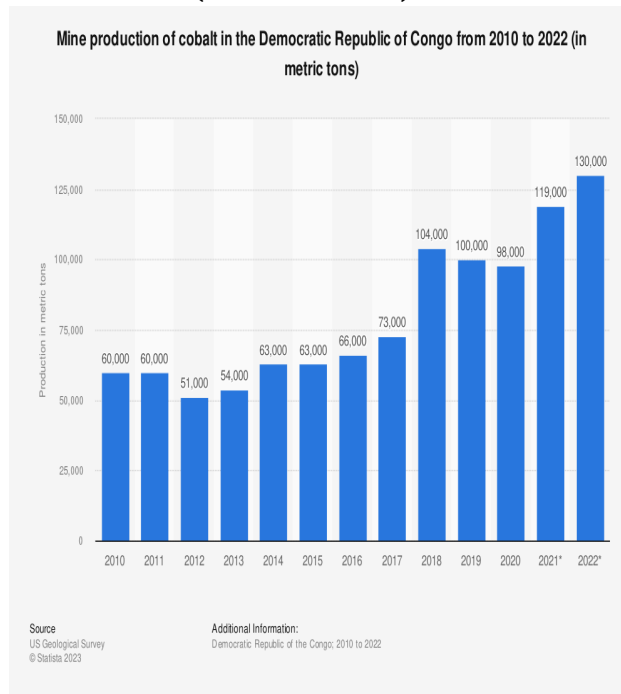
Source: Cobalt Institute via Statista 2023.

Figure 2. Cobalt demand worldwide from 2010-2025 (in 1,000 tons)



Source: McKinsey & Company via Statista 2023

Figure 3. Mine production of cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 2010 to 2022 (in metric tons)



Source: US Geological Survey via Statista 2023

While the DRC contributes immense value to the global economy, the people of the DRC live in some of the harshest conditions in the world.⁶ Conditions have improved since the early 21st century, but poverty, conflict, and humanitarian crises continue. In 2022, the DRC was ranked 179 out of 191 countries in the United Nations Development Programme’s 2021/2022 Human Development Report with a Human Development Index Value of 0.479. Additionally, in 2022, roughly 60 million people in the DRC (appx. 62% of the population) lived on less than \$2.15 per day (World Bank 2023). In 2023, the DRC accounted for 11.3% of the global population living below the extreme poverty line (World Data Lab 2023). These

⁶ This is the basis for claims that the Congo is resource cursed.

conditions have been exacerbated by conflict this year, as armed groups in the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu and Ituri have contributed to the internal displacement of nearly 7 million people (International Organization for Migration 2023). All these factors underscore the overall instability of the DRC.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

THE RESOURCE CURSE

The resource curse refers to the adverse effects nations with natural resource abundance experience such as increased autocracy/decreased democracy, slow economic growth, and stunted economic and human development compared to countries with fewer natural resources (Smith and Waldner 2021). While discussions of the relationship between natural resources and development predate Richard Auty’s *Sustaining Development in Mineral Economies: The Resource Curse Thesis* (1993), Auty was the first to coin the term *resource curse*. The theory was advanced by Sachs and Warner’s 1995 pioneering research that implemented a cross-sectional analysis to find that countries with a higher ratio of natural resource exports to GDP experienced slower economic growth (Sachs and Warner 1995). They later argue that natural resource export-led economies failed to enjoy strong and sustainable economic growth (Sachs and Rodriguez 1999; Sachs and Warner 1997). Proponents of the theory have proposed several different mechanisms connecting natural resource abundance to adverse outcomes which can be divided into two categories: political and economic.⁷ Political mechanisms of the resource curse

⁷ This two-level analysis is also used by Morrison (2013).

describe a positive relationship between natural resource abundance and rent-seeking and between petroleum and autocracy (Leite and Weidman 1999; Ross 2001; Ross 2015). Petroleum is also said to be a permissive or enabling condition of civil war (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Economic mechanisms include the Prebisch-Singer Hypothesis,⁸ commodity price volatility, the crowding out of manufacturing, Dutch disease, and negative effects on education (Black et al. 2021; Frankel 2012; Papyrakis and Gerlagh 2004). All these mechanisms have been used as support for the existence of a resource curse.

While many treat the resource curse and its extensions⁹ as conventional wisdom, it remains highly contested. Concerns with the cross-country regression analysis methodology, causal claims based on observational data, and theoretical and conceptual inconsistencies highlight the shortcomings of the theory (Haber and Menaldo 2011; Morrison 2013; Smith and Waldner 2021). Additionally, an opposing body of research and data has provided contradictory results. These studies find the relationship between oil and democracy – or more broadly between natural resources and growth – to be null, and some even find that the relationship may be positive (Haber and Menaldo; Kolstad and Wiig 2009; Morrison 2013; Smith 2015; Smith and Waldner 2021; Venables 2016). Most notable, however, is that the resource curse is understood by many scholars to be conditional on the strength of institutions (Cabrales and Hauk 2010; Hodler et al. 2023; Mehlum et al. 2006a; Mehlum et al. 2006b; Morrison 2013). As mentioned in the

introduction, Morrison (2013) suggests that the curse is not resources, but institutions. Mehlum et al. (2006a) differentiate between “grabber-friendly” and “producer-friendly” institutions, a framework similar to the “inclusive” and “extractive” institutions identified by Acemoglu et al. (2001). The following subsection explores the classification of these institutions.

INCLUSIVE AND EXTRACTIVE INSTITUTIONS

Acemoglu and Robinson differentiate between the “inclusive institution” and the “extractive institution” and eventually argue that the colonial foundations of these institutions permit their persistence (2012; 2017). At the root of this argument lies the identification of two distinct types of colonialism: settler colonialism and exploitation colonialism. In settler colonies, European settlers inhabited the colony and sought to replicate the economic and political structures of their home country. This led to greater political and economic freedom, as settlers could participate in trade for personal gain and would eventually gain the same political rights as those in the home country. Examples of these colonies include what would later become Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States. Here, emphasis was placed on property rights and protections against government overreach (Acemoglu et al. 2001). Meanwhile, extractive states (or exploitation colonies) created a system based on the exploitation of indigenous labor and resources that was designed to move wealth from the colony to the metropole as efficiently as possible. Dense populations of indigenous people

⁸ Primary commodity prices deteriorate over time compared to manufactured goods, leaving

primary commodity producing economies vulnerable in the long run.

⁹ The alleged negative effects of oil.

provided a labor force that the colonizer exploited through coercive institutions like slavery and forced labor¹⁰ (Acemoglu and Robinson 2017), and settlement in these colonies was less feasible due to high rates of settler mortality from local diseases (Acemoglu et al. 2001). Examples of these colonies can be found throughout Africa and parts of Asia. While colonial goals may have been similar across nations, the pre-existing conditions of the colonies were not and thus created great variation in outcomes.

The type of colonialism experienced by a colony created either inclusive or extractive political institutions, which led to inclusive or extractive economic institutions and are, in part, responsible for underdevelopment and poverty today. Forming an inclusive political institution requires two elements: 1.) Broad distribution of political power (to Acemoglu and Robinson, pluralistic) and 2.) A strong and “sufficiently centralized” state. Sufficient centralization is contingent upon the distribution of power permitting the enforcement of law and order permissive of economic activity, trade, and the basic security of citizens (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012, 81). These elements are crucial for innovation, the driver of economic growth, and in societies with inclusive institutions, innovation is possible because broad political representation provides avenues to economic participation and ensures property rights which are then enforced and upheld by strong states. With a greater ability to participate in the economic system, more people do so, and society reaps the benefits of the full creative and innovative potential of the population. The full potential of the population is also more

attainable because the inclusive institution funds technological advancement and education – two other drivers of growth. Lastly, the inclusive institution protects against monopolies and clientelism, which inhibit economic growth by reducing the capacity for innovation (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). Together, these conditions facilitate economic development.

When an institution lacks either required element of an inclusive institution, it is extractive. In the extractive institution, political power is concentrated in the hands of a select few who can then shape economic institutions to their liking. They face little opposition, and often use their power to evade accountability and further suppress opposition. Little investment is allocated to education, so schooling becomes either unavailable or inadequate and the potential of the population is never realized. The people of the extractive institution are excluded from the “economic game.”¹¹ Property rights are not adequately enforced, technological innovation is not encouraged, and the people are left unsupported (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012). The result is an institution whose goal is to benefit the political elites at the expense of the masses. These characteristics are central to the story of development.

The final prong of this argument posits that the types of colonial institutions formed in a country tend to persist. In a study using the mortality rates of Europeans in colonies as an expression of extractive institutional formation, Acemoglu et al. (2001) found a strong correlation between settler mortality rates and economic underperformance today.

¹⁰ E.g., the Spanish *Encomienda*.

¹¹ Participation in the market by starting businesses and engaging in free trade.

That is, colonies less hospitable (with higher rates of mortality) to European settlers led to the formation of extractive institutions that still exist today. Acemoglu et al. argue that independence only changed the faces of governance, as the institutions, structures, policies, practices, and tendencies of the colonial regime were all inherited by those who gained political power upon independence (2001). Based on this premise, they argue three mechanisms permitted institutional persistence (Acemoglu et al. 2001):

1. Elites have little incentive to bear the costs required to transform extractive institutions into inclusive ones and instead exploit existing institutions for personal gain.

2. The small local elite to whom European powers had delegated everyday procedures during colonial rule were the ones who inherited the state and chose to maintain a system that divided immense resource rents among a small group.

3. The local elites had invested in mechanisms that facilitated the extractive institution. Counterfactually, they had not invested in mechanisms promoting inclusive institutions and, thus, were incentivized to uphold the systems that perpetuated the interests around which their investments were organized.

Acemoglu and Robinson expand on some of these mechanisms in their 2012 book, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*, where they discuss examples in Sierra Leone and Guatemala (among others) of local elites inheriting extractive institutions and using them for personal gain just as the colonial power did. These observations permit a conclusion that – while requiring linkage – is structurally sound. Extractive political and economic institutions are inhibitive to economic growth and development, and

colonies, where extractive institutions were imposed, tend to retain these since the post-independence political regime typically inherited and maintained the same political and economic institutions as the colonial power, now using them for personal gain. This is not to say that every exploitation colony created extractive institutions that have persisted and will last forever – as there is no claim of absolute path dependence. Rather, the exploitation colony presents a condition that *can* create extractive institutions that *may* persist based on the decisions made by political elites.

Critiques of the institutional framework that Acemoglu et al. (2012) present are vast. Criticism has taken place in various forms including book reviews, personal websites, and blog posts, and Acemoglu et al. have often posted/published direct responses to critics. Popular critiques include accusations of oversimplification and misrepresentation of historical events, failure to properly consider other factors (many cite geography), and overly vague definitions of extractive and inclusive institutions (Diamond 2012; Fukuyama 2012; Sachs 2012). A back and forth between Acemoglu/Robinson and Jeffery Sachs, a seminal scholar of the resource curse literature, has seen the most substantive critiques. Published on Sachs' website, he accuses them of neglecting other factors such as diffusion as another measure of development (in addition to innovation), criticizes their inability to predict or describe outcomes, claims their data are unreliable, and criticizes their measure of political institutions for its conflation of expropriation risk with extractive political institutions (Sachs 2012). The critiques of the institutional framework posed by Acemoglu, Robinson, and Johnson do demonstrate flaws in their

theory, but nothing put forward has been definitive and for every example, there is a corresponding counterexample. A reasonable interpretation of this back and forth creates one logical conclusion – like the resource curse, the extractive institution as a predictor of development is influenced by other factors.

NEO-COLONIALISM

The post-war period saw the beginning of decolonization, and scholars quickly began to discuss efforts that former colonial powers were undertaking to reimpose or retain control of their former colonies. This idea became known as neo-colonialism. Kwame Nkrumah is said to have coined the term in 1963 at the Organization of African States Charter (Afisi 2017).¹² It was formally advanced in literature by Jean Paul Sartre in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (1964) and again by Kwame Nkrumah in *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965). The concept has roots in Marxian critiques of capitalism and finds that the former colonial power exacts control over the independent state through the indirect mechanisms of economic and political influence. In this state, independence is a façade that disguises the continuation of the colonial relationship (Afisi 2017). Also critical to the construction of this idea are the works of Frantz Fanon: *Black Skin White Mask* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) – seminal contributions to the study of decolonization. Fanon’s writings describe what can be deduced as the counterfactual to neo-colonialism where the former colony achieves freedom from all colonial influences. Neo-colonialism describes the failure to achieve the complete liberation Fanon describes, as the neocolonial system differs from the colonial

system in that its domination is insidious. Instead of direct violence, it is defined by its deceptive appearance of autonomy that hides the influence of the former colonial power, yet the colonizer still retains control over the former colony (Afisi 2017; Fanon 1961). From neo-colonialism, there have emerged various theoretical frameworks.

Dependency theory, world-systems theory, and postcolonialism are helpful frameworks to analyze neo-colonialism. Dependency theory and world-systems theory separate the world into the “centre” or “core” and the “periphery” wherein the former grows at the expense and the detriment of the latter (Halperin 2018; Munro 2023). Postcolonialism offers another useful framework to conceptualize neo-colonialism, as it recognizes the long-lasting effects of the cultural influence of the colonial power on the colony and how this influences the material and cultural construction of the newly independent state (Ivison 2023). These theoretical frameworks are part of the foundation of neo-colonialism and the idea that the post-colonial state endures long-lasting colonial influence.

Notable forms of neo-colonialism can be separated into two categories that correspond with dependency theory and world-systems theory. Under the dependency theory framework, multinational corporations (MNCs) and global economic institutions replicate the exploitative colonial dynamic. Under world systems theory, states replicate this dynamic. MNCs replicate this system by exploiting cheap labor and raw materials and benefit only a select few in the neo-colonial state. Since these corporations seek to retain their source of cheap labor and raw materials, they discourage steps

¹² The exact origins of the term are debated.

that foster development antithetical to their goals. Global economic institutions preserve this through conditions on loans that limit investment conducive to development, again, maintaining the neocolonial state as a source of cheap labor and raw materials (Halperin 2023). Powerful states engage in neo-colonialism by interfering in the domestic affairs of the neo-colonial state. This often happens through supporting the side that best suits the power's interests during domestic conflicts. This occurred throughout the Cold War, and the interests of the foreign powers often served to continue economic exploitation (Halperin 2023). Together, these displays of neo-colonialism all serve the same purpose – the preservation of the colonial system that sought to extract wealth at the expense of the people at the source.

Neo-colonial influence is achieved through three avenues: economics, politics, and military. The economic avenue propagates global capitalism and sees MNCs gain control of the country's natural resources at the marginal expense of paying off a small group of political elites. This practice facilitates continued dependence. The political avenue capitalizes on a mutually beneficial relationship between political leaders and foreign powers wherein domestic leaders advocate for the foreign power's interests. As is the case with the MNC, these relationships disproportionately benefit the political elites and continue the exploitation of the state's people. In these cases, the installation of a political leader often follows efforts that destabilize the political

system and see a previous political leader removed from power. Lastly, the military avenue involves foreign powers' support of rebels, revolutionaries, and coups. These efforts aim to install political leaders who will advocate for their interests. Additionally, the military aid provided by foreign powers can become crucial in fighting rebel groups and maintaining the strength of the current government. The importance of this aid creates a relationship of dependence where the government can only thwart rebel groups with the support of the foreign power. Through this reliance, the foreign power can use their leverage to create a favorable relationship and continue a system that benefits them at the expense of the neocolonial state (Rapanyane 2023).¹⁵ Through some or all these avenues, the colonial relationship is replicated.

Critiques of neo-colonialism are vast. Some are based on the racist colonial ideology that points to the alleged backwardness of African societies and puts forward the idea that African societies needed to be civilized by European powers.¹⁴ A reasonable criticism recognizes the negative impacts of European colonialism in Africa but claims that former colonies need economic aid and other forms of assistance to develop (Afisi 2017). These critiques do little in explaining what has occurred since independence in many African countries. The neocolonial perspective attributes negative outcomes after independence to the continued involvement of colonial powers. Despite recent growth and the likely future emergence of more African states as major economic players in the global system,

¹⁵ The paragraph above uses Rapanyane's (2023) "The Derivations of Neo-Colonial Dimensions" subsection as a framework.

¹⁴ This paper will not engage with these fundamentally racist arguments.

many African nations are still impoverished. To critics of neo-colonialism, this means that other factors must be causing these negative outcomes, or these countries are still “catching up.” Neither answer meaningfully addresses the reality that European and Western involvement continues alongside slow development in several countries.

IV. THE EXTRACTIVE INSTITUTION IN THE CONGO

The following section contains the argument central to this paper: Poor development outcomes experienced by the Congo despite its natural resource wealth are the path-dependent outcome of colonial institutional establishment and its continuation by kleptocrats and neocolonial forces. In each stage, I identify how the institution fails to meet the condition of pluralism or sufficient centralization and describe how it continues the model of elite personal enrichment of both domestic and foreign entities at the expense of the Congolese people. The argument is neither purely that of Acemoglu and Robinson’s extractive institution nor is it entirely neocolonial. Rather, the argument is that the combination of these factors shaped the history of the Congo since 1885, and they are more vital to explaining the development outcomes of the state than its resources are.

i. EXTRACTIVE INSTITUTIONAL ESTABLISHMENT

The history of institutions in the Congo did not begin under the CFS, as the people of the region had existing political and economic institutions centuries before the arrival of Henry Morton Stanley in 1871. However, the story of *the* Congolese institution begins here because, as was the

case in most of Africa, the colonial power established arbitrary borders that grouped numerous societies together. So, while institutions in the region predate colonization, the region called the “Democratic Republic of Congo” today had its first collective institution under the CFS.

While disguised as a humanitarian mission, Leopold’s motivation for obtaining an African colony was pure greed. In pursuit of these exploits, he expended great wealth and effort in his financing of Stanley’s expeditions and diplomatic maneuvers to legitimize his claim to the Congo in the eyes of European powers and the United States. Upon assuming control of the region, he turned to profit (Hochschild 1998). Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002) summarizes his motivations well in saying: “As a good capitalist, the king had to judge the success of his colonial enterprise strictly in business terms, that is, in terms of whether or not it was profitable” (20). And despite Leopold’s proclaimed humanitarian motivations including opposition to slavery, he immediately implemented a forced labor system akin to slavery. The colonial military force, the *Force Publique*, ransacked villages and kidnapped women to compel the men into labor. Men of the village were told to collect rubber, and after meeting the quotas imposed by the soldiers, the women could be bought back. If they refused, they or their families would be killed. The Congolese people were later required to provide labor, rubber, and ivory by law. If they did not comply, they were met with

horrific violence.¹⁵ Rubber extraction in the Congo was especially profitable because it could be harvested from wild vines, so after labor costs were removed, the only cost remaining was transportation. Under this model, Leopold became the richest man in the world (Hochschild 1998). This brief overview of the atrocities committed in the CFS does not fully capture the horror endured by the Congolese under Leopold's rule.¹⁶ An estimated 10 million Congolese people were killed through murder, starvation, exhaustion, famine, and disease while birth rates plummeted (Hochschild 1998).¹⁷ The CFS marks one of the darkest periods of human history. It also marks the establishment of the extractive institution in the Congo.

That the CFS was an extractive political and economic institution is not a novel conclusion. The people of the CFS held no political rights, which was vital in upholding the system of exploitation. Living in a slave system, their labor was forced under the use and threat of violence. The profits derived from their labor were moved swiftly to Leopold, his business partners, and the Belgian officials who maintained the system on the ground – the ground upon which Leopold never set foot (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). Failing to meet the condition of pluralism, here is the foundation of the extractive institution. This is not to say that any system following the CFS was equally exploitative. Rather, what underscores this stage is that a small group of political elites used the abundant natural resources of the land to enrich themselves at the expense of the people – a

system reliant on the exclusion of the people from the political process. This is consistent with the exploitation of colonialism and extractive institutions described by Acemoglu et al. (2001; 2012), and here begins the Congolese extractive institution.

ii. INSTITUTIONAL CONTINUATION 1

The atrocities of the CFS brought the first international humanitarian campaign – the Congo Reform Movement. Led by journalists George Washington Williams and E.D. Morel, missionary William Sheppard, and diplomat Roger Casement, the publicization of the acts committed under Leopold's regime forced him to relinquish the CFS to Belgium in 1908 (Hochschild 1998). However, the Congo Reform Movement focused only on the horrifying effects of this particular colonial system. That is, what was wrong with the CFS was that the *Force Publique* committed acts of reprehensible violence against the Congolese people, not that a system of forced labor was used to extract value from the Congo. Thus, when Belgium inherited the CFS from Leopold (then becoming the Belgian Congo), there were no calls for meaningful institutional reform (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). The Leopoldian system of direct economic exploitation and political and cultural repression was not only upheld by Belgium but refined through collaboration with the Catholic Church and corporations (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). Besides Leopold, few figures were removed. The *Force Publique* remained, some colonial officials received promotions, and some

¹⁵ The atrocities of the CFS included rape, arson, bodily mutilation, lashing, and murder among many others (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002).

¹⁶ It should be noted that while other foreign investors held concessions in the Congo, this

did not change the treatment of the people or the characteristics of the system.

¹⁷ Estimates are as high as 13 million.

remained in the same roles with new bosses. Forced labor continued, only it now took place under the imposition of high taxes and conscription during World War I. But when mineral deposit exploitation accelerated following WWI, tactics of old resurfaced with village chiefs receiving gifts from mining recruiters who then imposed labor quotas for chiefs to meet. These workers were compelled to work under a hostage system like that of the CFS. World War II brought another resurgence of forced labor, as 120 days of forced labor could be mandated annually (Hochschild 1998). This period saw copper production in the Congo increase by 180 percent between 1940 and 1960, accounting for 10 percent of global production by 1960 (Kara 2023, 109). Also under Belgian rule, concessions were sold to the Lever brothers who used forced labor to extract the palm oil vital to soap production – the profits of which built Unilever.

Meanwhile in Belgium, the wealth continued to flow from the Congo. No differently than under Leopold, resources extracted from the Congo were used to enrich the metropole and foreign elites. Leopold was removed as the face of exploitation, but the political exclusion used to uphold a system of economic exploitation persisted in the Belgian Congo. That this system continued is unsurprising, as the Congo remained a colony, and its institutions remained consistent with Acemoglu et al.'s extractive institutional framework (2012). Despite the first international humanitarian campaign, the transition of the CFS to the Belgian Congo upheld the extractive institutional model

and signifies the first institutional continuation in the Congo.

iii. INSTITUTIONAL PRESERVATION

The following section details the Congolese independence movement and shows how the extractive institution was preserved through two mechanisms: 1.) a flawed independence movement and 2.) foreign interference. These two mechanisms occurred during five years of extreme political instability following Congolese independence from Belgium in 1960, a period known as the “Congo Crisis.”¹⁸ This section will implement two lenses of analysis: 1.) Whether or not the institutions satisfied the conditions of pluralism or sufficient centralization (Acemoglu and Robinson’s definition) and 2.) A neocolonial framework that describes how foreign powers preserved their source of cheap labor and natural resources alongside Acemoglu and Robinson’s explanation for institutional persistence in the post-colonial period.

The Congolese independence effort began in 1885, and anti-colonial resistance existed in the forms of violent rebellion, politico-religious movements, and peasants’ and workers’ revolts at various points during the Congo’s colonial period from 1885 to 1960. Critical to understanding the anti-colonial movement is the pre-independence social stratification of the Congo.¹⁹ At the top were the *imperialist bourgeoisie*, the *middle bourgeoisie*, and the upper five levels of the *petty bourgeoisie* – of which none were African. Some African white-collar employees and artisans belonged to the lower strata of the petty bourgeoisie, and

¹⁸ These events eventually led to the installation of stage four’s focus – Joseph Mobutu (or Mobutu Sese Seko).

¹⁹ The following description of social stratification is that described by Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002).

below them was the *traditional ruling class* consisting of kings, nobles, religious authorities, etc. Next in the hierarchy were the *peasants* who produced food and cash crops (accounted for most of the African population), the *working class* which was divided by black and white workers (and within this distinction also divided by industrial and agricultural workers), and the *lumpenproletariat* who did not have stable employment and instead worked in the informal sector (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). The social stratification of the Congo was influential in the makeup of the independence movement. Most notably, an educated group of elites within the *petty bourgeoisie* known as *évolués* led the independence movement, yet the movement's success in achieving liberation was contingent upon collaboration between members from every stratum of Congolese society who were also uniting across geographic barriers (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002; Van Reybrouck 2010). An alliance between members of different social strata was made possible because their grievances were all with the colonial system, despite some having comparatively more privilege within it. But more critical to the story is how rapidly Congolese independence happened.

A successful Congolese independence campaign finally began in 1955, and the Congo achieved official independence in 1960 (renamed the Republic of Congo). This movement was led by rivals Joseph Kasavubu and Patrice Lumumba. Lumumba had met Kwame Nkrumah, Frantz Fanon, and other leaders in 1958 who inspired his pan-African leanings and laid the groundwork for his nationalist platform vital to the independence movement. This platform created a general impatience during the decolonization process, and in 1960, Belgium abruptly granted Congo complete

independence (Van Reybrouck 2010). The first mistake of the Congolese independence movement was the inability of its leadership to secure the economic assets of the state. Belgium transferred the assets of the colonial companies to themselves and left the public debt to the Congo. The second mistake was not as much a mistake as it was an intentional effort of power-seeking by *évolués*. They sought to capture the benefits previously enjoyed by European officials before them, and some of those who ascended to leadership immediately raised their salaries by 400 percent (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). The replacement of the European colonial force with an African ruling class existing within the same system quickly generated unrest.

Lumumba was elected Prime Minister in June of 1960. Within weeks he saw a mutiny by the army and a secessionist movement emerge from the southeastern mining province of Katanga that accounted for 70 percent of the Congolese government's income (Kara 2023). The secessionist movement was led by Moïse Tshombe with troops and financing from Belgium, as the former colonial power sought to retain economic domination (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). Belgian support of the secessionist movement was likely further emboldened by Lumumba's speech given at Congo's independence ceremony. After a patronizing speech from King Baudouin of Belgium and a restrained speech by President elect Kasavubu, Lumumba gave a scathing critique of Leopoldian and Belgian colonial rule. He emphasized the horrors endured by the Congolese people and their struggle for liberation (Van

Reybrouck 2010).²⁰ Lumumba responded to the Katangan secessionist movement with calls for United Nations peacekeeping deployment to expel Belgian troops. When the forces deployed could not expel them, he appealed to the Soviet Union – making the Congo a battleground for the Cold War and ultimately leading to Lumumba’s assassination. On September 5th of 1960, Kasa-Vubu announced his dismissal of Lumumba. While this action was illegitimate and both houses of parliament rejected it, nine days later Joseph Mobutu – backed by the United States Central Intelligence Agency, the United Nations, and Belgium – conducted his first coup. Lumumba was placed under house arrest initially, and after escaping in an attempt to reach his stronghold in Kisangani, he was captured on December 1st, 1960. Lumumba was assassinated in January of 1961, an operation orchestrated and carried out by Belgium and the CIA (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). Political crisis and a struggle for power continued, and ironically, the U.S. and UN supported a unified Congo. This was achieved in 1963, but in 1965 Mobutu executed his second coup (Kara 2023). These five years of political instability following Congolese independence saw several parties seeking to influence the Congo’s future to their advantage.

The Congo Crisis saw a complicated intersection of political actors and interests lead to severe instability for the five years that immediately followed independence. Collectively, these events inhibited the success of any efforts to escape the extractive institution under independence. The first shortcoming of the independence movement is consistent with the institutional persistence framework put forward by Acemoglu et al. (2001). They

find that a limited elite taking power following independence has an incentive to simply replace the ruling European elites. The *évolués* took power following independence because they were some of the few capable of leading. At independence, there were only sixteen college graduates in the entirety of the Congo (Van Reybrouck 2010). This narrow elite that inherited leadership roles in the Congo then did exactly what Acemoglu et al. (2001) describe. While this system led to mutiny and was quickly dissolved, it is important to note that elites attempted to continue the extractive institution in this manner.

An argument can be made that the Congo failed to meet either condition of an inclusive institution following independence. First, and most obviously, the democratically elected Patrice Lumumba was removed from office in a coup and was later assassinated. Thus, it could be argued that those who voted for Lumumba were not having their political voices represented and the distribution of political power was limited by his removal. However, this fails to account for many who had grown upset with Lumumba when their conditions did not improve immediately following independence. More important, however, is that the secessionist movements and widespread unrest rendered the Congo insufficiently centralized. The conflicting political forces meant no one could instill order that permitted economic participation nor even basic security.

Last, in assessing the Congo Crisis, neo-colonialism was central. While the borders drawn by the colonizer did arbitrarily group Katanga with the rest of the Congo (which influenced secessionist sentiments),

²⁰ See Lumumba 1960 for full speech.

Belgian interference and support for Tshombe was a clear effort to retain economic dominance over the Congo. This presented itself in two ways. First, Belgium was trying to form a close relationship with the mineral-rich province which provided the Congolese government with most of its income. Second, the support for Katangan succession left the province dependent on Belgium for military aid and, had it been successful, would have left the hypothetical Katangan state deeply influenced by Belgium. These efforts are consistent with the economic and military mechanisms of neo-colonial control.

Together, a faulty independence movement conceived in a country ill-equipped with adequate leaders (or at least those with its people in mind) and foreign interference generated a country that was not effectively de-colonized. While the extractive institution is not vital to this chapter, the fact that the Congolese independence movement did not allow the public to free themselves from exploitation is a historical turning point. Five years of crisis followed independence and saw foreign intelligence agencies assassinate one of the few political leaders that appeared to have the nation's people in mind. Despite supposed de-colonization, the colonial structure was preserved.

iv. INSTITUTIONAL CONTINUATION 2

After his second coup in 1965, Mobutu ruled the Congo for thirty-two years (renaming the country the “Republic of Zaire” in 1971). Mobutu came to and remained in power largely from American support he had gained through his staunch anti-communist position. Some of the first actions taken by Mobutu appeared

promising for the people of the Congo. He used his U.S. support to dissolve the Belgian monopoly that had its hand in most sectors of the Congolese economy, and he nationalized the Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (UMHK), a capitalist corporation founded in 1906 (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002).²¹ However, Mobutu was not interested in bringing prosperity to the people of the Congo. Instead, as Kara finds (2023, 112): “Mobutu ran the Congo for thirty-two years, just as Leopold did – a personal wealth machine.” With external support, the Congo became an autocratic kleptocracy with Mobutu as a dictator who, in true Leopoldian fashion, eventually saw himself become one of the ten richest people in the world (Kara 2023; Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002) further finds that Mobutu’s Congo (and eventual Zaire) created a state bourgeoisie that used governmental institutions as a means of self-enrichment accomplished through the maintenance of the colonial system. This was made possible in part by foreign support, but Mobutu also executed masterful plans to remain in absolute power for as long as he did while the people of the Congo continued to live in poverty.

Within months of achieving power, Mobutu began eliminating political opponents. He first had former members of Lumumba’s and Kasa-Vubu’s government tried and convicted for an attempted overthrow of Mobutu. Van Reybrouck (2010) calls this a trap that Mobutu used to eliminate men who never made efforts to overthrow his government. Among the multiple mechanisms Mobutu implemented to actualize absolute power was the official creation of the single-party state with himself at the head in 1970. Mobutu

²¹ UMHK had direct ties to Leopold at its creation.

retained popular support for many of the years he held power. Initially, his support was derived from fatigue caused by the Congo Crisis and continued during a period of economic growth from 1967 to 1973 – despite Mobutu eliminating several political opponents and cracking down on protests (Van Reybrouck 2010). However, support declined following 1973 when the effects of the Mobutu government’s corruption and crashing copper prices resulted in food insecurity and economic crisis. In 1975 a failed coup set in process the decay of the Congolese military and the strengthening of paramilitary forces who were at the command of Mobutu. Yet, Mobutu continued to garner support. To do so, he created a cult of personality that embraced an anti-colonial ideology. In this effort he ironically declared Patrice Lumumba a national hero despite having been influential in his assassination (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002; Van Reybrouck 2010). However, most vital to Mobutu sustaining power for such a period was the American support he had. Throughout the Cold War, the U.S. felt that the strongman leader of Zaire would prevent the state from falling to communism, and diplomatic relations between Mobutu and the U.S. were friendly (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). But when the Cold War ended, so did U.S. support for Mobutu, and eventually, so did his rule. The conclusion of this stage is less neat than the others. Mobutu began to lose power in 1990 but retained control until 1997. During this seven-year period, Zaire was a multiparty democracy, but this was only in name. Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002) finds that no changes occurred within this period because opposition remained weak, the kleptocracy clung to their power, African democracy movements had been met with violent repression, the Rwandan genocide generated instability, and support for

human rights and democracy in Africa by world powers was weak. For the purposes of this analysis, this period is considered to still fall under the Mobutu kleptocracy. However, the fifth stage will detail the events of this period that led to Mobutu’s removal from power.

The rule of Mobutu can be understood through both the neocolonial lens and through Acemoglu and Robinson’s conditions of the inclusive institution. The U.S. support for Mobutu was purely a device of the Cold War. American fears of communism gave Mobutu the backing he needed to stay in power. Mobutu also used masterful (and ruthless) tactics to create a single-party state. Under this single-party state, the first condition of an inclusive institution is left unmet, as the distribution of political power in Mobutu’s Zaire was spread among himself and the other state bourgeoisie. This stage of Congolese history most closely replicates the extractive institutional framework of the CFS. In both cases, a single man acquired immense wealth from the exploitation of resources and labor from people who had no viable means to stand up to him.

v. INSTITUTIONAL CONTINUATION 3

Mobutu’s rule saw Zaire and its military weaken, which proved critical in 1994. When the Rwandan Genocide pushed refugees into Zaire, Hutu militant groups (Interahamwe) created a base in Zaire’s eastern Kivu provinces from where they continued to attack Tutsis. In response, Rwandan President and head of the army, Paul Kagame – with the help of Ugandan forces – invaded Zaire. They partnered with Laurent Kabila, a Katangan, who united rebel groups into the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL) (Kara 2023; Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). Kabila and his AFDL pushed

Mobutu to flee Zaire, and by May of 1997, Kabila was the President of the newly declared Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). While the deterioration of Mobutu's regime happened over the course of seven years, it ended promptly after Kabila received the support of Rwanda and Uganda. However, Kabila entered power with no political vision or plan for the Congo (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002), and those who helped him reach power had high hopes for their relationship with the Congo. Beginning in 1996, Rwanda and Uganda established control of several resources in the northeastern Kivus and Ituri provinces (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). This later served as a catalyst for further conflict.

When Kabila first took power, there was a sense of optimism. The Congolese people had suffered under Mobutu, and Kabila's early reforms were outwardly encouraging. Public sanitation services resumed, public employees began receiving regular pay, inflation decreased, a new currency was established, and Kabila promised to bring prosperity to the Congo (Van Reybrouck 2010). However, these early signs of hope quickly diminished. The multiparty democracy that had been established in the waning years of the Mobutu regime was abolished and the Congo was again authoritarian. Kabila eliminated potential political opponents and when a new constitution went into effect in May of 1997, it granted the president near absolute control. Kabila found himself with a weak army, but to suppress the democratic movement all he needed was control of the media – which he had (Van Reybrouck 2010). During this period Kabila brokered deals with foreign mining companies and

their payments were directed to Kabila's personal accounts (Kara 2023). However, Kabila's weakness began to show in 1998.

In 1998, Kabila took on the forces that helped him reach power, fighting Rwandan and Ugandan forces in efforts to expel them from the Congo (Lemarchand et al. 2023). The violence that ensued killed 5 million Congolese civilians. Kabila turned to Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe for military support, offering stakes in Katangan mineral resources in exchange (Kara 2023). This period also saw the U.S. and Canada invest in Congolese mining assets for which payment was made to Kabila's AFDL (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). In 1999, the Lusaka Peace Accord was signed and United Nations peace-keeping forces were deployed, but the conflict did not end (Lemarchand et al. 2023). In January of 2001, Kabila was assassinated.

The short rule of Kabila was similar to the period of 1960 to 1965 in that it began with optimism but ended in conflict that ravaged the Congo.²² Despite serving as another continuation of the Congolese extractive institution, this period is more complicated than others. Both conditions of an inclusive institution failed to be satisfied. Kabila's authoritarian regime abolished multi-party democracy and neutralized political threats. His rule saw the Congolese people remain without a political voice. Further, the country was ravaged with conflict during the First and Second Congo Wars and Kabila was unable to sufficiently centralize the state to ensure basic security for the Congolese people as was evident with the death of millions of Congolese people during the conflict. What is less cohesive in this section is the

²² And that it included a series of complex political events that this paper is not capable of describing comprehensively.

beneficiary of this stage. Kabila did benefit financially, but his mismanagement of every aspect of his rule meant that his reign was short and comparatively less personally profitable. Several other countries purchased mining assets in the Congo during this period, but no single country/corporation was able to establish a monopoly as had been done before. The difference between stage five and stage three (i.e., why Kabila's rule qualifies as a continuation and not preservation) is that while Kabila was less effective at using the extractive institution for his enrichment due to the ongoing conflict and his mishandling of political power, it still existed and was exploited to some extent.

vi. INSTITUTIONAL CONTINUATION 4

The final stage of the Congolese extractive institution is the most complicated. This stage ends in contemporary DRC, but its foundations were laid immediately following Laurent Kabila's assassination. In the wake of his assassination, his son, Joseph Kabila, came to power and moved the country towards peace with Uganda and Rwanda – formally achieving this in December of 2002 (Van Reybrouck 2010). International aid facilitated a transitional period seeking to usher the Congo to sustained stability. However, instability has continued despite UN peacekeeping efforts because the Congo was and has been unable to maintain a monopoly on force, thus allowing militant groups to capture resource rich regions and exacerbating violence (Van Reybrouck 2010). These problems persist today.

Early on, Kabila took steps to rebuild the country and was elected president in

2006. Despite peace treaties having been reached, conflict continued among rebel groups and was met with a joint military response by Congo and Rwanda in 2009, but this still did not put an end to the conflict. In 2011, Kabila was re-elected in a poorly organized election contested by the second leading vote-getter, Etienne Tshisekedi. Nothing ever came of these contentions, and Kabila remained president until 2018 after maneuvers extending the anticipated end of his term by two years (Lemarchand et al. 2023). An assessment of Kabila's presidency leads to a conclusion all too familiar in the Congo.

Kabila, like his father and his predecessors, used the Congo for personal enrichment. In November of 2021, an account of Kabila's corruption was published – titled "Congo Hold-Up." The report finds that Kabila and his inner circle had been siphoning money from the national bank and other state-owned and affiliated entities. Further reports claim Kabila was involved in the embezzlement of US\$138 million from 2013 to 2018. Most notable of the report is the bribery and fraud described in the 2008 SICOMINES deal that saw China Railway Group Limited and Sinohydro Corp provide the Congo with upgrades to infrastructure (valued at US\$3 billion) while gaining 68 percent ownership in the country's copper and cobalt extraction (estimated value between US\$40 billion and US\$84 billion) (Fessy 2021; Rapanyane 2023).²³ Not only is this deal important in that Kabila used it as a means of personal enrichment, but also in that it laid the foundations for the current Chinese monopoly on Congolese cobalt. China's Belt and Road Initiative in the Congo has seen it

²³ The remaining 32% of stakes are owned by Gecamines, Congo's state-owned mining company (Rapanyane 2023).

acquire ownership of 15 of the 17 cobalt mining operations in the country (Wells 2023). In return, hospitals and roads have been built, but Chinese investment has also been accompanied by dangerous and exploitative working conditions for artisanal miners (Amnesty International 2023; Rapanyane 2023).²⁴ The labor market for cobalt extraction is informal among Congolese, as Chinese companies employ few locals at industrial sites, so people engage in artisanal mining and sell the cobalt to intermediaries who later sell it to Chinese companies (Kara 2023). The unregulated informal sector of mining not only creates unsafe and exploitative working conditions, but the labor demand is met by those similar to the *lumpenproletariat* as defined by Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002). This is a system of forced labor rooted in poverty.

When Kabila was replaced by Félix Tshisekedi following the 2018 election, more questions of legitimacy arose. Because of the closure of polling stations and violence against political opposition, the legitimacy of this election should be questioned (Human Rights Watch 2019; Tshombe 2023). However, upon his election, Tshisekedi was critical of elements of Chinese involvement in the Congo's mining industry (Kara 2023). Recently, Tshisekedi called for a restructuring of the SICOMINES deal that would create more favorable terms for the DRC (Rolley 2023). Chinese investment has created infrastructure and benefitted some aspects of life in the Congo, but education remains poor, and conflict rages on in the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu and Ituri

(Council on Foreign Relations 2023; World Bank 2023).²⁵ Today, the DRC can be classified as a weak state due to its inability to enforce law and order in these provinces along with its inability to provide regular social and protective services to ensure the security of its people (Tshombe 2023). While much has changed in the Congo since 2001, certain elements have merely been reshaped.

Political and economic institutions have formed the contours of Congo's history, a process that continues today. The sixth and final stage of institutions in the Congo describes the continued persistence of the extractive institution and Chinese neo-colonialism. While elections did take place under Kabila, the conditions that surrounded them were not conducive to a democratic process and the country continues to be ranked low in measures of democracy – being ranked sixth lowest in the world in 2022 (Our World in Data 2023). Thus, the DRC does not meet the condition of plurality. Additionally, the DRC still fails to meet the second condition of an inclusive institution. Despite UN peacekeeping forces and multiple peace treaties, the Congo did not enjoy sustained peace during this period which inhibited sufficient centralization that could ensure basic security of the Congolese people. This is especially true in the eastern Kivu and Ituri provinces. Further, this period marked the entry of China as a neocolonial force. The SICOMINES deal was negotiated through the bribery of a political elite that allowed China to gain strong control of the mineral assets of the Congo. Investment by Chinese companies in the Congo is mostly self-

²⁴ Miners who extract cobalt with handheld tools at unsanctioned sites (Kara 2023).

²⁵ While education enrollment has increased, 97% of children aged 10 in the DRC experience learning poverty, or the inability to “read and understand simple text” (World Bank 2023).

servicing, as the creation of roads has much to do with the need to develop sufficient transportation networks to make resource extraction more efficient. Investment has not been allocated to education, and this is consistent with the notion that neo-colonial powers seek to retain a source of cheap labor. Tshisekedi's efforts to restructure this deal are promising, as this could redirect rents to benefit the people of the Congo. However, as long as corruption and conflict continue in the Congo, their institutions will remain extractive, their growth slow, and their people impoverished.

V. CONCLUSION

While resources have played a vital part of the history of the Congo, they are not at the center of this story. At the center of this story is power and control – first by Leopold, then Belgium, Mobutu, Laurent, and Joseph Kabila, and now Chinese mining companies. Necessary to retaining this control are the Congolese political and economic institutions which have been nothing but extractive since 1885. Colonialism, kleptocracy, and neo-colonialism imposed and preserved a system of extraction. Based on the idea constructed by Morrison (2013), if the presentation of the resource curse is contingent upon the strength of institutions, then the exclusively extractive institutions that have existed in the Congo since the colonial period offer a better explanation of the country's stunted economic growth and persistent poverty than the resource curse. Proponents of the resource curse may point to rent-seeking and allege that the pattern of elite capture in the Congo is an indication of the resource curse. However, the appropriation of resource rents is a process better explained by the extractive institution that

existed prior to modern resource discoveries. It is these institutions that enable corruption, not something inherent to resources. That is, with better institutions, natural resource abundance likely would have had a more positive effect.

In reflecting on the history of the Congo, Kara (2023) provides two notable takeaways:

- "Less has changed since colonial times than we care to admit" (3).

- "At no point in their history have the Congolese people benefited in any meaningful way from the monetization of their country's resources" (15).

These quotes, while intended to be jarring, hold serious truths. Chinese corporations' infrastructure investments have improved some aspects of life in the Congo, but they are also tied to child labor, unsafe working conditions, and they accompany persistent poverty. While cobalt extraction is not comparable to rubber extraction under Leopold's CFS, the system of extraction has never left the Congo. Throughout the history of the country, several different natural resources have been exploited, but extractive institutions have remained constant. The Congo holds mineral deposits valued in the trillions. If resources are truly a curse for states, then the Congo is doomed. However, should the Congolese government create more inclusive political and economic institutions by ending conflict in the East, better ensuring the security of its people, and establishing an effective democracy, the future of the Congo will be much more promising.

LIMITATIONS

A potential critique of this paper might find that it is merely a reading of Congolese history through an

institutional/neocolonial hybrid lens and that it does not dispel the impacts of resources. However, the implementation of this lens is rooted in research that found the appearance of the resource curse to be conditionally reliant on the strength of institutions. Thus, this critique is only applicable as far as it is a critique of the findings and frameworks put forward by Morrison (2013), Mehlum et al (2006a, 2006b), and Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) as well as neo-colonialism broadly. However, critics could also question how compatible the lenses used in this paper are.

This paper covers an extended period of history and the focus on the institutions of the Congo may have neglected other factors that contributed to poor development outcomes. The coverage of a broad historical period may also have resulted in the omission of historical events that, while important, were not vital to tracing institutional persistence. While this is not an explicit limitation of this paper's utility, it is important to acknowledge.

FUTURE RESEARCH

When considering the possibility of the resource curse, attention should be given to not only the strength of the country's institutions, but to the roots of these institutions. Any discussion of a country with abundant natural resources, stunted economic growth and poverty, and colonial roots without a proper consideration of the lasting effects of colonialism neglects a critical factor. In many cases that appear to be the resource curse, institutions derived from colonialism and preserved by domestic greed and neo-colonialism may be a more plausible explanation. This analysis should be applied to other countries that appear to suffer from the natural resource curse. Additionally, an in-depth analysis of

economic participation in the Congo throughout history would be beneficial in further legitimizing the claims of this paper, and further research should draw upon this data if it is more widely (in the Congo or elsewhere).

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Flaws and Strengths of International Mediation: United Nations Peacekeeping in the Republic of Kosovo

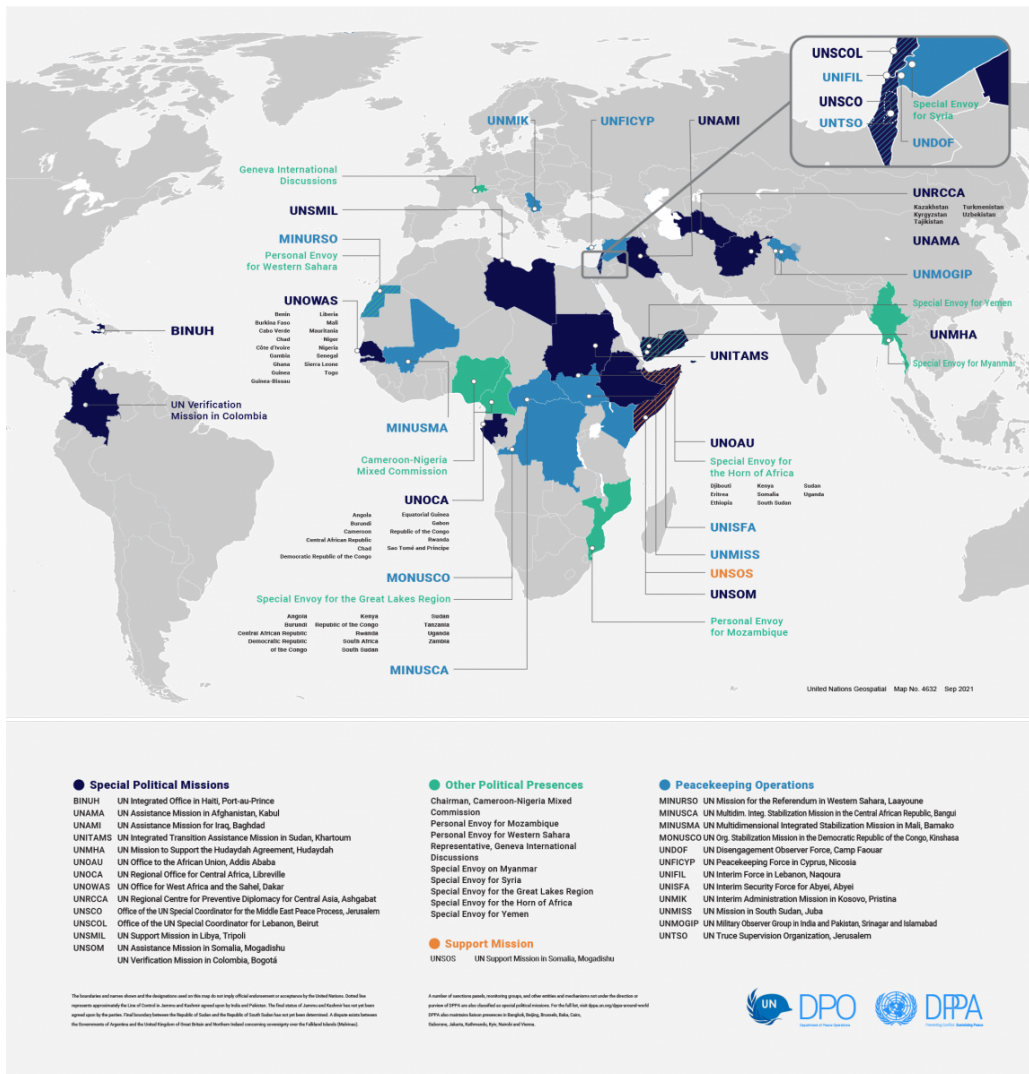
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Abstract: *The United Nations (UN) is the representative body of the international community. The UN is one of the first responders to interstate and intrastate conflicts. UN Peacekeeping utilizes diplomatic and military tactics to resolve or mitigate disputes. Peacekeeping methods that include persuasion, coercion, and inducement evolve with stages of conflict. Ethnically mobilized conflicts differ from traditional interstate disputes and require more extensive responses focusing on localized state-building. Using the Republic of Kosovo as a case study, the paper explores the history of ethnic strife between Kosovo-Serbs and Kosovo-Albanians. The UN mission in Kosovo displays flaws and strengths within peacekeeping, including institution-building and policing efforts. As the paper concludes, implementing the UN mission in Kosovo deterred significant violence, but reports of heightened tension in 2023 make for renewed concern.*

I. INTRODUCTION TO PEACEKEEPING

Figure 1: UN Map of Peace Operations



(United Nations 2021)

IDEATION AND PRACTICE

Intergovernmental organizations, from the League of Nations to the African Union, have existed for generations. Since World War II, peacekeeping has become essential to global governance. The United Nations (UN) was formed in 1945 following the success of the Western powers. The UN uses peacekeeping as a pillar of conflict resolution, most simply defined as a “neutral military operation supporting a peace process” (Mays 2013, 54-55). Legally,

the UN charter includes Chapter VI and Chapter VIII outlining peaceful solutions that “conduct collective security operations” (Mays 2013, 42) to uphold missions. The informal Chapter 6½, a mix of Chapters 6 and 7, legitimizes every mission implemented by the UN. Consent of the disputant parties and neutral forces with clear mandates and finances create a successful UN peacekeeping mission. Today, there are twelve active UN peacekeeping missions.

UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) diverge from traditional military missions through the parties' consent and the forces' neutrality. The selection of Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) includes a vetting process requiring the disputant parties' consent. For example, UNMOGIP: The UN Mission in India and Pakistan emphasizes neutrality as India rejected American troops' participation due to their self-interests in the conflict. Without consent of the parties, military force²⁶ comes into play. The force, as described by Mays (2013, 39), is present as "peace enforcement operations and deployed to compel compliance on disputants refusing to adhere to a peace process." Funding and political mandates facilitate a mission's ability to enact resolutions. The UN pays TCC soldiers' salaries and reimburses countries for training and logistical expenses. Mandates are usually vague and broad, as many political landscapes remain complex or situational. Specifically, mandates "provide the operation with international legitimacy as a neutral military mission deployed in support of a peace process backed by the international organization" (Mays 2013, 54).

Figure 2: Stages of a Conflict and the Techniques Available

<i>Stages of Conflict and Techniques Available</i>	
Conflict Stages:	Techniques:
Pre-War	Preventive Diplomacy
Wartime	Peacemaking
	Peace Enforcement
Post-War	Peacekeeping
	Peacebuilding

(Bash 1994)

The UN aligns its responses to the stages of conflicts. Figure 2 depicts the tools the UN uses as conflicts change over time. Preventive diplomacy includes third-party facilitation of prisoner swaps, boundary concessions, and peace resolutions. PKOs utilize financial and political restrictions—economic sanctions, arms embargoes, and visa restrictions—as deterrents. If a conflict escalates into war, the UN uses diplomatic tools while deploying peacekeeping troops on the ground. Post-war development tactics focus on peacebuilding and policing. Peacebuilding includes political institutions like impartial courts, election boards, and domestic police forces. Scholars argue that amplifying UN military equipment would ease peace enforcement, prompting quicker peacebuilding efforts. Bash (1994) suggests air power capabilities, similar to NATO,

individual interests during deployment. If more militarily advanced countries gain control of UN troops, they are more likely to use force to serve their self-interest, overriding the self-defense component.

²⁶ International Organizations' military capabilities used in self-defense are a cause of significant debate in peacekeeping literature. Bash (1994) explains how the use of force by TCCs makes it harder for the UN to control

would provide the UN versatility and fewer boots on the ground. As technology and conflicts evolve, peacekeeping remains the core of UN mediation.

PEACEKEEPING IN ETHNIC CONFLICTS

Ethnic conflicts require peacekeeping that differs from traditional interstate violence. Many states, like Kosovo, had ambiguous boundaries and weak proxy governments following the fall of the Soviet Union. Emerging states intertwined national identities with ethnicity and religion. Specific ethnicities are not the cause of violence but a trigger of social, economic, and political concerns. Intrastate conflicts with ethnic mobilization are more likely to intensify due to the ease of organization, recruitment, and credibility. Eck (2009, 370) describes disputes with groups who organize on ethnic lines as an ethnically mobilized conflict. People in such groups tend to live geographically close to others that share cultural practices. Proximity allows recruiting to be cheap and fast. The shared values of ethnicity also make organization and recruiting accessible as groups use shared beliefs to make their movement more credible. Group experiences based on social identity trump class and gender, making ethnicity more politically salient. Because ethnicity facilitates effective group organization, recruitment, and credibility, Eck hypothesized that “intrastate armed conflicts that mobilize along ethnic lines will be more likely to intensify to war than those that do not mobilize along ethnic lines” (2009, 374). Eck’s data, using five models²⁷, suggests “conflicts in which the participants mobilize along ethnic lines are

92 percent more likely to escalate to war than are nonethnically mobilized conflicts” (2009, 384). Ethnicity further complicates conflict resolution as it can lead to larger-scale violence.

Mac Ginty and Robinson argue violence is more widespread in ethnic conflict and thus makes it more difficult to mediate (2001). Ethnic violence can be categorized in three distinct ways: systematic, multiplicity of motives, and small arms. Systematic violence is present in perceived discriminatory legislation or human rights violations. Kosovo experienced bouts of violence after Serbia instituted the teaching of Serbian, which most Ethnic Albanians do not speak. Hate speech, for example, targets specific identities and can be used politically within propaganda. Institutionalizing identity conflict reflects Mac Ginty and Robinson’s suggestion that “sensitivity over identity places extra responsibility on any group considering third-party intervention” (2001, 33). The multiplicity of motives is described as “the perpetrator and victim may variously interpret an action as criminal, political, or random, or motivated by religion, ethnicity, race, or identity” (Mac Ginty and Robinson 2001, 31). Broad interpretation makes it challenging to police ethnically driven crimes as judicial rulings may differ over the correct categorization or impose bias. Lastly, intrastate conflict occurs on a more localized level. Guerilla war tactics are more prevalent, increasing the use of small arms in conflicts. Demilitarization through peacekeeping authorities requires intensive resources, as small arms are easier to hide and obtain.

²⁷ Model 1: ethnic pluralism, Model 2: ethnic “fractionalism” substituted for pluralism, Model 3: ethnic “fractionalism” squared, Model 4:

military personnel, Model 5: secondary warring party (Eck 2009, 378)

The complexity of ethnic conflicts on social and cultural levels requires more than traditional UN peacekeeping. Traditional peacekeeping relies on top-down diplomacy, which is not usually prevalent when ethnic violence occurs. Intrastate conflict means that two official governments are no longer the disputants the UN is used to mediating. It requires peacekeepers to engage with rebel or guerilla groups outside the law, which the UN legislation does not discuss. This oversight leads to the loss of representation, possibly delegitimizing UN power on the ground, making troops targets. Post-Cold-War politics, as mentioned before, sometimes led to weak state governments that heightened the question of top-down diplomacy tactics. Weakened states struggle with refugee exodus, food insecurity, and human rights. Ethnically mobilized conflict within weak states magnifies the humanitarian consequences, requiring the UN to take a more holistic approach.

Figure 3²⁸: Historic Events within Kosovo



(Author 2023)

II. CASE STUDY: THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO

HISTORY OF KOSOVO

To fully understand the complexities of UN peacekeeping, one must understand the region's history. Each group traces back their ancestry to the geographical region with differing perspectives: “Albanians consider themselves to be the descendants of the Illyrians, a people who lived in the

Balkans before the arrival of the Romans, the Serbs consider Kosovo to be the territory of Old Serbia, and the cradle of Serbia” (Demjaha 2017, 183). The historic Kingdom of Serbia clashed with the Ottoman Empire, which held territory in the overlapping region. The reach of the Ottoman Empire led to the “Islamization of the majority of Albanians and deepened the existing cultural divide, adding the religious divide to the language divide between the

²⁸ During the Kosovar war, many Albanian women were raped and killed by enemy soldiers. The legacy of sexual violence is still present today. A coalition of Kosovar experts has researched the changes in reporting and legislative aid throughout the 2010s. For more information, see here: https://kgscenter.net/site/assets/files/1742/gender_base_violence_eng-1.pdf.

Serbs and Kosovar Albanians” (Bebler 2015, 151). Religious differences cemented the groups’ underlying differences and remained a core issue throughout Kosovo’s history.

The first contemporary change occurred during the First Balkan War 1912-1913, with Serbians’ desire for territorial gains and minority populations of Christian Orthodox in the Kosovar regions. In October 1912, Serbia, with the help of the Montenegrin military, completed a brutal conquest of Albanian Kosovars and Turks, with estimates of “25,000 deaths” (Bebler 2015, 153). After World War I, European powers allocated Kosovo to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Fast forward to the Paris Conference of 1946, the powers again decided Kosovo would remain in the new communist Yugoslavia “with a certain degree of autonomy within Serbia” (Demjaha 2017, 183).

Serb/Yugoslav authorities ostracized ethnic Albanians, causing mass expulsions throughout the next decade. Discrimination spurred ethnic Albanian protests, and the political liberalization of the Yugoslav government helped create the 1974 Yugoslav constitution. The constitution gave Kosovo more autonomy, including equal political rights to the other republics like Serbia. Although a win for Albanians, it “put into question Yugoslavia’s very name (‘The Land of the Southern Slavs’), its anthem (‘Hey Slavs’), the privileged legal status of the Slavs, the existing power relations and the Belgrade bureaucracy’s pivotal position in the federal state” (Bebler 2015, 156). In 1989, Albanian protests were amplified by the reign of the new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) President Slobodan Milosevic—a Serb—as he rescinded the 1974 constitution and Kosovo’s autonomy.

The change in leadership exacerbated the conflict, and as Demjaha suggests, “a de facto apartheid began as Albanians were dismissed from their jobs, denied education in their language, and exposed to massive abuse of their human rights and civil liberties” (2017, 184). By 1998, war broke out between the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) of Ethnic Albanians and the Serbian special police force. The violence spiraled with the FRY government refusing to interfere. As of March 1999, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) believed neither side was willing to agree to a ceasefire; thus, they began airstrikes to deter Serbian forces. NATO hit Serbian targets in Kosovo for 78 days. On June 3, 1999,

the FRY Parliament ratified the Ahtisaari-Chernomyrdin Plan, which included a total (verifiable) withdrawal of FRY military forces from Kosovo, the safe return of all refugees, and an UN-based civil mission to implement the Rambouillet Agreement’s peace plan, which would be secured by NATO troops (Demjaha 2017, 185).

The war killed hundreds of thousands of people, left many displaced or refugees, and decimated the country’s infrastructure. One week later, UN Resolution 1244 passed, creating the UN mission UNMIK: The United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo. The resolution also implemented KFOR, a NATO-led Kosovo force of 50,000 international troops (Bebler 2015, 159).

During the early 2000s, the regional split of Kosovo became more evident. With an Orthodox Christian Serb majority, the northern regions instituted closed borders. The southern region has a majority of Muslim Albanians, as does the capital of Pristina (See Figure 4). In 2004, violence escalated into riots triggered by boundary

disputes. These riots focused on Albanians targeting Serbians and Orthodox religious monuments. Demjaha explains, “this was the worst violence since the end of the war in Kosovo and left nineteen dead, with nearly 900 injured” (2017, 186). Kosovo declared independence on February 17, 2008, but the four Serb majority regions refused inclusion. With the help of the EU, dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade was attempted in April 2013. Kosovo and Serbia signed “The First Agreement of Principles Governing Normalization of Relations” (Bebler 2015, 167). The agreement created an association for Serbian majority municipalities. It recognized the KP as the only police force in Kosovo and the judiciary in all municipalities would subscribe to Kosovar legal frameworks and parallel security structures (Government of the Republic of Serbia 2013).

Ethnic Albanians retain a majority over the Serb population, a 180-degree turn from the beginning of Kosovo’s story. Scholars emphasize national and ethnic identity clashes as the main concerns moving forward. Religion does seem to play a part in this question. With small portions of Catholic and Orthodox, Albanians are Muslims, and Serbians are predominantly Orthodox Christians. Interestingly, Pratto et al. (2018, 123) explains how Serbs perceived religion as a part of their ethnicity, while Albanians perceived it as an identifier given by birth, separate from their ethnicity. In addition, since Kosovo’s established independence, national identity has been difficult for citizens to ascribe to in their personal lives. Ethnic Albanians and Serbs describe experiencing an identity crisis within nationality, as each group perceives Kosovar identity differently. Pratto et al. found that “although Albanians embrace the new national identity, participants in our sample have for the

most part considered it a vague and an imposed political identity” (2018, 121). In comparison, “Serb participants mainly rejected it because the Kosovar identity was perceived as threatening to their ethnic identity” (Pratto et al. 2018, 121-122). Extensive historical turmoil and a national identity crisis loom over the present Kosovar government, setting the stage for future disputes.

Figure 4. Map of Serbian Majority Municipalities



(Conley and Saric 2021)

UNMIK: UNITED NATIONS INTERIM ADMINISTRATION MISSION IN KOSOVO

UNMIK: the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo represents the international community’s role in the conflict. UNMIK was established in 1999 by the UN Security Council’s Resolution 1244 to ensure peace in Kosovo while establishing a sustainable autonomous government. The United Nations (2023) puts forth “inter-community trust building, respect for human rights and

rule of law, gender equality and empowerment of women and youth” as the mission's primary goals. For organizational purposes, Resolution 1244 created a Four-Pillar structure: the UN, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union (EU), and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Each organization handled different administrative jobs, functioning as a “surrogate state” of Kosovo. Once the violence subsided in 2001, a multinational policing force replaced the UNHCR as the fourth pillar.

A Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRS) leads PKO missions and retains an executive-legislative role, thus representing the UN pillar. The OSCE handled institutional building, including human rights monitoring, and the EU managed economic reconstruction (Cockell 2002, 491). UNMIK and the SRS retained control of all legislative, executive, and judicial matters, supposedly acting on behalf of Kosovo's Provisional Institutions of Self-Government, a governing body within Kosovo. Ethnic Serbs dominate four northern municipalities. Thus, the UNMIK solution created parallel government structures in the north but was unable to blend administrative functions with the south.

Due to FRY president Milosevic's influence on pre-UNMIK political structures, a reinvention of judicial and legislative institutions comprised the main tasks of the UN. Within UNMIK's mandate, the Interim Self-Government—now the Assembly—retained the ability to create policy and institute legislation.

Nonetheless, the SRS held final authority over all appointments, policy, law enforcement, and “retained the power to amend the Constitutional Framework either on his own initiative or upon the request of two thirds of members of the assembly” (Murati 2020, 63). A new judicial system was created, with the Kosovo Judicial Council (KJC) suggesting and approving candidates while establishing a rule of law. The President of Kosovo holds the power of appointment, while the SRS reserves the right to override appointments (Murati 2020, 67). In addition, a hierarchy of courts, similar to the United States, was created, including the Supreme Court of Kosovo.²⁹

Legally, UNMIK struggled with how to reintroduce trust in the legal system. As Kosovo changed hands and authority many times, the legal systems from previous constitutions remained discriminatory, failing to meet human rights standards. July 25, 1999, UNMIK and local actors agreed to use the “laws of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia...to the extent that they did not conflict with the accepted standards of international human rights law” (Murati 2020, 32). The provisional government created a Criminal Procedural Code to oversee human rights laws not explicitly described in the previous FRY legal code. Since independence, the Kosovar government has continued to update and implement legal changes using this code.

Militarily, UNMIK created the Kosovo Force (KFOR) under NATO jurisdiction. According to AP reports, the force has had 4,500 troops since 1999 (Zhinipotoku and Semini 2023). KFOR's original tasks were to enforce the ceasefire, ensure Serbian troops withdrew, and demilitarize the KLA. Over

²⁹ For more in-depth judicial practices and court information from the Kosovo Judicial Council:

<https://www.gjyqesori-rks.org/pyetjet-e-shpeshta/?lang=en>.

time, their main focus has been “ensuring public safety; for supporting and coordinating with the international civilian presence; for conducting border monitoring duties; and for ensuring the protection and freedom of movement of international organizations” (Murati 2020, 11). After a decrease in violence, KFOR transferred its policing duties to the UNMIK police unit CIVPOL, establishing 4,000 police officers under the direct authority of UNMIK. CIVPOL acts as a traditional police institution: patrolling, investigating crimes, immigration, traffic control, etc. (Murati 2020, 18). The establishment of Kosovo’s self-governance in 2008 created the additional Kosovo Police Force. The police force includes Albanians, Serbs, and other minorities to reflect the multi-ethnicity of the state. Many officers are former militants as part of UNMIK’s goal to demilitarize the KLA and redirect their capabilities. Officers train in a twenty-week course that covers community policing and human rights (Ryan 2001, 124).

Today, UNMIK’s activities in Kosovo concentrate on administrative roles. Per their website, the main activities they oversee include the Human Rights Office, Community Support, Office of Rule of Law, and Political Affairs. The variety of offices emphasizes the United Nations’ broad mandates in mediating conflict. It also reflects the importance of peacebuilding tactics in post-war settings. For example, the Office of Rule of Law implicates UNMIK’s ability to maintain neutral judicial and legislative institutions. The Office’s primary focus as the country evolves is to

support “the integration of the judiciary in northern Kosovo” (UNMIK 2023). Since 2008 Independence, the role of UNMIK has been questioned by native political leaders. However, UNMIK continues to serve as an international third-party that has participated in the reduction of violence and aided in the state building of Kosovo.

Figure 5: UNMIK Boundary



(United Nations 2023)

III. IMPACT AND LEGACY

UNMIK: EFFECTIVE AND INEFFECTIVE³⁰

In several cases, UN missions have effectively reduced violence and instituted peace. Howard (2019) discusses how the UN completed mandates through persuasion, inducement, and coercion. Persuasion is

effectiveness by becoming untrustworthy, corrupt, and violent. For more resources: <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/reducing-sexual-abuse-and-exploitation-in-un-peacekeeping-missions/>

³⁰ Sexual violence is not mentioned in this argument as it deserves its own space and expert analysis. A lack of accountability and corruption has been reflected in sexual violence perpetrated by deployed peacekeepers. Sexual violence by peacekeepers undermines their

the power to “mediate, shame, symbolic displays, outreach, and education and training” (Howard 2019, 188). Coercion, in contrast, is the use or threat of military force to deter violence. Inducement is the use of financial restraints or promises. These usually include sanctions, foreign aid, trade embargoes, and tariffs. For example, the United Nations mission in Lebanon successfully built social services that deterred violence in the state’s southern region (Howard 2019, 84-85). Although a short-term success, introducing social services has caused the UN to be the biggest employer of Lebanese citizens, effectively creating a new sector in their economy. Similarly, using persuasion in the form of education at native church services in Namibia helped bring opposing sides to the negotiating table (Howard 2019, 77). The Namibian mission, UNTAG, was completed a year after its creation. The UN has effectively created institutional structures that mitigate disputes and implement sustainability in self-governance.

UNMIK has effectively minimized large-scale violence and democratic law and order. First, the international community displayed coercion as it deterred Serbia’s invasion in 1999 through NATO airstrikes. Institutionally, UNMIK coordinated military support to civil authorities to provide optimal security. The Four Pillars system delegates institutions with the resources that will most positively impact Kosovo. The EU focused its efforts on the economy by investing in infrastructure and raising employment (Cockell 2002). UNMIK, a civil authority, and KFOR, a military authority, combine their efforts to better interact with the community. For instance, KFOR and UNMIK perform joint patrols with civilian advisors and participate in joint security meetings (Cockell 2002, 488). Field

structures are also organized based on the five congruent sectors of Kosovo that include all municipalities, thus enabling the headquarters of KFOR to establish centralized standards practiced by each sector successfully.

One of the most significant achievements of UNMIK is the demilitarization of the KLA. In 1999, SRSG Bernard Kouchner authorized the creation of the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC). The leader of the KLA at the time, Hashim Thaçi, agreed to participate in demobilization. The KPC allowed the international community to observe and organize former militants. The force essentially created a standing army, giving members repurpose and employment. The KPS now provides employment for many ex-KLA members. The UNMIK mandate built the KPS from scratch, emphasizing neutrality. The extensive education and training system showcases its purpose to rebuild the community’s trust in the legal process. Cockell explains the process, stating (2002, 495):

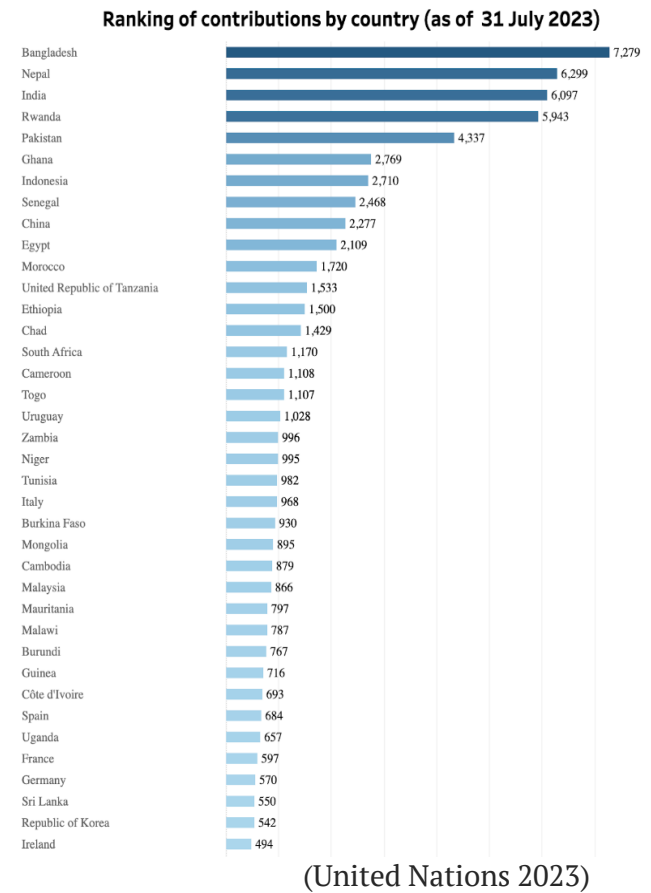
Upon successful completion of a basic nine-week training course at the school, each recruit is then assigned to an UNMIK Police station to undertake a further seventeen weeks of field training, interspersed with eighty hours of follow-up KPSS classroom instruction.

The education and emphasis on multi-ethnic forces further politicize security institutions that previously held strong bias.

UN peacekeeping has also been ineffective in several conflicts due to institutional flaws of the UN. Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) are predominantly from the Global South. Ten of the twelve active peacekeeping missions are located in the Global South, as seen in

Figure 6. TCCs being neighbors with the disputant parties could be effective through contextual education and understanding. Still, none of the TCCs have explicit power over mandates created by the UN before policing. The UN Security Council comprises Western powers: the United States, Russia, France, and the United Kingdom—plus the People’s Republic of China. They are empowered to create and grant peacekeeping mandates, with TCCs unable to create formal policy or legislation. In addition, vague and unsupported mandates reflect the power imbalance in the Security Council (Jett 2019, 63). For instance, the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) oversees a referendum of Western Saharan people to become an independent state or merge with Morocco. With support from France and the United States, Morocco has been able to strong-arm negotiations, including limiting resupplies of peacekeepers and using their military to put UN troops at risk (Jett 2019, 65).

Figure 6: Number of Soldiers Supplied by Top 38 TCCs



Additionally, powers vested to a UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), who leads UN peacekeeping missions, are broad and vague. The Kosovo case study explores a lack of checks and balances on the SRSG. The SRSG of Kosovo retained ultimate veto power acting as a ruler instead of conciliator. Ryan explains their omnipotence: "With a large NATO army, a well-armed international police force, and an indigenous police force, the SRSG had ample resources to secure this sovereign position" (2010, 117). After declaring independence in 2008, UNMIK’s legitimacy on the local level decreased, causing public dissent of the SRSG’s power. But, as long as

UNMIK remains active, so does the SRSG. In addition, UNMIK has not established any institutional change in Serbian-held northern Kosovo. Mitrovica, a major city in the north, repeatedly pushed back on UNMIK's presence. Ethnic Serbs have attacked police stations, set fire to UNMIK vehicles, and impeded police patrols in the region (Cockell 2002, 490). UNMIK inability to reach northern citizens effectively exacerbates the underlying tensions. Parallel structures coupled with the independence of the National Assembly trends the public's relationship with the SRSG and UNMIK negatively.

Human security is still not guaranteed in Kosovo. Public relations with UNMIK-backed police are an extension of this distrust. Previously, the paper discussed the negative effects of small arms on peacekeeping in ethnic conflicts. Ryan found that “a survey by the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons revealed that more than 317,000 guns were illegally held by citizens and arms groups in Kosovo.” (2010, 126). Thus, the police have yet to gain full support from everyday citizens, and UNMIK has not made headway on small-arm programs.

International personnel immunity reemphasizes inadequate checks and balances within UNMIK. UNMIK personnel are immune from arrest according to UNMIK Regulation 2000/47 (Ryan 2010, 122). The UN implemented immunity for international personnel in all PKOs to prevent interference of state governments in the mediation process. Murati (2020) argues that because UNMIK originally functioned without an established state government and virtually became an overseer of the administration, it allows officers not to be adequately investigated. For example, “cases involving trafficking in

women that linked both UNMIK personnel and KFOR remained uninvestigated. Those involved in such cases were mainly repatriated home and the files closed” (Murati 2020, 132). In addition, during the February 2007 protests, an Austrian officer was implicated for using torture. UNMIK lifted the officer's immunity but allowed the Austrian government representatives to extradite him before he faced consequences (Murati 2020, 132). The complex role of UNMIK in the now-established government causes checks and balances on the system to be challenging.

THE FUTURE OF KOSOVO

Figure 7: NATO Troops Policing the Kosovo-Serbian Border



(Bytyci 2023)

The United Nations' pivotal role in conflict resolution has created a safer world. The UN has instituted 71 Peacekeeping Operations, with 12 still active (United Nations 2023). They have made positive political, economic, and social changes. With the rise of intrastate conflict, the UN must evolve to respond correctly. Third-party intervention, especially in intrastate conflict, has to toe the line of occupation vs. mediation. UNMIK, with the aid of NATO, effectively ended the all-out war in Kosovo. The border troops continue to keep relative peace on the Serbia-Kosovo border. Since 2008, there

have been years of relative quiet, minimal skirmishes, and economic investments. Kosovo's economy has moved towards green energy, infrastructure projects, and established relationships across the EU. For instance, the World Bank's MENA Report stated (2023):

Since 2020, the EIB has unlocked 108.8 million under the Team Europe initiative to facilitate Kosovo's social and economic recovery. The funds were allocated to the railway sector, small and medium enterprises, and the construction of wastewater plants in Mitrovica and Gjilan.

International cooperation continues to impact Kosovo and its status on the global stage positively.

However, violence and political tensions between Kosovo and Serbia have amplified in 2023³¹. Post-COVID, the Kosovo government attempted to make Serbs re-register cars, effectively changing license plates to Kosovo. Seen as a provocation by Serbs living in Kosovo and the Serbian government, tensions amplified. On May 26th, 2023, major protests erupted in Kosovo after local elections as Kosovo government officials took control of municipal buildings in the four Serb-majority cities. This comes after Serbs boycotted recall elections, leaving only Ethnic Albanians at the voting polls. In response, Serb protesters armed themselves, resulting in a confrontation with KFOR troops. Prelec (2023) explains

the possible consequences of tensions because of severe fighting in northern Kosovo, targeting of the Serb minority population in the south, and a Serbian push for de facto partition. All these could erase efforts made over the last two decades. At the end of September, ethnic Serbians barricaded themselves in an Orthodox monastery after storming a village in response to perceived infringements of autonomy by the Kosovo government. Following an hours-long gun battle, a Kosovo policeman was killed, as were three of the gunmen. The BBC quoted the incident as "the worst escalation of violence in years" (Kovacevic 2023). The incident reiterates the distrust many ethnic Serbs have in the Kosovo Police Forces. To make matters worse, Milan Radoicic, a Kosovo-Serb politician, admitted to organizing the armed group, further delegitimizing peaceful politics (Kovacevic 2023). In response to amplifying tensions, NATO announced they would send 1,000 extra troops to the Serbia-Kosovo border. Reuters reported on November 25th, "NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the organization is reviewing whether a more permanent increase of forces was needed" (Bytyci 2023).

While the current situation in Kosovo seems worrisome, it's essential to highlight the positive intervention of UNMIK since 1999. Future recommendations specific to ethnic conflict peacekeeping may aid UNMIK as the conflict progresses³².

³¹ Gender disparity in Kosovo has been a consistent issue since the amount of sexual violence in the Kosovo War. Scholars continue to monitor the introduction of women into the political and economic landscape in Kosovo. There is a significant need for more support for women in Kosovo, as only 20% of women in

Kosovo participated in the labor force in 2023 (Asia News Monitor 2023).

³² Further discussion on the future of peacekeeping highlights women in the political arena: "Research has shown that adding more women improves peacekeeping operations, as women increase access to local communities and

Scholars suggest small-scale intervention focused on institution building, which could alleviate the issues created by Serbian and Kosovo parallel structures. Increased training and education of police forces may minimize the threat of scapegoating minority Serbs (Wilén 2018). Using Kosovo as a case study, it is evident that United Nations peacekeeping persists as an international necessity despite its flaws.

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Fast Fashion in the Age of Social Media and the Role of Retailers

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***Abstract:** Fast fashion has become popular among Western consumers since the turn of the century. With the invention of social media, these two industries have become integrated through consumer interest and retailer intervention through sponsorship. This study seeks to better understand current consumer perceptions of fast fashion retail practices to explore causes of the perpetuated unethical practices in the industry. Consumer perceptions are evaluated through an online ethnographic study of TikTok to understand Western consumer perceptions and consumption of items made by laborers in the Global South. This data is supplemented by quantitative data regarding transparency of practices within the fashion industry. This study aims to contextualize the role of retailers in the exploitative relationship between consumers and producers and highlight the lack of transparency in fast fashion retail practices.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the turn of the century, the fashion industry has morphed into what we know today as fast fashion. This phenomenon is characterized by high volume production, agile supply chains, and quick turnaround times between purchase and arrival, all at a low cost to consumers. While the financial cost of these stylish garments is low, there are real repercussions of the cost cutting practices of retail companies. The current literature focuses on the negative impacts of the modern fashion industry. The popular discourse specifically focuses on two areas: the conditions for workers in developing countries, where many of these items are produced, and the environmental implications of production and consumption. The actors framed in many of these studies are either the workers or the consumers. The link between these two interconnected groups is the retailer, yet these corporations have avoided this

responsibility. These brands hold power through their choice in where they source labor and which consumer groups they target. The current dynamic set by retailers pushes for a high producing Global South and a high consuming West. Under this dynamic, consumers are led to be unaware of the conditions in which their items were made, because brands use influencers to market their products and act as the face of their business. This effectively makes consumers associate the brands with relatable and reliable faces. This is far removed from the antiquated fashion industry, where designers were the face of their brand and were deeply connected to the value of their product.

The research questions this paper seeks to answer are: (I) How do fast fashion retailers use social media to market among target consumers? (II) How does current fast fashion marketing help retail brands disguise the exploitative relations between workers and consumers in their global

supply chains? I claim fast fashion retailers utilize consumerism and conformity cultures present on social media to target vulnerable Western consumer groups, namely teenage to college-aged girls. The familiarity of influencers distracts from the broadly underreported business practices of many fashion brands. By limiting transparency in all steps of the supply chain, retailers curate their brand image to not include the negative effects of the fast fashion industry. This is achieved by maintaining an unreflective image that consumers are not only exposed to but promote on these platforms. This framing and positive image of the fast fashion industry is replicated among Western social media users as others seek to imitate popular influencers, leading to increasing amounts of fast fashion consumption. By framing my research in this manner, retailers are held accountable for the negative implications of the modern fashion industry. Through an online ethnographic study of TikTok videos pertaining to fashion content, I seek to analyze the use of consumer promotion of fast fashion brands to reach target consumers. The ethnographic study is supplemented by The Fashion Transparency Index created by Fashion Revolution in 2022. The importance of this research lies in its ability to illuminate how these brands have successfully detached from the previous practices in the industry and drawn a curtain between those that produce and those that consume their products

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Fast fashion found its roots in Western consumerism beginning in the 1980s. As part of my sources; “National Capitalisms, Global Production Networks: Fashioning the Value Chain in the UK, US, and

Germany” (Lane 2009) represents this well. The chapter studies three major Western countries and analyzes their fashion industries. The chapter goes through the historical changes, strategies, and integrations of culture in each country. By explaining the development of the industries over time, the chapter gives a firm basis for the Western shift towards high volume textile production. McNeill’s study on the consumer preference to fast fashion over ethical fashion helps inform this shift from the consumer side. The study uses a qualitative research design to understand consumer tendencies toward unethical and unsustainable fashion even with a push for sustainability. Through open-ended surveys and interviews, the research found that consumers value being on trend and cost-effective more than the implications of their purchase, such as environmental issues or labor conditions for workers (McNeill 2015). These factors are also studied in combination with the influence of social media. Through a questionnaire, different media and sustainability purchasing were studied to better understand the role of social media in sustainable fashion purchasing. This study found that social media negatively affects sustainable purchasing (Lenne 2017). Like this study, the use of social media was considered in consumer habits. Revlon-Chion (2020) offers a new perspective through their online survey regarding the level of regard towards influencers. The survey found that influencers are an integral part of fashion purchasing decisions. Another analysis of the role of fast fashion is Michaela’s study of the correlation between positive or negative videos on fast fashion and consumer habits. This source uses survey results to determine the correlation between these two variables. It reaffirmed

that social media is highly valued by consumers and consumption reflects viewership (Michaela 2015). This valuation was mirrored by the Channel 4 documentary, *Inside the Shein Machine: UNTOLD*, on Shein working conditions (All 4 2023). When buyers of the brand were interviewed, their responses were majorly based on wanting to be on trend at a low cost. The buyers in this case were young women, mainly frequent social media users. The documentary has a separate focus on the use of social media in fast fashion. Different influencers are interviewed throughout the movie to gauge their connection and perception of retail brands (All 4 2023). The consensus of this topic is that consumerism culture is the firm driver of the fast fashion industry. This with the addition of new technology and globalization, brings us to the current fast fashion industry. Retailers hold power and control over the high stakes and high gain steps of the supply chain while passing the labor-intensive stages off to contracted workers in places such as Asia and other developing markets. Lane and Probert (2009) document the shift from valuing producers to retailers in supply chain dynamics in the context of Western companies outsourcing work to Asia. The chapter explains that the dynamic has permeated throughout the industry, leading Western retailers to profit off low wages. The beginning of this trend, recognized by Stephanie O. Crofton and Luis Dopico (2007), began with the mother company of Zara, Inditex. The company was one of the first to create an agile supply chain that supplied affordable pieces. The company sought to cut costs by outsourcing sewing to Asia for a low cost through contracted workers that were then responsible for wages and working conditions. This created the exploitive labor dynamic we now see

popularized by many brands in the industry. A database of information regarding the industry, The Fashion Revolution Transparency Index, brings the same information to the forefront of the conversation on this topic. The Index seeks to document the responsibility of retail corporations on the effects of their practices. While the data is applicable to both this category and the effects on consumer and producer areas, the concept of transparency falls firmly in the power dynamics category. The data was collected via questionnaires sent to about 250 of the top retail corporations in the world. The responses were then scored under multiple categories to assess the transparency of each major retailer (Fashion Revolution 2022). The concept of transparency is integral to understanding the issues with the industry. As the Index explains, there is no real traceability so what we know is filtered through the lens of retailers which need to be seen in a positive light by consumers to earn profit. While laws and protections are in place for working conditions and there have been pushes for sustainability, there is very little control over the industry because of the complexity in supply chains with no clear group in charge. This index keeps retailers accountable the only way they can, attempting to grade their transparency. There is a consensus within academic literature that Western brands popularly outsource their labor, leading to the exploitation of workers for high volume outputs for a low cost.

The effects on consumer and producer areas can be split into two categories: environmental consequences and worker exploitation. A 2021 study evaluates the change in net environmental impacts from 2000-2015 made by the textile industry. The study uses estimates from worldwide

data sources to understand the changes in global consumption of resources and waste. This study found that while the per-garment-consumption cost had decreased, the high volume of items produced increased enough to warrant a 0.3 gigaton increase in carbon dioxide production with a 75% increase in overall textile production (Peters, Li, and Lenzen 2021). This, combined with a consumer-side study of textile waste in Florida, shows unmanageable levels of environmental strain. The consumer-side study by Julia DeVoy (2021) compares different counties in the state of Florida with various levels of wealth to determine which groups are contributing the most to textile waste from fast fashion. The study operates with an understanding that textile waste has increased by ten times since the 1960s with an estimated 34 billion pounds in the US alone. The conclusion drawn from this study is that wealthier groups contribute more waste than any other. These two studies combined illuminate the unsustainability of current practices. As for producer areas, laborers are exploited and exposed to poor working conditions with limited compensation (All 4 2023). Worker exploitation largely goes unreported which poses challenges for a comprehensive literature review. Inside the Shein Machine: UNTOLD captures women working roughly 18 hours per day with only one day off a month. The documentary explains conditions are not in compliance with Chinese labor laws. The exploitative nature of the industry is brought to light through the documentation of workers producing 500 pieces of clothing for just 19 pounds per day (All 4 2023). The literature shows that the negative impacts of the industry are severe in both consumer and producer areas and are set to rapidly increase given the growth of fast fashion consumption.

III. METHODOLOGY

The majority of the data used to evaluate the central questions comes from an online ethnographic study of fashion content creators and other consumers in the Spring of 2023. This qualitative study on consumer-created content documents sentiments towards specific brands and types of fashion popular during this period. A digital ethnographic study of TikTok offers a comprehensive view of the positive and negative sentiments towards fast fashion, the paid promotion of fast fashion by influencers, and the demographics interested in or currently purchasing fast fashion. The qualitative nature of this study allows for documentation of consumer perspectives and retailer influence among target consumers. To best evaluate question one, the use of influencer promotion on social media will be evaluated. Question two requires supplemental data regarding retailer transparency in addition to information gathered by the main qualitative study. While the ethnography does not directly cover retailers or laborers, consumer understanding of labor exploitation and environmental harm reflects the state of transparency in the industry. The evaluation of these questions will draw on the quantitative study noted in the Literature, *The Fashion Transparency Index of 2022*.

PARTICIPANTS

The qualitative study focuses on the users creating and interacting with videos of fashion related content on TikTok. The participants in this study, much like an in-person ethnography, are any individuals interacting with the online space. This limits the population being studied to those that have access to the platform and that are interested in fashion content. Many of

these participants are in their teens to mid-twenties, based in the United States, and predominantly women. Participants include users creating videos or commenting on videos. There are many “unseen” participants within the available data such as likes or number of shares. These numbers are not always reliable given many creators and brands purchase likes and shares to inflate their popularity statistics (All 4 2023). This practice makes studying these “unseen” participants challenging and often impossible to do so effectively. While these users are not able to be studied, they act as markers for the relevance of the information that the video presents. This adds a layer of complexity to who is categorized as a participant in this study. In addition to these numbers not always being accurate; likes and shares only reveal the number of users interacting with videos, not emotional impressions. Comment sections are the only reliable source of user reactions towards content. All users interacting with the online space offer some information of the general perceptions consumers have of fast fashion, and by default, popular retailers.

DATA

There are two sources of valuable information TikTok’s platform offers: videos and comment sections. Due to the divisiveness of this topic, I anticipated there to be dialogue relevant to my study in comment sections on videos both promoting and discouraging fast fashion. Videos offer information in a multitude of ways; documentation of the demographics of shoppers, volume of paid promotions by fast fashion brands, and amount of fast fashion indirectly promoted by creators. On the other hand, I am able to hear from those opposed to fast fashion that utilize the

platform to inform and discourage its purchase.

PROCEDURE

This research was conducted over a 4-week period with a total of 10 hours of observation. I conducted my research by utilizing the search function of the app using keywords such as “fast fashion”, “haul”, “fashion”, and “what to wear” since TikTok offers videos of many kinds of content on every “For You Page.” A variety of words that have a positive connotation of fast fashion and others that opposed it were used in these searches to include various perspectives. Comment sections revealed how the audience reacted to the content and offered insight on the demographics of each video’s viewers. Repeated content was anticipated from the beginning because much like there are trends in fashion, there are also trends in content format. I continuously sought to note the age, race, gender, and potential class of those creating videos. As a metric of popularity of particular viewpoints, likes and user following are used as the greatest factors considered.

LIMITATIONS

The platform automatically filters all content by relevance to each individual user based on videos they have interacted with in the past. By default, there are identity characteristics embedded in each user’s app. Users we see tend to share our age, gender, language, class, and race characteristics because of similar perspectives and interests. Due to this, the content first generated for each keyword search is usually posted by people with these shared characteristics. To mitigate the effects of this limitation in the research, the apps of individuals with the following backgrounds: Black female college student,

Asian female college student, White male college graduate, and White and Latina female college students were utilized to collect representative data. The same main keywords were used on each device to generate similar content through each algorithmic lens. The searches were most varied on my device to collect data on groups that were not represented through the other devices. Searches specific to men's fashion and other demographics were utilized to attempt to bridge gaps in representation. The age range of user platforms in the study is extremely limited due to access to others below and above the college age range. This issue was not detrimental to the results because of the prominence of both older and younger users present in all search results. Due to location and language settings of all users' apps, searches were limited to the United States and other English-speaking countries. The algorithm posed a variety of limitations to data collection, which were unique to the digital nature of this study.

IV. ETHNOGRAPHIC RESULTS

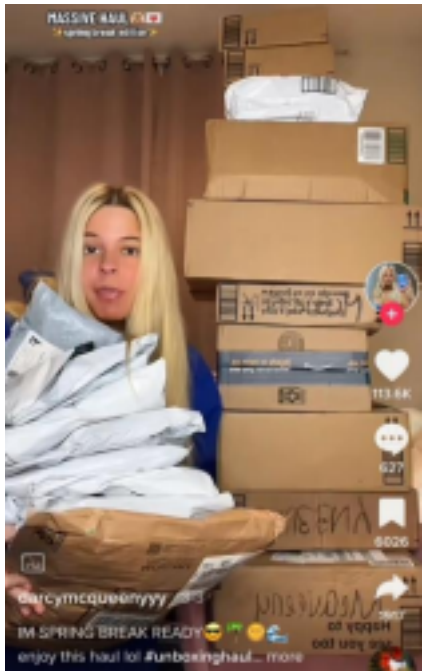
Following the completion of the digital ethnographic study of TikTok, a clear set of patterns emerged. Many of the videos encountered were nearly identical in form and purpose. Not only are certain fashion styles on trend, but specific aesthetic styles of video creation go in and out of trend. These trends change the same way as fashion, which offers new modes of content creation that communicate different meaning for ethnographic purposes. If it is popular to make videos for school outfit inspiration, that allows the researcher to understand that the target audience and the creator are in their mid to late teens or college-aged. Videos promoting fast fashion brands that sell items that resemble high-

end fashion wear inform the researcher that purchases are due to budget constraints. These trends in videos allow for varying information to be conveyed and each period of research done on these platforms will offer different results due to the impermanent nature of popular internet content.

FAST FASHION VIDEOS

The main source of relevant data comes from videos that discuss items sold by fast fashion brands. These videos can take form in two major ways: videos that are sponsored by fast fashion retailers and videos that emphasize fast fashion products with no monetary gain for content creators. These two categories have different links to retailers but by default promote the industry and influence others to purchase similar items. It is in no way assumed that these videos intentionally shift consumer perceptions to not consider the ethical implications of these purchases. In fact, it may be assumed that the users promoting such content are mostly unaware of retailer practices or at least ignorant to retail practices given the vast lack of acknowledgement. There is a sect of users that are aware and continue to purchase from retailers, a position that will be further analyzed in the *Complicit Consumers* section.

Figure 1. March 3, 2023



Source: TikTok.

<https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTRWuUgvy/>

Based on the qualitative data, most content creators post two forms of popular content within the first two categories. There are “hauls” (e.g., videos showing 5-20 or more items purchased to viewers) and inspiration videos that show other users how to style items or recommendations for different events. These haul or inspiration videos can be made either by users paid by fast fashion retailers or not. The videos promote the consumption of fast fashion in high quantities (See Figure 1). Given the environmental implications highlighted in the Literature Review, haul videos are highly problematic given consumption rates. This, combined with the amount of inspiration videos put out each week, contributes to a high consuming and fast-changing fashion culture. Considering that users are likely unaware of the ethics of

supporting such retailers, there is no check on consumption. Retailers directly influence haul content by sending select influencers multiple items at no cost in exchange for content promotion on the platform (see Figure 2). This allows retailers to control a portion of users to only share positive content about their brand. Given the crossover between social media users and fast fashion consumers, it is essential for these brands to maintain a positive online image. An interesting trend in the data is mimicry of influencers by young teens, especially in haul culture. The content found under searches of specific brands and the keyword “fashion haul” was a mix of influencers posting paid promotion videos of items fast fashion brands sent them and young teens posting similar content.

Figure 2. March 3, 2023



Source: TikTok.

<https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTRWu6Ych/>

These teens had a clear class delineation as the amount and source of the items were costly. Contrary to paid promotion videos and other major influencers, these young girls were not making money by posting their content. In this phenomenon it becomes clear the influence content creators have on young consumers. These young consumers have limited interactions with the larger body of users unlike their more popular counterparts. The low traffic on their videos documented by likes, comments, and shares implies these videos are likely posted to be seen by others they know like other traditional forms of social media. The comments show familiarity, giving more context for how these videos impact social pressure felt by users in their close circles. Mimicry videos show the prevalence in fast fashion among young consumers, allowing for deeper insight into the consumption habits of the younger generation.

Among these fast fashion videos, retailers partner with influencers to target eco-minded consumers. Green washing is a common practice among retail brands that are aware of the push for sustainably and ethically sourced clothing (All 4 2023). These items are promoted as being eco-friendly and tend to be featured in sustainable collections on brand websites. Videos highlighting such products fall into both fast fashion and anti-fast fashion content categories. The former supporting such collection and the latter criticizing brands for this practice. These items tend to either be packaged in industrially compostable packaging or be partially made of recycled fabric. These small changes allow for consumers that want to reduce their carbon footprint to feel better about their purchases with little change to retail practices.

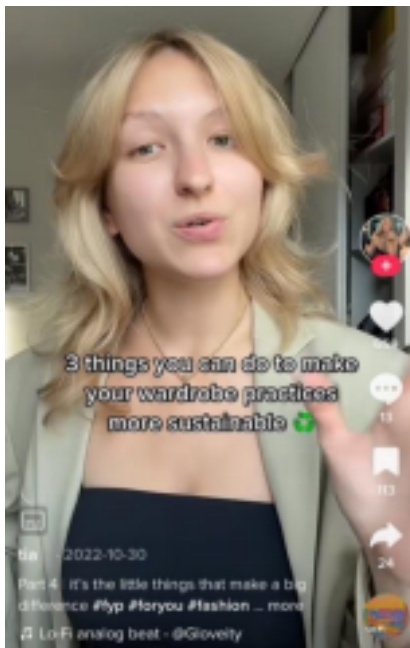
ANTI-FAST FASHION VIDEOS

While a large portion of the content analyzed through the digital ethnographic study promoted fast fashion consumption, there was a significant subculture of users opposed to these retailers and the overall culture of the industry. These users tended to be more diverse than fast fashion content creators in terms of race, class, and gender. There is a movement against fast fashion practices and consumer consumption that becomes more prevalent depending on keywords used to search for content. Keywords such as “fast fashion” and brand names, such as Shein, offered larger amounts of videos against the purchase of fast fashion. Many of these videos sought to educate other users of the negative effects and offer alternatives to shopping these brands (See Figure 3). Another form of content was consignment clothing promotion. These videos showcased “thrifted” items (e.g., garment pieces bought second hand) that were either repurposed or styled in a way that was on trend. These videos seem to have as much traffic on them as regular fashion content. Given the large user basis and algorithm-based filtering of each user’s “For You Page,” it is possible that many users do not encounter both sects of content creation.

Content creators in this sphere interact with videos made by fast fashion creators but the reverse was only documented in cases of “complicit consumers.” The use of the reaction function was popular among videos aimed to inform consumers of the issues with fast fashion practices, showing awareness of the role social media plays in the promotion of fast fashion. These creators post videos in a similar style to their fast fashion counterparts such as fashion inspiration videos but haul culture is unique to fast fashion users. There is a

stronger emphasis on mindful purchasing and support of ethical businesses. In the same way there is a social pressure to be on trend for fast fashion creators, there is a push to adhere to ethical practices. Due to this, there is discourse within these videos on the accessibility for all people to partake in ethical purchasing.

Figure 3. October 30, 2022



Source: TikTok.

<https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTRwxMLnL/>

Contrary to fast fashion, sustainable purchasing is not always available at a low cost or accessible to all people. Many of the affordable options posed by these users come from consignment stores where items are unique and cannot be purchased by all users that see the item at a low cost, unlike fast fashion. This divides anti-fast fashion users into two major categories.

Consignment shoppers that seek low-cost items and sustainable shoppers that shop less at a much higher cost. This divides the sect of users based on class since budget is

the major division among these creators and the users interacting with the videos.

COMMENT SECTIONS

Dialogue between users is a crucial source of data for this study as it represents the consensus and disagreement within retailers' target audience. Many comment sections support the content being offered in the video, likely due to the algorithm's ability to offer what users would like best. For the videos that do not have supportive feedback, users on both sides of this issue are able to interact with each other and clearly defend their opinion. This unique online space is the only accessible way to gauge consumer opinions aside from those presented through videos. Comment sections are not as outright as videos made by users, but they reveal more about the general user's view on those creating this content. Discourse on videos comes from two major issues: class divisions and moral arguments.

Figure 4. October 10, 2022



Source: TikTok.

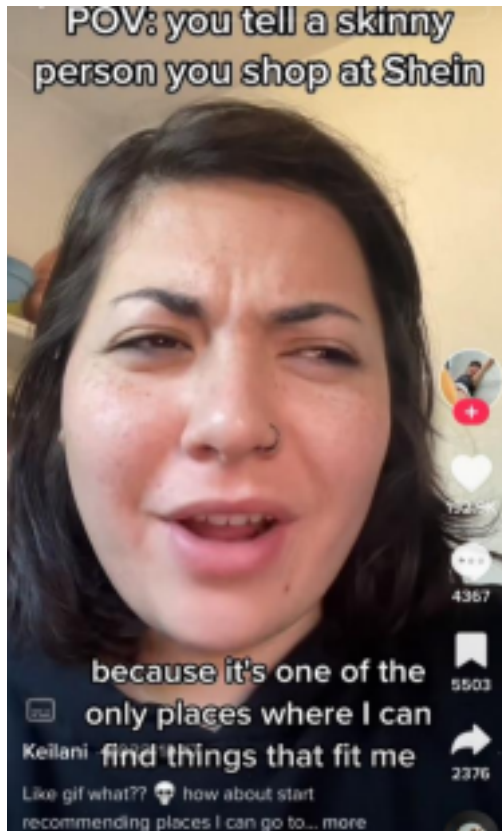
<https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTRwXPmy4/>

While fast fashion pieces are sold at a significantly lower cost to consumers than slow fashion, buying in bulk as seen through haul culture is costly. Comment sections of these videos tend to have the most division among consumers, showcasing users that enjoy watching others share their purchases and users who are aware of the monetary implications of these purchases (See Figure 4). These are intuitive differences that come from users being critical or supportive of content offered by creators with the means to purchase hundreds of dollars of clothing. In some cases, users will point out how these content creators will only wear an outfit once before they do not want it anymore and the waste associated with buying in bulk. The unattainable amounts of

consumption for average or lower income consumers creates polarization within the platform with comment sections offering the only space to react.

The second major use of the comment section is discourse about moral arguments. A point of polarization between users is in the case of moral arguments related to purchasing habits. When content creators make videos that shame or judge other consumers for purchasing fast fashion products, comment sections become a place for users to defend their positions. Many users express upset at this judgment due to the lack of accessible and affordable alternative ways to shop. There is also a notable emphasis on the lack of retailer responsibility which leaves consumers with limited brands they can ethically support. These moral debates show that there is less consensus among consumers than video content offers. It allows consumers to share their reservations about both fast fashion and the sustainable fashion movement without being under direct scrutiny by other users.

Figure 5. December 17, 2022.



Source: TikTok.

<https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTRwXffaL/>

COMPLICIT CONSUMERS

An interesting category of user that emerged within this research was the complicit consumer. This was the most surprising sect of users I encountered within my digital ethnography of TikTok. These users expressed their knowledge of the unethical implications of fast fashion brands, such as labor exploitation and environmental harm, yet openly supported purchasing from these brands. This dissonance mainly came from marginalizing factors, such as size and income. They expressed their frustration with the sustainable fashion movement and the lack of nuance users accepted. For plus sized consumers, shopping consignment is

not a realistic option if they want to dress on trend due to the limited options (See Figure 5). This sentiment was shared among many users in this category. The alternative would be to shop sustainable brands, which come at a much higher cost to consumers. These options are limiting factors for these consumers, leaving fast fashion to be the best option to shop trendy and affordable items. Other marginalized users expressed similar sentiments about the lack of options and unnecessary judgment from sustainable buyers. There is a racial element to this category of content creator. Many of the creators in this sect come from marginalized backgrounds, which have led to lower class status and limited disposable income to spend on stylish clothing. Clothing is a source of confidence and expression for many people, so judgment on one's ability to purchase costly items or forgo their style of choice for consignment is a point of polarization. This group of content creators is heavily supported in their comment sections depicting consensus among consumers that style and cost are more important than the implications of their purchases.

V. RETAILER TRANSPARENCY

In addition to the results of the ethnography, quantitative data on retailer practices is necessary to draw conclusions for the central research questions. This section covers the raw data collected by Fashion Revolution for their Fashion Revolution Transparency Index of 2022, as noted in the Literature Review. This index bases its data on brand responses to their questionnaire and does not value the quality of company policies, only transparency. The total average of retailer transparency in 2022 was just 23%, meaning the average disclosure of among all 250 major brands was just under one

fourth. Out of the 250 brands, 10 brands disclosed zero information, 78 brands disclosed under 10%, and only 28 brands disclosed more than 50% of the information covered on the questionnaire (Fashion Revolution 2022). My claim focuses on labor rights and environmental harm as the major areas of concern, these areas will be further evaluated through the Index.

The Fashion Transparency Index evaluated relevant categories to labor rights and conditions including Living Wage, Working Hours, and Child Labor. For the Living Wage category, only 27% of the 250 brands disclose their approach to offering a living wage to supply chain workers while only 4% publish their percentage of supply chain workers earning a livable wage. For Working Hours, 82% of brands publish their supplier policies while only 34% disclose how these policies are implemented. As for Child Labor, 89% of suppliers publish their policies but only 48% say how they are implemented (Fashion Revolution 2022). As for environmental harm, the main categories of relevant data are Production Amounts, Product Waste, and Carbon Footprint. Only 15% of brands publish the number of products made annually, making this a particularly underreported category. As for Product Waste, 38% of brands publish company policies while 24% publish supplier policies. Finally, for Carbon Footprint, 65% disclose the carbon footprint from their own facilities but only 22% include the emissions at a raw materials level (Fashion Revolution 2022). There is a clear lack of reporting of practices in all parts of the supply chain for these brands.

VI. ANALYSIS

Following the collection of data through the online ethnographic study and the supplementation of data taken from *The*

Fashion Transparency Index of 2022, the central questions of this paper can be effectively evaluated. The questions this paper seeks to answer are (I) How do fast fashion retailers use social media to market among target consumers? (II) How does current fast fashion marketing help retail brands disguise the exploitative relations between workers and consumers in their global supply chains? My findings support my original claim that retailers weaponize consumerism and conformity culture to reach younger female target consumers on the platform. As for question two, both the ethnographic and Index findings were concurrent in the lack of detailed reporting of bad practices made available to consumers. There was more nuance present among users than expected, particularly the existence of complicit consumers. The following sections evaluate these questions in further detail.

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE FINDINGS

The first central research question seeks to investigate how social media is utilized by retail brands as an effective marketing tactic. Fashion content often promotes fast fashion items and brands to consumers through posting reviews and inspiration videos. Retailers have employed conventionally attractive college-aged content creators through sponsorship deals. These sponsored posts aim to reach users that look to these influencers for recommendations. Many of the users that look to college-aged people are those in the same age group and younger. This age range of the target audience is purposeful as these consumers do not have income comparable to adults well into their career, making low-cost items ideal. These consumers are more vulnerable to social pressures to conform to standards set by peers. This age group often does not have

anyone financially dependent on them so there is a higher portion of income that can be spent on themselves. This allows retailers to specifically target vulnerable consumers and capitalize on the social pressure prevalent in this demographic inside and out of these online spaces.

Understanding the demographics of creators is essential to understanding the demographics of the users they target their content towards. Social media offers mirrors for creators and users to interact with those with similar backgrounds and interests. Through the weeks of observation on TikTok, the demographics of users interacting and creating content remained predominantly young White females. By using TikTok apps of users with different ethnic backgrounds, I was able to identify the differences in the racial composition of creators of fashion content. There was little to no change in the demographics of “haul” video creators, confirming these creators are predominantly White women. Racial and gender consistency in comment sections solidifies this assumption. It can be concluded from the creators and the users that there is a mix in demographics among fast fashion consumers.

Those who use the platforms to promote sustainable fashion only reach users with demonstrated interest in similar topics. With the addition of trend culture, it is unlikely for fast fashion supporters to be effectively challenged due to the ease in access and affordability. Social media effectively influences the way people present themselves, but moral issues seem to not be equally impacted due to less emphasis inherent to visual content. Pressures encourage specific looks but fall short in changing opinions on complex issues. For this reason, social media works as an effective promoter of trending fashion and may be the largest influence on

consumer behavior. Due to the conformity and consumption patterns present in trend content, it is an effective tool retailers have weaponized to target young consumers.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO FINDINGS

The second central question builds on social media marketing to understand how these practices disguise the exploitative dynamics between consumers and producers in global supply chains. Retailers target vulnerable consumers in a space that continues to perpetuate their perceptions due to algorithmic echo chambers. This finding combined with the labor conditions, environmental harms, and lack of retailer transparency leaves Western consumers to perpetuate exploitive relationships with producers in the Global South. There is little reference to producers in fashion content, depicting consumer ignorance to these workers. Unlike other forms of fashion, such as high fashion and small business, it is not common to reference the creator of the garment. The humanization of production has been removed by fast fashion retailers, leading to this lack of consideration by consumers.

Similar to the lacking dialogue in reference to producers, there is a high level of consumer ignorance to the negative impacts of fast fashion. The side of this industry that consumers most interact with is positive. They are exposed to the trendy, affordable, and accessible clothes promoted by peers they respect. This appeals to consumers that want to stay on trend at a low cost. Trend shifts push consumers to keep pace with new styles and new brands which perpetuates both the problem of high waste and the high production pressures that lead to labor exploitation. The role of social media must be understood as the gateway of knowledge for consumers to understand retailer practices and a pacer to

the production of the industry. Since many individuals in the target group are reached through social media, there is limited interaction with information outside of these platforms and retail websites. Aside from the marketing tactics that isolate consumers from critical lenses of fast fashion, there is limited transparency in the industry making consumer education near impossible. Retail brands effectively limit conversations of their unethical business practices by not publishing information necessary to consumer education and governance intervention. By keeping those outside of the supply chain in the dark about business practices, retail corporations do not need to take responsibility for harm caused by their clothing production. As the data from *The Fashion Transparency Index* makes clear, not only is there limited transparency but what is published does not include the practices of outsourced steps of the supply chain (2022). The complexity of these supply chains allows retailers to avoid accountability for unethical repercussions of their work. The combination of social media marketing and lacking transparency leads to mistrusting consumers and surface level disclosure, allowing for retailers to perpetuate harm without being held accountable.

VII. CONCLUSION

After analyzing the results of the online ethnography and levels of retailer transparency, it is evident that the results of this study are supportive of the current literature surrounding fast fashion and the role of social media. This data fills the gap of current consumer perceptions of fast fashion and gives insight into the target consumer groups social media reaches. Considering the original claim, fast fashion retailers utilize consumerism and

conformity cultures present on social media to target vulnerable Western consumer groups, this claim can be confirmed. The familiarity of influencers distracts from the broadly underreported business practices of many fashion brands. By limiting transparency in all steps of the supply chain, retailers effectively curate their brand image to not include the realities of these practices, causing consumers to unknowingly perpetuate harm.

IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY

The observations taken from this online ethnographic study offer context to the established consensus the Literature Review establishes of the fashion industry as laid out by other authors. Consumer behavior acts as a reflection to the goods made available. Consumers can only purchase available goods and they do not control the ethics of retailer practices. Due to this, consumers are only able to shop as ethically and eco-friendly as the items they are offered. Given the lack of transparent business practices, many shoppers are unaware of the implications of their choices. As social media platforms continue to promote and integrate online shopping with fast fashion retailers, access to consumers will become even more simplified. This will likely lead to an increase in fast fashion consumption and textile waste. The tie between social media tendencies towards short-term trends and fast fashion is necessary to consider while looking towards the future.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

There are a few notable limitations to this study including the demographic of participants and the time frame. The demographic of users was limited to consumers in the United States and other English-speaking countries. Given my

research, this reduced my interaction with those producing in the Global South to none. This study is inherently only able to view one side of this complex practice given the prevalence of consumer facing content on the app. Due to the platform's one-sided nature, consumers share their thoughts without regard for the experience of laborers leading to potentially more genuine responses. These unmarred opinions may have not been so openly shared in a space where both sides were present. A consumer only study may limit the voices being heard, but insights as to the dynamics consumers have with retailers and producers may be more clearly understood.

The other limitation of this study is the time frame. As this study assumes, social media trends change quickly. The consensus the platform may exhibit this month may be entirely different after some time has passed. Any new interactions with or releases of information about retail practices may entirely shift the content on the platform. For a more representative study, the time frame would ideally span over a year to capture consumers' willingness to change. This short-term study thus offers a snapshot of the viewpoints of Western consumers during the time of this study. This data may not be generalizable if new information to consumers disrupts the strong support of fast fashion on the platform.

FUTURE PLATFORM USE

Social media offers more than just a means of promoting fast fashion and unsustainable trend shifts. As seen through the observations, the content users encounter is not all supportive of the current industry. In the same way retailers have weaponized the platform for increased purchasing, anti-fast fashion users can

educate other users through comment interactions and video content. It would be incorrect to say that the platform's users all contribute to the problem of fast fashion. Social media may instead be one of the most effective tools in reeducating people on sustainable shopping habits. The subculture of sustainable creators is currently aiming to improve users' consumption of fast fashion by offering better solutions and recommendations. This is vital to create a shift in consumer shopping habits and move away from a retailer-positive consumer attitude. In the same way that influencers promote fast fashion, these groups can likewise increase social pressures to disincentivize consumption. Target consumers are most easily accessible on these platforms and pushing for a critical lens of retailers can only be achieved by changing the views of this group. Western facing retailers are dependent on their positive portrayal on social media platforms to maintain a consistent consumer basis. If the perception of these brands becomes critical, retailers will be pressured to improve the relationship between consumers and producers to maintain high revenue. Thus, social media plays an integral role in moving towards a more ethical and sustainable fashion industry.

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Nuclear Volatility in South Asia

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Fall 2023

Abstract: *South Asia's nuclear powers, India and Pakistan, have a longstanding rivalry, particularly over Kashmir. This paper examines how their recent domestic political developments impact their foreign policy choices and contribute to the risk of nuclear conflict. India's rise in far-right nationalism under Modi and Pakistan's deep-seated military influence are analyzed through relevant frameworks of nuclear proliferation and conflict. The paper argues that Modi's "Akhand Bharat" vision and Pakistan's proxy war strategy fueled by groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed challenge classical deterrence theory. The stability-instability paradox plays out through Pakistan's asymmetric warfare and India's conventional responses. With Modi showing an inclination for forceful reactions, the risk of escalation towards nuclear brinkmanship intensifies. The paper concludes by highlighting the urgent need for de-escalation measures and dialogue to avert a catastrophic nuclear incident in South Asia.*

INTRODUCTION

South Asia is one of the most geopolitically important regions in the world. Strategically located, the region serves as a crossroad between Middle East, Central Asia, East Asia, and the Indian Ocean. Being at such a critical geostrategic juncture, South Asia serves as a key global economic waypoint, and a melting pot of various cultures, ideologies and nationalities. At the heart of region lie India and Pakistan- two nuclear powers who have been engaged in a long-standing conflict since 1947 over the disputed territory of Kashmir. Over the years, these two powers engaged in multiple low and high intensity conflicts, as well as well-coordinated and sustained asymmetric warfare campaigns against each other (Behra 2001). In addition to having strained relations with each other, both of these countries are facing glaring issues that impact their respective domestic politics. Pakistan has been seeing political instability since the 1950's characterized by

coups, assassinations, and dissolution of democratically elected bodies (Barany 2009). Among the primary sources of this continuous political fluctuation is the deep entrenchment of the Pakistani military into the country's politics and economy, which has significantly weakened the country's democratic institutions by the means of direct political interventions, suppression of dissent, co-opting civilian institutions, and weakening the rule of law (Siddiqua 2017). In addition to these longstanding factors, Pakistan's asymmetric warfare campaign against India has been negatively impacting its domestic politics. Pakistan is now overdependent on its terror proxies as a tool to achieve its foreign policy objectives (Jones and Fair 2010). As a result, these proxies have so deeply embedded themselves into the social fabric of Pakistan's domestic politics that even if their armed wings are shut down, they'll still find ways to function (Center for International Security and Cooperation 2018). What this means is that in addition

to civilian leaders, designated terrorists make up for a certain portion of the Pakistani polity.

India, on the other hand, has been witnessing a surge in far-right hyper nationalist sentiment since 2014 when Narendra Modi led Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) came to power. Modi's brand of governance can be best characterized as a homogenous concoction of authoritarianism, Hindu nationalism, and cult-based politics. Over the course of his Prime Ministership he has managed to circumvent, completely dismiss, and even crush five of the core pillars of a functioning democracy: dissent within his own political party, consultation from his cabinet, freedom of press, nonpartisanship of civil services, and fairness of the judicial system (Guha 2022). All of these trends clearly point towards centralization of power within a single individual.

Given the clear states of disarray in which India and Pakistan's domestic politics are in right now, the question arises: how –and if- these two countries foreign policies towards each other are a function of their respective domestic political atmosphere. This paper zeroes in on a more specific aspect of the aforementioned question- given the changing foreign policy attitudes between the two countries, is the South Asian region becoming increasingly vulnerable to a inter-state nuclear incident? In order to approach the question, this paper looks at theoretical frameworks pertaining to nuclear proliferation and conflict within the international relations theory, and applies them to the domestic political atmospheres of India and Pakistan to look at the feasibility of nuclear conflict.

AUTHORITARIANISM IN INDIA

Over the last decade, the world has seen a sharp uptick in national leaders with moderate to high levels of authoritarian tendencies. From Bolsonaro in Brazil to Putin in Russia, the latest historical generation of authoritarians have been accused of pretty much everything ranging from rigging elections to committing war crimes. The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, is an interesting member of this aforementioned generation; he walks a fine line flexing his autocratic tendencies while maintaining a charismatic personality to swoon the majority of the Indian population who align with his ideological beliefs. Under the covers of brilliant oratory performances and grandiose public appearances, Modi's rule is laced with repression of free speech, perpetuation of hate and violence against the minorities, and diminishment of civil liberties among other fundamental rights that the citizens of any well-functioning democracy should be entitled to (Chowdhury 2022).

Ever since assuming power in 2014, the Modi administration has launched several systematic measures to curb civil liberties. Acts such as Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act (UAPA), National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act, and Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) have been employed and abused to detain vocal critics of the government under the veil of national security (Chowdhury 2022). In addition to cracking down on individual liberties, the government has also restrained the freedom of speech and expression historically enjoyed by the press and media by forcefully sealing newspaper offices and interrupting live news broadcasts. Not only does Modi led BJP suppress free media, but uses a few pliant news channels to spread selected state propaganda. This multi-

faceted usage of the media establishes a one-way communication channel between the government and the population (Pinto 2022).

The question then arises: how does Narendra Modi still enjoy an approval rating of almost 78 percent (Morning Consult 2024)? Ever since Modi started his Prime Ministerial campaign for 2014 elections, it has been clear that instead of being a representative extension of his political party, the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), he operates as a discrete political entity in himself. This personal 'brand' of Modi has been pivotal in creating ardent following consisting of the common population, politicians, journalists, bureaucrats, and members of the judicial establishment. As historian Ramachandra Guha puts it, this 'cult' of Modi has elevated him to a demigod-like status where his leadership is equated with the very existence of the nation. This has biasedly swayed the supposedly democratic institutions in favor of Modi (Guha 2022).

One of the ways Modi maintains his following- and voter base- is by stoking and fueling the rapidly growing Hindu nationalistic sentiment in India's predominantly Hindu population. He uses the Hindu nationalistic rhetoric and vocabulary to woo his right-wing Hindu vote-bank. This selective use of language creates a 'us vs. them' divide which has led to increased polarization and violence against minority communities (Guha 2022). However, there is only a certain extent to which Modi can capitalize on his implicit domestic anti-Muslim rhetoric without tarnishing whatever is left of India's image as a democracy on the world stage. In order to maintain the balance between appeasing his Hindu nationalist voter base and retaining the pseudo-image of a democratic leader, Modi focusses on the next best

thing- Pakistan. A quick analysis of the Modi government's foreign policy towards Pakistan clearly shows that it is a fine-tuned balance of diplomacy and theatrics (Times of India 2019). One such example is the aftermath of the Pathankot airstrikes carried out by the Indian Air Force. These airstrikes were carried out in response to a terrorist attack on Indian paramilitary forces in Pulwama, Kashmir by Jaish-e-Mohammed- a terrorist organization funded by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) (Times of India 2019).

The Hindu nationalistic connotation in Modi's foreign policy goes far beyond Pakistan. From an ideological standpoint, it is inspired by the idea of '*Akhand Bhaarat*,' which translates to 'undivided India' (Mogul 2023). It is a concept perpetuated by the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh)- BJP's ideological parent organization- since 1925 (Frayer and Khan 2019). It carries the notion of re-integrating states ranging from Afghanistan in the west to Myanmar in the east, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives back into India. The resulting geographical entity- *Akhand Bharat*- would be identical to what ancient India looked like more than 2,000 years ago. Integration of this ideology into policy to produce tangible change has already started. In 2019, India passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Act that expedites the path to citizenship for Hindus from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan and excludes Muslims (Singh 2022). That same year came one of the most momentous and controversial decision with respect to the disputed region of Kashmir- the abrogation of Indian constitution's Article 370. Article 370 gave the people of Kashmir partial lawmaking autonomy and rights to self-governance as a disputed territory. By abrogating it, Modi government brought the entire disputed

territory of Kashmir under the federal rule (Goel 2019). Pakistan, the contending party opposite India in the Kashmir dispute, was obviously not happy. The Modi government taking tangible actions to materialize its expansionist ideology contributes to increasing the volatility of the region that already has a history of weak geopolitical stability.

POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan has been experiencing frequent, if not consecutive, periods of political fluctuation. This history of instability is directly tied to its military's long-standing ambition to exert influence over the spheres of polity that usually fall under the democratically elected civilian government (Nayar 2007). The first notable intervention was led by General Ayub Khan in 1958, when he completely abolished the constitution established in 1956. This set a dangerous precedent, and Pakistan saw subsequent military coups in October 1958, July 1977, and October 1999 (ConstitutionNet 2018). Even Pakistan's judiciary has played a significant role in undermining the legitimacy of its democratically elected leaders. In 1954, Pakistan's governor general dissolved the elected constituent assembly, after dismissing the East Bengali prime minister who enjoyed a majority in Parliament. However, Pakistan's democratic spirit saw its darkest days in 1977 when Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was imprisoned by the Chief of Army Staff Zia ul Haq on unverified charges of murder. When Bhutto's wife challenged his unlawful detention in the supreme court, the court not only deemed the military takeover perfectly legal, but also allowed his execution by the military (Guruswamy 2022). In more recent times, this pattern of instability continues with the

disqualification of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif from holding any public office, and the ousting of his successor, Imran Khan.

The entrenchment of Pakistan's military in its domestic state of affairs runs much deeper than top-brass politics. The military has a significant share of Pakistan's land, industries, and businesses, making it deeply involved in the country's economy. The military's economic activities are carried out through various entities, including the Fauji Foundation, the Shaheen Foundation, and the Army Welfare Trust, among others (Siddiqi 2017). These entities have interests in industries such as cement, fertilizer, and banking, as well as real estate and agriculture. This involvement in the economy has led to a lack of transparency and accountability, which has contributed to corruption and inefficiency. As noted by Ayesha Siddiqi in *'Military Inc. - Second Edition: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy,'* such deep investments in the country's economic interests is directly proportional to ability to influence the country's political decision-making apparatus.

It is important to note that the military's influence on Pakistan's policy making transcends into the realm of foreign policy as well. The ISI is usually in charge of advancing Pakistan towards its long-standing foreign policy objectives. One of these objectives is obtaining complete control over the disputed territory of Kashmir, and in order to do so Pakistan has long relied on asymmetric warfare (Behra 2001). The use of proxy warfare by Pakistan against India finds its roots way back in 1947 as both countries wanted complete control over the state of Kashmir (Blakemore 2019). Using the tactics and resources from supporting the CIA in Afghanistan, Pakistan's ISI launched 'Operation Tupac' in Kashmir, aimed at creating multiple terror proxies to

destabilize the region. A major component of Tupac was radicalizing the Kashmiri population, which was already disgruntled by harsh crackdowns by the Indian security forces in the region (Kanwal 1999). The combination of proper funding, arms supply, and local disdain for the Indian government served as the perfect recipe for the ISI to create multiple proxies against India. Two of the most notable ones are Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. Out of all the proxies supported by ISI, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LT) is perhaps the most effective and notorious. This can be attributed to its deep integration with Pakistan's domestic politics, and the successful siege of the Indian city of Mumbai in 2008 (Macander 2021). LT found its origins as the militant wing of Markaz-ud-Dawa-wal-Irshad (MDI), a so-called 'missionary and social-welfare' organization found in Pakistan during the 1980s to oppose the Soviet presence in Afghanistan (CIA n.d.). Following the Soviet withdrawal, it focused its attention on Indian administered Kashmir, and consequently garnered ISI's support in the form of funding and training. LT surpassed the effectiveness of most Kashmiri militant organizations in 1999, when it introduced *fidayeen* style suicide attacks in Kashmir, primarily targeting Indian paramilitary and police forces (Macander 2021). Emboldened by the development of a successful *fidayeen* strategy in Kashmir, LT targeted the Indian capital, New Delhi. In 2000, two LT terrorists open fired on the historical Red Fort, killing two Indian army personnel. Almost a year later, in 2001, LT, in collaboration with Jaish-e-Mohammed, targeted the Indian parliament (Center for International Security and Cooperation 2018).

However, LT's most notorious attack was in 2008 on the Indian city of Mumbai,

which consisted of multiple near simultaneous attacks on multiple locations, lasting for four days and resulting in around 174 deaths (D'Souza 2022). The sophistication, coordination, and ingenuity of these attacks was far beyond what LT alone is capable of and suggests that there was direct involvement of ISI in planning and executing these attacks. This was confirmed by one of LT's operatives, David Coleman Headley, who was responsible for narrowing down potential targets and performing reconnaissance. According to Headley's statement, every major LT operative had a direct ISI handler. Moreover, the planning of these attacks involved oversight from serving and retired ISI officers (Tankel 2011). The direct operational and logistical support by the ISI clearly shows that the Pakistan's state support for LT goes far beyond training and funding.

Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) is yet another proxy used by the ISI against India. Unlike LT, the ISI was directly responsible for creating JeM. Following the hijacking of Indian passenger flight IC-814 by terrorists associated with Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, and the consequent release of the Pakistani terrorist Maulana Masood Azhar, the ISI saw the opportunity to prop up another proxy in Kashmir. ISI's exact rationale for having another proxy in the region remains unknown, but many analysts claim that this was done because, at the time, ISI was losing its grip over LT, and wanted a more reliant and compliant proxy (Fair 2017). In 2001, as JeM evolved to operate outside ISI's complete sphere of influence, it underwent an ideological split. The primary reason for this was Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's support for the United States campaign against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Between the two splintering JeM factions, Azhar remained with the one

loyal to the state of Pakistan and continued reporting to the ISI, demonstrating his loyalty.

Other than that joint attack, in collaboration with LT, on the Indian parliament in 2001, JeM has carried out several attacks on its own against Indian armed forces. In January 2016, it attacked the Indian Air Force station in Pathankot, Punjab, that led to 29 casualties (BBC News 2016). The notable aspect of this attack was its timing- just a few days after the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the Afghan parliament, signed a new defense deal with Russia, and, most importantly, held bilateral talks with the then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. These bilateral talks were critical to diffusing the 2015 tensions and exploring diplomatic solutions for the Kashmir situation (Rifaat 2016). Both things go against what ISI has been working for since the past forty or so years in Kashmir. Conveniently enough for the ISI, JeM's attack sabotaged the diplomatic progress as then Indian External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, called off any further prospects of bilateral talks (Indian Express 2016). Therefore, the Pathankot attack serves as a prime example of the ISI using proxy warfare as a tool to achieve Pakistan's policy objectives (Kanwal, Strategic Stability in South Asia: An Indian Perspective 2017). Other attacks by JeM along similar lines include the 2016 Uri attack and the 2019 Pulwama attack. Both were followed by Indian armed forces conducting surgical strikes on Pakistani soil (Mukherjee 2019).

APPLYING NUCLEAR FRAMEWORKS

By now it is clear that India and Pakistan's respective foreign policies

towards each other are a function on their domestic political issues. However, the fact that both these countries have a sizable nuclear arsenal means that their respective domestic situations can influence the overall geopolitical stability of South Asia. This section takes three theoretical frameworks of nuclear conflict- Deterrence, Stability-Instability Paradox, and Nuclear Brinkmanship- and applies them to the case of India and Pakistan and analyzes which framework is best suited given both countries' geopolitical dynamic with each other.

Deterrence- The deterrence theory is based on the rational theory of decision making (Geller 2017).³³ It operates on the fundamental principles of probabilistic game theory. A strategic confrontation is viewed as a 'game' with two opposing 'players,' who do a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis before making a move. The idea of deterrence lies in the conceptualization that one player threatens the other player with such massive retaliation that the latter decides that launching an attack is not in their best interest. The key concept of deterrence is the threat of punishment. In order for deterrence to be effective, the potential adversary must believe that the threat of punishment is credible and that it will be carried out if the undesirable action is taken (Geller 2017). In the context of nuclear deterrence, this means that both sides must believe that the other will respond with overwhelming force in the event of a nuclear attack. There are two types of deterrence: direct deterrence and extended deterrence. Direct deterrence refers to the use of threats or force to deter an adversary from acting against the deterring state

³³ The following paragraph contains information from Geller (2017) exclusively.

itself. Extended deterrence refers to the use of threats or force to deter an adversary from acting against another state that is allied with the deterring state. Deterrence theory assumes that both sides are rational actors who seek to maximize their own interests. It also assumes that both sides are aware of the other's capabilities and intentions, and that they can communicate effectively in order to avoid misunderstandings or miscalculations.

Deterrence theory has worked successfully in explaining nuclear stability between India and Pakistan starting from when both became nuclear powers till 2014. Even though there have been multiple skirmishes and a few notable wars, both states showed extreme nuclear restraint. A prime example would be the 1999 Kargil conflict, about which many scholars believe that the nuclear deterrence of both countries kept the conflict limited and constrained (Sipress and Ricks 2002). However, deterrence theory functions on the assumption that both the players are rational enough to conduct a cost benefit analysis from an objective standpoint. The fulfillment of this condition seems bleak given Modi's hawkish foreign policy to stoke his nationalist image marred with authoritarian tendencies.

Stability-Instability Paradox- The stability instability paradox is the idea that the presence of nuclear weapons can simultaneously promote stability at the strategic level while increasing the likelihood of conflict at the tactical level (Kapur 2017). At the strategic level, the possession of nuclear weapons by two or more states can create a state of deterrence that reduces the likelihood of a direct

military confrontation. The theory of deterrence suggests that if each side believes that the other will respond with overwhelming force in the event of an attack, then neither side will initiate a military conflict. This creates a stable strategic environment in which both sides are deterred from taking aggressive action against each other. However, at the tactical level, the stability created by deterrence can paradoxically lead to instability (Krepon 2003).³⁴ This is because each side may feel emboldened to take aggressive actions that fall short of direct military conflict, such as supporting proxy wars or engaging in low-level skirmishes. This can create a situation where each side is constantly testing the limits of the other's resolve, leading to a heightened risk of miscalculation, escalation, and conflict. In essence, the stability instability paradox suggests that the presence of nuclear weapons creates a stable strategic environment, but paradoxically increases the risk of conflict at the tactical level. This is because each side may feel more secure in their deterrence posture and may take more risks in their interactions with the other side.

At the strategic level, both India and Pakistan possess nuclear weapons, which creates a state of deterrence that reduces the likelihood of direct military conflict. Both countries are aware of the catastrophic consequences of a nuclear exchange and thus have an incentive to maintain stability at the strategic level (Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation n.d.). However, at the tactical level, the stability created by deterrence can lead to instability. This can be seen in Pakistan's actions of funding terrorism in

³⁴ The remainder of this passage contains information deduced from Krepon (2003) exclusively.

Kashmir as a means of asymmetrical warfare (Behra 2001). Even though at times India does not have grounds to have a direct confrontation with Pakistan in the aftermath of an ISI-sponsored attack, the former usually increases the intensity of cross border artillery firing (Al Jazeera 2020). Needless to say, this increases the risk of a conventional response, therefore logically fulfilling the paradox.

Nuclear Brinkmanship- The theory suggests that in a situation where two nuclear powers are in conflict, both parties may use the threat of nuclear warfare to try and force the other side to back down and concede to their demands. The term "brinkmanship" refers to the strategy of pushing a situation to the brink of disaster, in the hope that the other side will back down and make concessions. In the context of nuclear brinkmanship, this means that one or both sides may threaten to use nuclear weapons in order to try and achieve their goals. The theory assumes that both sides are rational actors who seek to maximize their own interests, and that neither side actually wants to engage in nuclear warfare, which would have catastrophic consequences for both sides (Powell 2015).³⁵ One of the key concepts of nuclear brinkmanship is deterrence. The idea is that both sides will refrain from using nuclear weapons if they believe that the other side will respond with overwhelming force. This is known as mutually assured destruction (MAD), and it serves as a deterrent against the use of nuclear weapons. However, nuclear brinkmanship involves a delicate balance, and there is always a risk of miscalculation or unintended escalation. In a crisis, both

sides may feel that they have no choice but to escalate their threats in order to demonstrate their resolve and avoid appearing weak. This can lead to a dangerous cycle of escalation, with each side pushing the other to the brink of disaster.

This framework is perhaps the most applicable for India Pakistan nuclear stability moving forward. Since 2016, a new trend has emerged as part of Modi's policy-responding to acts of asymmetric warfare with conventional responses. This was first seen in 2016 in the aftermath of the attack on an Indian army camp in Uri, when Indian special forces launched simultaneous surgical strikes in Pakistan Administered Kashmir (Bhattacharjee 2016). A few years later following an attack on an Indian paramilitary convoy in India Administered Kashmir, Indian Air Force launched airstrikes in Balakot, Pakistani territory. Following the airstrikes, Pakistan Air Force sent its own strike package into Indian airspace, which resulted in an aerial dogfight. In the skirmish, an Indian Air Force pilot was captured by Pakistan. After a failed round of heated negotiations, both sides started readying their nuclear missiles. It was only when the, then, United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo intervened that situation de-escalated (Biswas n.d.). India and Pakistan are in a vicious cycle where Pakistan's every action to wage asymmetric warfare against India fuels Modi to take overt and grandiose actions to maintain his Hindu nationalist image, only to further incentivize both the parties (Guha 2022). Given this, it would be fair to say that the current trajectory of the

³⁵ The remainder of this passage contains information deduced from Powell (2005) exclusively.

India-Pakistan relations is aligning towards brinkmanship model.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, India and Pakistan are two nuclear armed states that have a bloody history, primarily over the disputed territory of Kashmir. However, apart from the geopolitical dispute, both countries have domestic political issues as well. India is seeing a surge in hyper-nationalism because of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's alignment with the BJP's pro-Hindu ideology and authoritarian governance practices. These policies and ideology expand into the realm of foreign policy as well with Modi envisioning an *Akhand Bhaarat*. Pakistan, on the other hand, is going through severe political instability, with the military embedding itself into the country's economic and policymaking spheres. This has direct effects on Pakistan's dynamic with India as the former's intelligence (ISI) wages a proxy war campaign against the latter. Two of Pakistan's most successful proxies are Lashkar-e-Taiba (LT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM). Both of these organizations operate with direct logistical and operational support from ISI. Moreover, many of the attacks by these organizations have a policy aftermath which is very much in line with ISI's agenda, clearly indicating that Pakistan uses terrorism as an effective foreign policy tool. Given these domestic state of affairs in India and Pakistan, different frameworks of nuclear conflict can be applied to see how they fit in. Deterrence theory explains the era of nuclear stability before Modi, but his wanton policy actions violate the theory's assumption that both the parties are rational actors. The stability-instability paradox is most commonly observed framework in action as Pakistan wages proxy warfare against India, the latter

responds conventionally. Finally, the brinkmanship theory seems to be more fitting as we look toward the future- Modi is becoming increasingly willing to respond to acts of asymmetric warfare with symmetric responses, opening the possibilities of conventional retaliations which might become nuclear.

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