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Note from the Chief Editors

Mitchell Bowcock and Antonia Giles

11/07/2025

Thank you for reading Juncture: The University of Manchester Undergraduate Politics Journal. We hope you find Volume 8, our special combined publication for the 2024/2025 academic year, interesting and insightful. We are both continuously impressed by the high standard of research conducted at undergraduate level at the University of Manchester. The School of Social Sciences fosters incredible political scholarship and it has been our privilege to place a spotlight on that talent throughout our time at Juncture.

We both joined as Editorial Board Members in October 2022 as 1st year students. We took over as Editors-in-Chief in July 2023 and held this post until the publication of Volume 8, when we handed over to a brand new and incredibly committed executive team. Juncture has been a defining responsibility of our university experience, and one that has uniquely enabled us to meet promising scholars and enjoy some of the highest quality undergraduate research.

We'd like to thank the School of Social Sciences, particularly Dan Silver, Marta Cantijoch, and Nick Turnbull for their support and effort throughout our tenure. They have championed our mission to highlight the value of undergraduate research and will carry this through with new boards. We'd also like to thank our executive board who has been with us for two years. Ella, Farida, Ed, and Ellen have shown such commitment even when the workload has been mountainous and deadlines tight. Without them, we simply would have not been able to get off the ground at the start of the year. We extend our gratitude to the rest of the editorial board who have worked with diligence and integrity throughout. From our editorial board, we are excited to hand over the baton to Ben and Otis, Juncture's new Editors-in-Chief, and wish them every success in future publications.

We hope you enjoy Juncture: Volume 8 and continue to visit and support in the future. It has been our privilege to showcase this young scholarly talent and we are proud to have developed an international readership. We hope you share our belief in the underrepresented value of undergraduate research and continue to support Juncture's mission to fill that analytical gap.

With warmest wishes for every success,

Mitchell Bowcock & Antonia Giles

Editors-in-Chief 2023-2025

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Introduction

This ethnography ventures to locate the experiences, attitudes, and relationships of my female flatmates within the discursive aestheticisation of feminism on social media, theorised by Rosalind Gill (2011), by looking at its presence on Instagram. I use the term 'Instagram feminism' to describe the postfeminist, digital-cultural movement, which sees women on Instagram endorsing a feminist identity that is "trendy" and connoting buzzwords like "choice" and "empowerment" (Crepax, 2020). This messaging is often paired with photos of women- mostly white- who are intentionally celebrating heteronormative femininity and sexuality (Caldeira, 2018). In different ways, the group have entangled relationships with Instagram feminism. Mimi (no real names are used) describes these internal dialogues as "everyday contradictions".

I engage with secondary sources to interpret the complexities that emerged in the research. I examine Gill (2011; Banet-Weiser, 2020) and Caldeira's (2018) critique of this movement as essentially empty of meaningful messaging or ideology, and challenge this with the potential that it has shown a limited capacity in my research to empower women through demonstrations of self-presentation. Feminist

scholar Angela McRobbie's (2009) work is integral to exploring the inextricable link between neoliberalism and the emergence of postfeminism. McRobbie argues that this digital discourse is a harmful, neoliberal postfeminist movement that "focuses on the body and the pursuit of beauty as a personal choice, thereby losing the political edge of feminism" (Caldeira, 2018, p. 26). Joan Sangster's (2014) ethnography on white, working-class women in Ontario between 1920-60 became an important point of comparison with my findings. I recognise that my positionality as a 20-year-old woman who's grown up with Instagram and lives with the interlocutors is pivotal to the way I will interact and understand both my interlocutors and the literature. I strongly believe that attempting to omit my proximity to the topic would have been fallacious, and so, this ethnography involved self-ethnographic exploration. When engaging with my interlocutors, I conducted one-on-one interviews and initiated group conversations. In doing this, I understood the ultimately unresolved relationships that women have to the digital feminist aesthetic. In this exploratory essay, I hope to do justice to the thoughts and feelings evoked during these conversations, all of which paint the deeply complex experience of fashioning feminist- and feminine-identities within digital, postfeminist discourse.

Methodology

The field site was that of my flat in Manchester, home to seven girls who were like-minded regarding political issues. This like-mindedness, we all felt, stems from similar middle-class, London upbringings. Not only this, but all seven women are in the same physical demographic (being within cultural beauty standards, e.g. being white/white-passing and able-bodied), meaning that the research offers a very particular perspective. Initially, I believed this to be a fundamental flaw as it

meant limited representation and intersectionality. I was also worried about my biased positionality. However, upon reading Sangster's (2014) ethnography, I was guided to an understanding of the poststructuralist approach to feminist anthropology. A poststructuralist approach to gender studies signals a necessary abandonment of the search for a universal experience and solution for women's issues. Ethnographic research from a privileged perspective was not invaluable; it simply required an acute critical self-awareness of the limitations of myself, as an ethnographer, and the limitations of my sampling pool when interpreting my findings (Lamphere, 2016). This methodology and its findings could not, and would not, speak to all experiences of femininity and would not try to assume any kind of universality or generalisation. And so the research began with this crucial analytical awareness of the deconstructionist conversations happening within feminist anthropological literature.

As I will recount, there were surprising diversities within the group concerning cultural, religious and ethnic cleavages that emerged throughout my participant observation that had previously felt quite invisible among us (given the physical homogeneity and similar material backgrounds). This was an important step in making a distinction between the feminist approaches and feminist identities within the field site (Heger, 2022), as I will go on to explore. First, I will begin with the thinking behind this project.

Instagram Feminism: finding empowerment through hyper-femininity

This research endeavour was prompted by a post made by Emily Ratajakoswki's to Instagram last year of her in a low-cut dress, looking seductively at the camera with a caption beneath that read,

"decided i'm never beating the bimbo allegations so why not lean in, you know?". Being described as an "outspoken feminist" (Maddick, 2024) and writing a bestselling book, My Body, on her experience of being both sexualised and rewarded by the patriarchy, Ratajkowski (2021) is a poster girl for this liberal, postfeminist discourse. Ratajkowski's hyper-feminine and provocative Instagram profile, alongside the likes of Taylor Swift and Cara Delevingne, was greatly inspiring to me as a teenage girl, growing up with a liberal childhood.

In recent years, this feeling became blurred by pressing questions: Is it really liberating to post in such a way that appeases and perhaps reinforces the male gaze? It seemed I was constantly grappling with wanting respect from a patriarchal society, whilst trying to embody the celebratory culture of sexuality and femininity which was being promoted by female celebrities I admired. These displays of "empowerment" feminism were inaccessible to me; I was a student in a school where girls were constantly embarrassed, criticised, micro-managed, and 'slut-shamed'. I later realised that this was even more inaccessible to girls who were outside of such an exclusive beauty standard. The digital dawn of Andrew Tate's popularity and the 'manosphere' powerfully denounced liberal feminism, specifically ridiculing its celebration of sex-positivity and confident feminine self-expression (Lindsay, 2022). This only made it more difficult to shamelessly embody the Instagram feminist aesthetic, and yet, it did not make it feel less empowering when I witnessed other women embracing this aesthetic online.

For me, Instagram feminism felt like a more accessible and appealing alternative to the stigmatised image of feminism I grew up avoiding – the vilified feminist. Angela McRobbie (2009) describes the vilified feminist as an overly radical woman who rejects mainstream, heteronormative expectations of femininity entirely- and describes society's departure from this hegemonic image. The

Ratajakowski-esque, postfeminist woman then replaced her; a modern woman who embraces heteronormative feminine expectations once again, this time as a feminist exercise of choice and empowerment. Nancy Fraser (2015) critiques this development in feminist identity within the development of neoliberal capitalism. McRobbie's work expands on Fraser's theory to argue that neoliberal capitalism actively sought to enforce postfeminism, signifying the end of necessary material feminism demands for equality in Western society, thereby revitalising the lucrative market attached to women's aesthetics.

The construction of (para)social relationships through female self-presentation

With neoliberal postfeminist theory in mind, I look at a conversation with my flatmate, Mimi. She conveys how Instagram feminism can be empowering when encouraging positive and creative self-presentation and creating para-social camaraderie with other women. Mia's testimony counters McRobbie's argument somewhat because it emphasises self-conscious self-presentation, as opposed to the subconsciousness of postfeminist expression. Self-presentation has been theorised historically as a means of self-empowerment for women, regardless of whether the form this presentation takes is influenced by a 'male gaze' (Hillman, 2013; Lazar, 2017). Joan Sangster's (2014) ethnographic work presents women's accounts of being socialised with a rigid understanding of sexual divisions of labour and hierarchies and relates this to their feminine identities in work and home life. Sangster's testimonies reveal how, as women became wage-earners, feminine identities were constructed more consciously by the women who, being economically liberated, had more choice with their appearance. The female interlocutors recounted their enjoyment as a result of this freedom over self-presentation. Without negating the presence of patriarchal influences on their aesthetic decisions,

self-presentation was symbolic of a liberating and empowering economic and creative independence.

When speaking with Mimi, she describes Instagram feminism as an assimilation to the male gaze, if not heightening its demands (as she stressed her concerns around plastic surgery). Whilst, on the other hand, finding it "hard not to support and enjoy seeing other women being self-confident and enjoying how they look online". Mimi's experience reveals the interplay between the male gaze, beauty standards, and the individual woman's self-expressing online. Women witnessing this interplay on Instagram is, in Mimi's terms, "a mind f***". Stella and Clara disagreed with this view, whilst the other three girls agreed with Mimi's opinion, saying they related to her mixed feelings. Alice was more in favour of Instagram feminism.

Comparing this to Sangster's ethnography, I realise that she doesn't seek to argue whether or not adherence to the male gaze through their consumer practices makes women less empowered. Digital self-presentation, for Mimi, was empowering when she was responding to and interpreting patriarchal standards in her own nuanced and creative ways. She described recognising this creative process in other women on Instagram too, saying she could tell when women were appealing to a male gaze and when they had given their appearance "alternative twists". For Mimi, this creative self-expression, as well as a shared understanding and empathy for cultural expectations that other women online are subject to, fuels a parasocial feeling of community amongst women on Instagram. This echoed the testimonies of women in Sangster's ethnography who described how discussions of fashion and aesthetics during the workday created a "distinct culture of femininity" (p. 99) for the women in male-dominated factories. Sangster's and Mimi's accounts reinforce how there is an empowerment to be found in the exercise of self-presentation, regardless of the social pressures and

concerns to conform to culturally normative expectations. Implied in Mimi's account of her relationship to Instagram feminism is a separation between "feminism" and "empowerment". Mimi was reluctant to confidently identify the digital discourse as a feminist movement, but found that it was undeniably empowering for her.

A culturally relative exploration of 'harnessing' hyper-feminine aesthetic online: a tool of resistance or unwittingly regressive?

The distinction, explored by Heger (2022), between feminist attitudes and feminist identities emerged from my ethnographic research as a result of differing cultural and religious backgrounds. The seven girls were fundamentally united in their feminist attitudes; all aware and critical of casual sexism in their day-to-day lives, viewing this as symptomatic of the bigger societal gender inequality of which they all agreed was still in desperate need of reform. However, in their feminist identities, my interlocutors differed considerably. Stella, being influenced by her Eastern European family and cultural experiences when visiting Croatia, and Clara, who was raised in an Orthodox Jewish

household, were both strongly opposed to the idea that Instagram Feminism could be an empowering feminist movement. In a heated discussion, Stella argued that this kind of "liberal feminism" was "undoing the work of women in history" who had fought not to be seen as beautiful objects of male desire. She asked how Alice (our flatmate who is most strongly in favour of Instagram feminism) can believe that adhering to the system that oppresses her could be liberating. My understanding of Alice's response is that Instagram feminism is empowering, not because they are rejecting the male gaze but the opposite: they are using their femininity as "the powerful tool that it

is". She believes that they can and should use this "tool" to "manipulate and profit from the system they are in". This is a mentality Alice embodies in her own life. Alice's approach raises the paradoxical nature of actively embracing Western ideals of femininity that you disagree with to benefit from the patriarchy, a concept explored deeply in Emily Ratajkowski's (2021) book, where Ratajkowski describes how the patriarchy that so negatively implicated her life as a woman (and particularly a model) is the same system that she "worked" to amass enormous success and power. Endorsing a neoliberal outlook on the topic, Alice describes Instagram as a "marketplace" whereby women appealing to the male gaze can creatively harness mechanisms of the patriarchy and ultimately benefit themselves. Where Alice's experience fits into McRobbie's analysis is the way that the political economy has infiltrated her feminist identity. Treating Instagram as this marketplace whereby women can self-optimise and "profiting" from the patriarchy by adhering to it is a distinctly neoliberal-inspired pursuit. This is presented by Alice as an exploitative practice, one where men are blindsided by their simplistic interpretations of nuanced and self-aware performances of femininity. Alice's beliefs, I argue, undermine literary critiques of Instagram feminism being devoid of active resistance or messaging as, for Alice, women like Ratajkowski have reclaimed heteronormative femininity and used itquite viciously - to empower themselves. This, Alice feels, is a radical feminist feat.

Alice, like Mimi, is not arguing that this is a feminist endeavour; she only argues that it is a form of empowerment for the individual women. Alice herself experiences the benefits of adhering to mainstream feminine aesthetics as a conscious practice, one that grants her "pretty privileges" online and in real life. Alice also makes a clear distinction that this is not to attract men romantically but to enhance her experience of life within the patriarchy. However, this mindset, from Stella's

perspective, reinforces and incentivises hetero-normative cultural standards of femininity. Similarly, Clara, who described being influenced by her traditional Orthodox Jewish conceptions of gender, believes that this neoliberal approach to female empowerment is incredibly discursive and unproductive. She says that the heightened standards of beauty, perpetuated by Instagram, only serve to disempower all women, even the subjects of the Instagram posts. Clara felt that Instagram, as a "reflection of wider society", would reinforce unrealistic and non-inclusive feminine ideals. Clara described to me a painful experience of growing up as a Jewish girl at a very White, Christian school. This saw her rejecting features of her appearance that she associated with her Jewish identity, and she describes the white-dominated space of Instagram feminism at the time as worsening this pressure to assimilate. This isolating experience, Clara says, is what makes her opposed to Instagram feminism.

This underpins the argument made in Caldeira's (2018) article, where she argues that, despite being a form of self-presentation, subjects of these Instagram posts are unavoidably speaking to a bigger discourse. In Clara's opinion, it is in the interest of herself and other women not to actively perpetuate harmful demonstrations of feminine aesthetics. She said this particularly concerns the promotion of plastic surgery by female celebrities online. Caldeira's article supports this, saying that, rather than inducing fundamental societal change, the Internet has proven to reproduce - if not deepen - gender norms and hierarchy. Burns (2015) echoes this in an examination of "the selfie", as she reveals how this form of photo-taking became conceptualised in popular discourse as a deplorable cultural practice, associated with young women. Attaching narcissism to the feminised practice has sought to legitimise disdain for women's self-presentation, and ultimately acts as a

mechanism of correction to reinforce gender hierarchy. Stella and Clara's assertions underpins the theoretical discussions by Foucault and Butler (Lazar, 2017), which explain femininity as a physically laborious performance, one requiring the subject to have an acute, often subconscious understanding of the socio-cultural world they are responding to (Hillman, 2013). These theoretical viewpoints bolster Stella and Clara's assertions that Instagram has ultimately sought to harmfully deepen beauty standards, making femininity an even more exclusionary, regulatory, and laborious form of aesthetic maintenance (Feltman, 2018).

Mimi's more positive response to the self-presentation online counters this argument to an extent, though she also described additional pressure on her appearance that she felt growing up with Instagram. For Mimi, it appears that the confidence she has gained with maturity, as well as her privilege in meeting physical cultural norms, has enabled her to interpret gender performativity positively and creatively. Even at times where Instagram has made her feel "insecure", Mimi describes still enjoying the freedom to reclaim a "sexy and girly aesthetic" in her own way. This reclamation is an important commentary on the historic mediation of femininity by men, through mediums like the media, literature, and art (Forster, 2015; Sangster, 2014). This is a key difference in the case of "self-conscious sexism", which McRobbie (2009) proposes is a tool of postfeminism whereby sexism is purposefully brought into discussion just so that it can be revealed to be redundant. McRobbie uses the example of an outrightly sexy and sexist advertisement featuring Claudia Schiffer in 1998. Because of its irony and political awareness, the sexism in the advert seems warranted; however, McRobbie reveals that there are inconsistencies to this postfeminist messaging once we realise that, behind Schiffer's daring and ironic advert, is a team of men. This is where the conversation returns to self-presentation as a form of empowerment. As a woman who identifies with this

heteronormative expression of femininity, self-presentations of this by women online remove the male third-party and make such presentations feel empowering to Mimi. While Burns's compelling analysis of the selfie sees how cultural filters can be imposed upon this form of self-presentation, it has ultimately not hindered Mimi's views.

Conclusion

In these often heated conversations, it became clear from my participants that there were a plethora of complexities and calculations attached to their feminist identities. This was in relation to: adhering to the male gaze, posting themselves online, and grappling with the growing anti-liberal-feminist countermovement from the manosphere. The parallels in Sangster's ethnography to my findings regarding empowerment created by self-presentation helped make sense of the interesting distinction between what is "feminist" and what is "empowering", realising that they are not mutually exclusive. Through ethnographic accounts and feminist literature, this ethnography has explored the negative implications of Instagram feminism in reinforcing beauty standards, providing misguided postfeminist sentiments, and creating an exclusionary feminist aesthetic. All participants recognised these shortcomings in different ways, and none of the participants viewed Instagram feminism as a fully satisfying or effective form of feminist resistance (bar Alice, to some degree). And yet, these ethnographic accounts were permeated with conflicting feelings, and one could not ignore the capacity that Instagram feminism could have to empower most of the women in the group to reclaim and reinterpret heteronormative, Instagram feminine aesthetic in response to other womens' digital self-presentation.

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Challenging Traditional Political Participation: Gender and Identity in the Modern Era

Chanelle Patterson, 2nd Year Essay

BA (Hons) Social Sciences

Introduction

In this paper, I argue that political participation is traditionally gendered for both men and women in opposing ways. Due to emerging movements in politics, our society has faced unprecedented impacts on the political world, both for the better and for the worse. Throughout the paper, I contend that while women are typically discouraged from participating in politics due to rigid patriarchal expectations to remain in the private domestic sphere, men are being encouraged to partake in a new wave of far-right politics. Then, I also argue that we must recognise how political participation in the modern age is subject to changing times, defending Newman and Peel's (2022) justification for a global non-binary movement towards the abolition of the biological sex distinction. Finally, I conclude that, although political participation is more gendered for women compared to men, we must redefine the conventional understanding of political participation to incorporate non-conforming gender expressions.

Political Participation for Women

In this first section of my essay, I will argue that political participation is more traditionally gendered for women because women are discouraged from disassociating themselves from the traditional roles within marriage and motherhood. This is because although public attitudes have shifted greatly in recent years, political mobilisation from women still remains low due to an overall lack of political ambition from women of all ages. Firstly, I will outline how I define 'political participation' itself. In *Women and Political Participation* (2001, p. 231), Margaret Conway proposes that political participation involves any activity in which citizens are motivated to influence their government, the selection of public officials, as well as political policy. I find Conway's (2001, p. 232) focus on the gender bias within United States public office throughout her journal article powerful as an investigation of the disparity between women who participate in local political activities, such as voting and writing to Congress members, and women holding elected offices. This is because she identifies two key explanations for why the universal level of political participation is so low for women, namely the sociological explanation and the institutional explanation (Conway, 2001, p. 231).

Conway's sociological explanation is convincing because it brings attention to how the patriarchal expectations which are enforced on women at a young age can detrimentally affect how they perceive their political autonomy later in life. For example, women are traditionally burdened with the responsibilities of childcare and domestic labour, stemming perhaps from the religious, specifically Roman Catholic, nature of Western public attitudes throughout time towards the role of women within the social hierarchy (Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2010, p. 324). Hence, patriarchal social norms are central to the limited occupational opportunities for women

in the political sector and, as a result, create pessimistic views of formal political participation, such as running for public office.

Secondly, Conway's (2001, p. 232) institutional explanation, which suggests that public officials have the power to discriminate against women and as a result negatively impact female presence in candidate nomination, emphasises that when women persevere with their aspirations to participate by running for elected offices, they often get rejected due to institutionalised sexism. I think that Conway's institutional explanation for low female participation captures the insidious nature of the exclusion that women face when attempting to engage with politics. For instance, in her journal article, Conway (2001, p. 232) highlights how the United States political gatekeeping system is inherently corrupt because they have the unregulated power to discriminate against women candidates, which is rooted in personal prejudices. Conway (2001, p. 233) highlights this subtle form of institutional sexism through the 'outgroup effect', which refers to political gatekeepers holding gender biases against candidates whom they perceive as too different from themselves, usually women. This effect is more significant today due to the emerging movement of anti-feminism, especially within US politics, where male candidates are inherently seen as more capable of being political figures compared to female candidates. Despite being written over twenty years ago, Conway's ability to provide an insightful account of how traditional public attitudes within our patriarchal society not only transcend time, but present an ongoing threat to women's political autonomy, highlights that the explanation for why women's political participation is gendered is not as simple as it appears.

Furthermore, it could be argued that political participation is especially gendered for younger teenage girls who, in their formative years, are subject to societal expectations derived from parental pressure. This aspect of political participation is often overlooked and not recognised in the academic discourse, even throughout Conway's paper, which is a weakness of her investigation. Yet, parental pressure can limit political freedom during adolescence, which could have otherwise helped them to participate in community activism. This view is supported by Hava Rachel Gordon's *Gendered Paths to Teenage Political Participation* (2008), in which she proposes that parental power can hinder the extent to which teenagers want to willingly engage in political activity. Throughout her journal article, Gordon (2008, p. 35) brings attention to the impact of parental pressure, specifically on the socialisation of young girls who later face political subordination as a result of a lack of political autonomy.

Consequently, during the years when women are expected to develop the same core leadership skills by building activist networks as their male peers, teenage girls are confronted with parental constraints that directly affect levels of female political participation. These obstacles could include future career coercion and academic performance, which can all have psychological impacts on adolescents (Gordon, 2008, p. 33). Without parental encouragement to engage in local political activities, teenagers can potentially become stunted in both their political knowledge and political involvement with their peers later in life (Fox & Lawless, 2014, p. 502). Thus, low female political participation derives from a lack of parental interest in politics during formative years.

Political Participation for Men

In the next section of my essay, I will argue that while it is true that women are usually steered away from the political world, Conway fails to consider that political participation is also gendered for men. In a traditional sense, men are typically perceived as being political leaders compared to women from a young age, which directly translates to the high levels of male representation seen on the international political stage today (Fox & Lawless, 2014, p. 512). Although on the surface they are more likely to engage in political activities because of this, the current shift in male interest towards far-right politics has meant that political activities can often be more harmful than beneficial overall.

For instance, due to the new wave of online anti-feminist movements on the far right, young men are increasingly being coerced to engage in extremist politics (Mamié, Ribeiro, & West, 2021, p.141). The internet has significantly changed the traditional definition of political participation itself due to the rise of online networks such as Reddit, where impressionable teenage males are being introduced into dangerous communities which are predicated on a universal hatred for women. In *Alt-Right Pipeline: Individual Journeys to Extremism Online* (2019), Luke Munn rightly focuses on how the new social phenomenon of the 'alt-right pipeline' breeds a new, more violent variant of radical sexism. According to Munn (2019, p. 4), the 'alt-right pipeline' refers to when boys are subject to online radicalisation towards far-right wing political views. I find his claim plausible because the gendered pressures that boys

experience to fit into behaviours that are deemed socially acceptable, namely patriarchal masculinity, can lead to a fear of ostracisation from the male community.

This radicalisation of young men engaging with anti-feminist movements on digital communication platforms often results in participation in extremist politics and, in the worst cases, a motivation to pursue genuine political careers in far-right politics, which can be psychologically damaging to young, vulnerable males with unrestricted internet access. Although it is possible for men to substantively represent women's interests, the emerging public attitudes within the far right imply that some forms of political participation can be quite harmful. An example of this can be the Men's Rights Movement, a campaign dating back to the 1970s but has seen a resurgence in recent years, which claims to protect men from the so-called feminist agenda by silencing women and their experiences of gender inequality (Mamié, Ribeiro, & West, 2021, p. 139). Because of this, it is important not to ignore the rising culture within male communities, even if it leads to increased political participation among men, as this type of engagement often comes at the expense of women. In short, it is important to recognise that the conventional notion of political participation for men no longer encapsulates how men are taking part in a new, more violent form of extremism that can manifest into physical acts of violence against women; both institutionally (if these men feel determined to the extent of pursuing political careers) and psychologically.

On the other hand, it seems reductive not to hold men accountable for their political values past a certain age because we must recognise that they are political agents who are responsible for which political views they adopt. In comparison, social submission is internally embedded as an

expected behaviour for all women as a result of patriarchal socialisation beyond their control (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010, p. 320). This, therefore, implies that women's political participation is still more traditionally gendered than that of men since women continue to be the central victims of the alt-right pipeline, which can further limit the participation of women in politics. This is because women may feel discouraged from participating in a heavily politicised culture where harmful and archaic patriarchal norms such as the traditional housewife ideal remain dominant (Conway, 2001, p. 231).

For example, in the United States, Donald Trump achieved the presidency despite his numerous accusations of sexual assault against women (Rothe and Collins, 2019). The success of his campaign reinforced the lack of protection that women face as victims of misogyny-fuelled abuse and further perpetuates the hegemonic power of anti-feminism today. Perhaps in the future, we can redefine our conceptualisation of political participation to incorporate private forms of activism where women typically feel safer to participate, such as petitioning and writing to public officials to encourage change (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010, p. 320). This way, we can collectively deconstruct traditional notions created by sexism in order to accommodate changing times in the modern political world.

Furthermore, to fully explore the impact of the emerging anti-feminist movement in recent years on female participation, we must also consider the political views of women who do not identify with feminist interests. This is because focusing exclusively on left-wing women and their political interests can result in a consequent dismissal of women, such as right-wing women, who

do not necessarily align with the current efforts towards traditional forms of female representation. Hence, perhaps the claim that political participation for women is perpetually low is inaccurate because it treats women as an entirely homogenous group with one-dimensional interests. For instance, the aforementioned new wave of extremist politics online might conversely incentivise right-wing women to participate more in politics through conservative feminism (Celis & Childs, 2012, p. 220). A key example of this is Sarah Palin, a Republican political figure in the United States who substantively represents women with right-wing political values (Schreiber, 2018, p. 57). Despite holding political beliefs that are considered anti-feminist, such as being against abortion, Palin was able to secure a high-profile campaign to run for elected office by making herself palatable to the conservative culture of US politics. This suggests that one of the main explanations for why women do not tend to participate in political activity is perhaps because they do not assimilate to the traditional public attitudes dominated by men in the political sphere. Therefore, it could be argued that although political participation is negatively gendered for left-wing affiliated women, it can be said that political participation is positively gendered for right-wing affiliated women.

Beyond The Gender Binary

In the last section of my essay, I argue that although it is important to bring attention to how traditional notions of political participation can harm both men and women, we should reconceptualise political participation beyond the scope of the heterogeneous biological categories of female and male sexes. This is because, for non-binary individuals, political participation is inherently gendered due to their ongoing fight for gender-identity-based reform.

The term 'non-binary' refers to gender identities that fall outside of the conforming genders of 'woman' and 'man' (Newman and Peel, 2022, p. 1382). In the United Kingdom, Newman & Peel's (2022, p. 1382) study has indicated that the lack of legal recognition of a gender identity for non-binary individuals has substantially impacted not only the mental health of non-conforming people, but also their motivation to participate in politics. They found in their research that the binary nature of the current legal gender system has discouraged non-binary citizens from participating in a political world that inherently alienates them by denying them their right to legal recognisability on a global scale. Therefore, this lack of belonging results in behavioural attitudes that resemble political apathy for activities such as voting, wherein they might abstain from voting altogether as a form of self-protection against a system which constantly fails to include them (Newman & Peel, 2022, p. 1387).

Moreover, the consistent exclusion of non-binary individuals from the global political arena suggests that the barriers to participation are deeply rooted in our political systems. Accordingly, it is important that in the future we reach a solution that rejects the notion of bio-essentialist gender, also known as cisgenderism, by affirming the gender identities of non-conforming individuals. In support of this, my first suggestion to encourage political participation for non-binary individuals is to initially introduce a third gender identity. However, a major difficulty when attempting to globally recognise gender non-conformity is not being able to change the traditional public attitudes towards gender based purely on sex, which is the view that has been most commonly accepted throughout time, at least in Western society. Because of this, many non-binary people push for a more radical change in public policy in rejection of the status quo,

advocating instead for the abolition of the two-dimensional understanding of gender entirely (Newman and Peel, 2022, p. 1389). Therefore, my second suggestion is to enforce gender-inclusive language even within everyday conversation. This solution might create a safer social environment where those who identify as non-binary might no longer feel so disconnected from their peers and, in turn, develop a more optimistic perception of political participation.

Conclusion

To conclude, in this paper, I have argued that political participation is traditionally gendered for men and women in opposing ways. For men, political participation can often be encouraged in the political sphere at the expense of women's safety; women, in comparison, are socialised to take on more passive careers away from political activity. The modern dimension that the digital age brings to how young men are becoming radicalised into extremist politics online further suggests that the traditional conceptualisation of political participation can no longer encapsulate how the political world is constantly subject to changing times. This essay has also illustrated that we must recognise not only the threat of the emerging anti-feminist movement online but also the importance of gender identity-based reform for non-binary individuals to create an inclusive understanding of political participation in the future for all.

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‘Comfort Women’ and the Politics of Injury Gendered and Colonial Violence in War

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BA (Hons) Politics, Philosophy, and Economics

Introduction

This essay argues that the experiences of Korean ‘comfort women’ under Japanese imperialism challenge dominant, state-centric understandings of war in traditional IR, which often frame it as an exceptional, state-sanctioned act of violence, overlooking its pervasive role in everyday life as a structure of power institutionalising gendered and colonial harm through militarisation (Enloe, 2000:103). This reductive ontology neglects the body, embodiment, and bodily experiences of war, which Sylvester (2012:4) terms a ‘politics of injury’. Bodily injury is not the unfortunate consequence but the ‘content’ of war, experienced differently by different people; yet, the focus has centred on soldiers, neglecting the gendered and colonial violence faced by marginalised groups. First, this essay critiques IR scholarship through an analysis of sexual violence as a politics of injury within the context of Korean ‘comfort women’. It then explores the naturalisation of contradictory colonial representations of men as protectors/ perpetrators, and then women as objects of protection and sexual victims.

Korean 'Comfort Women'

First, 'comfort women's' embodied experiences are central to understanding their exploitation; their gendered, colonial, and racialised embodiment is not incidental but essential to how their bodies became sites of violence, domination, and systemic exploitation within militarised and colonial frameworks.

During Japan's imperial occupation of Korea, up to 400,000 women—primarily young, unmarried Koreans, many of them virgins—were forcibly conscripted into sexual slavery through systemic military policies, alongside others from occupied Asian countries (Lee, 2007; Min, 2003:938). Exploited in military-run 'comfort stations,' their commodified bodies sustained troop discipline and were framed as essential to the war effort. This practice reinforced Japan's imperialist and patriarchal hierarchies, transforming women's bodies into tools of war and empire. (Kurahashi, 1994; Yun, 1988, cited in Min, 2003:944).

Further, exploitation persisted under U.S.-regulated prostitution during Korea's post-war occupation, reinforcing colonial and patriarchal control (Lee, 2007). This continuity reflects how systems of domination—colonialism and patriarchy—institutionalised harm and exploited women's bodies in various military contexts. Survivors have documented their experiences, seeking justice despite decades of denial and delayed reparations (Dolan, 2021:194). Having established the systemic nature of sexual violence against 'comfort women,' I now critique dominant discourses on wartime rape. These discourses obscure the gendered and colonial dimensions of wartime sexual violence as a politics of injury.

Sexual Violence and Wartime Rape

Notably, sexual violence is a systemic feature of wars across cultures and contexts, not unique to Japanese imperialism. It is framed by two dominant discourses: the first attributes it to soldiers' immutable biological urges, presenting rape as an inevitable consequence of war (Baaz & Stern, 2009;2018). The second frames it as a 'weapon of war' to destabilise communities, humiliate enemy men, and undermine their ability to protect 'their women' (Mackenzie, 2010:203). Binaries like 'rape is about sex' or 'power' obscure its systemic nature, depoliticising sexual violence, and reinforcing cultural narratives of male dominance and female subordination (Enloe, 2000). Furthermore, sexual violence reflects the continuity between wartime and peacetime violence, challenging the notion that wartime rape is an isolated phenomenon. As Baaz and Stern (2018:297) argue, wartime sexual violence intensifies pre-existing colonial and gendered violence, embedding harm within structures of power that endure long after the war ends.

These discourses fail to capture the experiences of 'comfort women' under Japanese imperialism. The biological impulse narrative reduces sexual violence to natural, immutable, and individual wrongdoings. This framing of injury as 'collateral damage' absolves any responsibility for sexual violence, despite its deliberate use to destabilise and control colonised populations (Puar, 2017:142). Similarly, the 'weapon of war' framing was not merely a tactic to demoralise the enemy but part of a broader colonial and militarised system (Enloe, 2000; Tamale, 2020; Lugones, 2016). Both accounts fail to capture the institutionalised sexual violence imposed on 'comfort women' by states and militaries. Sexual violence is a deliberate, militarised mechanism of colonial and patriarchal control, further reinforcing war's embodiment as a politics of injury and persisting beyond the battlefield.

The naturalisation of men as protectors and perpetrators of sexual violence

Dominant discourses reduce wartime sexual violence to individual impulses or tactics, ignoring militarisation's systemic role in normalising such violence. Military cultures socialise soldiers to embody 'militarised masculinity' defined by aggression, toughness, and dominance with their bodies framed as impenetrable while devaluing feminine 'weak' traits, positioning them as guardians of the nation (Hutchings, 2008:389; Stern & Strand, 2022:8). Heteronormative gender roles assign men 'masculine' traits like dominance and women 'feminine' traits like vulnerability, reinforcing an essentialist gendered dichotomy which assigns immutable roles (Eichler, 2014:82; Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Colonial ideologies use biological determinism to naturalise male aggression and justify sexual violence as an inevitable aspect of soldiering (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Lugones, 2016). Heteronormative ideals frame sexual violence as a 'necessary outlet' for soldiers' 'biological needs,' socially constructed to align with militarised masculinity and institutionalising gendered exploitation under the guise of discipline (Lee, 2007). In militarised cultures, sexual violence is systemic, embedded in institutional norms that normalise it as a 'pattern of violence' and very often tolerated by military institutions (Baaz & Stern, 2009; Wood & Toppelberg, 2017).

Furthermore, military masculinity is rooted in hegemonic ideals, constructed in opposition to alternative masculinities and femininities, and inseparable from racial hierarchies linked to imperial status. Hegemonic masculinity, tied to white, heteronormative ideals, derives meaning through differentiation from sub/counter-hegemonic masculinities and femininities (Hutchings, 2008:394). It marginalises sexual minorities and non-conforming masculinities, creating a rigid gender hierarchy where men in militarised colonial structures are positioned as both protectors and perpetrators and women as objects of protection or exploitation (Hutchings, 2008:389). Within the Japanese military, imperialism constructed soldiers as disciplined 'just warriors,' embedding hegemonic and

racialised masculinity into its colonial agenda (Elshtain, 1988, cited in Sylvester, 2012:42). This positioned Japanese men as superior to colonised Korean men, who were emasculated (Yoshiaki, 2000, cited in Min, 2003). While globally hegemonic masculinity was tied to whiteness, Japanese soldiers represented a localised hegemonic masculinity tied to imperial power, mimicking Western colonial practices while reinforcing Japan's racialised hierarchy (Hutchings, 2008).

Moreover, the dual role of protector and perpetrator is central to the contradictions of militarised masculinity. Soldiers frame rape either as an 'evil' act, reserved for extreme cases or as an entitlement justified by their protector role (Baaz & Stern 2009:508). By positioning men as both protectors and perpetrators, militarised masculinity facilitates a system in which women's bodies are objectified and controlled in the name of protection. This paradox reveals how militarised power turns protective acts, like defending borders or 'honour,' into justified violence (Cohn, 1987). Sexual violence is sometimes reframed or rationalised as a tragic byproduct of the soldier's duty to protect imperial honour, revealing the hypocrisy of the protector's role. This protective role often involves the destruction of the very lives it claims to safeguard, particularly when the 'protected' are racialised or colonised others (Mbembe, 2019). The sexual exploitation of 'comfort women' stems from the contradictions of militarised masculinity, which naturalises gendered and racial hierarchies, enabling violence under the guise of protection and reinforcing colonial and patriarchal systems. These gendered constructions of militarised masculinity reinforce war as a politics of injury as war is embodied, with the body serving as an agent capable of inflicting harm (Sylvester, 2012:5).

The naturalisation of women as objects of protection and sexual victims of war

Importantly, militarised masculinity constructs men as protectors and perpetrators of violence by constructing women as objects of protection or exploitation to serve military needs. Militarised systems cast women as either moral anchors—supportive, innocent military wives to be protected—or sexual objects in military bases (Enloe, 2000). Militarisation regulates both men's and women's bodies, shaping gender roles and reinforcing rigid hierarchies within the military. Further, relationships between male soldiers and women are scrutinised, with marriage seen as stabilising but potentially disruptive to troop loyalty and military duties. At the same time, prostitution is normalised as part of military life despite health concerns over sexually transmitted diseases (Enloe 2014:142). However, 'comfort women' were designed to protect Japanese soldiers from STDs because Korean young women were believed to be sexually inexperienced and therefore uninfected (Lee, 2007). Eventually, the increase in STD rates led to policies enforcing regular exams for 'comfort women' deemed dangerous STD spreaders, with enforcement supported by Korea's leaders (Lee, 2007). This duality of femininity—as either passive victims or dangerous seductresses—served to reproduce colonial and militarised power.

Similarly, the naturalisation of women as 'beautiful souls' upholds militarised masculinity by positioning men as defenders and active participants in war and positions women as embodying the feminine ideal, the innocent Other that war must defend (Elshtain, 1987, cited in Sylvester, 2012). This casts women as wives, daughters, and mothers, framing the feminine as tied to the private, domestic, and national spheres, often associated with reproduction, nurturing, and peacefulness. These representations depict women as passive and non-agential in war, objects rather than subjects of conflict. This excludes women from war, portraying them as unsuited for violence due to their essentialist peaceful and nurturing nature. Associating femininity with the homeland, the private,

and the domestic, reinforces the idea that constructs war as something that happens 'over there,' outside the home and away from the domestic sphere, thus reinforcing the separation between the private and the public spheres. Understanding war as a politics of injury that affects bodies and everyday lives challenges this binary, exposing its inherent interconnectedness.

Paradoxically, Korean comfort women were denied the same protection awarded to other women as militarised and colonial systems racialised femininity. White women were idealised as 'beautiful souls', while Korean comfort women were framed as sexually available and violable, justifying their exploitation (Tamale, 2020; Elshtain, 1987, cited in Sylvester, 2012). It is important to note that the construction of 'beautiful souls' was not universally applied; although white women were often granted this status in Western discourses, this protection was inconsistently extended depending on intersecting identities of race, class, and sexuality (Hill Collins *et al*., 2016). The Japanese military used contradictory tropes to shift blame onto Korean women, portraying them as willing participants and denying the systemic nature of their exploitation (Yoshimi, 2000, cited in Min, 2003). Ironically, survivors gained passive victim status only after speaking out, advancing the cause for reparations but reducing their embodiments to symbols of national suffering and the wounds of colonisation despite the complicity of the Korean state (Lee, 2007; Dolan, 2021:193). However, their activism, through testimonies and reparation advocacy, challenged their portrayal as purely passive victims.

In addition, the exploitation of 'comfort women' was justified by the militarisation's framing of women's bodies as inherently passive and naturally sexually available, positioning them as objects for control and exploitation (Steidl & Brookshire, 2019:1281). This masculinised, heteronormative

understanding of female sexuality justifies sexual violence, portraying it as inevitable. While sex is socially constructed, societal norms categorising bodies as 'masculine' or 'feminine' significantly shape how individuals are perceived and produce material effects, shaping how women's bodies are treated (Steidl & Brookshire, 2019:1273). The racialisation of women's bodies further normalised their exploitation as an intrinsic part of colonial and military structures (Lugones, 2016), while euphemistic terms 'comfort women' and 'comfort stations' further sanitised the brutality of sexual violence.

Equally important, the experience of comfort women was not homogenous; intersecting hierarchies of race, class, and gender shaped the experiences of violence for 'comfort women' (Hill Collins *et al.,* 2016). The racialised 'Asian fetish' further casts colonised women, particularly Koreans, as 'sexually available' and therefore 'un-rapeable,' reducing them to stereotypes and fantasies and denying their humanity (Mukkamala *et al*., 2018). This fetishisation included the commodification of virginity as desirable, tying purity to national honour. In South Korea, for instance, legal definitions of rape until 1995 framed it as a 'crime against chastity,' embedding patriarchal norms that silenced survivors and upheld systems of honour and shame (Dolan, 2021:190). Korean women, deemed racially inferior and economically desperate in Japan's colonial hierarchy, faced harsher treatment than Japanese women, who often served officers and were paid (Min, 2003:944). They endured extreme brutality, serving large numbers of enlisted men and suffering dehumanising practices like physical abuse and forced compliance, which erased their agency and identity (Kurahashi, 1994; Yun, 1988, cited in Min, 2003:944). Survivors were left with lasting physical and emotional scars (Dolan, 2021; Lee, 2007). Examining the naturalisation of women as objects of protection and sexual

victims in war reveals how the politics of injury operate through intersecting systems of gendered, racialised, and colonial violence (Hill Collins *et al.,* 2016).

Conclusion

In conclusion, by institutionalising bodily harm through intersecting systems of gendered, racialised, and colonial domination, war operates as a politics of injury that endures long after the battlefield. The exploitation of Korean 'comfort women' illustrates how women's bodies are subjugated as either objects of protection or sexual exploitation, while men are naturalised as protectors and perpetrators. Understanding war as a politics of injury reveals its enduring legacies within gendered, colonial, and racial systems, demonstrating the necessity of addressing these structures to challenge how bodily harm becomes institutionalised within militarised, gendered, and colonial power systems.

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Education Over Prohibition: Freedom of Speech, Speech-Act Theory, and the Role of Authority in the Silencing of Women by Pornography

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BA (Hons) Social Sciences

Abstract

This paper explores the debate surrounding the prohibition of pornography on the grounds of the subordination of women, extant since the so-called "feminist sex wars" at the tail end of second-wave feminism in the wake of the Sexual Revolution. Engaging with the foundations of this discourse, this paper first covers the basic grounds for censorship in a liberal democracy. It then considers the arguments of Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin (supporting prohibition on account of pornography causing harm) and Ronald Dworkin (against prohibition on account of pornography constituting speech), ultimately finding neither satisfactory. Using John Longshaw Austin's speech-act theory (as applied by Rae Langton), this paper discusses the subordinating and silencing effects of pornography on women. However, contrary to Langton, this paper argues that, whereas prohibition delegates contraband to unregulated black markets where the associated problem can become exacerbated, increased and improved education regarding pornography and sexual relations would impede pornography as a speech act by neutralising pornographers' authority (as a felicity condition) on such matters.

Introduction

This paper concerns restriction/prohibition of pornography, approaching the question via freedom of speech arguments, ultimately concluding that censorship is not the best response to the harms of pornography. I use Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon's definition of pornography (1988, p. 36), summarised as "sexually explicit material that eroticizes a gendered hierarchy" (McGowan, 2019, p. 128), this being an influential working definition, helping form the basis of this debate. Within a liberal framework, this question boils down to whether pornography violates principles of free speech, thus warranting censorship – and whether censorship is the best solution. Thus, the scope of this paper is not inclusive of concerns with harm done to those in the production of pornography, this being a separate issue (Eaton, 2007, p. 677), or whether limiting the debate to pornography is counterproductive to addressing relevant patriarchal harms with *prima facie* benign roots (Antony, 2011, p. 387), though these are important debates. Firstly, I will analyse MacKinnon and Ronald Dworkin's arguments regarding the harm and persuasion principles. Secondly, I analyse Langton's conception of pornography as a harmful speech-act (Langton, 2017, pp. 26-29), concluding that the success of this approach is contingent upon pornography's authority, which is better countered through greater public awareness (Langton, 2009, p. 47) and the lifting of taboos than through prohibition.

What Warrants Censorship?

Firstly, I address the issue of what warrants censorship in a liberal democracy. I address MacKinnon's argument that pornography should be censored, and Ronald Dworkin's

response to this. I conclude that, whilst both arguments are strong, both are based upon faulty premises, and thus, neither is convincing.

Mill's harm principle, highly influential upon liberal thought as well as liberal democracy, stipulates that an individual's freedom can only justifiably be curtailed to protect others from harm (Mill, 1859, p. 22). This aims to maintain justification for individual autonomy – the cornerstone of liberalism – sustainably. Should individual autonomy be unmitigated, a problem arises if one person uses their autonomy to harm another, and therefore may harm the other's autonomy. Thus, it is justifiable to disallow some things in the interests of protecting autonomy from a utilitarian perspective. This is not to say that something causing harm necessarily calls for its prohibition; the harm principle is not the only determinant of whether something should be illegal. The "persuasion principle" posits that agents, as hearers, must be respected in their capacity to be persuaded by arguments through their rational facilities (Scoccia, 1996, pp. 779-80). Pornography, according to the working definition, necessarily depicts harm in the form of subordination (Dworkin and MacKinnon, 1988, p. 36). However, the contention here lies in the questions of whether it causes harm and if this is via convincing hearing agents with rational arguments (Langton and West, 1999. p. 303).

MacKinnon argues that pornography causes harm by bypassing the viewer's cognitive processes in a way comparable to "primitive conditioning" (MacKinnon, 1993, p. 16). This entails a Pavlovian process (Langton and West, 1999, p. 304), whereby viewers learn to associate women's subjugation with sex, developing sexually violent desires and/or misogynistic attitudes (Scoccia, 1996, p. 777). Firstly, whether pornography does indeed cause such harm is an empirical question without

conclusive evidence in favour of either side of the debate (Eaton, 2007, p. 692), there being a problem of correlation and causation in the relationship between consumers of such pornography and misogynists/sex offenders. However, the "primitive conditioning" aspect to this argument plays a pivotal role: if pornography does indeed circumvent and undermine the consumer's rationality, then this poses a problem for the "persuasion principle". Presuming that pornography does have a causal relation to misogyny and sexual violence (thus violating the harm principle), consumers being unable to employ their rational capabilities (due to harm done to them as rational "hearers") to judge what the pornography is propagating additionally violates the persuasion principle. Thus, *if* pornography causes harm and lacks the quality of enriching the marketplace of ideas (Ingber, 1984, pp. 3-4) on account of circumventing and undermining the rationality of the "hearer" and thereby their ability to choose otherwise, then this provides a strong argument for its censorship. Conversely, Ronald Dworkin argues that pornography's message is not conveyed in this way: rather, that pornography does "'[seek] to deliver' a 'message'", and as such, people must be left to "the evaluation of ideas" (Langton and West, 1999, p. 303). In doing so, Dworkin does not interpret pornography as conveying a message subconsciously, but as any other argument might normally be (although admittedly "informally" (Dworkin, 1994, p. 13)), thus not violating the persuasion principle, and thence not warranting regulation or prohibition.

However, neither of these arguments are convincing. Are the rational capabilities of a consumer of pornography really as compromised during consumption as MacKinnon (1993, p. 17) purports? Regular exposure to pornography may have psychological effects upon the consumer over time, however MacKinnon exaggerates the extent to which the consumer's rationality is compromised. A rationally capable adult may consume pornography and maintain their cognitive ability to critique

what they view. Thus, providing the consumer is properly equipped with such rationality, they should be able to avoid the detrimental psychological effects of the pornography in the first place. And, regarding Dworkin, does a pornographer really use pornography to convey sexist beliefs? Certainly in the vast majority of cases, this seems absurd: "pornography is designed to generate, not conclusions, but orgasms" (Langton and West, 1999, p. 305). That pornography can foster sexism and that pornography is a medium through which sexist ideas can be articulated should not be conflated – as cars can be used to run people over, but cars are not sold as weapons. Thus, this argument against pornography's censorship is unconvincing.

In conclusion, neither MacKinnon's nor Dworkin's argument is convincing, with MacKinnon understating the cognitive capacities of rational adults and Dworkin overstating pornography as a means of expressing views. Consumption of pornography does not necessarily damage the cognitive abilities of the consumer, and pornography should not blanketly be considered to posit arguments. Whilst Dworkin's objection is unconvincing, the burden is on those in favour of censorship to demonstrate why pornography *should* be censored. Thus, my conclusion from this exchange is not that pornography should not be censored, rather that it should not be censored on the grounds MacKinnon provides.

Speech-Act Theory

Rather than as a result of causing harm, is it more appropriate that pornography be censored because it *constitutes* harm? Langton proposes this approach, reformulating MacKinnon's argument (Langton, 2009, pp. 25-6). This she does by drawing on Austin's theory of "speech-acts" (Langton, 2009, pp. 27-9), and viewing pornography as a harmful speech-act which harms women by silencing

and subordinating them. If pornography constitutes a harmful speech-act, then its censorship appears justifiable. However, I argue that education may be a more effective method of mitigating pornography's harm.

Speech-act theory analyses speech as an act, separating it into three dimensions: locutionary (the words that are said), illocutionary (the meaning conveyed by those words), and perlocutionary (the result of those words) (Austin, 1975, pp. 94-108). Austin (1975, pp. 101-2) clarifies this with an example: one man has a gun aimed at a woman, and another man says "Shoot her!". The locutionary act is the saying of those two words. The illocutionary act is the second man urging the first man to shoot the woman. There are two perlocutionary acts: the second man convincing the first to shoot the woman, and the first being made to. Langton applies this theory to pornography, arguing that pornography functions as an illocutionary act, subordinating and silencing women (Langton, 2009, p. 34-5). By ranking women as sexual objects, women are reduced to a lower status (Langton, 2009, p. 44). Additionally, Langton argues that pornography silences women by normalising attempted speech-acts (such as refusal of sex; "No") as lacking sincerity – a "felicity condition" (a condition which must be fulfilled in order to render the sentence meaningful as a locutionary act (Green, 2021, [no pagination])). Thus, women are rendered unable to refuse sex as a result of the removal of the felicity condition of sincerity (Langton, 2009, pp. 53-4). If this is true, then this is potentially a strong (though not conclusive) argument in favour of pornography being censored as a harmful discriminatory act (Langton, 2009, pp. 46-7).

However, another felicity condition is authority. If one simply stands before the *QEII* and states "I name this ship *Noam Chomsky*", one has failed in the speech-act of naming it thus on account of lacking authority (Green, 2021, [no pagination]). Similarly, if a pornographer, through their

pornography, subordinates women by ranking them as sexual objects, what authority do they have which renders said pornography felicitous as a speech-act (Langton, 2009, pp. 44-5)? It is not immediately obvious that they do. But to someone without sufficient understanding of the context, they may misplace authority – in our example, in a pornographer for an account of sex. Additionally, it is notable that most pornography is presented as fiction (Langton and West, 1999, p. 314), often interpreted in an escapist fashion (Langton, 2009, p. 43). Thus, does the pornographer even rank women (in the real world) as sexual objects? Langton and West (1999, p. 317) provide an analogy to posit that the pornographer still can: a person reading a fictional novel set during the French Revolution, but who has minimal background knowledge about the French Revolution. The reader may struggle to discern fact from fiction. Similarly, a consumer without sufficient background knowledge of women and sex may learn myths propagated by pornography; attitudes such as women enjoying rape (Langton and West, 1999, p. 317). When pornography is consumed by people without this knowledge, it can act as a twisted form of education. Thus, the argument that pornography's harm is rendered nil if it is interpreted as mere fiction is weak.

However, what is to say that censorship would solve these problems (Langton, 2009, p. 46-7)? Prohibition does not end a problem so much as delegate it to unregulated black markets, where the problem is often exacerbated – as has been witnessed in the case of the failings of the war on drugs (Harp, 2010, pp. 1670-1). A similar situation regarding a prohibition of pornography is conceivable, especially given the modern context of internet pornography, whereby illegality would result in pornography becoming unregulatable and more extreme, but far from inaccessible. As such, prohibition does not obviously offer the answer to the problems posed by pornography as a harmful

speech-act, whilst also potentially entailing controversial baggage regarding freedom of speech, as discussed previously.

As explained, it appears that pornography can only constitute harm if it has authority, and pornography only has authority if there is a dearth of knowledge amongst consumers. Thus, this reveals a theoretical Achilles' heel: if the public were better-educated (Langton, 2009, p. 47) about pornography and sexual relations – largely through lifting of taboos around the subjects – then this could keep pornography from constituting harm. In keeping with Langton and West's analogy (1999, p. 317), more widespread knowledge of the French Revolution would help to prevent such misconceptions. This option appears far preferable to prohibition, both in its likelihood of success and by lacking baggage relating to freedom of speech.

Langton uses Austin's speech-act theory to analyse the illocutionary dimension of pornography interpreted as speech and uses this to develop and further MacKinnon's argument. This is a strong argument, however it relies upon pornography having authority. Therefore, whilst Langton's argument that pornography can constitute harm is convincing, it appears that a better remedy – theoretically as well as practically – to this is to remove its authority rather than its legality.

Conclusion

MacKinnon's argument (1993, pp. 16-17) that pornography not only subordinates women, but also undermines the consumer's rational capacities (rendering them incapable of resisting being made to associate women's subordination with sex), thus rendering pornography not protected as free speech, is valid. However, it appears an exaggeration that consumers are mentally incapable of resistance. Conversely, Ronald Dworkin argues that pornography does convey a message which

"hearers" can judge (Langton and West, 1999, p. 303), using their rational capabilities – and as such, it should be protected as free speech. However, it appears mistaken that pornography should be interpreted as seeking to convey a message in order to convince people of things. Langton (2009, pp. 25-26) elaborates on MacKinnon's view by applying Austin's speech-act theory (1975, pp. 94-108), positing a convincing argument which views pornography as constituting harm. However, this argument reveals that education and lifting of taboos may be a better solution than censorship to the harms of pornography. As women may be silenced by pornography (Langton, 2009, pp. 53-54), so might pornography be silenced by education.

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Part Two:

Global Development & Conflict

Is it possible to arrive at an objective understanding of what terrorism is and which groups might be characterised as terrorists?

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Introduction

Terrorism has long cast a shadow over the modern world, but ironically, it continues to defy easy definitions to make objective assessments. Schmid (2011, pp. 99-148) for example, has catalogued 250 definitions from academic, governmental, intergovernmental and others. Despite such extensive literature, all of these definitions are still actually, if not highly, controversial (Begorre-Bret, 2006). Without a shared understanding of what constitutes terrorism, how can we effectively combat it? This essay seeks to explain the persistent challenges to arrive at an objective understanding of terrorism, and which groups can then be characterised as terrorists. Ultimately, I contend that the relative nature of terrorism makes a universally accepted definition impossible, however it remains necessary for a better world.

To this end, I will start by examining attempts to universalise the definition, with particular attention to the contributions of Ganor. I will then analyse the role of cultural relativism in making definitions of terrorism highly subjective and subsequently propose why this limits the validity of Ganor's argument. Following this, I will explore the political and legal dimensions of terrorism to highlight why defining terrorism is crucial on the grounds of characterising terrorist groups. For that reason, this essay argues that even without a universal definition, arriving at an objective

characterisation is plausible. I argue that Ganor merely characterises terrorist groups, rather than defines them. Begorre-Bret (2006, p. 1989) suggests that a statement is definitional 'if and only if it is adequate to the totality of what is defined'. Thus, for this essay, I assume that the parameters which establish an "objective understanding" of terrorism are universality, impartiality, adaptability, and consistency. Such characterisation seeks cross-cultural relevance to arrive at the totality of what terrorism is. This ensures that my assessment will be useful and authoritative, especially in promoting international cooperation for counter-terrorism measures.

For the convenience of my analysis in the next parts of this essay, I analyse Ganor's work to make an objective definition of terrorism. According to him, terrorism is defined as 'the intentional use of, or threat to use, violence against civilians or civilian targets, to attain political aims' (2002, p. 294), consistent with Butko's (2006) and Netanyahu's (1995, p. 8) definitions, which emphasise 'the deliberate and systematic assault on civilians to inspire fear for political ends'. Their definition has three elements at its core. The activity [A] must use, or at least threaten to use, violence. This means activities like protests, strikes, and peaceful demonstrations would not be categorised as terrorism since they lack violence or the prospect of violence. And the activity must generally [B] target civilians. The third element is that the activity must be [C] in the pursuit of political objectives such as regime change or altering policies. The sum of A, B, and C is what they propose as terrorism, and hence, what characterises terrorist groups. However, the task of analysing the effectiveness of this attempt to objectively define terrorism relies heavily on analysing through an exploration of cultural relativism.

The Challenge of Defining Terrorism

In a general tone, cultural relativism suggests that whether an action is "right" or "wrong" is determined by making value assessments according to the ethical standards of the society within which the action emerges (Zeidan, 2006; Wright, 2016). For instance, the struggle for self-determination by certain ethnic or nationalist groups is often viewed differently by the international community and the affected society. The actions of certain groups, labelled as terrorists by some, are often considered acts of justified resistance against perceived oppression by others within their cultural context. To illustrate how cultural relativism contributes to the difficulty of defining terrorism, consider the case of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey. The separatist group's armed struggle for Kurdish autonomy has been labelled as terrorism by the Turkish government and some international actors (US NCTC, 2022; Palmer and Holtz, 2023). However, there is a perception that the PKK is fighting for the legitimate rights of an oppressed ethnic group within the Kurdish community (Davis et al., 2012). The PKK, by Ganor's definition, is deemed a terrorist organisation due to its killing of civilians. Though any attack on unarmed civilians is reprehensible, Ganor's explanation fails to capture the significance of public support for the PKK's cause in fighting human abuses and suppression by the 1984 Turkey government.

This provokes a moral reflection: we are not in their shoes, so what entitles us to pass judgement on those directly involved in their struggles? Defining terrorism would only 'draw a line between "them," barbarian enemies, and "us," who are naturally entitled to resort to force' (Begorre-Bret, 2006). This leaves room for different interpretations of terrorist conflict. Hence, we can see how cultural relativism influences the understanding of terrorism based on historical grievances and cultural perspectives.

Another example is the Israel-Palestine conflict. At the time of writing, at least 87,150 Palestinians have been reported dead, missing or injured following the October 7th 2023 escalation. More than 31,340 of these people were women and children (AJLABS, 2023). From the Palestinian standpoint, Hamas is often perceived as engaging in a legitimate struggle for self-determination and resistance against what they perceive as Israeli occupation. However, from the Israeli perspective, the deliberate targeting of civilians by the group is unequivocally labelled as terrorism. This has resulted in Israeli military operations, which have killed thousands of Palestinians under the pretext of self-defence. Having undergone decades of displacement and Israeli violence, Palestinian support for Hamas becomes more understandable. Ultimately, acts of violence committed by resistance groups are interpreted diversely based on cultural and political contexts. The purpose of this essay is not to determine which side is right, but to demonstrate how cultural relativism shapes perceptions of terrorism. This illustrates the challenges in arriving at an objective understanding of what terrorism is.

In an attempt to refute the relativism of the understanding of terrorism, Ganor's approach to terrorism focuses too heavily on the methods employed by groups and not enough on the motivation behind their actions. Ignoring how relativism shapes our perceptions of terrorism is flawed. Doing so removes analytical compassion, allowing the analyst to declare someone an 'enemy of all mankind' (Ganor, 2002, p. 289). This would, in effect, ultimately dehumanise someone or one's group. In my view, compassion is required to understand the causes and intentions of people's actions. While I agree with Ganor (2002, p. 290) that "without an objective and authoritative definition accepted by all nations, the fight against terrorism will always suffer from cultural

relativism," I think it is short-sighted to use this as an absolute solution to terrorism. Counterterrorism measures should address the underlying causes of terrorism to eradicate it. However, achieving this objective is challenging because the relativism of terrorism makes its definition dependent on the definer's point of view, when at times, one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter. This means cross-cultural relevancy is virtually impossible, and any definition that follows is not universal, not impartial, not adaptable, and inconsistent. This proposes that any efforts to define terrorism would not fulfil the characterisation of an "objective understanding". I therefore maintain that a universally accepted definition of terrorism is impossible.

The Need to Define Terrorism

Having established that an objective definition of terrorism is implausible, this essay will now argue that, despite this, it is still necessary to define terrorism due to the issues in the political and legal dimensions revolving around it. These consequently become the reasons that necessitate an objective understanding of which groups might be characterised as terrorists. Firstly, from a political dimension, the ambiguity surrounding the definition of terrorism enables states and non-state actors to advance their agendas while avoiding accountability for actions that might be considered terrorist in a different context. Ramsay (2015) notes that the debate about the definition of terrorism is not politically neutral. The Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, for example, consider irregular fighters to be terrorists if they are against the state (Begorre-Bret, 2006). Furthermore, Jackson (2006) mentions how non-state groups that are opposed to Western interests are almost exclusively labelled terrorists. In most cases, Western-sponsored groups are not subject to it, even if they commit similar acts of violence against civilians. This logic may challenge the

reliability of Ganor and Netanyahu's definitions. Their proximity to the Israeli government may promote bias against Palestinians. However, it is critical to assess the individual's argument rather than their positionality in instances of terrorism.

Hence, the definitions generally tend to reflect the subjectivity of 'political interests and the moral judgement (or lack thereof) of those who do the defining' (Schmid, 2011, p.40). Therefore, the difference in political motives has become an obstacle to an objective understanding of terrorism accepted by the international community. However, waiting for an objective understanding is more disastrous due to the severity of actions by terrorist groups, as it hinders the call for stronger authoritative cooperation on the international scene. This is the reason why, despite the implausibility of the terrorism definition, it is still necessary to at least characterise which groups might be terrorist groups. This is so that we can be pragmatic in enforcing the law as well as anti- and counter-terrorism policies. However, establishing an effective counteract effort is highly improbable if states disagree on its definition (Zeidan, 2006). This results in the absence or lack of international legal standing, preventing cohesive approaches to terrorism despite the urgency of doing so. Universally defining terrorism becomes paradoxically impossible while fundamental.

Conclusion

The urgency to act on terrorism is what drives the possibility to arrive at an objective characterisation of terrorist groups, even without a universal definition. This essay proposes to draw a baseline agreement on certain tactics as inherently unacceptable. Richard (2012) argues that 'reference to the cause or the perpetrator is unhelpful because terrorism should first and foremost (and more objectively) be seen as a particular method of violence'. And Ganor's definition offers just that.

Thus, an objective characterisation of terrorist groups is when violent methods are used against civilians for political motives. Following this, if proven intentional, then Hamas and PKK fall under this characterisation. Whilst Ganor's attempt to universalise the definition does not help us understand terrorism objectively, it does allow us to characterise terrorist groups. I hope to strike a balance between condemning universally unacceptable tactics and understanding the underlying issues to foster a more objective understanding of the multifaceted terrorist conflict.

This essay has explored the elements of cultural relativism, political and legal. From this extensive analysis, we have discussed how the relative nature of terrorism and differences in political motives have become the challenges that make it impossible to arrive at a total and objective understanding of terrorism. In spite of that, this essay has made its case that, without any authoritative defining criteria, it hinders international cooperation against terrorism and opens the door to political exploitation. Hence, this essay has consistently argued that even without a universal definition, we should have a baseline of what we can universally condemn. Finally, I believe this should only be a means to an end. Efforts to keep exploring terrorism must be continued so we can truly defeat it without only inciting a cycle of violence one after another.

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Shifting Paradigms in the Anthropocene: An analysis of sustainable alternatives to development in an urgent environmental crisis

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Abstract

In the current age of the Anthropocene, human activity and traditional development are dangerously accelerating ecological and social imbalance. As this natural crisis begins to reach a critical point, it is important now, more than ever, to consider the importance of shifting the economy-driven global systems towards more sustainable methods of development. This thesis will firstly critique the idea of a 'Green economy' and go on to propose that development needs to move away from its economic focus altogether. It examines the sustainable approaches of degrowth, proposed by André Gorz (1977), as well as indigenous methods (using the Latin-American idea of 'Buen Vivir' as a case study). The research highlights the benefits of the two and asserts that these methods are the most important, and increasingly necessary, alternatives to 'development as usual', through their focus on consumption reduction, natural balance and social harmony, which has the potential to mitigate the urgent problems rooted in the current systems.

Introduction

In the contemporary age of the Anthropocene, an emerging geological epoch in which human activity has become the dominant force destabilising the natural world, the traditional model

of development is quickly becoming unsustainable (Malhi, 2017). 'Development as usual' is characterised by theorist Eriksen (2014) as a linear approach to development which prioritises economic growth, industrialisation, and neoliberal market policies in the pursuit of capitalist expansion. Despite the model's success in shaping an economy-driven global system, it has simultaneously given rise to a rapid increase in ecological instability and social inequality, features that underpin the existing process of development. Hence, to both sustain the planet and rebalance societal equality, it is evident that a move away from conventional pathways to development is necessary and, while the idea of decoupling and sustainable development has been introduced to shift towards a 'Green Economy', the current challenges render this inefficient and call for a more radical rethinking of development (Wilson, 2013).

This thesis seeks to critique the idea of a 'Green Economy' and instead proposes that stronger alternatives to 'development as usual' exist, namely the approaches of degrowth and indigenous-led systems, specifically focusing on Buen Vivir in South America. This work will firstly address the problems with 'development as usual' and will contend that the current situation calls for a more drastic change than decoupling to create the proposed 'Green Economy'. It will go on to assess how, following post-development and post-colonial theory, degrowth addresses the colonial underpinnings of the current global development system and focuses on reducing consumption to foster environmental and social equity, while indigenous and holistic approaches call for socio-ecological transformation and a rebalancing of human-nature coexistence. By exploring these alternative approaches, this research concludes that a move away from the current development model and towards degrowth and indigenous alternatives is important and necessary in changing

what constitutes development in order to alleviate the poverty and environmental degradation caused by the current system and achieve a sustainable future.

'Development as Usual'

In order to evaluate the principal alternatives to development, it is important to first consider why they are becoming necessary. Prominent since the Industrial Revolution, 'development as usual' has aimed to create global prosperity with a central focus on economic growth to increase industrialisation, modernisation, and progress. However, while neoliberal scholars, such as Neilson (2019), uphold that the current system has created advancements in global development, it is clear that the Western model is Eurocentric and enables colonial dynamics as well as severe environmental degradation. Characterised primarily by economic growth, the current development system focuses on principles like industrialisation and market liberalisation and is largely measured by GDP, following the assumption that a rising GDP leads to further societal progress Davidson (2000). However, despite the widespread adoption of this system, it is proving detrimental to the ecological and societal world. As highlighted by Barbier (2010), Western resource utilisation in the current system of development has led to resource depletion in developing countries, as well as environmental problems through the reliance on fossil fuels in industrial processes, which have increasingly impacted biodiversity. While Neilson (2019) upholds that the system of development uplifts all countries in the process of progression, it is contrastingly evident that by taking a post-colonial approach, the economic benefits of 'development as usual' are often unevenly distributed. This is due to the system favouring developed countries that are able to exploit cheap labour and resources, and forcing developing countries in the Global South to be dependent on the unfair business they receive from the North.

In turn, opposing the aim of development, the system leads to wealth disparities and the colonial exploitation of societies in developing countries, neglecting the long-term welfare of the population to further economic gain. Thus, new approaches to development are evidently necessary.

Critiquing the Proposal of a 'Green Economy'

One widely discussed alternative has been the transition to a green economy, but through exploring the drawbacks of this approach, it is evident that this would not be a strong enough move away from the current model of development.

Attempting to provide environmental protection simultaneously to development, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) proposed a 'green economy', essentially decoupling material use from economic output by improving production efficiency. The idea is centralised in resource efficiency, renewable energy transitions and technology innovation, which can be less ecologically damaging, and therefore ideally improve the sustainability of the current economy-driven systems of development (Wilson, 2013). However, although economists like Kasztelan (2017) assert the benefits of decoupling, based on the ability to continue development while reducing environmental risks and promoting a more circular economy through reuse, ecological economists recognise that absolute decoupling is unlikely, and simply adapting to a green economy is not as fundamental of a change as is needed in the current situation (Kallis, 2011).

Opposing decoupling, Kallis (2015) instead contends that it is impossible for there to be a sustained continuance of economic growth without harm to the environment. Complete decoupling of GDP growth from harmful resource use is not plausible in the contemporary world, given the foundational reliance on those resources, and only serves as a temporary solution. Therefore, it is

reasonable to argue that the core problem is that development as a process cannot exist without ecological consequences, and it is subsequently imperative to challenge the roots of Eurocentric development and refocus the prioritised aims of economic growth towards sustainability and human wellbeing in order to move forward sustainably.

Degrowth

In order to alleviate the problems of ecological pressure and social inequality, which unavoidably emerge from the current neoliberal model, the concept of development needs to move away from the focus on economic growth altogether. Considering this, the process of degrowth, proposed by ecologist André Gorz (1977), would be the most effective alternative approach to development as usual. Degrowth, unlike decoupling, recognises that 'growth' is foundationally negative for both the environment and for social equality, and suggests a planned reduction of energy and resource throughput to 'degrow' the economy (Kallis, 2011). The process offers a critique of growth, rejecting the idea of economic growth as a measure in the system of development, and advocates the importance of downscaling production and consumption in industrialised countries to rebalance the environment and human society, and achieve an improved quality of life (Eriksen, 2014). A study by Santos shows that the indicator of Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare, including environmental and social factors, has remained at the same level in the US since 1950, despite huge GDP growth, which suggests that human development is not improved by economic growth and the environment is needlessly being affected (Santos, 2010). Degrowth would enable the mitigation of both environmental and societal impacts which exist within the process of 'development as usual'.

Primarily, degrowth benefits the environment as it is a social transformation which calls for a complete refocus of the meaning of development. It suggests that the paradigm of continuous economic growth is not feasible on a finite planet and, by reducing the global rate of consumption and shifting towards focusing on localised and sustainable economies, degrowth will rebalance human co-existence with the planet (Escobar, 2015). Through the reformation of the economic system, degrowth promotes local enterprises and the sharing economy as an alternative to profit-driven business, which in turn will promote well-being over economy and reduce harmful environmental practices like global production chains, fossil fuel emissions and excessive waste generation. Moving away from the contemporary trend of consumption and endless economic growth would provide an important shift towards prioritising the environment and fostering local trade as opposed to international and unequal systems.

Neoliberal scholars provide the argument that degrowth is not feasible, as it requires cooperation from political and economic institutions which are deeply rooted in the process of economic growth, and the transition is too large at this late stage (Nielson, 2019). However, while degrowth has not been officially adopted, several countries have successfully aligned with its principles in order to introduce environmental solutions and sustainability agendas, suggesting that the transition is possible and sought after. For example, Bhutan measures its development success through Gross National Happiness rather than GDP, which emphasises sustainable development and cultural values (Donnelly, 2004). Demonstrating a move towards a rethinking of development, these policies show that the prioritisation of the environment and wellbeing is possible. Given that this shift is not happening globally, there are significant challenges as these countries still have to integrate within the existing global economic system, which limits the effectiveness of their transition. However, it

supports the argument that change is necessary and, as the environmental crisis worsens, degrowth should be considered as an important alternative to rebalance humans and the planet.

Further, degrowth is an important alternative to 'development as usual' in seeking to reduce social inequality. As Larrain (2013) explores, growth within development is detrimental to equality as it is unevenly successful. Taking a post-colonial approach, development is colonial in character, as the elite benefit from the process at the expense of communities in the Global South (Larrain, 2013). While scholars like Heldring (Heldring & Robinson, 2018) argue that the system of development has helped countries in the Global South become integrated in the global economy, Larrain suggests that development is colonial as countries in the Global North are able to exploit cheap resources and labour in the South, who then become dependent on the financial gain they are receiving from developed countries and keep wages low and working conditions poor to hold onto their business (Larrain, 2013). The profits from this system often flow back into developed countries, and therefore, they remain the main financial beneficiaries and maintain global economic disparities (Larrain, 2013).

Considering this, degrowth as an alternative for development can act as decolonisation in the South and push social equality by addressing colonial exploitation and injustices. Firstly, degrowth only immediately applies to high-income countries, which are characterised by excess resource and energy use. Given that industrialised countries are the main consumers, they can be regarded as responsible for the negative impacts of production and growth that developing countries often bear the brunt of (Hickel, 2021). Therefore, by reducing consumption and degrowing the major economies, the need for high production rates, cheap labour, and resource use from developing countries will

decrease massively (Hickel, 2021). With the economies becoming more localised, it enables the release of communities in the Global South from unequal exchange and allows them to develop internally rather than following the euro-centric linear model of development, based only on the success of the North, in which they hold a disadvantaged position as a result of ongoing colonial injustices.

Further developing the argument that degrowth will help both societally and environmentally, it is important to recognise that the reduction of consumption also leads to a reduction in resource extractivism, which will allow the regeneration of ecology and a global redistribution of wealth as developing countries will be able to utilise their resources to their advantage. Therefore, degrowth provides an alternative to development as usual, which prioritises the environment and societal wellbeing in an important way that development as usual does not.

Indigenous Approaches

Considering the problems with 'development as usual' previously discussed, a second important alternative to assess is the implementation of indigenous approaches. Sharing the degrowth model's critiques of conventional development, like the omission of the importance of sustainability, equity and value of the non-material, indigenous alternatives offer theoretical insights into processes of social and economic change (Nash, 2003). The approaches can be considered particularly important in providing a solution for the problem of unequal development, as many countries in the Global South have struggled to emulate the Western model of development, which indigenous communities attribute to the cultural and geographical differences which are disregarded by the current system (Curry, 2015).

Centralised in social equity and cultural integrity, indigenous approaches assert a holistic view of development, rooted in the environment and traditional world views, and critique the consumerist values of the contemporary world. Unlike the growth-centric model, indigenous approaches emphasise the interconnectedness of humans and nature and the importance of a balanced life, considering factors including emotional, social and spiritual health to ensure a better understanding of the meaning of human development. This serves as an important alternative to 'development as usual', revealing possibilities beyond the modern Eurocentric model to benefit both the environment and society as a whole (Curry, 2015).

Indigenous approaches: Buen Vevir

Demonstrating a practice of indigenous alternatives, Buen Vivir, translating to 'good living', is a concept rooted in the indigenous cultures of the Andean region in Latin-America which, unlike degrowth, steps away from the idea of economy and sustainable energy almost completely and re-engages with the region's origins (Kothari, 2015). Concepts like Buen Vivir recognise cultural and traditional dimensions and suggest that ancient, localised practices help specific communities develop in their individual ways, as opposed to following a universal model. Particularly different from development as usual is the acceptance within these approaches that concepts of wealth and poverty are not interlinked with the accumulation of material goods, which is far removed from the capitalist systems of the contemporary world (Kothari, 2015). Instead, the principles of Buen Vivir emphasise a need to recover indigenous practices in order for each nation to develop towards a holistic and meaningful version of wellbeing rather than one centred in material wealth. Not only does this approach benefit the environment as, moves away from an interconnected world, it

advocates for the use of local, natural resources and respect of ecological limits, but it also places an emphasis on creating an inclusive society, which contrasts the hierarchical nature of the traditional development model.

Similar to the criticisms faced by degrowth, Buen Vivir and other indigenous approaches to development have been subject to criticism about whether they are realistic in the contemporary world. Gudynas (2021) has contested that the concept lacks compatibility with global state and economic structures and argues that a substantial change in the dependency on extractive industries would be necessary for indigenous approaches to be implemented. However, while it holds true that it may be hard to apply the principles of Buen Vivir in a globalised world, with established capitalist dynamics, it has been implemented into the constitutional frameworks of countries like Ecuador and Bolivia, in which the land reforms and initiatives to protect biodiversity have been successful (Caria, 2016). Unlike degrowth, the holistic approach has been implemented in some regions already, suggesting that it is a more accessible, realistic and necessary alternative despite criticism. Given the detrimental crisis existing with the environment, it is key that alternative approaches to the unsustainable process of development are recognised. Therefore, it can be considered that these approaches would unveil new potential to protect the environment and social equity, and it is possible to slowly incorporate them into national and international policies.

Significance of Marginalised Experiences

Perhaps the most compelling factor to consider when assessing why these traditional approaches are important is the fact that they have emerged directly from the marginalised groups which are exploited by the current development system (Villalba, 2013). Instead of maintaining the hegemony

of superior Western production models, indigenous approaches take into account cultural dimensions and a connection to the land and community, which can be integrated into local governance. Reflecting their struggles against unfair industries and the mechanisms of neoliberal markets in the global economy, their vision of development reveals what is wrong with the current model and highlights that many countries struggle to emulate the concept of linear development (Eriksen, 2014). By implementing indigenous concepts, it may enable countries to develop in a way that benefits them as opposed to struggling to develop through models based on Western success, aligning with the agenda of economic growth. Thus, nations will not only be able to increase their autonomy, but also be released from the dependency on capitalist countries which exploit them and keep them in a disadvantaged position.

This supports the importance of indigenous approaches, as the concepts appreciate that the current model of development does not provide an inclusive route for all nations and allows for exploitation and dependency on the capitalist system, which is rapidly progressing into a societal and environmental crisis.

Conclusion

Conclusively, this thesis has found that both degrowth and indigenous alternatives like Buen Vivir address the multifaceted crisis of development and provide compelling alternatives to the traditional 'development as usual' model, which prioritises economic growth at the expense of the environment and social equality, and is proving to be an irreversible risk in the Anthropocene. Degrowth advocates for a much-needed reduction in consumption and production, which is the key attributor to the environmental crisis the world is currently facing, and, by identifying that economic growth cannot continue without further harmful consequences, it is important as it provides a solution to

environmental degradation and unfair distribution of resources. Similarly, indigenous approaches are necessary to offer a new, transformative vision of development which respects both environmental and societal traditions. They are important alternatives to consider when looking to the future of development, as they provide foundations for rethinking development and turning towards a more sustainable and just future. This thesis, therefore, acts as an important call for national institutions and industrialised countries to now consider the concepts discussed as a way of avoiding the crisis the world is heading towards. Prioritising nature and the populations on earth over economic monopoly, they must accept the need to re-evaluate their priorities in order to mitigate environmental degradation and social inequality caused by the system they are currently rooted in.

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Altruistic Aid or Neocolonialism? How Practices of International Development Worsen Poverty and Restrict the Autonomy of Developing Countries

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BA (Hons) Politics and Modern History

Abstract

This essay analyses how practices of international development worsen poverty in developing countries. This essay examines the impacts of European imperialism on creating an international hierarchy that forefronts Western values as superior. It examines how ideas of modernisation and development have maintained this hierarchy in a continuation of neo-colonial power relations. This essay goes on to examine how practices of development ensure that developing countries remain impoverished. This essay concludes that international development has trapped many countries in endless cycles of debt, and neoliberal policies have, in many ways, damaged progress in poverty alleviation, all while perpetuating neocolonialism.

Introduction

The goal of addressing poverty and underdevelopment in the world's poorest countries has long been recognised globally as a matter of great importance. After World War II, it was believed that the new nation-states in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, freed from European colonialism, needed

to be set on a pathway of development and social transformation to end poverty. (Tagarirofa, 2017, p. 1). Yet, after almost 70 years of development efforts, over 700 million of the world's population still live in extreme poverty today. (World Bank, 2022, p. 21). This essay analyses why decades of development efforts have failed to significantly end poverty in the Global South, specifically focusing on Sub-Saharan Africa, which is the poorest and least developed region in the world.

This essay is divided into 3 sections. First, this essay explains how the effects of European imperialism first placed former colonies in an underdeveloped and impoverished position to be economically dependent on global powers, creating an international hierarchy that forcefully asserted Western values as superior. The next section proposes that the ideas of modernisation and development have maintained this hierarchy in a continuation of neo-colonialist power relations, and have intended to keep less-developed countries weak. In the final section, this essay explains how the specific practices of development ensure poor nations remain impoverished, using Mozambique as a case study, as international funding costs for development have trapped many countries in endless cycles of debt. Neoliberal policies have, in many ways, damaged progress in poverty alleviation, all while perpetuating neocolonialism.

Section I: Colonialism and Development

Colonialism

To understand why poverty and underdevelopment persist today, their origins must be understood first by analysing the role of colonialism, defined as the direct control of foreign territories, involving political subjugation, and economic and social exploitation. (Zhou & Machenjera, 2017, p. 35). This

exploitative system generated surplus value from forced African labour, stolen resources and unequal trade relations, with these profits repatriated to Europe to fund domestic development in colonial empires, whilst the economic development of Africa was suppressed. (Matunhu, 2011, p. 68) (Muiu, 2010, p. 1314). Before imperialism, many African states such as Mali and Songhai were developing politically and economically at a steady pace, contrary to the European propaganda painting African civilisations as backwards and barbaric. However, colonialism left Africa politically fragmented, impoverished, and technologically underdeveloped, with economies designed only to generate wealth for European imperialists. (Zhou & Machenjera, 2017, pp. 58-59). Therefore, colonialism created the problem of poverty and underdevelopment in Africa, placing the continent in a position with no economic self-sufficiency, and being forced to rely on their former colonisers. As this essay will demonstrate, this global hierarchy from colonialism continues to be maintained.

Colonial Ideology in Development

The idea of modernising Africa and the term 'underdevelopment' remain problematic. During colonialism, European control of Africa was framed as a benevolent, civilising mission bringing technological development to the continent, with African culture being presented as inferior. Following formal decolonisation, ideas of development emerged based on the modernisation theory, which presented development as a linear path to enable post-colonial states to reach the era of mass consumption enjoyed by Western countries. (Byekwaso, 2016, p. 288). This simplistic narrative ignored how former colonies were engineered to be underdeveloped in the first place. Disregarding this crucial aspect of exploitative power relations by suggesting that all nations can follow the same development path has perpetuated economic imperialism.

Although modernisation theory has been criticised for this, it remains highly relevant in shaping international policy today. (Clement & Ojukwu, 2019, p. 20). This is problematic because framing Western standards as the ideal level of development implies that shifting towards Western culture is crucial for modernisation. This presents African culture as undesirable and an obstacle on the path towards development, which in turn suppresses African initiative, preventing postcolonial states from shaping their destiny. (Matunhu, 2011, p. 67). Thus, parallels can be drawn from development theory to the ideology and practices of colonialism, as Africa is forced to be economically dependent on hegemonic powers for development, allowing foreign countries and institutions to dictate policy and maintain unequal relations.

The push for African states to meet these Western development standards has exacerbated poverty in some areas. For example, the process of urbanisation is often equated to development as the majority of populations in Western countries live in towns and cities generally enjoy a high standard of living. However, this belief is misguided when applied to less-developed countries, as their current economic conditions, which are not yet prepared for mass urbanisatio,n have meant that urban areas have grown unsustainably, exacerbating issues in social development. (Byekwaso, 2016, p. 296). In Uganda, the expansion of Kampala City and other areas has caused the emergence of slums, unsanitary living conditions, food shortages and homelessness. Meanwhile, rural communities are neglected in the pursuit of urbanisation, creating a false and limiting dichotomy between the two. (Matunhu, 2011, p. 69).

This demonstrates that the issue of development is political and contested. The implication that the position of underdevelopment is a country failing to meet Western standards is reinforced in international practices. To avoid affirming and reproducing these asymmetrical power relations

commonly observed in development discourse, this essay takes a postcolonial approach by understanding development as social and economic reforms guided by social justice, with the enablement of individuals and local groups to manage their own affairs. (Omar, 2012, p. 47). As this essay will continue to prove, poverty persists because the autonomy of the poorest countries is wrested from the state by international development policies – an undeniable aspect of neocolonialism.

Yet, it should be clarified that although this essay is a strong criticism of Western imperialism in creating and sustaining poverty in Africa, there is also recognition that the failure of many historical leaders in post-colonial Africa to manage resources efficiently has also contributed to underdevelopment. (Zhou & Machenjera, 2017, p. 64). Certainly, former colonial states have failed to maintain their inherited infrastructure, and issues of government corruption have plagued all countries of Africa. (Kutor, 2014, p. 18). This essay is not absolving poor political leaders from responsibility and is not painting the continent solely as helpless victims – a pitfall many African scholars are keen to avoid. However, the evils of neocolonialism are scrutinised in this essay as they are still the primary cause of Africa's poverty and underdevelopment.

Section II: Aid and Debt

Aid Dependency

Being forced into a position of economic dependency, international aid, commonly in the form of loans, has long been an established method of African development since the 1960s, given by former

Western colonialists with the claimed intentions of poverty reduction and promoting democracy. (Fentahun, 2023, pp. 2-3). In reality, however, aid has crippled the autonomy of Africa and has failed to bring significant results in poverty alleviation and development. This is partially because aid has propped up undemocratic leaders and has allowed recipient countries to be less accountable to their people, as the state is less reliant on the public for the financing of government spending. This has meant the quality of governance has worsened, resulting in the policies of developing countries failing to progress social development. Since the 1970s, the failures of aid became visible, as foreign donors began providing Africa with vast levels of foreign aid, yet this coincided with stagnating economies and rising poverty in the subsequent decades. The slowing of economic progress forced Africa to seek more aid, resulting in the continent becoming increasingly dependent on aid to fund public expenditure. (Fentahun, 2023, pp. 7-8). With more aid came more conditionalities, with donors increasing their control over their recipients' economy and policymaking, under the guise of financial assistance. By 1989, twenty-five African countries were classified as heavily aid-dependent. (Goldsmith, 2001, p. 125). Consequently, with the continent suffering from high inflation and unemployment during this period, African countries began failing to service their debts from development loans, spiralling into a seemingly endless cycle of debt repayment.

Debt Crisis and SAPs

Countries in Latin America and Asia also fell into a similar trap of debt, with development progress increasingly tied to receiving loans and needing to pay off these loans. In this way, debt became a key instrument in maintaining neocolonial relations and the global hierarchy, whilst halting progress in social development and poverty alleviation for the poorest countries. (Toussaint, 2022, p. 61). This

pattern of economic imperialism has intensified over time, with the debt crisis at its worst in recent years. In 2019, the US' raising of interest rates increased the cost of loan repayments for indebted countries, who were also facing currency devaluations and decreased export revenues, which exacerbated the issue. (Toussaint, 2022, pp. 64-65). The subsequent Coronavirus Pandemic only worsened this issue by increasing unemployment and severely damaging export revenues, making debt servicing even more difficult. Comparing 1980 and 2019, debt in Sub-Saharan Africa has increased from $60bn to $625bn, and in Latin America and the Caribbean, debt has increased from $227bn to $1.9tn. The consequence of the debt crisis is that, as expenditure has become increasingly focused on loan repayments rather than social spending, progress in social development has halted as a result, which demonstrates why aid has failed to significantly alleviate poverty in developing countries.

The worsening of the debt crisis and the tightening of neocolonial relations harming development in the Global South can be attributed to the advent of neoliberalism, and the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). In 1982, Global South countries particularly in Latin America, began to default on loan repayments, due to the US substantially increasing interest rates in years prior, known as the Volcker Shock. (Toussaint, 2022, pp. 62-63). With countries in Africa failing to repay their loans too, this marked a turning point in the approach of international development. International institutions leading development efforts, such as the World Bank and the IMF, turned away from advocating for state-led development, as aid failure and inability to repay debt were blamed on government corruption, resource mismanagement and excessive state intervention. (Fentahun, 2023, p. 8). The SAPs were introduced, lending funds at high interest rates

to countries which were failing to continue their other development loan repayments. However, these loans were only promised on the condition that recipient countries would fundamentally shift their economies towards the free market to follow the new approach in development strategy laid out by international institutions.

Developing countries were mandated to decrease public spending, privatise key industries, reduce import tariffs, lower interest rates to attract foreign investment and become increasingly integrated into global trade by focusing production on exportable goods. (Toussaint, 2022, p. 63). In the subsequent decades, the consequences of imposing these neoliberal policies on impoverished, aid-reliant countries have shown to be highly detrimental to development progress. Regarding aid, neoliberal SAPs did not reduce the debt burden but exacerbated it, as demonstrated by today's looming debt crisis. Worse still, international institutions have promoted an even more neoliberal approach to development lending in recent years, shifting away from donor contributions and more towards private financing, which has mandated further reductions in social spending in favour of increasing corporate powers and encouraging foreign investment. (Mawdsley, 2018, pp. 191-192). This financialised, less-regulated approach has only increased the risk of developing countries being overburdened by debt, reducing their chances of ending poverty.

Section III: Neoliberalism and Neocolonialism

Consequences of Neoliberal Development

Africa was initially opposed to conforming to neoliberal ideology; however, its struggling economies soon had no choice but to accept SAPs to access the development aid it had become so reliant on.

(Fentahun, 2023, p. 8). With neoliberalism blaming development failures on Africans being incapable of governing themselves, and lacking innovation hence the need for foreign investment, colonial attitudes are propagated, and African autonomy is suppressed. (Byekwaso, 2016, p. 293). By proposing that the state is too inefficient to manage its economy properly, SAPs have justified using the private sector as the main strategy of development, arguing that economic growth trickles down to helping impoverished communities. In reality, the resulting decline in state-led development has proved to be disastrous for poverty alleviation.

The case study of Mozambique is proof of this, as although the country receives significant levels of aid, it remains one of the world's poorest countries. PARPA, implemented in 2001, is Mozambique's national strategy of poverty reduction based on the neoliberal ideology of maximising economic growth for development, and was created by investment stakeholders, and World Bank policymakers. (IMF, 2003, p. 1). Between 2002 to 2008, Mozambique experienced an 8% growth rate in GDP, yet little progress in social development occurred during this time, as poverty, food insecurity and child malnutrition increased, and the majority of the population was still living below the national poverty line. (Cunguara, 2012, p. 161). PARPA has overseen growth concentrated mostly in the energy and mineral industries such as aluminium and natural gas, however, this has provided very few tangible benefits, as job creation has been limited, and production is rarely consumed locally but instead exported. Meanwhile, during South Korea's developing period, the government employed a strongly state-led system of development, going against neoliberal thinking, and not relying on foreign investment or aid to alleviate policy. (Byekwaso, 2016, pp. 291-292). Subsequently, it is one of the most developed countries in the world

today. This demonstrates that the idea that wealth trickles down into poverty does not work in reality and that economic growth cannot replace state spending on social welfare. Thus, the influence of neoliberalism has contributed to the continued existence of poverty and underdevelopment.

Another way neoliberalism has contributed to continued poverty and underdevelopment is by forcing poorer countries to integrate into the global economy and open up to Western markets under free trade. With the SAPs demanding that aid-receiving economies remove protectionist measures such as import tariffs, hegemonic powers have been able to flood African markets with cheaper, and often production-subsidised, commodities. (Popoola, 2023, p. 137). With indigenous industries being unable to fairly compete with the influx of cheaper, foreign goods, it has resulted in revenues and jobs being lost, contributing to poverty and exacerbating global inequality. The successful development of East Asian economies such as Taiwan and South Korea took place because governments worked to protect their infant industries, but unfortunately, neoliberalism has not allowed this opportunity for the countries of Africa and Latin America. (Piplani, 2022, p. 41). For example, in the countries of Côte d'Ivoire and Zimbabwe, the forced removal of import tariffs caused the collapse of many industries such as chemicals, textiles and automobile production, resulting in soaring unemployment. (Popoola, 2023, p. 149). Free trade has therefore allowed global powers to manipulate the economies of developing nations and has contributed to the continuation of poverty and underdevelopment in Africa.

In the case of Mozambique, PARPA's encouragement of boosting growth in industrial sectors to participate in trade has left the agricultural sector neglected, as part of its neoliberal, non-

interventionist policy. Since 2002, the allocation of foreign aid towards agriculture has dropped significantly, with the Ministry of Agriculture facing budget cuts, resulting in a decrease in agricultural productivity. (Cunguara, 2012, pp. 162-163). As 80% of Mozambique's population is employed in agriculture, it acts as the country's main engine for development; thus, lower productivity has caused an increase in poverty. Food security in Mozambique remains a significant concern, yet rather than increasing productivity in the sector which feeds the country's population, foreign investment is instead focused on improving modern technology in natural resource extraction, as these industries are more exportable. (Ferrão, et al., 2018, p. 9). Rather than increasing incomes for small, local farmers who make up a large section of the population, PARPA has instead channelled more wealth into foreign companies. Mozambique also loses its economic self-sufficiency by increasing its reliance on imports for food. For these reasons, poverty and underdevelopment persist, perpetuated by foreign companies and hegemonic powers.

Neocolonialism

This system of neocolonialism demonstrates why Africa is in a seemingly endless cycle of poverty. As mentioned prior, the implementation of SAPs has suppressed the autonomy of the state, damaging progress in social development, and preventing the indigenous populations from controlling their own economic destiny. Neoliberalism has handed this control to foreign companies instead, advocating that the private sector is the way forward in development. Historically, colonialism aimed to exploit the natural resources of Africa, extracting their wealth to be given to the West at the expense of the indigenous population. This economic practice is mirrored in neoliberalism today. In Nigeria, multinational oil companies operating in the state of Bayelsa reap

billions of dollars in profits through resource extraction, whilst the living conditions of peasants suffer in the process. (Byekwaso, 2016, p. 292). A recent report has revealed that, compared to the value of what Africa receives in aid, three times that amount is taken from Africa by multinational companies. (Popoola, 2023, p. 148). How can an aid system where the poorest countries continue to lose far more than they gain truly be considered development? Aircraft construction companies benefit from depleting the continent of its aluminium and copper. (Matunhu, 2011, pp. 68-69). But production to create the final product, where the surplus value is generated, does not take place in Africa, but instead in the already wealthy economies where these multinational companies are based.

The contemporary system of development sees Africa as an opportunity to gain wealth from its abundant natural resources, rather than a way for the creativity and entrepreneurship of Africans to flourish. Through this practice of suppressing African initiative, Africa's educated people are encouraged to leave their home countries to migrate to Western economies. Hegemonic powers benefit from this brain drain, as Africa becomes not only a source of cheap resources but also cheap labour. Wealthy economies profit from controlling and taking advantage of African labour to generate value from resources also extracted from their homelands. This may seem a far cry from the colonial practice of the slave trade, but parallels can certainly be drawn from the economic results of both systems. Development programmes in the modern day fail to see the socio-economic benefits for the countries they are supposed to help, as they are instead a tool to maintain the wealth and power of the global hierarchy. Africa is now suffocating in the ever-growing burden of aid debt, whilst the so-called development process enables foreign companies to continue siphoning resources from African lands while providing little economic benefit in return. Corporations and financial

institutions grow wealthier and more powerful, but the African continent stays poor and loses autonomy. Thus, colonialism in a new form continues.

Unfortunately, mainstream development discourse does not acknowledge these issues; the same narrative continues to be pushed, with claims that the poorest countries are on the right path to ending poverty, only that there is not enough aid. (United Nations, 2023, p. 8). Therefore, this exploitative practice advocated by global hegemons and international institutions remains firmly in place. It is for this reason that development fails to reduce poverty and continues to suffocate the freedom of the world's poorest countries.

Conclusion

In summary, poverty and underdevelopment still exist because the international system of development remains an exploitative practice imposed on poorer countries, most notably in Africa. Colonialism first engineered the position of underdevelopment for countries to become dependent on aid from hegemonic powers. This unequal relationship and impoverished position has been maintained through trapping less developed countries in debt, and the imposition of neoliberal policies causing the collapse of domestic industries. This has necessitated more exploitative economic interaction with Western powers through trade and has suppressed African initiative and autonomy. Combined with the forced reduction of social welfare spending, the extraction of wealth by multinational corporations and the loss of educated workers, the corrupting influence of neoliberal ideology enables the practice of neocolonialism, which fuels poverty in developing nations.

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The Distinct Wrong of Colonialism: A Political-Psychological Analysis of Alien Rule and Structural Injustice

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Abstract

This study interrogates the moral status of colonialism by critically engaging with the debate between contingently unjust and inherently unjust perspectives. It advances the position that colonialism is inherently unjust, rooted in the imposition of alien rule, a distinct form of political domination in which a foreign power asserts authority. Contrary to contingent accounts that locate moral failure in specific harms such as violence or exploitation, this analysis contends that such harms are structurally embedded in the colonial framework, arising inevitably from its foundational denial of self-determination and political legitimacy.

Drawing from political psychology, the study highlights how colonial rule fosters psychological mechanisms such as moral distancing and paternalism, which normalise domination and entrench inequality. Ultimately, the essay proposes that integrating structural and psychological insights bridges the divided understanding between contingent and inherent critiques, offering a more nuanced account of colonialism's enduring injustice. This approach not only reaffirms the moral distinctiveness of colonialism but also contributes to broader debates on legitimacy and recognition.

Introduction

The discourse surrounding colonialism elicits a nuanced debate amongst scholars regarding the specific injustices intrinsic to colonial expansion. Acknowledging the diversity of colonial experiences, this essay argues that colonialism is inherently wrong, grounded in Tignor's (2005) definition of colonialism as "a foreign nation taking political and economic control of another group." This imposition of external political authority deprives colonised populations of autonomy and self-determination, constituting a foundational injustice that renders subsequent harms not incidental but structurally inevitable. In challenging the "contingently unjust" position - which holds colonialism morally objectionable only when accompanied by particular abuses such as "racism, violence, exploitation, murder, [and] forced relocation" (Valentini, 2015). This essay contends that such harms are neither accidental nor independent from colonialism's core structure of alien domination.

Distinctively, this essay employs a political psychology framework to deepen the discourse. Examining how the unique foreignness of colonial rule intersects with its inherently coercive nature to shape the coloniser's perceptions and behaviours, thereby legitimising physical, psychological, and cultural harms. Drawing on empirical studies and engaging with thinkers to demonstrate that the moral wrongness of colonialism cannot be reduced to contingent outcomes. Rather, it is embedded in the very architecture of imposing foreign political authority. This structural alienation is central to understanding colonialism's unique character and the inevitability of its injustice.

The Contingent vs Inherent Unjust Thesis

To establish this argument, we must examine the two opposing positions: the inherently unjust view and the "contingently unjust" view of colonialism. The inherently unjust position asserts that colonialism is intrinsically wrong in all cases, regardless of its methods or outcomes. Contrastingly, the contingently unjust view - advanced by theorists such as Valentini (2015) - argues that colonialism is morally wrong only when it is accompanied by specific unjust practices, such as cultural imposition, violence, forced relocation, or apartheid. According to this perspective, colonialism in and of itself is not necessarily objectionable; rather, it is the exploitative measures commonly practiced within colonial systems that constitute its moral failings. Within this framework, it is possible to conceive of a hypothetical "benevolent colonialism" that avoids these harms and, as a result, escapes moral condemnation.

However, this interpretation overlooks the structural injustice that is inherent in colonial relationships. Even in the absence of overt harm, the imposition of foreign rule without the consent of the governed constitutes a deep moral violation. Valentini may not advocate for colonialism per se, but in academic inquiry it is essential to consider the ethical implications of one's research and positions. Valentini's position, by suggesting that colonialism could be morally permissible under certain conditions, inadvertently opens the door to viewing colonialism as a potentially legitimate enterprise - a stance that risks downplaying the foundational injustices embedded in colonial rule.

The Issue of Self – Determination and Consent

Theoretical fault in the contingently unjust argument emerges when considering scenarios of 'good colonialism' devoid of overt injustices. However, the crux of the matter lies in the absence of consent

and self-determination. While some anti-nationalists oppose nationalism as a political ideology, it is important to recognise that not all reject the principle of self-determination itself. Many anti-nationalists support the right of peoples to pursue political autonomy and cultural self-expression, particularly when faced with colonial domination (Walker, 2018). However, the core issue remains that colonialism structurally denies this right by imposing foreign rule without consent. Therefore, regardless of one's stance on nationalism as a concept, the denial of self-determination constitutes a fundamental moral wrong embedded in colonialism.

While it can be acknowledged that this makes the matter of the distinct wrong of colonialism a 'nationalistic' argument, it must be reckoned with the weakness of perspectives that dismiss nationalism entirely. Colonialism would theoretically not exist if we had a cosmopolitan world where nations and power hierarchies did not exist, and we were all simply citizens of the world. This view, however, ignores the reality that we do live in a world of nations, with power hierarchies historically enabling the domination of weaker nations by stronger ones through colonialism and, today, neocolonialism (Nkrumah, 1965). The most notable example of this is Western domination of the Global South, such as British colonisation of India (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2012). Therefore, I affirm that we cannot discuss the unique wrongness of colonialism without engaging with the issue of nationalism and the right to self-determination. For the sake of relevance, this essay focuses not on territorial nationalism specifically but rather on the seeking of political affinity by a group that shares political and cultural ambitions (cultural nationalism) (Smith, 1991).

The right to self-determination is enshrined in international legal instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007), which affirms that all

peoples have the right to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social, and cultural development. This principle is also central to liberal political theory. Buchanan (1991) argues that self-determination is not merely a procedural preference but a substantive moral claim, particularly relevant in contexts where communities are subjected to foreign rule without consent. He contends that the legitimacy of political authority depends on the governed's ability to authorise that rule, which colonialism systematically denies. Similarly, Ypi (2012) critiques colonial domination for obstructing the conditions necessary for autonomous political agency, stressing that colonialism is not simply a governance failure but a structural imposition that deprives colonised peoples of the very means to realise political freedom. Together, these perspectives show that colonialism fundamentally violates the principle of self-determination by imposing illegitimate authority and denying colonised people's recognition as moral and political equals.

Closely tied to the issue of self-determination is the absence of consent in colonial rule. No community freely consents to being governed by a foreign power whose interests fundamentally diverge from their own. Colonialism is not merely an administrative arrangement; it is a system of domination in which authority is imposed without the approval or participation of the governed. Absence of consent is morally significant because it strips the colonised of political agency and turns them into subjects of an imposed order. For example, during the Algerian War of Independence (1954 to 1962), the French colonial regime governed without the consent of the Algerian people, when uprisings occurred, they were met with violent repression (Evans, 2012). The lack of genuine political consent, especially in situations where resistance is met with coercion, renders colonial rule illegitimate regardless of any material benefits. Consent, in liberal traditions, is not a trivial formality

but a condition for political legitimacy. Without it, any form of governance risks becoming an exercise in domination rather than mutual recognition. Thus, even if colonialism avoided overt harms, the absence of consent alone would constitute a deep moral wrong by disregarding the colonised people's capacity to govern themselves.

Alien Rule and the Problem of Reciprocal Legitimacy

Furthermore, the issue of alien rule fundamentally underscores the inherent wrongness of colonialism. Unlike internal governance by a domestic authority, even a flawed one, colonialism involves domination by an external power that lacks any cultural, historical, or political ties to the governed population. This form of governance precludes the possibility of reciprocal legitimacy or democratic accountability. Stilz (2015) emphasises that political institutions derive their legitimacy from shared cultural and political bonds; while a domestic minority may relate to its government through common language, traditions, or civic identity, the colonised possess no such affinities with the colonizer. Their government is alien in every sense - linguistically, culturally, ideologically, and often racially. This absence of shared identity is not merely symbolic but translates into practical disempowerment and systemic marginalisation. For instance, despite Pakistan's ethnic and linguistic diversity, many groups cohere around the political ideal of an Islamic republic. Colonial authorities do not simply misrepresent indigenous interests; they systematically subordinated them to imperial priorities, a dynamic replicated across colonial contexts. However, critics such as Mamdani (1996) caution against uncritically equating legitimacy with cultural affinity, warning that such a stance risks essentialising identity and romanticising precolonial polities that may themselves have been exclusionary or unjust. This critique invites a more nuanced understanding of legitimacy that

acknowledges internal contestations within colonised societies while maintaining the distinctiveness of colonial domination.

Critics highlight that oppression also occurs within self-governing polities, as exemplified by India's caste system, raising the question: what precisely makes colonialism uniquely wrong? Ypi (2013) offers a compelling response by distinguishing the nature of political relationships. While domestic injustices take place within frameworks where rulers and the ruled maintain some cultural or political ties, colonial systems are characterised by a profound absence of reciprocal engagement. The colonised are not only excluded from power but also from belonging itself; their marginalisation is codified through foreign rule that claims legal superiority. Yet, postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha (1994) challenge the simplistic portrayal of colonial relations as unilateral domination, emphasising hybridity and negotiation. This complicates the narrative by suggesting that colonial encounters were sites of contested meaning and agency, though this does not negate the structural imposition of power. Instead, it calls for an analytic balance that recognises both resistance and the overwhelming asymmetry of colonial authority.

Beyond Material Outcomes: Structural and Legal Dimensions of Injustice

Colonialism further entrenches cultural and legal hierarchies that often outlast formal rule. Osterhammel (2005) notes that colonial regimes constructed narratives of cultural superiority to justify domination, portraying indigenous peoples as backward to legitimise control. Generating epistemic injustice by marginalising indigenous ways of knowing and being (Fricker, 2007). Moore (2016) extends this analysis by framing colonial wrongs as collective subjugation that denies entire

groups their political and cultural identity. Even when colonial regimes introduced material developments such as infrastructure or education, these benefits do not absolve the foundational injustice of imposed rule. Rather, such benefits often serve colonial self-interest: roads facilitate resource extraction, and schools promote colonial values. From a liberal consequentialist perspective, scholars like Miller (2007) argue that the ethical evaluation of colonialism must consider outcomes alongside origins, suggesting that tangible improvements may complicate straightforward moral condemnation. However, from a political theory standpoint, the presence of beneficial outcomes does not erase the fact that colonial authority originates in coercion and lacked legitimacy from the outset. Political legitimacy requires just procedures for the moral equality of all persons - principles that colonialism systematically violates. The structural wrong of foreign domination is not nullified by later advantages; rather, those advantages remain tainted by the absence of consent, denial of self-determination, and imposition of alien rule. In this light, colonialism cannot be rehabilitated by outcomes alone since its foundational relationship to the colonised was one of domination, not justice.

The legal codification of colonial authority compounds this injustice. By enshrining their rule in law, colonial powers render their domination "legitimate" within a framework they themselves construct. This creates a circular justification for authority: colonial rule is legal because the coloniser is the lawmaker (Narayan, 1995). These self-validating structures suppress dissent, prevent accountability, and ensure that the colonised remain second-class subjects. As Narayan (1995) argues, colonialism produces a lasting legacy of internalised inferiority, where colonised populations may come to accept their subordinate status as natural, undermining their capacity for political agency even after formal decolonisation.

Importantly, this essay does not deny that coercive or authoritarian power can exist in other political contexts such as dictatorships or oligarchies. However, the distinct element of colonialism lies in the foreignness of that power. It is not merely that power is exercised oppressively, but that it is exercised by an external entity with no cultural, religious, linguistic, or political ties to the governed population. The imposition of alien rule denies the possibility of reciprocal legitimacy (Stilz, 2015). For example, the Sykes-Picot Agreement, where colonial powers drew borders across the Middle East without regard for the social or historical context of the populations involved, illustrates how the consequences of such foreign legal imposition can be catastrophic and long-lasting (Barr, 2011). The laws and institutions established under colonial rule are designed not for the flourishing of the colonised, but for the strategic benefit and administrative convenience of the coloniser.

From a political theory standpoint, this matters deeply. The moral wrong of colonialism is not reducible to outcomes alone. Even where colonial rule results in infrastructure or legal codes that persist, it remains structurally illegitimate. The wrong of colonialism lies in the imposition of a political order without reciprocal justification, an order imposed by a foreign power with no moral entitlement to rule (Stilz, 2015). This is what makes colonialism uniquely immoral. It is not only the harms it causes, but the political structure that makes those harms inevitable. The assumption of power by a foreign entity over another people, for political and economic gain, is morally distinct from domestic forms of authoritarianism (Ypi, 2013). This framework also clarifies why many contingent harms such as racism, forced relocation, and economic exploitation are so prevalent in colonial contexts.

Political – Psychological Analysis

With the relevant literature now established, I now argue that these injustices are not incidental but predictable, systemic outcomes of a political order founded on domination without consent. Once a people are stripped of self-rule, they become structurally vulnerable to further violations. This vulnerability does not arise from poor governance alone but from the very architecture of colonial rule, which is designed to exclude the colonised from political agency (Moore, 2016). The political-psychological landscape that colonialism creates enables and justifies domination. It cultivates a mindset in which the coloniser believes they are entitled to act in defence of their own interests at any cost and to view the subjugation of the colonised as both natural and necessary (Moore, 2016). In this framework, coercion, paternalism, and violence are not abuses of the system but expressions of its underlying logic (Ypi, 2013). The coloniser internalises a political psychology that not only permits but demands the suppression of resistance, however legitimate that resistance may be (Butt, 2016).

The moral wrong of colonialism lies not in isolated acts of harm but in the unique political structure that systematically enables, rationalises, and perpetuates these harms. Unlike domestic injustices, which may occur within frameworks of shared identity or the potential for reform, colonialism denies such reciprocity from the outset (Stilz, 2015). It creates an inherently unequal and alien relationship where domination is both method and goal (Mamdani, 1996). This foundational denial of political legitimacy and self-determination makes colonialism uniquely immoral (Ypi, 2012). My contribution to the debate is the integration of a political psychology framework, which reveals how colonial structures shape the coloniser's mindset to sustain domination. This approach goes beyond

philosophical claims about justice by showing that the political-psychological mechanisms embedded in colonial rule make coercion and harm systemic rather than incidental. By connecting the structural imposition of foreign rule with psychological processes that justify ongoing domination, this framework fills a critical gap in current discourse.

Psychological research provides valuable insight into how individuals, even without originally malicious intent, become complicit in systems of domination. Milgram's obedience experiments (1963) demonstrated that ordinary people, when instructed by an authority figure, are willing to inflict harm if it is framed as legitimate - mirroring colonial dynamics where violence was justified by paternalistic ideologies of "civilisation" and "progress". Similarly, Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment (1971) revealed how those in power quickly adopt dehumanising behaviours, echoing how colonial hierarchies fostered moral distancing and cruelty. Social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) further explains how group hierarchies are sustained through "legitimising myths," such as racial superiority and cultural inferiority, embedded in colonial governance. Even so-called benevolent colonialism operated within fundamentally unequal and exclusionary structures, showing that injustice was not incidental but systemic.

What distinguishes colonialism is its alien nature. Unlike domestic authoritarianism, colonial rule is imposed by an external power with no historical, linguistic, cultural, or political ties to the governed. This externality makes colonialism a system where self-interest is foundational and accountability impossible. Colonisers, even in good faith, filter their perspective through their own norms and strategic interests, producing what might be called moral myopia - viewing domination as duty or

development. Over time, this entrenches perceptions of inferiority and dependency among the colonised, reinforcing inequality psychologically even without explicit violence (Moore, 2016; Ypi, 2013).

This holistic analysis challenges views, like Valentini's (2015), that colonialism's wrongness depends on contingent harms. Instead, the moral wrong is structural: colonial governance inevitably produces a political and psychological order of domination where coercion, exclusion, and paternalism are naturalised. While similar psychological dynamics may exist in domestic authoritarian regimes, colonialism's externality exacerbates the injustice by denying colonised people's recognition as political equals in their own land (Ypi, 2012). In this sense, colonialism's wrongness is not simply a function of how it governs but who governs and with what justification. The imposition of a foreign political structure that is indifferent or even hostile to the norms, identities, and aspirations of the governed is what sets colonialism apart. It transforms mechanisms of domination from unfortunate by-products into essential features of a system founded on conquest and control (Moore, 2016).

Conclusion

In conclusion, colonialism is inherently wrong because it is defined by a structure of political domination through alien rule. Denying self-determination, embeds cultural and legal hierarchies, legitimises the coloniser's interests over those of the colonised, and triggers psychological mechanisms that deepen injustice. While contingent injustices exacerbate the moral failings of colonial regimes, they are not necessary to establish its wrongness. The very act of imposing foreign rule, regardless of intention or outcome, violates political and moral equality.

Importantly, although psychological mechanisms of domination such as obedience to authority or internalised subordination can occur within national or authoritarian systems, their moral significance is qualitatively different in the colonial context. What makes colonialism uniquely immoral is not only the presence of these dynamics but that they are imposed by a foreign power with no organic political or cultural connection to the governed. The alien nature of colonial rule strips people of the ability to shape their own institutions, laws, and identities, replacing them with a structure designed for the coloniser's benefit. This foreign imposition compounds the injustice, transforming otherwise general mechanisms of oppression into an enduring system of domination that systematically denies recognition, autonomy, and collective dignity. Future theoretical work should further investigate how this foundational wrong informs contemporary debates on sovereignty, citizenship, and postcolonial justice.

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U.S. Sanctions on Cuba: Recognising the Genocidal Potential of Economic Warfare

Nathan Bird, 3rd Year Essay

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Abstract

This dissertation examines whether U.S. economic sanctions on Cuba can be considered genocidal under both international law and broader theoretical frameworks of structural genocide. Challenging the narrow, intent-focused definition of genocide codified in the 1948 UN Convention, the study argues for an expanded understanding that incorporates colonial and imperialist dynamics. Drawing on historical and contemporary scholarship, it demonstrates how economic sanctions can function as instruments of structural genocide by deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to destroy a national group, in whole or in part. The analysis traces the evolution of U.S. sanctions against Cuba since 1960, highlighting their punitive design, catastrophic humanitarian consequences, and explicit intent to destabilize the Cuban government through mass immiseration. By contextualizing these sanctions within the history of U.S. imperialism and settler colonialism, this dissertation reveals their alignment with the logic of elimination inherent in structural genocide.

Evidence includes U.S. officials' admissions of leveraging starvation and deprivation to incite regime change, the sanctions' disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations, and their systemic

denial of essential resources like food, medicine, and supplies crucial for civilian infrastructure. Ultimately, the study concludes that U.S. sanctions on Cuba meet both the legal criteria of genocide under the UN Convention (Article II(c)) and the broader theoretical model of structural genocide, as they reflect a deliberate, historically rooted strategy of subjugation through economic warfare. The findings underscore the urgency of redefining genocide to address the violence embedded in modern imperialist policies.

Introduction

The question of whether economic sanctions can constitute genocide remains fiercely contested in international law, political theory, and genocide studies. This dissertation challenges the limitations of conventional genocide scholarship by interrogating the genocidal potential of U.S. economic sanctions against Cuba. I argue that the sanctions regime exemplifies *structural genocide*: a form of mass violence embedded in colonial and imperialist systems.

Mainstream perspectives and definitions fail to recognise the full scope of genocide. The focus on intent being observable through specific expressions of hatred is an ahistorical requirement which presents genocide as an innately irrational act. This dissertation contends that intent must be inferred from the *design, consequences* and *political context* of policy. This is supported through a (re-)examination of the Holocaust, addressing its colonial origins and other underlying political motivations outside of racial hatred.

This dissertation then analyses the two areas which contextualise the U.S. embargo on Cuba. The first is U.S colonialism and imperialism history and its relation to structural genocide. America's

position as a global hegemon and its imperial and colonial legacies indicates the adoption of eliminatory dynamics into its policy (Smith 2023; Morley 1988; Parenti 1998). The second is the nature and utilisations of sanctions and their capacity to be a genocidal tool. By restricting access to food, medicine, fuel, spare parts and raw materials, comprehensive sanctions disproportionately target civilians, inflicting conditions of life designed to erode a population's physical and social fabric. The instrumentalization of civilian suffering unsurprisingly led to accusation that they are siege warfare (Gordon 1999: Simons 1999) and demonstrate their genocidal capacity (Basharat 2001).

Together these points reveal that the American embargo on Cuba demonstrates the genocidal capacity of sanctions under both traditional and critical perspectives. Cuba's experience of U.S. sanctions is marked by mass starvation, preventable diseases outbreaks and systemic immigration. Legal scholars and professionals have recently argued that the sanctions defy the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Lopez and Friedman 2023). This dissertation supports that claim but also advocates for a broader definition that does not require explicit hatred as a condition for genocide. America's imperial history, the design and consequences of sanction and statements from U.S. officials clearly demonstrate the intent to destroy the people of Cuba through an unprecedented, unilateral and deadly embargo.

Methodology

This dissertation draws primarily on secondary sources, including scholarly books and peer-reviewed articles. Primary sources such as medical journal articles and epidemiological studies are incorporated to assess the sanctions' health impacts, providing empirical evidence of their destructive effects on Cuba's population. Other primary sources, such as legal and government documents, are used. Cuba serves as the focal case study due to the unresolved scholarly debate surrounding the genocidal nature of U.S. sanctions against the island. The methodology combines historical analysis, legal interpretation, and critical theory to interrogate how economic sanctions function as instruments of structural violence, with Cuba's experience providing a compelling case of how modern imperial powers may pursue genocidal policies through economic rather than purely military means.

Genocide Studies

"Traditional Definitions and Conceptualisations of Genocide"

Genocide has remained a contested term since its inception. Genocide scholarship emerged during World War Two, founded by the Polish lawyer Rapheal Lemkin. After observing the atrocities the Holocaust, Lemkin coined the term 'genocide' to represent the egregious actions of the Nazi regime. The severity and immorality of the act required a separate and exclusive category to make it distinct from other crimes against humanity (Wald 2007). Since the term's inception, the Holocaust has remained the dominant conceptual prototype in genocide studies (Zimmerer 2012; Spencer 2013; Benventuo *et al* 2007; Basharat 2001; Bloxham and Moses 2010). In the 1980s and 1990s, this became further entrenched as American social scientists developed the uniqueness thesis (Benventuo *et al* 2007). This presented the Holocaust as the most significant, if only, case of

genocide (Katz 1994; Bauer 2001; Sémelin 2005). Subsequently, the most popular definitions and perceptions of genocide have centred around its specifics. The definition that exists in the public zeitgeist reflects this, as envisions genocide as the hate filled total annihilation of a people through systematic mass extermination (Basharat 2001; Wald 2007; Schaller and Zimmerer 2008). This has contributed to the stringent and selective use of the term in both academia and legal definitions (Douglas *et al* 2007; Gordon 2010; Wald 2007). According to certain scholars and legal experts, the defining feature of genocide, as opposed to other crimes against humanity, is the *intent* to destroy a certain group (Gordon 2010; Douglas *et al* 2007; Wald 2007). Genocide requires a mental competent or *mens rea* to have guilt, wrongful purpose or criminal intent (Douglas *et al* 2007). This has been codified in the most popular document on the topic (Zimmerer 2012), the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948. Genocide is defined as any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such:

a. Killing members of the group;

b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole in or in part;

d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

(UN 1948, emphasis added).

With these conditions, alongside popular perception, the application of the term genocide has remained limited.

The other most prominent examples of genocide have been the Ottoman's extermination of a million Armenian people in 1915 (Schaller and Zimmerer 2008) and the persecution of the Tutsi ethnic group in Rwanda in the 1990s (Basharat 2001; Power 1999). These other examples also reflect on a specific element of the mens rea of genocide. The Holocaust, the Armenian and Rwanda genocides had an explicit racial hatred as the driving force behind the persecution. This had led to racial hatred being established as the primary qualifier for genocide, requiring it as the sole reason behind the action (Gordon 2010; Basharat 2001). Therefore, these narrow specifications severely limit the applicability of the genocide. This can be seen in the legal rulings of certain cases. For example, Bosnia claimed Serbia had committed genocide against its people through the surrounding and bombing of civilian areas and severing of supplies to starve the population. The International Court of Justice ruled against the claim, citing the existence of other motives outside the sole intent to destroy (Gordon 2010). Proponents of its stringent use argue that this constrained definition is necessary to prevent the dissolution of the meaning of genocide and preserve the terms for the most egregious acts (Basharat 2001; Wald 2007). Maintaining this stringency prevents the victims of genocide from being disrespected (Zimmerer 2012; Basharat 2001).

"A New Approach to Genocide Studies"

This narrow definition of genocide has increasingly faced criticism from contemporary genocide scholars. The exclusivity allows the perpetrators of atrocities to avoid responsibility for genocide by using justifications other than racial or group hatred (Basharat 2001; Gordon 2010).

Judge Patricia Wald (2006), who served on the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia recognised the insufficiency of this strict requirement for intent. The requirement for specific intent means that international law cannot prosecute "genocidal murderers in general, but only tactically inept ones, who make stupid blunders in their public proclamations" (Gordon 2010, p. 227). Therefore, scholars of genocide have redeveloped definitions to be more inclusive (Basharat 2001; Benventuo *et al* 2007; Bloxham and Moses 2010). This reconceptualization has sought to understand how genocide exists in the broader historical frameworks of colonialism and imperialism (Spencer 2013; Zimmerer 2012; Sartre 1968).

In recent years, scholars of genocide studies have increasingly recognised the relevance of colonialism in understanding the perpetration of genocide. Colonialism is a process where settlers or administrations form a colony outside of the boundaries of their own country. These administrations begin to expand and expropriate indigenous land (Moore 2017; Spencer 2013; Wolfe 2006; Beckert 2015), which allowed for the primitive accumulation of capital and the subsequent development of capitalism (Liboiron 2017). Capitalism's colonial origins entrenched a global system of extraction, which would develop into imperialism (Grosfoguel 2002; Emmanuel 1974; Amin 1978).

To ensure unrestricted access to land, colonialism contains an elimination dynamic (Whitt and Clarke 2019; Wolfe 2006). In certain circumstances, it is advantageous for the colonial project to liquidate the indigenous population. This eliminatory dynamic can manifest in genocide (Spencer 2013; Whitt and Clarke 2019; Wolfe 2006). An example includes the treatment of Aboriginals in Australia. Historian Patrick Wolfe refers to the specific cases of colonial violence as "structural genocide" (2006, p. 403). This is not to say that all genocides can be attributed to structural genocide,

or that all colonial projects are inherently genocidal (Dougles *et al* 2007). For example, the genocide committed by the Khmer Rouge cannot be attributed to this process and South Africa did not commit genocide due to the necessity of indigenous labour (Wolfe 2006).

The genocide and mass death that accompanies the violent process of extraction and exploitation required colonial governments, administrations and settlers to construct a framework to justify this. This was achieved through the creation of a 'Humanity' that was racialised and exclusive (Moore 2017). Colonial powers constructed spaces of living death to impose and defend the ideas of 'Humanity' and 'civilisation' (Mbembé and Meinjtes 2003). Capitalism's development was reliant on these racialised concepts to justify the exploitation and systemic violence (Bhattacharyya 2018).

Explicit racialised justifications in the enactment of structural genocide have diminished as colonialism evolved into imperialism. The U.S. driven sanctions regime on Iraq displays this. In explaining the sanctions on Iraq, George Basharat labels them as "racially conditioned" as opposed to "racially impelled" (2001, p. 388), meaning that that discrimination informed and maintained the policy but did not cause it. The sanctions imposed on Iraq during the 1990s are considered to be genocidal by many scholars (Douglas *et al* 2007; George 2010; Basharat 2001; Bossuyt 2000). The enactment and permittance of this genocide from both the international community and the Western public occurred due to structural inequalities in world politics (Douglas *et al* 2007; Basharat 2001). These inequalities follow racialised lines, but race is not *fundamental* in the implementation of destructive capitalist or imperialist policy (Bhattacharyya 2018). Structural genocide could not feasibly be directed towards contemporary white European countries, due to "racial, national, and

cultural affinity at both elite and popular levels" (Basharat 2001, p. 388). While racial concepts are significant to understand structural genocide in certain examples, they are not necessarily required to conclude genocide. This is because global inequalities in world politics are the primary reasons behind the enactment of structural genocide.

"Re-examining the Holocaust: Recognising Colonial Relations"

The expanding scholarship on structural genocide challenges the narrow definition presented by mainstream academics. By focusing predominantly on the Holocaust, liberal scholars have often failed account the systematic issues that underpin certain examples of genocide (Spencer 2013). The requirement for intent under the UN Convention does not suitably incorporate structural genocide caused by colonialism and imperialism. This has led to ambiguity over the application of genocide, with scholars disagreeing over certain cases. For example, certain scholars have not recognised the colonial genocide of the Indigenous North Americans, instead labelling it "ethnocide" or "cultural genocide" (Benventuo *et al* 2007, p. 10). Mainstream perspectives and definitions of genocide, such as the UN Convention, originate from a liberal analysis of the Holocaust. Subsequently, the liberal perspective developed a definition which is focus on intent, observable through evidence of explicit racial hatred. However, colonial analysis of the Holocaust reveals that its uniqueness is ahistorical, and that structural genocide can be appropriately applied to it. Therefore, the contemporary narrow definitions lack legitimacy and must be expanded to include genocides which occurred under colonialism and imperialism.

Jürgen Zimmerer (2012) supports this argument by directly addressing the relationship between European colonialism and the Nazi Holocaust. Before the mass extermination of the Jews

and other racialised and dehumanised groups during the Third Reich, the German imperialists in West Africa had conducted a genocide of the Hereros (Spencer 2013; Gewald 2003). The German Empire enacted a project of settler colonialism in Namibia (formerly German South West Africa). Their occupation eventually resulted in 'war' from 1904 to 1908. However, the nature of war in a colonial context is inherent inequal due to the military advantages of the coloniser and therefore contains the logic of genocide (Douglas *et al* 2009). This is observable in the excessive violence and systematic persecution of the Herero. German soldiers and settlers enacted a campaign of mass execution, starvation and rape against the Herero and Nama people (Gewald 2003). By its end, at least 80% of the Herero and 50% of the Nama had been murdered (Drechsler 1980). Those that survived remained in concentration camps as forced labourers, working on state projects (Gewald 1999). The justification for this expansion, domination and ruling remains consistent with the racialised and dehumanising view of its indigenous inhabitants by colonial and imperialist projects.

The Nazi policy of Lebensraum contained this colonial logic. Racist ideology presented the inhabitants of Eastern Europe as primal, uncivilised and backward (Zimmerer 2012). This reflects on the colonial aspect of Nazi policy as it applied racist ideology that had been constructed in its Empire to justify its expansion Eastward. Indeed, the slogan "Volk without space" emerged in Germany's African colonies and then was applied to Eastern Europe (Zimmerer 2012). The reference to space is significant, as alongside race, they form the core two elements ideology of settler colonialism (Zimmerer 2012; Moore 2016; Spencer 2013). The racialisation and elimination of Jews and Eastern Europeans by the Nazis mirrors the empire building tactics of Germany. The parallels between colonialism and Nazi policy exhibit the structural elements of the Holocaust.

The adequacy of the contemporary definition is compounded further as the Holocaust contained motivations other than racial hatred, such as economic incentives. To ensure the supply of food the German Army in occupied terrorises in Eastern Europe, the consumption of the local population was lowered through elimination to allow for a surplus (Zimmerer 2012). Additionally, the racial dehumanisation of the Jewish people came in tandem with the political justification to the entire Nazi imperialist project. The Nazi political conscious perceived Jewish people as manipulating foreign governments, especially the Soviet Union, and preventing Germany from creating its Empire (Spencer 2013). Therefore, the systemic liquidation of Jews in Eastern Europe existed to serve the empire building goals of German imperialists. Liberal scholars have failed to account this element of the Holocaust and have subsequently mythologised genocide as irrational (Schaller and Zimmerer 2008; Spencer 2013). Racial hatred is not an irrational position as colonialism and imperialism incentives it to justify their brutality. Racial hatred is unquestionably a part of Nazi ideology, but it alone cannot explain the full story of the Holocaust. Colonialism creates the conditions in which the indigenous inhabitants of a land are categorised as sub-human as a justification for their both their exploitation and elimination. Consequently, the use of genocide exists within this colonial and imperialist logic. The Nazi Holocaust is a continuation of the same colonial logic that underpinned the German Empire's genocide of the Herero people, demonstrating the relevance of structural genocide. Understanding the colonial origins of genocide is necessary as it contextualises the genocidal qualities of past and contemporary imperialist policy.

"Re-examining the Holocaust: The Evolution of Genocide"

While the Holocaust contained the genocidal dynamics seen in colonial policy, it also represented its modernisation. Hannah Arendt was a German-born, Jewish philosopher who

covered the trial of former SS member Adolph Eichmann on behalf of *The New Yorker* in 1961. She understood the colonial elements that underpinned the Holocaust and how its implementation reflected the evolution of structural genocide. Eichmann was a high-ranking Nazi official who oversaw the deportation of Jews and others in death camps. Despite Arendt and the court expecting a "wide-eyed, anti-Semite", Eichmann appeared normal and declared he had no allegiance to Nazi ideology, nor a hatred of Jewish people (Caswell 2010, p. 3). Before the trial, six psychiatrists had examined him and declared his mental state to be normal (Breton and Wintrobe 1986). In court, Eichmann presented himself as not only ordinary but feeble, scared at the sight of a drop of blood. Arendt, drawing from Karl Marx's theory of alienation, then developed the theory of the banality of evil (Caswell 2010). Arendt argued that Eichmann represented a new type of evil in modernity, "office drudges" that were murderous technocrat criminals (1979, p. 57). Karl Marx wrote that modern industry "convert[s] the workman into a living appendage of the machine" (1995, p. 412). Arendt expanded on this and referred to Nazi officials as 'cogs', which represented how bureaucracy has alienated ordinary people. This results in the systemic dehumanisation of the both the victim and the perpetrator, which allows supposedly 'normal' individuals like Eichmann to commit systemic mass murder in a bureaucratic setting. Accordingly, presenting all perpetrators of genocide as bloody thirsty monsters is mischaracterisation.

Capitalism and modern bureaucracy can transform people into apathetic criminals, reliant on their thoughtlessness and detachment to continue their complicity in genocide. Her analysis of the bureaucratisation of evil is valuable to genocide studies, as it reveals that explicit and zealous racial hatred is not fundamental in enacting genocide. This is by no means to argue that racial hatred was

not immensely significant in the example of the Holocaust. The Nazi ideology was specifically insidious and inventive on the topic of race and emphasised racial hierarchy profusely (Spencer 2013). Nonetheless, the bureaucratic implementation of genocide by the regime was not reliant on the vitriolic racial hatred. Instead, as Arendt points out, alienation allowed for some of those administering over the system mass murder of undesirable groups to act apathetically instead of zealously.

Arendt's theory of the banality of evil exposes the issues with narrow definition of genocide. The assumption that an explicitly zealous racial or group hatred is necessary to enact genocide is false, as the bureaucratic administration that enacts mass death can do so without it. Racial discrimination is undoubtedly involved in the process, but only to a certain extent. As Basharat puts it: "it is likely that all or most acts of genocide are accompanied by a varying admixture of motives, in which the racial motive may be greater or lesser, depending on the circumstances." (2001, p. 418). While the example of the Holocaust has explicit racial hatred, its implementation was not wholly reliant on it. Arendt herself recognises the flaws with mainstream perspective of genocide, stating in her report that:

> For the concept of genocide, introduced explicitly to cover a crime unknown before, ... is not fully adequate, for the simple reason that massacres of whole peoples are not unprecedented. ... the centuries of colonization and imperialism provide plenty of examples of more or less successful attempts of that sort... (1979, p. 288).

"My Argument"

I will argue that the both the definition and perspective on genocide need to be expanded. The contemporary position is inadequate as its requirements are too limited, leading the exclusion of cases of structural genocide. Understanding how colonialism and imperialism employs a logic of elimination is crucial to addressing and stopping genocide. To ignore or oppose this risks the continuation of such acts today as well as disrespecting the unrecognised victims of those that have experienced the brutality of genocidal regimes. The requirement for intent must be reapproached to recognise structural genocide. This is a difficult task to for any scholar, as there are no set guidelines for evidence gathering (Selmi 1997). Scholars of colonialism, imperialism and genocide have suggested that wider discussion is necessary but have not provided a concrete definition (Spencer 2013; Schaller and Zimmerer 2008; Wolfe 2006; Sartre 1968). Instead, deducing genocide must come from historical analysis which follow the dynamics of imperial conquests (Spencer 2013; Wolfe 2006; Sartre 1968). Acts of genocide occur in historical specific contexts (Sémelin 2005), but by recognising the structural element of genocides that are associated with colonialism and imperialism a conclusion can be made. Specifically, this dissertation strives to conclude if U.S. economic sanctions on Cuba can be considered *genocidal*, not if they have resulted in genocide. This means the analysis will focus on intent behind the legislation and political context. This can be inferred in a several ways: details and nature of the sanctions; consequences of the sanctions; excerpts from U.S. officials; the U.S.'s imperial interests and the historical presence of structural genocide within U.S. domestic and foreign policy.

The United States, Imperialism and Genocide

After World War Two, the United States vehemently proclaimed its abhorrence with genocide. Shocked by the crimes of the Holocaust, American lawyers wrote the first draft of an International Convention to stop further genocides, and American representatives in the UN spoke passionately about prevention (Power 1999). In 1949, President Truman energetically encouraged U.S. Senators to ratify the Convention as it presented America as a free and democratic country that stood against genocide (Truman 1964). Despite the eager post-war calls for genocide prevention, it took 40 years for the Convention to be ratified, and the document was stripped of any opportunity to for other bodies to hold the U.S. accountable for genocide (Power 1999). Despite official U.S. rhetoric, the country has not made any sacrifices to inhibit mass atrocities or genocides (Power 1999). This is for a simple reason; the United States perpetrates mass death on an exceptional scale for the benefit of American capitalists and imperialists (Smith 2023; Parenti 1998). To pass meaningful genocide prevention legislation would directly counter the interests of American imperialists. The perception of America as country against genocide exists in rhetoric only.

David Smith (2023), in his book *Endless Holocausts: Mass Death in the History of the United States* attests to this and argues that the so-called "American empire", though a contested conceptualisation, is responsible for the deaths of 300 million people. While this figure is exceptionally difficult to verify, this staggeringly high number reflects that America is has internalised the logic of structural genocide into its fabric of the nation. The beginnings of this relation can be traced to its settler colonial origins.

The founding of the United States of America as a sovereign nation occurred in during the British colonisation of the continent. America assumed the logic of settler colonialism from the British and began the process of expansion westward. Matching other colonial entities, this

expansion was reliant on the concepts of space and race (Zimmerer 2012). The doctrine of Manifest Destiny was genocidal in nature as it relied on the racial dehumanisation and extermination of the indigenous Americans, perceiving them as heathens or rodents (Zimmerer 2012). This shows that since its conception, structural genocide has been present in American policy. This remains relevant as its colonial legacy evolved into imperialism. Similar to colonialism, imperialism is the domination of one country over another through political, economic, or military control. Unlike colonialism, it does not always require direct territorial occupation and can operate through indirect influence, coercion, or economic exploitation.

One example of U.S. imperial structural violence is the country's war against the Vietnamese Communists (Sartre 1968; Marciano 2016). Due to the imbalance of military force between advanced imperialist states and less-developed states, the nature of conflict can become structurally genocidal (Douglas *et al.* 2007). This has been applied to the Vietnam War, as the U.S. possessed advanced military technologies, while North Vietnam relied on guerrilla tactics (Sartre 1968). In its efforts to suppress Vietnamese resistance, the U.S. employed overwhelming force and tactics that disproportionately affected civilians (Douglas *et al.* 2007). On the ground, racialised ideologies emerged to justify this brutality. Rather than being seen as liberators, U.S. forces were increasingly perceived as occupiers by the Vietnamese (Sartre 1968). Confronted with this contradiction, many U.S. soldiers conflated Vietnamese identity with Communist insurgency, justifying generalised attacks. Sartre concluded that this matched the sentiment in Hitler's declarations on Jewish people: "He killed the Jews because they were Jews. The armed forces of the United States torture and kill men, women and children in Vietnam *because they are Vietnamese*." (1968, emphasis in original).

Some scholars argue that this ideological framing contributed to indiscriminate violence against civilians, especially in rural areas, and reveal how dehumanisation and structural power imbalances shaped the conflict's conduct.

This reflects the process of dehumanisation of a people that accompanies imperialist endeavours. Additionally, Starte (1967) reflected on the modernisation and premeditation of genocide in the Vietnam war, as it required organisations and budgets to conduct. This aligns with Arendt's theory of the banality of evil, which reveals how genocide is bureaucratised and modernised in an imperialist context.

Noting on American imperialism and genocide is necessary for two reasons. Firstly, it reflects on the evolution of U.S. colonial policy into imperial policy. No longer are direct colonial administration necessary, as foreign policy tools like military inventions, diplomatic pressure or debt trapping are used to exercise political and economy hegemony. This is supported by the numerous examples of U.S. imperialism. There are many instances of military interventions in Latin America, where U.S. military forces enacted coups against democratically elected and popular leaders to employ puppets who allowed for U.S.-friendly economic interests to dominate their country (Smith 2023). U.S. dominated institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank enforce and sustain economic subjugation on the global periphery in a manner which mirrors colonial-era extraction (Hickel *et al* 2021; Grosfoguel 2002; Hickel *et al* 2022). The progression of colonialism to imperialism shapes the way genocide is enacted. Imperialist and neocolonial war is one example in which structural genocide can occur. Secondly, it provides the necessary historical context for U.S. perpetration of genocide. America's relationship with colonialism and imperialism

reveals that the country incorporates structural genocide. These two reasons mean that the examination of it sanctions regime can be appropriately contextualised.

Economic Sanctions

Both theoretical and practical examinations of economic sanctions reveal their capacity to enact structural genocide. While imperialist wars have a more clear and direct relationship to genocide, I will argue that sanctions can be just as relevant in the enacting of imperial oriented structural genocide. Scholars of sanctions studies have produced a varying range of definitions for sanctions. These definitions have ranged from economic to sociological to goal-based use (Nossal 1989). This dissertation focuses on economic sanctions specifically and will not address sanctions on weapons. Therefore, I will define sanctions as intentional and specific policy of targeted economic restriction on country by another through limitations on trade.

"Ethical Issues with Sanctions"

Much theoretical discussion of sanctions has primarily focused on their morality and ethics. This dissertation does not seek to moralise the issue of sanctions and instead addresses their suitability in structural genocide. Nonetheless, the discussion of ethics of sanction can assist in understanding their genocidal nature. Before World War One, economic sanctions were understood to be a form of warfare, and they fell under the rules of war (Gordon 1999). However, the League of Nations pushed to reframe them to be peaceful alternative (Gordon 1999; Simons 1999). It was thought that instead of enacting a military campaign, an aggressor country could use sanctions as a less violent substitute (Daponte and Garfield 2000; Gordon 1999). However, the presentation of

sanctions as a more ethical and peaceful alternative to war is problematic. This is because sanctions do not discriminate between military and civilian populations (Peksen 2019; Gordon 1999). Sanctions can be considered as siege warfare, as they deprive whole nations of economic resources (Simons 1999; Gordon 1999). Unlike other strategies of war, siege warfare indiscriminately strangles a whole population, and civilians are more likely to be killed than combatants (Walzer 1977). This is deliberate decision, in which civilian suffering is the aim, instead of an unintended side effect (Gordon 1999). Therefore, like siege warfare, sanctions instrumentalise the suffering of innocents (Peksen 2019, Gordon 1999; Habibzadeh 2018).

To compound this further, sanctions impact the most vulnerable disproportionately (Barry 2000; Gordon 1999). Often sanctions result in limited access to food, clean water (Cortright and Lopez 2000; Weiss 1997; Gordon 2010; Basharat 2001) emergency medical services and medicine (Garfield 2002; Gibbens and Garfield 1999; Gordon 2010; Lamrani *et al* 2013), and fuels and other necessities (Schwab 1999; Gordon 1999; Daponte and Garfield 2000; Gordon 2010). The very old and young, the sick and the injured are most susceptible to this reduced access (Gordon 1999). Other groups, like women and minorities, bear the brunt of sanctions harder (Peksen 2019; Barry 2000).

This raises the question of whether the systemic deprivation caused by sanctions, particularly when applied comprehensively and with foreseeable humanitarian consequences, could align with broader understandings of genocidal harm, as defined by Lemkin. The ethical problems of targeting innocent civilians, as well as the disproportionate harm against the most vulnerable, reveal on the suitability of economic sanctions to be genocidal. If sanctions intend or result in the targeting of a national group through the deprivation of resources to both innocent and vulnerable citizens, they can be considered destructive. It is this element of targeted destruction which sanctions

can be understood as genocidal. Lemkin defined genocide as occurring in phases, in which the "the destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group" occurs (1944, p. 79). This can be applied to sanctions, as their systemic deprivation of resources affect the whole of a national population. Comprehensive economic sanctions have potential catastrophic effects on a nations' people. Data from sanctions studies reflect this, as sanctions negatively impact life expectancy and mortality (Mohamed and Shah 2000; Biersteker 2015; Gordon 2010; Daponte and Garfield 2000). Necessary civilian and medical infrastructure break down due to lack of access to spare parts and material supplies, resulting in people silently dying from disease (Habibzadeh 2018). Returning to the 1948 Convention, genocide is defined as "[an act] committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or part, a *national*, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such ... Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole in or in part" (UN 1948, emphasis added). This definition confirms that sanctions can be genocidal as they are deliberately intended to devastate a national group through economic warfare.

Despite the destructive element being a fundamental aspect of economic sanctions, the scholarship on sanctions and genocides remains political and contested. Some scholars remain unconvinced that economic sanctions can be considered genocidal (Gordon 2010; White 2019), while others adamantly conclude they can be (Basharat 2010; Douglas *et al* 2007; Bossuyt 2000; Simons 1999). Disagreement has revolved around the interpretation of the requirement for intent as state by the UN Convention. However, as mentioned in the previous section, popular legal definitions are for the most part unsuitable in addressing genocide. Without expanding the definition to included instances of colonial and imperial genocide, debate will continue. Resolution

of this debate cannot occur without a refreshed approach towards genocide, which includes anti-imperialist historical and political analysis.

"Sanctions as Punishment"

Sanctions are not a new tool foreign policy and have been used by states and groups of states since 400 B.C. (Simons 1999). In the past 100 years, there has been an increase in both the use and unilateral nature of sanctions (Losman 1998; Hufbauer *et al* 2009; Yotov *et al* 2020). This growth has continued, and sanctions remain a widely used tool to this day (Yotov *et al* 2020). Scholars of sanction have primarily focused on their efficacy as a defining feature (Hufbauer 1990; Yotov *et al* 2020; Biersteker 2015). Typically, sanctions are implemented with specific goal-oriented conditions designed to influence a state's behaviour, such as deterring military aggression or compelling compliance with human rights norms (Nossal 1989; Peksen 2019; Gordon 1999; Damrosch 1999; Lamrani *et al* 2013). However, real world applications of sanctions have consistently failed to produce their intended results, and economic sanctions are often seen as unsuccessful policy instruments (Yotov *et al* 2020; Lindsay 1986; Peksen 2019). Studies have routinely proven that sanctions have limited effectiveness, failing to reach their objective 60% to 95% of the time (Hufbauer *et al* 2009; Neuenkirch and Neumeier 2016; Peksen 2019; Drezner 2021). Despite sanctions being considered flawed and inconsistent by scholars, they have remained popular (Lindsay 1986; Neuenkirch and Neumeier 2016; Nossal 1989).

The contradiction between efficacy and utilisation implies that sanctions are used or remain in use due to alternative reasons. Some scholars have concluded that an additional qualifier must be included in the reasons why sanctions remain in use, that being as a punitive measure (Nossal 1989;

Gordon 1999). Including punishment as a reason behind the use of sanctions explains the inconsistency between their utilitarian justification and their results (Gordon 1999). If a state cannot achieve the desired goals from using sanctions but they remain in place, this can be seen as punishment for the targeted states behaviour. Some sanctions scholars have framed the decision to punish other states through a moralistic lens (Gordon 1999; Simons 1999). In their eyes, states deploy punitive sanctions on others if they can be considered "bad" or "rogue nations" (Gordon 1999, p. 139). For example, if a state commits human rights violations, punitive sanctions can be used to signal the deplorable nature of the ethical behaviour of that state by other states (Simons 1999). However, this moralistic approach obscures the political reality in which punitive sanctions are used. States use sanctions as punishment for punishment sakes, not out of obligation to any moral framework, but out of a desire for political repression (Weintraub 1982; Nossal 1989; Schwab 1999). States enact sanctions because of realpolitik and their desire to achieve certain goals (Nossal 1999; Weintraub 1982). If these goals are not met by the sanctions, then reason for their existence shifts to become punitive (Weintraub 1982).

"Genocidal Potential of Sanctions"

The capacity of sanctions to be implemented or continued for punitive reasons and the instrumentalization of civilian suffering reveals that they can be considered genocidal in certain instances. Evidence proves that sanctions result in death through deprivation. This means that if they are enacted for punitive reasons, the conclusion that they are designed for the destruction of a population is unavoidable. This means that economic sanctions can be considered genocidal.

The design of sanctions and historical use of sanctions confirm their genocidal potential. Sanctions are at their most effective when sender state has a larger economy than the targeted state. Large, diverse economies are practically immune to sanctions as they have the finances to pay for higher costs in the short run and can adapt their economy in the long run (Gordon 1999). Sanctions are only practical to nations with large economies or international alliances to be used against weak, small or unstable nations (Gordon 1999). This shows the nature of sanctions as an economic tool are disproportionately designed to be used by states with hegemonic political and economic power. This reflects on the imperial character of sanctions, because they leverage the economic dominance of powerful states to attempt to achieve concessions from weaker states. This is supported by the fact that most sanctions have been imposed against less developed countries (Dajani and Daoudi 1983). Indeed, in cases where sanctions were considered a success, the average sender's economy was 187 times bigger than the average target (Elliott 1995). This real-world asymmetrical element of sanctions reflects on its genocidal capacity. Comparing economic sanctions to the imperialist oriented structural genocide confirms this. The example of the Vietnamese war occurred in a context striking similar to that of most economic sanctions. A policy, war or sanctions, is used to attempt to achieve the political or economy goals of the aggressor country. Sanctions as economic warfare compounds this point further as it illuminates the destructive capacity of economic restrictions. This policy is conducted in an unbalanced manner, in which the targeted country has a comparative disadvantage, such a small and/or vulnerable economy or a less developed military in the case of Vietnam. The enactment of this policy begins to affect both military and civilian populations in a devastating way, costing human life on a national scale. Civilian causalities are subsumed into this process and themselves become intentional targets of destruction. Therefore, the use of sanctions in

certain context can be clearly comparable to the structural genocide enacted by imperialists powers. The real-world use of sanctions matches the framework of targeted civilian persecution for political goals seen in other structural genocides. It is not that all instances of sanctions can be considered genocidal, but that imperialist powers can use them to enact structural genocide.

U.S. Sanctions

One country has dominated in the utilisation of sanctions: the United States (Peksen 2019; Gordon 1999; Neuenkirch and Neumeier 2016; Hufbauer et al 2009; Losman 1998). In 2024, the U.S. was targeting one third of the worlds' nations with sanctions, with 60% of them being low-income nations (Washington Post 2024). The U.S. has presided over the largest and longest sanctions regimes and has also dictated the use of sanctions by international bodies like the United Nations Security Council (Simons 1999; Gordon 2010; Basharat 2001). The record of U.S. sanctions supports the previous assertions on the nature of the tool. A study from the Government Accountability Office found that the federal government lacked the awareness of the efficacy of U.S. sanctions (Drezner 2021). The Departments of Treasury, State and Commerce do not conduct "assessments of the effectiveness of sanctions in achieving broader foreign policy goals" (GAO 2019, p. 1). If American officials have no regular awareness of the success of their sanctions but use them frequently then utilitarian justifications are unsubstantial. The fact that these agencies lack routine measures to qualify the success of sanctions supports the perception that sanctions can be used as a punitive measure. The international community (UNHRC 2014; Frank *et al* 1997) and sanctions scholars (Nossal 1989; Gordon 1999; Basharat 2001; Biersteker 2015; Peksen 2019) have long known the civilian cost of sanctions, but this has not impacted American's continual use of the tool.

This clearly displays that the Washington's continual and frequent use of sanctions occurs in a context in which the pursuit of U.S. interests results in the elimination and immiseration of human lives. America's position as an imperial power and their utilisation of sanctions despite the human cost reflect on the capacity of their economic sanctions to subsume the logic of structural genocide. Theoretical discussion of American policy suggests the capacity of sanctions to be considered as genocidal. However, only real-world analysis can substantiate this claim. Analysis of American sanctions on Cuba will clearly demonstrate the imperial and genocidal logic which underpin American sanctions.

The Case of Cuba

"Colonial Relations to Cuba"

The United States attitude towards Cuba has followed colonial dynamics since its early inception. This started in 1783 with John Adams, the second president of the U.S., who stated that Cuba was a natural extension of America (Schwab 1999). This claim has been asserted for centuries and still characterises contemporary American foreign policy (Lamrani *et al* 2013; Yaffe 2020; Schwab 1999). The U.S. used the 1823 Monroe Doctrine, which defines the Americas as crucial to the security interests of the U.S. and stakes dominion over them, alongside the concept of Manifest Destiny to justify involvement in the region (Smith 2023; Yaffe 2020; Yaffe 2022; Schwab 1999). As expressed in the previous section, Manifest Destiny was a genocidal and colonial doctrine. The importation of this colonial logic provides the foundation for the belief that American foreign policy in Cuba in genocidal. The U.S. undertook operations to assert their domination over Cuba, beginning in 1898 with a military occupation that lasted 4 years (Yaffe 2022; Schwab 1999; Smith

2023). Cuba became a U.S. protectorate state for decades (Lamrani *et al* 2013; Smith 2023), with the mafia running the country throughout the late 1930s and 1940s (Schwab 1999). After 1952, Fulgencio Batista used a military coup to seize power, the U.S. government and corporate investors began to control almost all the entire economy of the island (Schwab 1999).

"The First Phase of Sanctions"

In 1959, the Batista regime was overthrown by communist revolutionaries and a socialist state was establishment (Askari *et al* 2003). In the months after their ascension to power, the Cuban government nationalised U.S.-owned petroleum processing facilities and agricultural lands (Askari *et al* 2003; Schwab 1999; Lamrani *et al* 2013). This was an unacceptable outcome for American imperialists and the Cuban elite. The wealthy Cubans who were beneficiaries of the Batista regime had been dispossessed by the new communist administration and fled to America. These Cuban elites, alongside anti-communist American officials, supported imperialist policy against the new Castro-led Cuban administration (Schwab 1999). In 1960, Assistant Secretary of State Roy R. Rubottom Jr expressed in the plan to replace Castro by "covertly supporting the build-up of anti-Castro elements ... as to bring about his downfall. ... This would be the most desirable end to the Castro menace, assuming that he is replaced by elements friendly to the U.S." (1991, pp. 955-956). This shows the perspective of American officials, willing to enact regime change to secure U.S. imperial interests.

From the 1960 onwards, the U.S. began to construct the long and most comprehensive of unilateral sanctions regime seen in modern history (Yaffe 2022; Lamrani *et al* 2013; GAO 2007). This started in 1960, with President Eisenhower imposing sanctions, blocking U.S. exports to Cuba,

except for unsubsidized foodstuffs and medical supplies (Askari *et al* 2003). American oil companies were forced to stop their deliveries to the island, as well as any refining (Lamrani *et al* 2013). In 1961, the U.S. severed diplomatic relations (Lamrani *et al* 2013; Yaffe 2022) and launched the Bay of Pigs invasion a few months later, which was defeated swiftly by the Cuban military (Schwab 1999). By 1962, a total embargo had been placed on the country, banning both international aid as well as the export of certain drugs and food products (Yaffe 2022; Lamrani *et al* 2013). Additionally, the U.S. used their §Cuba (Lamrani *et al* 2013). For example, Haiti was given economic assistance to vote to expel Cuba from the Organisation of American States and impose their own embargo (Weintraub 1982). Under Lydon B. Johnson, the U.S. Commerce Department instituted a comprehensive ban on *all* medical supplies and medicines in 1964 (Schwab 1999).

Referring to this period, Donald Losman states "In short, successful denial of critical imported inputs in tantamount to pinpoint bombing" (1998, p. 38). Other scholars corroborate this, seeing these sanctions as warfare, just without the visual element of military invasion (Schwab 1999; Yaffe 2020). These measures were immensely destructive to Cuba's infrastructure, crippling it almost entirely (Losman 1998; Schwab 1999; Yaffe 2022; Pérez 1995; Lamrani *et al* 2013). As a response, Cuba underwent a decade of economic adjustment and rationing to attempt to protect its economy and people (Garfield and Santana 1997; Lamrani *et al* 2013; Losman 1998). As Cuba has limited natural resources, it must depend on other countries (Askari *et al* 2003). With the U.S. no longer available, Havana began to rely on its European political counterpart, the Soviet Union. The U.S.S.R. provided a lifeline for Cuba, easing the impacts of the sanctions (Gordon 2010; Drezner 2021; Yaffe 2022).

"The Second Phase of Sanctions"

Between 1989 and 1991, Soviet subsidized trade ended as the socialist blocked dissolved, severely impacting the Cuban economy (Askari *et al* 2003; Yaffe 2022). In this period, Cuba lost 87% of its trade and investment, with a third of its GDP disappearing (Yaffe 2022). Oil imports fell drastically, from 13.3 million tons in 1989 to 4 million tons in 1993 (Schwab 1999). Cuba was devastated and isolated, both politically and economically.

U.S. officials saw an opportunity to achieve their colonial goals and imposed an additional series of sanctions measures, increasing the severity of the embargo. In 1992, under President George Bush, the Cuban Democracy Act (CDA) was passed (Yaffe 2022; Lamrani *et al* 2013; Schwab 1999; Kaplowitz 1998) Otherwise known as the Torricelli Act, as it was introduced and sponsored by U.S. Congressman Robert Torricelli (Yaffe 2022; Schwab 1999). The CDA blocks U.S. subsidiaries from initiating trade with Cuba and included punishment for countries that provided aid to the island (Lamrani *et al* 2013; Yaffe 2022). Additionally, any foreign ship which traded freight in Cuban ports is barred from U.S. ports for 6 months (Yaffe 2022; Schwab 1999). Family remittances, a lifeline for many families living in Cuba, were restricted (Askari *et al* 2003; Yaffe 2020; Yaffe 2022). In Article 1705 of the CDA, millions in funding are allocated for internal opposition for those demanding regime change in Cuba (Lamrani *et al* 2013). In 1996, during the Clinton administration, the Helm-Burton act was instituted (Losman 1998; Schwab 1999; Yaffe 2022). This act imposes sanctions on third countries which trade with Cuba, granting the U.S. permission to fine, prevent and prosecute foreign companies that operate in Cuba under certain circumstances (Schwab 1999; Lamrani *et al* 2013). The act extends sanctions to effectively function as a blockade (Yaffe 2022), breaking international law for its extraterritorial and ensuring that Cuban struggle to access essential goods

(Lamrani *et al* 2013). Cumulatively, these acts form a complex legal web of policy, which is almost impossible to navigate (Yaffe 2022).

"Characterising U.S. Sanctions"

The goals of these sanctions are clear; to besiege Cuba with economic warfare and replace the communist administration with one friendly to U.S. economic interests. U.S. officials are aware of the destructive potential of sanctions and seek to use them to achieve their goals of regime change. Torricelli himself boasted about this, stating in 1992 that the CDA would "wreak havoc on that island" (Franklin 1994, p. 30), concluding that it would be weeks before the regime collapsed (Lamrani *et al* 2013). However, a quote from the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, James Mallory, in 1960 illustrates the lengths to which the United States was prepared to achieve its goals:

> The majority of Cubans support Castro. . . . The only foreseeable means of alienating internal support is through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship. . . . every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba . . . a line of action which . . . makes the greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, *to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government*. (1991, p. 885, emphasis added).

This remains the primary underlining reason for the existence of U.S. sanctions on Cuba to this day. This is most evident in the 1990s, when Cuba was especially vulnerable. Across the period of 1989 to 1993, the import of foodstuffs dropped by half, with the availability of proteins and calories dropped by 25% and 18% respectively (Garfield and Santana 1997). Caloric intake was

reduced by 33%, from 2,800 per day to 1,863 across the same period (Schwab 1999) This continued into the late 1990s (UNDP 2000). Peter Schwab, who visited the island around this time, put it simply: "Food disappeared" (1999, p. 84). Sanctions had blocked both direct food imports, fuel and spare parts, directly hampering the countries capacity to feed itself. Domestic food production fell by 34% from 1985 to 1995, exacerbated by the lack of pesticides and fertilisers as account of the embargo (Schwab 1999). The CDA led to the abrupt ending of many long-term food supplies to Cuba, leading to a heightened struggle to negotiate or find new suppliers (Frank *et al* 1997). The middle class in Cuba collapsed as professionals and students were pushed into the service industry (Schwab 1999). Mothers and daughters were forced into prostitution to make ends meet (Schwab 1999). With the lack of fuel, spare parts and raw materials, Cubans struggled to maintain water treatment plants and coverage of chlorinated water plummeted from 98% in 1988 to 26% in 1994 (Garfield and Santana 1997), leading to outbreaks of diseases (Barry 2000). Other areas of essential human needs, such as housing and medical supplies, faced drastic shortages, leading to poor sanitary conditions (Askari *et al* 2003; Garfield and Santana 1997). The result was an increase in mortality, which was mostly attributed to the older population and young children. Deaths from diseases, suicide and injuries increased rose by at least 10% in from 1992 to 1993 alone, due to the combination of the malnutrition, poor sanitation and housing condition (Garfield and Santana 1997). Maternal mortality increased due to untreated infections, lack of nutrition and shortages in parts for transportation and electricity during emergencies deliveries (Garfield and Santana 1997).

Despite the unfavourable situation, Cuba avoided mass death. The government had previous experience in rationing from the earlier stages of the embargo, so its reintroduction was

effective (Garfield and Santana 1997). The vulnerable were prioritised, and women, the elderly and children got increased access to food, clothing and other scare goods (Lamrani *et al* 2013; Garfield and Santana 1997). The Cuban medical system maintained high quality care to the best of its abilities. Sanctions devastated Havana's access to medicine and medical technologies (Barry 2000; Yaffe 2020). There are many examples of this due to the dominance of American made supplies, as the blockade limited access to essential chemotherapy drugs, AIDS medications, insulin, cancer related X-ray equipment (Schwab 1999; Yaffe 2020; Yaffe 2022; Barry 2000). In spite of this, a humanitarian catastrophe was averted due to the robustness of the Cuba state and health service (Frank *et al* 1997; Lamrani *et al* 2013; Barry 2000). In general, Cuba is considered to have world leading medical health services despite its small economy (Yaffe 2020; Frank *et al* 1997; Lamrani *et al* 2013; Schwab 1999). The Cuban government has and continues to successfully navigate the deadly limitations imposed on it by the U.S. (Yaffe 2020). However, this does not dissuade from the argument that the nature of U.S. sanctions on Cuba are genocidal. This is a quality imbedded within the policies themselves, the political context and the opinions of U.S. officials. The direct consequences of the sanctions reflect on their intended nature, which contains an eliminatory dynamic. The death (and suffering) of the people of Cuba because of U.S. sanctions proves this, regardless of how successful the Cuba government is at curtailing the worst outcome.

Conclusion

The conclusion that U.S. sanctions can be genocidal is apparent in the example of Cuba. Even within traditional legal definition, others testify to this. In November 2023, a report was conducted by an international tribunal in the European Parliament, consisting of legal scholars, lawyers, activists, doctors and others. The report concluded that U.S. sanctions amounted to the

crime of genocide under the UN Convention (Lopez and Friedman 2023). Specifically, these sanctions violate Article II, paragraph c: "Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part" (UN 1948). The Convention recognises national groups it in definition, which makes it applicable to Cuba as U.S. sanctions target the nation and its people. The report attests to the long-lasting brutality, as its 60-year life span has resulted in numerous human lives lost both directly and indirectly (Lopez and Friedman 2023). Indeed, the calculated perspective of U.S. officials and administrations indicates a recognition of the destructive element of sanctions and instrumentalises it. The intent is observable in statements, policy and its consequences. Even within mainstream definitions of genocide, the argument these U.S. sanctions are genocidal are sufficiently substantiated.

The expansive definition of genocide employed in this dissertation establishes the genocidal nature of U.S. sanctions on Cuba further. This broadened perspective eliminates the need for expressions of vitriolic group hatred to show genocidal intent. Instead, structural genocide emphasises the political context of destructive policy. The difference between economic and political power of the U.S. and Cuba is substantial. Cuba's limited size and resources make it especially vulnerable to economic sanctions, while the U.S. imperial dominance in the world stage provides substantial leverage to pursue its goals (Morley 1988; Smith 1999). The colonial and imperial legacy of U.S.-Cuba relations, seen in both the direct U.S. control of the island and economic dominance of it, contextualise the sanctions regime. Schwab (1999) recognised this and reflected on the similarities between the U.S. policy of starvation in Cuba and the manufactured famine by French colonial authorities in Senegal and Mali. This history is relevant in the discussions

of these sanctions, as America "has still not abandoned its old colonial aspiration of integrating Cuba into the U.S." (Lamrani *et al* 2013, p. 75).

Alongside starvation, the U.S. blockade attempts to destroy life through the blockade of drug products and medical equipment. Cuba holds a unique position as the only nation in the world denied medicine from an embargo (Schwab 1999; Garfield and Santana 1997). Many scholars reflect on this as 'a war against public health' (Schwab 1999; Yaffe 2020; Eisenburg 1997). Ultimately, "[h]unger, malnutrition and the essential destruction of life are what ... the entire United States Congress, have bequeathed Cuba" (Schwab 1999, p. 90, emphasis added). Economic sanctions have had multifaceted consequences for the country, and no Cuban citizen has remained unaffected. These sanctions remain in place to this day, despite continually failing to achieve its stated goals (Yaffe 2020; Kaplowitz 1998). Their destructive nature and intention, done in the pursuit for colonial and imperial interests, makes these sanctions a war against the sovereignty and the people of Cuba. These sanctions are fundamentally genocidal in nature.

Closing Remarks

Genocide discourse remains fiercely controversial. The term is policed and contested by governments, laws, scholars and groups. This dissertation recognises that its use, both legally and descriptively, is a *political* issue. Who defines genocide, its nature, timing, location and form, is shaped in part by prevailing narratives. In this dissertation I have demonstrated the insufficiency with popular legal definitions and perceptions of genocide. A broader view must be established to bring justice to the past and present crimes committed in the name of colonial and imperial interests.

With this wider perspective, this dissertation concludes that America's blockade of Cuba is a violent act of war that is inherently genocidal.

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Institutionalised human rights as a secular regime: a framework that depoliticises human rights practice

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BSocSc Politics and International Relations

Introduction

In the decades since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the human rights regime has become increasingly institutionalised. The codifying, formalising and bureaucratisation that this entails (Oberleitner, 2007, p. 18; McNeilly, 2019, p. 818) has intensified with the rise of neoliberalism and the proliferation of NGOs in the 1970s (Mutua, 2006, p. 610; Kantola and Childs, 2024, p. 2). Although this institutionalisation has aimed for greater efficiency in protecting rights, I argue that it has significantly depoliticised human rights in practice by enabling political power play, hindering deliberation, and undermining alternative worldviews (Ploof, 2024, p. 124; Yeganeh, 2025, p. 273). I further argue that a central factor of this depoliticisation is the secular basis of the institutionalised human rights regime (Calo, 2011, p. 499; Feron, 2014, p. 184).

I will go on to justify this in four sections. In section one, I establish secularism's relationship with human rights. In section two, I outline the influence of secularism's self-presentation as neutral and objective in institutionalised human rights. In section three, I examine the link between secularism's focus on rationality and scientific growth with the neoliberal human rights agenda. Lastly, in section

four, I demonstrate the secular basis of human rights' claim to be the highest moral standard. Throughout, I emphasise secularism's integral role in the institutionalisation and resulting depoliticisation of human rights in practice. As many contemporary conflicts are situated in regions where religion plays a central role (Fox, 2003, p. 102), examining the secular dimension of the institutionalisation and depoliticisation of human rights practice is particularly vital.

Section 1: Secularism as the basis of institutionalised human rights

I begin this section by tracing the institutionalisation of human rights, before then establishing the centrality of secularism in this process. The modern conception of human rights is commonly understood as stemming from the United Nations' adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (Ignatieff et al., 2001, p. 5; de Man, 2018, p. 89). Following the atrocities of the World Wars, this was positioned as a universal standard of state conduct and morality (Wolfsteller, 2017, p. 230; Gutwirth and Hert, 2021, p. 431), designed to protect the rights and dignity of individual citizens from being violated. However, as Moyn emphasises, the notion of human rights only gained significant traction in the 1970s, as it became considered a "last utopia" (2010) in the context of disillusionment with the "collapse of socialism and social democracy" (Nash, 2019, p. 490). Although the codification of the UDHR was a significant point in the institutionalisation of human rights, it was during the rise of neoliberalism from the 1970s onwards that NGOs, intergovernmental bodies and sector-specific organisations rapidly expanded (Elliott, 2014, p. 414) and institutionalisation became entrenched in the human rights regime. In line with the neoliberal focus on market dynamics and quantifiable measurements of growth (Asad, 2003, p.

158), this institutionalisation meant that the handling of human rights became increasingly professionalised, technocratic and rules-based (Schick, 2006, p. 321; Engle, 2012, p. 51).

Secularism played an integral role throughout this development of institutionalised human rights, to the extent that Ellie Wiesel described the UDHR as the sacred text of a "world-wide secular religion" (Ignatieff et al., 2001, p. 53). The influence of secularism stems from the United Nations' attempt to secure a universal moral and political ethic independent of all particularist affiliations, the most prominent of which is religion (Asad, 2003, p. 50; Sachedina, 2007, p. 50; Calo, 2011, p. 499). In accordance with Enlightenment understandings of the privatisation of religion (Butcher and Hallward, 2021, p. 1), a secular approach to establishing the UDHR was viewed as the only means through which a neutral ground for the deliberation of human rights could be attained (Freeman, 2004, p. 391; Scaperlanda, 2011, p. 576; Gaston, 2019, p. 10). This proposed neutrality is further exemplified in the institutionalisation of human rights: monitoring bodies such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the UN Human Rights Committee all assume the role of impartial observers of the implementation of human rights (Oberleitner, 2007, p. 11). This framing of human rights institutions as neutral and the assumption that this neutrality upholds universality is reflective of secularism's normative logic and signifies its structural importance in the formation and institutionalisation of human rights (Calo, 2011, p. 512).

In the following section, I expand on the neutrality of human rights institutions, as this constitutes a central aspect of their secular foundation. This will establish the basis for Sections 3 and 4, where I further analyse the consequences of this proposed neutrality and its resulting depoliticisation of human rights in practice.

Section 2: Human rights institutions and their secular self-presentation as neutral

Human rights institutions typically present themselves as neutral and apolitical arbiters of the common good (Ignatieff et al., 2001, p. 9; Brown, 2004, p. 453; Zigon, 2013, p. 719). This self-presentation finds its roots in the 1970s and 1980s (Moyn, 2014, p. 147), when the human rights movement's "strategy of minimalism and its insistence on being anti-political were two of its greatest strengths" (Engle, 2012, p. 49). By assuming a neutral and apolitical stance, human rights institutions not only uphold impartiality but also position themselves as the "quintessence of human goodness" (Mutua, 2006, p. 591), thereby appearing capable of casting objective judgements on human rights affairs (Gutwirth and Hert, 2021, p. 433). This secular neutrality extends beyond institutions to the codification of human rights. This was seen in the case of Greece's accession to the European Union in 1981, after which it was required to remove all references to religious affiliation from citizens' identity cards in accordance with the European Charter of Human Rights (Asad, 2003, p. 139). This removal of particularist affiliations, as advocated for by the institutionalised human rights regime, reflects a secular commitment to a supposedly neutral universalism that is said to safeguard individual autonomy and ensure equal treatment across diverse populations (Sachedina, 2007, pp. 50-51; Oberleitner, 2007, p. 13).

Yet it is this very assumption of the neutrality of institutionalised human rights that facilitates inequality and political power play, for which the UN and other international human rights organisations have been particularly critiqued (de Man, 2018, p. 96). Since upholding human rights is framed as a neutral practice that promotes the universal good, states can use their discourse as justification for actions that advance their national interests (Mutua, 2006, p. 600; Wolfsteller, 2017,

pp. 234-235; Ploof, 2024, pp. 130-131). However, the institutionalised human rights framework masks such actions through its secular appearance of fairness and impartiality, allowing larger political actors to maintain disproportionate influence (de Man, 2018, p. 93). The limited enforcement and accountability of the UDHR and related treaties, despite their codification (Yeganeh, 2025, p. 273), further enable states to shape the functioning of such institutions to serve their own ends, thus crucially averting scrutiny (Schick, 2006, p. 324; Oberleitner, 2007, p. 9). Through this, the neutral and apolitical stance of human rights institutions, as grounded in secularism, depoliticises human rights in practice. It hinders the equal exercise of power (Ploof, 2024, p. 133) and enables stronger political actors, being predominantly Western states, to assert their interests, thereby curtailing effective political deliberation (Ploof, 2024, p. 122).

This secular foundation of neutrality in institutionalised human rights forms the basis for two further dimensions of depoliticisation. Firstly, secular neutrality is intertwined with its privileging of rationality and the scientific method; this is in line with the neoliberal shift in human rights institutionalisation and its resulting depoliticisation. Secondly, the secular neutrality of human rights carries the assumption of it being the highest moral standard, which undermines and depoliticises alternative worldviews. These dimensions will be elaborated on in the following sections.

Section 3: Secular neutrality, rationality and neoliberal depoliticisation

Neoliberalism strongly influenced the institutionalisation of human rights from the 1970s to the extent that Moyn asserts international human rights law itself can be claimed a "neoliberal

phenomenon" (2014, p. 147). This neoliberal influence was evident in the rapid expansion of NGOs (Mutua, 2006, p. 608; Ana, 2024, p. 2) and their accompanying professionalisation, bureaucratisation and quantification of human rights practices (Asad, 2003, p. 157; Choudry and Kapoor, 2013, p. 1; Elliott, 2014, p. 421). An NGO that highlights this quantification is Freedom House, as it represents civil and political rights through various numerical indices (Feron, 2014, p. 184). This institutional shift towards a technocratic approach to human rights practice reflects its secular commitment to objectivity and scientific progress (Celermajer, 2007, p. 112; Hallaq, 2013, p. 15), whereby "reason and a sound methodology" (King, 1999, p. 73) are considered the most effective route to improving human rights standards. However, by compartmentalising the complexity of human rights violations into matters of statistics and technical expertise, the neoliberal institutionalisation of human rights has depoliticised the practice (Schick, 2006, p. 322; Ana, 2024, pp. 7-8), by rendering the role of human rights institutions into one of constant monitoring and management (Elliott, 2014, p. 421).

Although this process places significant focus on the individual as an object of study, in doing so, it crucially depoliticises them (Elliott, 2014, p. 419). The valuing of the individual as rational, independent and rights-bearing is central to secularism and the institutionalised human rights regime (Westmoreland-White, 1995, p. 91; Nash, 2019, p. 501). However, the neoliberal reshaping of human rights into a matter of neutral market solutions and bureaucracy reduces individuals into "legal persons more invested in claiming legal protections than exercising political power" (Ploof, 2024, p. 136). Their resulting depoliticisation is further exacerbated by the institutionalised human rights breakdown of the political collective. In its emphasis on securing the inalienable rights intrinsic to every person, institutionalised human rights neglect communal ties and collective welfare

(Nash, 2019, p. 491; Gutwirth and Hert, 2021, p. 445), thereby "disbanding the demos" (Ploof, 2024, p. 129). As such, it hinders the capacity for holistic social change as a response to rights violations, and instead reinforces mechanisms such as legal protection and constitutional reform as the primary means of upholding human rights (Wolfsteller, 2017, p. 232; de Man, 2018, p. 98).

Section 4: Secular neutrality and institutionalised human rights as the highest moral standard

The secular neutrality that underpins institutionalised human rights allows it to not only claim universality but also "present human rights as the only legitimate morality" (Feron, 2014, p. 183). Through claiming to overcome particularist affiliations, human rights as codified in the UDHR are positioned as upholding a morality that is above politics (Brown, 2004, p. 456), making them representative of the highest moral standard and a guiding ideal to continually strive for (Moyn, 2010, p. 1; de Man, 2018, p. 100). However, this raises the fundamental tension between universalism and cultural relativism within human rights. In accordance with secularism's assertion of being a morally and politically superior framework (Hurd, 2011, p. 83), the universalist framing of human rights equally positions itself as inherently superior due to its supposed overcoming of bias (Feron, 2014, p. 194), often regarding cultural relativism "as little more than an excuse for condoning local cruelties" (Asad, 2003, p. 148). Through this framing, institutionalised human rights depoliticises its practice by undermining the validity of alternative visions of human rights and delegitimising them (Westmoreland-White, 1995, p. 87), while maintaining its proposed neutrality and universality as the only legitimate human rights framework (Feron, 2012, p. 194; Gutwirth and Hert, 2021, p. 426).

The assertion of the UDHR as a universal moral ideal risks abstracting it from human rights realities across various political contexts (Oberleitner, 2007, p. 17). Neoliberal professionalisation and bureaucratisation mean that human rights practice is increasingly detached from the communities it serves, which — along with the aspirational nature of the UDHR — frequently leads to significant disparities between what the principle of human rights promises and what its institutionalisation is capable of delivering (Elliott, 2014, p. 408; de Man, 2018, p. 89). This inevitable decoupling (Zigon, 2013, p. 723) perpetuates the further institutionalisation of human rights, as more precise measures, a stronger legal apparatus and increased monitoring are viewed as essential in closing the gap between ideals and practice (Elliott, 2014, p. 409). Through this process, the depoliticisation of both human rights practice and the individual is reinforced, as institutionalisation, grounded in its secular foundations, serves to maintain prevailing power dynamics and political structures, rather than enable the deliberation or cultivation of alternative approaches to human rights (Zigon, 2013, p. 733).

Conclusion

I have argued that the institutionalisation of human rights significantly depoliticises human rights in practice by reinforcing unequal power dynamics, reshaping claims into bureaucratic processes, and undermining alternative worldviews. Analysing this institutionalisation through the lens of secularism reveals the normative foundations upon which its depoliticising effects rest. As conflicts and rights violations persist in regions where religion plays a central role, their resolution depends on the effective politicisation of affected actors and the legitimisation of their worldviews. The secular form of the institutionalised human rights regime may inhibit this, making it essential to understand

the mechanisms of depoliticisation it entails in order to overcome potential barriers to upholding human rights in such contexts. It is in pursuit of this understanding that I hope this paper can meaningfully contribute.

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Part Three:

Political Systems and Power

Beyond Maximisation: Refining the Effectiveness Principle for Global Prioritisation

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Abstract

When faced with competing global responsibilities, states must determine how to allocate resources most effectively. This essay argues that the principle of effectiveness—prioritising actions that yield the greatest impact—is the most compelling framework for decision-making. However, while effectiveness provides a strong foundation, it must be refined to account for ethical and contextual considerations. To address its limitations, this essay integrates sustainability, feasibility, and diverse decision-making as key pillars within the effectiveness principle, ensuring a more adaptable and ethically sound approach. Furthermore, the supplementary principles of reducing disadvantage and culpability enhance effectiveness by ensuring that interventions prioritise the most vulnerable, and acknowledge historical responsibility. By adopting a multidimensional framework, states can navigate the ethical complexities of global responsibilities in a way that balances impact, justice, and long-term sustainability.

Introduction

When faced with competing global responsibilities, states must prioritise where resources go. States use five main principles to decide where aid is most needed – effectiveness, reducing disadvantage, culpability, diversification, and urgency (Glanville and Pattison, 2024, p.8). Of these principles, effectiveness is the most convincing way to navigate the complex ethical puzzle of resource management, especially in areas such as health (Ord, 2019). I argue that while effectiveness is the most convincing principle due to it being a basic maximisation approach, it requires nuance and the consideration of other principles in tandem to be most successful when prioritising between global responsibilities. Section 1 of this essay will discuss why effectiveness is the most convincing, and the potential shortcomings that may be faced. This leads directly into Section 2, where I explore some of the key factors that must be acknowledged to maximise the success of the effectiveness principle and avoid the shortcomings that have been brought up in Section 1. Finally, Section 3 will evaluate the relevance of reducing disadvantage and culpability as supplementary to the effectiveness principle.

Section 1: The Effectiveness Principle

Effectiveness within the context of global responsibilities refers to the prioritisation of cases where the greatest impact can occur (Glanville and Pattison, 2024). It is the most frequently used principle as it is quantifiable, utilitarian, and holds intrinsic value. Effectiveness ensures that resources will address the most severe and impactful crises, which are likely to have the greatest effects on humanity (Bostrom, 2013). In addition to the instrumental benefits of effectiveness, it is one which most would intuitively agree with. According to Locke, human nature is rational and has an inherent sense of moral duty (Hancey, 1976), which would imply that our desire for effectiveness is

to be trusted. It is in line with utilitarianism, rationalism, and other schools of political philosophy. Therefore, I argue that we should trust intuition to support the effectiveness principle, but not without caution.

Caution must be taken as effectiveness has inherent limitations (as all principles do). One of the major critiques is that it is an abstract concept and is overly broad, which has led to indecision and tension when it is being applied to complex crises (Fuller, 2012). As a basic maximisation principle, it has faced criticism for being detached from the political and moral realities of crisis response (Rubenstein, 2015). This detachment can exacerbate systemic inequalities and neglect those whose suffering is less visible (Aginam, 2018). These criticisms are valuable as they guide the rest of this paper, which sets out to refine effectiveness by incorporating complementary principles and key pillars within it to account for ethical and contextual considerations.

Section 2: A Nuanced View

The principle of effectiveness is an extremely broad concept, something it is criticised for frequently (Fuller, 2012). To ensure that the principle is as comprehensive yet specific as possible to provide a clear framework for institutions to follow, there must be an understanding of the nuances to pay heed to within the effectiveness principle. In this section, I will introduce and discuss some of these: sustainability, feasibility, and diverse decision-making. Doing this will help to establish key factors within effectiveness that must be accounted for, creating a clearer guide.

The sustainability argument is essential when looking to apply the theory of effectiveness. Sustainability ensures that short-term solutions do not result in long-term harm, and instead

prioritises looking into long-term solutions. Cripps (2022) argues that addressing the immediate needs without acknowledging the consequences undermines the effectiveness of intervention over time. This manifests itself in the form of encouraging institutional change and development as opposed to rapid humanitarian aid, which could negatively impact the environment or help support the structures of imbalance that triggered the crisis. A sustainable approach to responding to crises could be used to help dismantle the systemic inequalities that produced or exacerbated the crisis (Aginam, 2018). By embedding sustainability into the effectiveness principle, states and institutions would ensure that the allocation of aid can be prioritised for structural and long-term change. Doing so would help build a balanced response where the most people can be reached for the most amount of time – thus increasing the impact of the effectiveness principle. Considering present and future implications makes effectiveness more adaptable, and the framework for decision-making more evident. Thus, sustainability should be emphasised within the field of effectiveness to provide foresight and prevent recurring crises.

Feasibility is a crucial element to highlight and explain within the effectiveness principle. The most well-intentioned interventions often lead to failure when the limited capacities of institutions are disregarded (Rubenstein, 2015). This displays the importance of having realistic strategies that align with capacities. As discussed, long-term solutions are necessary, as short-term solutions rely on greater international or institutional support, which is unstable and may result in collapse (Cripps, 2022). Actors must ensure that when they are addressing global responsibilities, it is with an awareness of their own restraints (both soft – political, and hard – economic), as an overreaching of capabilities can lead to systematic strain (Aginam, 2018). Feasibility is tied to political dynamics,

which are often discussed within the context of culpability. When attempting to address their global responsibilities, states may face domestic political resistance, which complicates their ability to act. This must be acknowledged before states act, which is one of the reasons feasibility is key. It is not only what states can do, but what the people of the state are willing to do. Embedding feasibility into the effectiveness principle ensures that interventions are not overly ambitious to help the most people, but that they remain targeted and pragmatic. Interventions should be actionable, with feasibility being employed to help bridge the gap between idealism and practicality, all while strengthening the framework for global responsibilities.

Due to much of the criticism around the effectiveness principle stating that it is too broad of a concept and leads to conflict within the decision-making process, this is something that should be given extra attention. Diverse decision-making would ensure interventions account for socio-political dynamics and local contexts rather than relying on abstract statistics and foreign knowledge. Contextual fairness needs to be central to the decision-making process, as there must be an understanding of how policies impact communities differently (Hessoun and Herlitz, 2019). Crises affect different states in different ways due to their historical and cultural circumstances, which must be accounted for prior to any intervention. Expanding on this, there must be diverse actors within the decision-making process, with an emphasis on the affected communities (Wisor, 2012). The integration of local perspectives can help to maximise the positive impact that can be made, thus increasing the effectiveness principle's threshold. Adopting diverse decision-making within the effectiveness principle allows for adaptive responses that hold respect for local contexts while increasing the effectiveness of the intervention.

Highlighting sustainability, feasibility, and diverse decision-making as three pillars of effectiveness addresses the inherent broadness that is a major criticism of the principle. Together, they enhance the capabilities, fairness, and ethical grounding of the effectiveness principle when addressing global responsibilities.

Section 3: Supplementary Principles

Effectiveness is the primary principle among a group of five (effectiveness, reducing disadvantage, culpability, diversification, and urgency). While the others may not be as widely regarded when prioritizing between global responsibilities, they remain key in ensuring states have a well-rounded response to their responsibilities. The principles of reducing disadvantage and culpability can be used to enhance the effectiveness principle. Using these in conjunction with effectiveness can, I argue, ensure that the greatest amount of good can be achieved.

The reducing disadvantage principle is rooted in prioritarianism, which has two major aspects. Firstly, prioritarianism states that help give to those who are worse off have greater intrinsic moral weight (Nielson, 2022). This is reflected in the public support that can be seen in response to the direct instances. Political will is much more evident when the stakes are high, and there is a greater sense of responsibility when looking at those in the worst situations. Therefore, there is an intrinsic benefit to acknowledging reducing disadvantage, as well as an instrumental benefit. Secondly, it relies on the concept of the absolute worse off over the comparative level of well-being. This concept centres around ensuring individuals have equality of opportunity, implying that the focus should be given to those in the greatest need to elevate them, even if that does not mean helping the greatest number of people (like the basic maximization approach often taken under the effectiveness

principle) (Persad, 2009). This characteristic is valuable in tandem with the effectiveness principle because it ensures that the effectiveness principle does not focus solely on high-impact crises, but also accounts for justice for marginalized populations due to systemic neglect or poverty.

Equality of opportunity (EO) reinforces the principle of reducing disadvantage by advocating for the removal of barriers preventing individuals from accessing aid, resources, and opportunities (Persad, 2009). It is a widely accepted liberal idea, one that is often understood as distributive justice, and is adopted by most Western institutions, most notably the European Union (EU) (Siboni, 2023). EO has been a successful policy of the EU, helping to intervene in issues of gender inequality and formal discrimination (Siboni, 2023). It has been evidenced as a successful mode of alleviating some systemic barriers of inequality. Therefore, it is a valuable aspect of the reducing disadvantage principle, where the goal is to get individuals into a position where they are then able to help themselves, thus removing the need for longer-term aid. This helps to inform the effectiveness principle by ensuring that interventions are not only about immediate resource allocation but about creating sustainable, long-term impacts, raising the worst off out of poverty, and building systems to keep it that way.

Culpability refers to the moral obligation of actors to address crises or vulnerabilities that they have caused (directly or indirectly). This can be in relation to previous colonies, damages from war, or ecological damage because of industrialization. It is a key principle to examine in tandem with effectiveness, as it ensures states can target their interventions to be more ethically aligned with their responsibilities. Based on the idea of coercive justice, states must be held accountable for their involvement in destabilizing societies, marginalizing communities, or creating vulnerabilities (Rubenstein, 2015). It is most salient when looking into cases where harm has been

disproportionately inflicted on marginalized populations. A key example is post-industrial states, which have had a greater impact on the climate crisis. Therefore, they have a greater obligation to address the global harms, even though they will not suffer from climate change as drastically as lower-income states that are currently industrializing (Shue, 2021). This should be used in tandem with the effectiveness principle because it ensures that states that have a greater capacity to help due to their advancements in technology help those they have exploited and often left in crisis.

The role of culpability is also key in the context of humanitarian crises. By looking at the Responsibility to Protect and refugee responsibility, we can examine how the U.S. should take a greater role in protecting asylum seekers due to their role in destabilizing much of the Middle East, causing the crisis (Coen, 2017). The actions of foreign states in destabilizing other governments have a greater impact on humanitarian crises. When states have clear involvement in the origins of a crisis, it is clear that they are morally obligated to act, using long-term policies that allow them to help the greatest number of people for the greatest amount of time, in line with the effectiveness principle.

While effectiveness is a compelling framework for prioritizing global responsibilities, it must be supplemented by these other principles to ensure there is a more ethical and comprehensive response than pure maximization. The integration of reducing disadvantage and culpability ensures that resource allocation goes to those most in need and rectifies historical wrongs. A multidimensional approach – like the one explored above – ensures that states fulfil their global responsibilities in an ethical, practical, and principled manner.

Conclusion

When states prioritize between competing global responsibilities, the principle of effectiveness emerges as a powerful guiding framework due to its emphasis on maximising positive impact. However, as this essay has demonstrated, effectiveness alone is insufficient to navigate the intricate ethical and practical dimensions of global decision-making. A more comprehensive approach emerges when effectiveness is balanced with sustainability, feasibility, and inclusive decision-making, creating a framework that is both impactful and morally justifiable.

Sustainability ensures that interventions account for long-term consequences, preventing cyclical crises and fostering systemic change rather than short-term relief. Feasibility grounds interventions in political and institutional realities, recognising that overly ambitious or impractical efforts can backfire, undermining the very goals they seek to achieve. Meanwhile, inclusive decision-making embeds contextual fairness, amplifying the voices of local communities and ensuring interventions are tailored to specific regional dynamics. This combination tempers the utilitarian tendencies of pure effectiveness with pragmatic and justice-oriented considerations.

In addition to these structural principles, the ethical dimensions of reducing disadvantage and addressing culpability add essential layers to the effectiveness framework. Prioritising the most vulnerable populations ensures that those in the most desperate need are not sacrificed for broader impact calculations, aligning global action with humanitarian imperatives. Addressing culpability, meanwhile, reinforces historical and moral accountability, compelling states to take responsibility for past harms and rectify ongoing injustices.

By weaving together these principles, states can better navigate the complex ethical landscape of global responsibilities. This multidimensional framework strengthens the legitimacy of

interventions, enhances their long-term success, and ensures that states fulfil their global duties in a manner that is not only effective but also deeply attuned to justice, sustainability, and moral clarity. Ultimately, this approach enables states to promote meaningful, lasting change while upholding their ethical obligations to the global community.

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Do we need institutionalised party systems for democratic consolidation?

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Abstract

This essay investigates the extent to which party system institutionalisation (PSI) is a prerequisite to democratic consolidation. This will be carried out by measuring PSI in India using the PSI dimensions of Pedersen's Index of aggregate volatility (PIAV) and effective number of electoral parties (ENEP), the data for which has been obtained from the 2024 Indian general election. India's electoral volatility will be compared with that of the USA, and India's ENEP will be compared with that of the UK. This essay finds grounds to challenge the traditional assumption that PSI is necessary for democratic consolidation. India scores worse than the USA in PIAV and the UK in ENEP, and so has comparatively low PSI, yet is a consolidated democracy. Furthermore, this essay engages with the possibility that the opposite of the traditional assumption is true, as India has undergone democratic backsliding while its PSI has become stronger.

Introduction

Traditionally, party system institutionalisation (PSI) has been seen as essential to establishing and stabilising "tenuous new democracies" (Dix, 1992:490). This is because fledgling democracies are

vulnerable to reverting to authoritarianism, and so PSI improves government transparency and stimulates a culture of democratic norms and values (Sartori, 1976). Ezrow (2011) points to various countries that have struggled to democratise without strong PSI, such as Pakistan and Venezuela, as examples that PSI is a prerequisite.

This essay will challenge the notion that PSI is a prerequisite to democratic consolidation, using the example of India. India does not have a highly institutionalised party system in the way countries in Western Europe and North America do, yet it remains a relatively consolidated democracy. This essay will first establish a theoretical framework of PSI and democratic consolidation while critiquing both conceptions, and will argue that India is a consolidated democracy based on the framework. This essay will then operationalise PSI using electoral volatility (EV) and the effective number of parties. These operationalisations will be applied to a comparison of India's EV with the USA, and a comparison of the effective number of parties in India and the UK. This will prove that India's PSI is weaker in comparison to other democracies.

This essay will further challenge the necessity of PSI by arguing that the decrease in India's effective number of parties has not been conducive to democratic consolidation. PSI, therefore, cannot be used as a way to measure the extent to which a country's democracy is consolidated.

PSI

There are four dimensions of PSI. However, because this essay is going to operationalise two of these dimensions, this section will focus specifically on those two dimensions.

One dimension is stable interparty competition, which refers to the predictable behaviour of parties within a political system. Countries with weak PSI have more unstable interparty competition that produces a "high supply of competing candidates and a great dispersion of the vote" (Mainwaring and Zoco, 2007:158), attributed to high EV and uncertainty from the electorate regarding electoral outcomes.

Another dimension is the strong rootedness of parties in society, which posits that when a party has strong roots in society, voters feel connected to it and will regularly vote for it (Mainwaring and Torcal, 2006). Kitschelt and Rehm (2024) argue that personalism, when elections are focused on a specific political figure rather than a party, demonstrates poor party roots and, consequently, weak PSI.

Luna (2014) has critiqued these four dimensions as a coherent conception of PSI by arguing that some countries show strong PSI in some dimensions, and weak PSI in others. He used the examples of Brazil and Chile to illustrate how democracies can have stable interparty competition but weak party roots. Consequently, it is unhelpful to think of PSI as a one-dimensional concept, as the extent to which many democracies have strong or weak PSI is difficult to judge. Morlino (1998) produced an alternative conception of PSI, of which the three dimensions are the stability of electoral behaviour, stability in the patterns of partisan competition and the stability of the political class. Like Luna (2014), Morlino (1998) critiqued the conception of PSI as being one-dimensional.

In a later section, this essay will operationalise PSI, focusing on the dimensions of stable interparty competition and the strong rootedness of parties. India's comparatively weaker PSI will be contrasted with the stronger PSI in the USA and the UK.

Democratic consolidation

Schedler (1998) argued that there are five concepts of democratic consolidation (DC). DC can be defined as preventing democratic breakdown and a return to authoritarianism, the prevention of democratic backsliding, the deepening of democratic norms, making democracy more representative by facilitating civic engagement, and the institutionalisation of parties. Schedler (1998) would therefore agree that PSI is essential to DC.

India meets the criteria for preventing democratic breakdown. Since 1947, India has had a stable and mostly uninterrupted democracy; Freedom House (2024) notes that India has free and fair elections, and has a well-respected Election Commission that oversees the fair implementation of electoral laws. While Indira Gandhi's government introduced a national state of emergency between 1975 and 1977, during which India had a constitutional autocracy (Chaudhuri, 2018), the state of emergency was soon lifted, and by the end of 1977, India was a fully functioning democracy again (Leone, 2016).

India also meets the criteria for the deepening of democratic norms and the facilitation of civic engagement. Turnout in Indian general elections has generally increased since 1951, reaching 65.79% in 2024 (Sadan and Road, 2024), higher than other consolidated democracies, such as the

UK, where turnout was 59.7% (Sturge, 2024). This increase in turnout is attributed to the increase in electoral participation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs), which has helped increase the representation of OBC politicians. This has facilitated DC in India by enhancing political and electoral pluralism, meaning that Indian politics is no longer dominated by elites (Jaffrelot, 2000).

These concepts of DC have been critiqued. Przeworski (1991) argued that Schedler's (1998) approaches do not consider the role of informal patronage and clientelism, both of which contribute to the flawed nature of democracies, particularly in developing countries. Levitsky and Way (2010) argued that Schedler's concepts do not account for hybrid regimes. They presented a competitive authoritarian framework, whereby elections occur but are not free and fair.

This section has shown how India meets Schedler's (1998) conceptions of DC. The next section will operationalise PSI using EV and the effective number of parties to prove India's comparatively weak PSI.

EV

The most common method of operationalising PSI is measuring EV (See: Welfling, 1973; Tóka, 1997; Birch, 2003; Chiaramonte and Emanuele, 2017). This has traditionally been calculated using Pedersen's index of aggregate volatility (PIAV) (Pedersen, 1979). The larger the index, the more volatility there has been within an election cycle. EV measures the strong rootedness dimension of PSI; if parties have strong roots in society, a large portion of the electorate will regularly vote for them, and so EV will be low.

This section will contrast India's comparatively high EV with the USA's comparatively low EV. This is because India's levels of partisanship are much lower than those of the USA. In September 2024, 47% of American registered voters were registered partisans (USAFacts Team, 2024). In 2019, 28% of Indians said there was a party they "particularly feel close to" (Barthwal and Jensenius, 2024). The USA's parties, therefore, have stronger roots in society as there is a larger portion of the electorate that has partisan leanings.

Figure 1: EV calculated with PIAV from 2004 to 2024.

Figure 1 shows that India has higher EV than the USA in national elections, indicating that parties have weaker roots in society, and so PSI is weaker in India. Figure 1 also indicates that India has more unstable interparty competition than the USA, evidenced by the fluctuations in India's PIAV.

The most volatile electoral cycles in the USA and India both occurred with a change in power. The USA's highest PIAV in Figure 1 was 4.7 in 2008, when Democrat Obama ended 8 years of Republican executive leadership. India's highest PIAV was nearly 3.5 times higher, at 16.2 in 2014. This was when the Indian National Congress (INC) vote share plummeted and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won a majority.

Strong EV in India compared to the USA is exacerbated by differences in regional party systems. While some states, such as Rajasthan (The Hindu Bureau, 2024), are dominated by the INC and BJP, many others are not. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) won the majority of Tamil Nadu's seats in 2024, while the BJP did not win a single one (NDTV Elections, 2024). In Bihar, Janata Dal United (JDU) and the BJP won 12 constituencies each in 2024, while the INC won 3 (The Times of India, 2024). The performance of these dozens of regional parties can fluctuate dramatically from election to election. The USA does not have regional party systems, with all states having a Democrat-Republican duopoly system (Anthony and Carl, 2019).

ENEP

PSI can also be operationalised via ENEP (See: Laakso and Taagepera, 1979; Horowitz and Browne, 2005). This calculates party system fragmentation through the relative strength of each of the parties competing, and is a way to operationalise the dimension of stability of interparty competition.

This section will contrast India's comparatively high number of ENEPs (both raw vote percentage and number of seats) with the UK's comparatively lower number of ENEPs. India elects its MPs via

single-member constituencies using First Past The Post (FPTP), and so, contrasting with the UK, which uses the same electoral system, is conducive to a more accurate comparison.

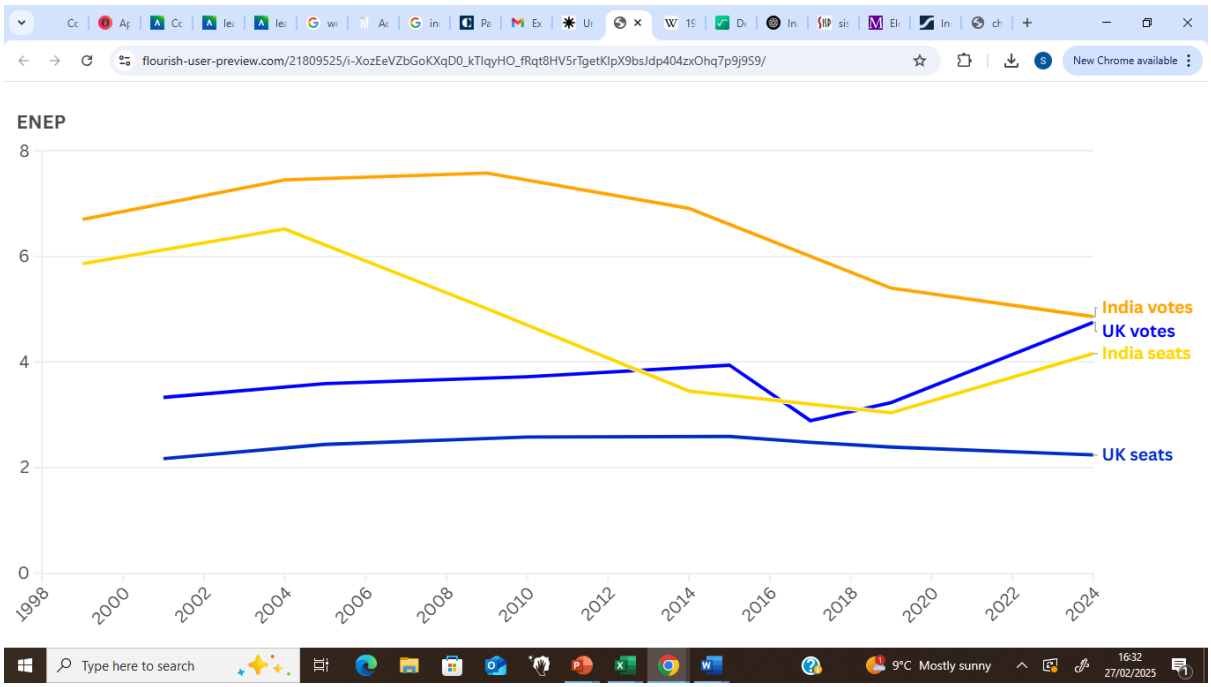

Figure 2: ENEP in general elections in India (post-1999) and the UK (post-2001) for both votes and seats. NB: The differences between the number of votes and seats of effective parties are attributed to the disproportionality of FPTP.

For every election shown in Figure 2, India's ENEP is higher in both votes and seats than the UK. This shows that party fragmentation is stronger in India and would indicate that PSI is weaker in India than in the UK. India's ENEP in votes reached a maximum of 7.58 in 2009, when the INC built on their 2004 victory, and in seats reached a maximum of 6.52, when the INC was 77 seats short of a majority in the Lok Sabha. The UK's ENEP in seats has never exceeded 3, and in votes

reached a maximum of 4.75 in 2024, when FPTP produced the UK's most disproportional general election result.

When comparing ENEP in terms of votes between the UK and India, India's party system has become less fragmented over time, while the UK's party system has become more fragmented. While India used to have double the number of effective parties as the UK, in 2024, India's number of effective parties was only marginally higher. This phenomenon creates a paradox, as, while by this metric, PSI appears to become stronger in India over the past 25 years, democracy has not necessarily become more consolidated in India.

The opposite has happened. Since the BJP won in 2014, India has undergone democratic backsliding. Chacko argued that the BJP has adopted "authoritarian statist tendencies" and "authoritarian populism" (2018:541). This has been fuelled by the promotion of Hindutva ideology, the notion that India should be a Hindu state and that Muslims are a threat (Ellis-Petersen, 2022), leading to the violation of the civil liberties of Indian Muslims. The BJP government has also responded harshly to the Dilli Chalo protests, with Amnesty International India (2024) condemning the use of tear gas grenades, arbitrary arrest of peaceful protesters and Internet bans.

While India is still classed as a democracy, albeit a "flawed" one (Jaiswal and Patra, 2022), it is paradoxical for democratic consolidation in India to become weaker while one of the metrics indicates stronger PSI. This would challenge the notion that PSI is a prerequisite to democratic consolidation, as while India's ENEP has decreased over the past 25 years, the state of India's democracy appears more perilous now.

The two operationalisations of PSI also support Luna's (2014) critique of the conceptualisation of PSI. EV in India remains at high levels, whereas India's ENEP has decreased. The fact that India performs differently in both metrics supports the critique that PSI should be considered to be a one-dimensional concept.

Conclusion

This essay has provided an explanation and critical analysis of PSI and democratic consolidation, along with how India meets the criteria for democratic consolidation, to prove that India is an appropriate example to answer the question. This essay has then operationalised the strong rootedness dimension using PIAV, to prove that India's EV is stronger than that of the USA, and so India's PSI is weaker. This essay has operationalised the stability of interparty competition dimension using ENEP to prove that India has a more fragmented party system than the UK, and so India has weaker PSI than the UK. When brought together, this essay has challenged the necessity of PSI to democratic consolidation, by proving that India has a relatively consolidated democracy while having weak PSI.

This essay continued to engage with the data by highlighting that while the decrease in India's ENEP (and so stronger PSI) over time should suggest stronger democratic consolidation, the opposite has happened. This may lend itself to the critique of PSI being a one-dimensional concept, as EV in India remains high.

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Modi, Hindu Nationalism, and the Personalisation of Electoral Politics in India

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Abstract

This paper examines how Prime Ministerial visits and campaign rhetoric influenced voter behaviour in India's 2019 and 2024 general elections, with a focus on Hindu nationalist messaging and constituency-level targeting. Using a mixed-methods research design, the study combines vote share analysis with campaign speech content analysis to offer new insights into how symbolic leadership and emotionally charged messaging shape electoral outcomes.

The quantitative analysis, based on constituency-level data from the Election Commission of India and the Prime Minister's Office. Using Welch's t-test, the study finds that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visits had no statistically significant effect on vote share in 2019. In contrast, in 2024, visited constituencies recorded a 3.33 percentage point increase in vote share for Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), indicating a strategic shift toward identity-based mobilisation.

The qualitative analysis of 81 speeches, 21 from 2019 and 60 from 2024 (see Appendix B), coded using a set of 23 keywords (see Appendix C), highlights a sharp rhetorical shift. In 2019, Modi's messaging centred on anti-corruption and development; by 2024, religious and cultural symbolism

dominated, with significant rises in references to terms such as "Ram Temple," "Shri Ram," and "Bharat Mata."

These findings contribute to broader debates on populism, political communication, and identity politics in digitally mediated democracies. They demonstrate how effective, digitally amplified narratives can reinforce loyalty among core voters. Modi's evolving campaign model, rooted in symbolic leadership and majoritarian identity, raises critical questions about the sustainability of leader-centric populism and the future of democratic pluralism in India.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the last decade, Indian electoral politics has undergone a significant transformation, marked by a shift toward emotionally driven, leader-centric campaigns. At the forefront of this change is Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose political messaging combines populist performance with Hindu nationalist imagery. Since 2014, Modi has not only become the dominant face of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) but also the symbol of a new political style which is highly personalised, digitally amplified, and rooted in cultural identity (Jaffrelot, 2021).

This paper investigates how Prime Ministerial visits and campaign rhetoric influenced voter behaviour in India's 2019 and 2024 general elections, with a particular focus on Hindu nationalist messaging and constituency-level targeting. This research question sits at the intersection of political communication, identity politics, and electoral strategy, and responds to growing academic interest in how affective and symbolic appeals shape voting behaviour in large-scale democracies.

While campaign visits have long been part of Indian electoral strategy, their function has evolved (Jaffrelot, 2021). Modi's 2024 rallies were not simply political events; they became emotionally charged performances that signalled cultural alignment and symbolic authority (Observer Research Foundation, 2023). This study explores that shift through a mixed-methods approach.

Quantitatively, it uses constituency-level voting data and Welch's t-test to assess whether PM visits were statistically associated with higher vote share for the BJP. Qualitatively, it conducts content and discourse analysis of 81 campaign speeches across the two election cycles, using a keyword-based framework to track rhetorical changes. These methods allow for an integrated investigation of both measurable outcomes and symbolic strategies.

The findings suggest a strategic transition from persuasion to consolidation. In 2024, Modi's visits corresponded with a 3.33 percentage point increase in vote share in visited constituencies, while his rhetoric shifted from governance themes in 2019 to religious and cultural symbolism in 2024. This evolution reflects broader trends in populist political communication, where emotionally resonant leadership and digitally mediated identity narratives are central to voter engagement.

By combining statistical and narrative analysis, this paper contributes to scholarly debates on populism, majoritarian nationalism, and the personalisation of electoral politics. It seeks to understand not only what Modi's campaign did, but how and why it worked—offering insight into a political style that continues to reshape India's democratic landscape.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews four key strands of scholarship that inform the analysis of Modi's campaign strategy and its electoral impact. While Prime Ministerial visits, leader-centric communication, and symbolic rhetoric are widely studied in Western democracies, they remain underexplored in the context of India's personalised leadership and digital mobilisation (Jaffrelot, 2021; Udupa, 2019).

Existing literature often focuses on either institutional models of campaigning or the psychological dimensions of voter choice, overlooking the affective and ideological dynamics that define India's electoral terrain (Mudde, 2007). Under Modi, political campaigning has evolved into emotionally charged performances that blend populism, identity politics, and majoritarian symbolism (Cox, 2017).

This calls for an integrated analytical framework that connects emotional appeals, narrative strategy, and measurable electoral behaviour. To that end, this chapter draws on four bodies of literature:

1. Psychological theories of voter behaviour, especially emotion and identity-based decision-making.
2. Populism and leader-centric mobilisation.
3. Hindu nationalist rhetoric as an ideological strategy.
4. Constituency-level and digital campaign mobilisation.

These strands collectively frame the political logic behind Modi's evolving campaign style, setting up the empirical investigation in Chapters 3 and 4.

2.1: Historical Development of BJP

The evolution of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) provides essential context for understanding the shift toward emotionally charged leader-driven campaigning. Founded in 1980 as a successor to the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the BJP remained a marginal national force until the late 1990s, briefly holding power under Atal Bihari Vajpayee (Singh, 2005). Its transformation into India's dominant political actor occurred under Modi, whose 2014 campaign secured 282 seats (out of a total 545) with a 31% vote share, redefining political communication and leadership personalisation in India (Jaffrelot, 2021).

Modi's rise redefined political messaging from development-focused narratives to symbolic leadership and cultural identity (Jaffrelot, 2021; Girvin, 2023). The BJP's victories in 2019 and 2024 illustrate the consolidation of this transformation, with Modi becoming both the face of state power and a symbol of national belonging. This shift is further documented by Rajagopal (2008), who traces the institutional consolidation of Hindu nationalist thought within the BJP's political agenda.

Jaffrelot (2021) argues that this evolution reflects a deeper ideological shift: from a coalition of conservative interests to a party rooted in Hindu majoritarian identity. This shift enabled the party to run campaigns that are digitally sophisticated, logistically expansive, and ideologically assertive, drawing on cultural grievances and religious nationalism.

This section outlines the political context in which campaign visits, speeches, and strategic messaging occur not as standalone tactics but as part of a larger ideological shift.

2.2: Psychological Events and Voter Behaviour

Traditional electoral models often assume that voters make rational decisions based on party performance, policy preferences, or ideological alignment (Souto Batista et al., 2021). However, psychological theories of voting behaviour challenge this notion, highlighting how identity, emotion, and symbolic leadership often play a greater role than logic or policy analysis in shaping electoral outcomes (Varshney, 2000; Chandra, 2004).

Samuel J. Eldersveld (1989) was among the earliest scholars to argue that voting is not purely a rational act, but a psychological process grounded in emotional affirmation and symbolic representation. He contended that political commitment often stems from voters' desire to identify with leaders who offer moral clarity, cultural affirmation, or personal recognition (Eldersveld,1989). In this view, leaders function as symbols of group belonging, and electoral support reflects a kind of emotional alignment rather than a policy-based agreement (Eldersveld, 1989). Recent research (Chauchard, 2017) supports this, showing how ethnic and identity-based appeals foster deeper emotional alignment with political leadership, especially in rural India.

While Eldersveld's insights remain foundational, his framework assumes a largely top-down model of political messaging, in which elites construct meaning and voters passively absorb it. More recent scholarship, particularly by Sahana Udupa (2019), challenges this assumption by introducing the concept of "hyper-local nationalism" in the digital age. Bolsover (2019) extends this argument by showing how political identity is no longer merely consumed but co-produced through everyday digital interactions, with WhatsApp groups emerging as critical sites for cultivating "digital nationalism". Lloyd (2018) similarly argues that WhatsApp operates as a key vector for the

horizontal spread of nationalist political identities in India. In this participatory environment, emotional messaging is not just received; it is circulated, interpreted, and ritualised by voters within their peer networks. Political loyalty, therefore, becomes not only emotional but performative, constantly enacted through everyday digital practices (Udupa, 2019).

This lens is particularly crucial in understanding Modi's enduring appeal. His campaign speeches are not just informational; they are symbolic performances that reflect the values, anxieties, and aspirations of his core support base (Palishkar, 2019). Modi's use of religious metaphor, mythological references, and binary framing, such as "the people vs. the elite", invokes emotional loyalty rooted in cultural identity (Jaffrelot, 2021; Banaji, 2018). Vaishnav (2015) emphasises that Indian voters increasingly align along cultural and identity markers, rather than traditional policy-based divides. These speeches function less as platforms for policy explanation and more as sites of symbolic recognition.

Furthermore, empirical studies support this dynamic. Voters who report feeling "seen" or "represented" by Modi in rallies or invoked in digital messaging are more likely to remain loyal not due to rational agreement, but due to a perceived emotional connection (CSDS–Lokniti, 2019). Once this attachment is formed, opposing views are often dismissed as anti-national or culturally alien. In a context like India, where disagreement is routinely moralised, symbolic affirmation becomes a powerful tool of long-term voter consolidation (Girija, 2024).

In sum, while Eldersveld (1989) laid the foundation for understanding symbolic voting, Udupa (2019) extends it into the present, showing how emotion, identity, and digital ecosystems now combine to create persistent, intimate forms of political loyalty. This paper builds on both by

investigating how Modi's rhetoric, amplified through offline speeches and digital channels, creates and sustains emotionally driven political loyalty across two election cycles.

2.3: Populist Rhetoric and Leader-Centric Mobilisation

Building on the psychological dimensions of voting, a second major strand of literature is populism. This section examines how populist rhetorical strategies contribute to emotionally charged and exclusionary forms of voter mobilisation. Theories by Cas Mudde and Michael Cox are useful in understanding how Modi merges personal charisma with national identity, crafting a political style that is both emotive and exclusionary (Mudde, 2007; Cox, 2017).

Mudde (2007) conceptualises populism as a "thin-centred ideology" that constructs politics as a moral struggle between a virtuous people and a corrupt elite. It lacks a fixed ideological core, and populism often attaches itself to dominant broader ideologies, such as nationalism or religion, to give it emotional and symbolic substance. Chatterjee (2019) argues that the Indian media landscape, particularly television networks, played an active role in amplifying Modi's populist narratives. In Modi's case, this attachment has shifted over time: from anti-corruption in 2014 ("*Main bhi Chowkidar*"), to national security in 2019 *(e.g., Pulwama/Balakot),* and religious majoritarianism in 2024. This adaptability underscores the strategic nature of populism, allowing leaders to frame moral binaries such as "the people vs. the elite" or "Hindu vs. appeaser" depending on electoral needs (Meijers and Zaslove, 2020; Mounk, 2018).

Cox (2017) emphasises populism as a performance of a leader's ability to enact authenticity and connect with voters emotionally. Modi's speeches exemplify this: they blend mythological references, patriotic tropes, and spiritual language to stage a narrative of moral authority and cultural

reclamation. His persona becomes both message and medium—a tool for enacting leadership as devotion, not just governance. Sharma and Kumar (2023) similarly observe that Modi's speeches increasingly fused emotional appeal with religious imagery to deepen symbolic identification.

While Mudde (2007) emphasises populism's ideological emptiness, Jaffrelot (2021) offers a more culturally grounded view. He argues that Modi's populism is not ideologically thin but deeply rooted in the majoritarian worldview of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).* Unlike European populists, Modi's claim to represent the "real India" is explicitly religious, aiming to consolidate Hindu identity and delegitimise pluralism. Populist mobilisation, in this frame, is not merely rhetorical; it is an ideological weapon of exclusion (Delacroix, 2024).

Digital technologies amplify this framework. Modi's image is carefully curated and widely disseminated by the BJP's IT cell, which ensures that each speech is not just a live event but a repeated digital performance across WhatsApp, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter). This creates a hybrid field of mobilisation, part emotional theatre, part algorithmic targeting that allows symbolic binaries to spread virally and rapidly. This aligns with Kaur's (2020) framing of Modi's brand as a carefully curated performance of extraordinariness, blending charisma with Hindu cultural symbolism.

In this context, populism is more than a campaign strategy, it is a rhetorical logic that defines who belongs, who speaks, and who is heard. It neutralises dissent by moralising loyalty and framing opposition as betrayal. As Mudde (2007) warns, populist systems often erode democratic pluralism by collapsing the boundary between leader and people. In India, this is visible both in public discourse and institutional drift: populist rhetoric reshapes not only how campaigns are run, but how democracy is imagined. This also mirrors global trends where populist leaders harness

emotional framing and direct communication to displace institutional mediation (Cox, 2018), a pattern visible in the strategies of Trump and Bolsonaro.

This literature provides the conceptual foundation for Chapter 4, where Modi's rhetorical strategies are analysed as central mechanisms of voter mobilisation, not just stylistic flourishes. His success, ultimately, lies not in managing narratives, but in embodying them.

2.4: Hindu Nationalism and Identity Politics

Hindu nationalism forms the ideological backbone for Modi's campaign rhetoric. It does not merely reflect cultural pride; it actively constructs political identity through religious majoritarianism. The BJP, under Modi, has redefined secularism as appeasement and positioned Hindutva as the authentic expression of Indian nationhood (Jaffrelot, 2021; Tomalin, 2024). This diffusion of ethnic resentment into electoral politics aligns with the findings of Adeney (2023), who highlights the grassroots spread of nationalist sentiment.

Jaffrelot (2021) argues that this shift represents a deeper transformation within the BJP, from a broad conservative coalition to an ideologically driven movement. In this model, the "real Indian" is Hindu, and political loyalty is measured not by policy support but by symbolic alignment with civilisational identity. Girvin (2023) extends this argument by framing Hindu nationalism as a form of ethno-religious majoritarianism, where pluralism is seen not as a democratic strength but as a cultural contamination. Varshney (2014) highlights how the strategic mobilisation of Hindu identity became central to electoral success, framing religion not just as faith but as political loyalty.

This ideological foundation shapes campaign strategy. In the 2024 general elections, Modi's rhetoric increasingly centred on religious symbols like *"Ram Temple*," "*Ayodhya,*" and "*Shri Ram*", terms that surged (see Figure 4.2.1) in frequency compared to 2019. These references are not benign; they operate as political tools to mark in-group loyalty and exclude dissenting or minority voices. As Banaji (2018) notes, such symbols are weaponised in speeches and digital media to create affective bonds and moral binaries.

The legal and institutional landscape reflects this ideological turn. The abrogation of Article 370 and the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) are not isolated policy decisions but expressions of a broader project to embed Hindu identity into the constitutional and demographic fabric of the Indian state (Anderson & Damle, 2018; Ziegfeld and Jain, 2024). These policies disproportionately affect Muslims, embedding the Hindu–Muslim binary into the legal and political structure of the state.

Digital platforms further amplify this majoritarian narrative. As Udupa (2019) notes, the circulation of emotionally charged nationalist symbols, through WhatsApp and other informal channels, localises Hindu nationalist discourse and embeds it in everyday interactions. These platforms do not just spread content; they reinforce the symbolic boundaries of belonging, making cultural identity both intimate and politically charged (Dutta and Pal, 2024).

While electorally effective, this strategy poses risks to democratic pluralism. Scholars like Mudde (2007) warn that when populism merges with majoritarian identity, it can produce exclusionary political orders. In India, these dangers are not theoretical. They manifest in the normalisation of

hate speech, rising communal violence, and the erosion of institutional safeguards against majoritarian rule (Dutta and Pal, 2024).

Under Modi, elections have shifted from contests over policy to referendums on cultural identity. The voter is no longer imagined as a rational actor, but as a cultural subject, whose political loyalty is measured in symbolic terms (Jaffrelot, 2021; Kaur, 2020). As Udupa (2019) argues, this is not simply about message delivery but more about identity performance, where leadership is affirmed through shared emotion, religious symbols, and digital rituals

For this study, Hindu nationalism is not a contextual backdrop; it is the ideological and emotional engine driving campaign strategy. It defines how voters interpret leadership, how they perceive threats, and how they construct political meaning within India's evolving ideological framework.

2.5: Methodological Approaches and Gaps in the Literature

Existing scholarship on Indian elections tends to fall into one of two methodological camps. The first comprises large-scale quantitative studies, which use survey or voting data to analyse electoral trends, demographic patterns, or issue-based alignments (CSDS–Lokniti, 2019; Vaishnav, 2017). The second focuses on qualitative interpretations of discourse, ideology, and media narratives, particularly in relation to populism and nationalism (Jaffrelot, 2021; Udupa, 2019). While both approaches offer valuable insights, they rarely intersect. As a result, there remains a limited understanding of how symbolic campaign strategies translate into measurable voter behaviour.

Quantitative research often assumes that voting is driven by rational evaluation of policy or performance and thus overlooks the affective and narrative forces that increasingly shape modern

political campaigns (Eldersveld, 1989; Chhibber & Verma, 2018). In contrast, qualitative studies on Hindu nationalism, populist rhetoric, and digital mobilisation compellingly explain how campaigns generate emotional resonance but typically stop short of linking these symbolic strategies to constituency-level outcomes such as changes in vote share (Jaffrelot, 2021; Udupa, 2020). Scholars frequently suggest that symbolic appeals "matter," yet few systematically test how much they influence electoral behaviour, where, or under what conditions.

A second gap lies in the treatment of digital media. Although many studies acknowledge the BJP's sophisticated use of platforms like WhatsApp, they often treat these platforms primarily as dissemination tools. In doing so, they overlook how digital spaces function as environments where political identity is constructed, emotionally reinforced, and ritually performed (Udupa, 2019; Banaji, 2018). Bolsover (2019) argues that WhatsApp-driven political communication now plays an active role in embedding everyday nationalism, a factor often overlooked in large-scale electoral analyses.

This study addresses these gaps by integrating both strands. It adopts a mixed-methods design: constituency-level electoral data are analysed using Welch's t-test to identify whether Modi's campaign visits had a statistically significant impact on vote share, while campaign speeches are subjected to keyword and discourse analysis to trace shifts in rhetorical strategy between 2019 and 2024. By combining data-driven analysis with narrative interpretation, this research directly connects symbolic communication to voter behaviour. This is an approach few studies attempt within the Indian electoral context.

This dual methodological strategy is particularly necessary given the current political landscape, where campaigns are increasingly personalised, digitally amplified, and ideologically polarised. By bridging the divide between quantitative and qualitative research, this paper offers a more grounded, coherent explanation of how narrative, identity, and leader presence operate as tools of voter mobilisation in India's contemporary democracy (Mudde, 2019; Cox, 2017).

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to examine how Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaign visits and rhetorical strategies influenced voter behaviour during India's 2019 and 2024 general elections. The objective is twofold: to assess the measurable electoral impact of Modi's campaign visits, and to explore how shifts in rhetorical strategy shaped voter engagement within a personalised and ideologically charged political environment.

A mixed-methods approach is particularly suited to this study because leadership campaigns operate both at the level of electoral outcomes and symbolic meaning. Quantitative data captures vote shifts, while qualitative analysis uncovers how emotional appeals and identity narratives operate. This chapter outlines the data sources, analytical methods, and limitations of both components.

3.1: Quantitative Strand: Measuring the Electoral Impact of Campaign Visits

The quantitative component assesses whether Modi's campaign visits were associated with significant differences in BJP vote share across constituencies. Leadership presence, especially in

highly personalised populist campaigns, is theorised to have a symbolic effect that reinforces political loyalty and mobilises support (Mudde, 2007; Jaffrelot, 2021).

Electoral data were sourced from the Election Commission of India (ECI) and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), covering 436 constituencies in 2019 and 441 constituencies in 2024. Key variables included BJP vote share, voter turnout, and whether Modi visited a constituency during the official campaign period.

To compare visited and non-visited constituencies, Welch's t-test was used (Field, Miles and Field, 2012). Unlike the standard t-test, Welch's test does not assume equal variances between groups, making it appropriate given the heterogeneous characteristics of Indian constituencies (Ruxton, 2006). The analysis was conducted using R software, focusing on two key outcome measures: BJP vote share and the change in BJP vote share relative to the previous election. This statistical strategy provides a robust method for testing whether Modi's presence had a tangible electoral impact.

3.2: Qualitative Strand: Analysing Campaign Rhetoric and Symbolic Shifts

While vote counts reveal electoral impact, they cannot capture how political meaning is constructed and communicated. Therefore, the qualitative component focuses on analysing Modi's rhetorical strategies across two election cycles.

A total of 81 speeches were selected for analysis: 21 from 2019 and 60 from 2024. These speeches were drawn from official sources, including the PMO, BJP, and PIB websites, and selected to ensure thematic and geographic diversity. The sample was restricted to speeches delivered during official campaign periods to maintain consistency.

A list of 23 keywords (see Appendix C) was developed based on prior scholarship (Jaffrelot, 2021; Udupa, 2019), categorised into three main groups. First, Hindu nationalist symbols such as "*Ram Temple*," "*Shri Ram*," and "*Ayodhya*." Second, governance and development-related terms including "corruption," "*Ujjwala Yojana*," and "*Chowkidar*." Third, polarising or identity-based phrases such as "*vote jihad*," "*Article 370*," and "*Bharat Mata*" (see Figure 4.2.1). Keyword frequency analysis was conducted to identify shifts in the prominence of these categories between 2019 and 2024.

However, keyword frequency alone cannot capture the emotional framing or symbolic resonance of campaign rhetoric. Therefore, a qualitative discourse analysis was conducted alongside the frequency analysis. Special attention was paid to mythological references, binary framings such as "the people versus the elite," and invocations of religious identity. This dual approach allows for a richer understanding of how Modi's rhetorical style evolved from a development-centric narrative to one rooted in cultural identity mobilisation.

3.3: Limitations

Several limitations to this study are acknowledged.

First, the data on PM visits may not capture informal or unpublicised events, potentially underestimating Modi's presence in certain constituencies. Although the PMO and public reports were used to compile visit data, some events may not have been documented or may have been strategically understated.

Second, translation from Hindi and other regional languages into English may introduce interpretive challenges. While great care was taken to preserve tone, symbolism, and nuance, subtle shifts in meaning are an unavoidable risk in cross-linguistic research.

Third, the speech sample may overrepresent high-profile campaign events. Digital documentation is often more complete for major rallies and televised speeches, which may skew the analysis towards the most visible elements of the campaign, potentially underestimating subtler messaging dynamics present in smaller or less-publicised settings.

Despite these limitations, the study's combined quantitative and qualitative framework allows for credible and meaningful insights into Modi's campaign strategy and its broader electoral effects.

3.4: Conclusion

This mixed-methods design enables an integrated analysis of Indian electoral politics. Quantitative methods assess whether campaign visits measurably affected voting behaviour, while qualitative methods uncover how symbolic appeals, emotional narratives, and religious identity were mobilised across two electoral cycles.

By bridging numerical analysis with narrative interpretation, this study captures not only shifts in electoral behaviour but also the emotional and cultural logics underlying political loyalty. In doing so, it contributes both empirical evidence and theoretical insight into the evolving role of leadership, identity, and symbolic performance in India's contemporary democracy.

Chapter 4: Analysis

This chapter reports the findings of the mixed-methods analysis introduced in Chapter 3. Quantitative results examine whether Modi's campaign visits produced measurable shifts in BJP vote share, while qualitative analysis traces how rhetorical strategies evolved from development-focused appeals to identity-based mobilisation. Together, the findings reveal how physical presence and symbolic leadership combined to consolidate political loyalty in India's contemporary electoral landscape.

4.1: Quantitative Impact of Campaign Visits on Voter Behaviour (2019 and 2024)

This section examines the statistical relationship between Modi's campaign visits and the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) vote share in the 2019 and 2024 general elections. To assess this relationship, Welch's two-sample t-test was used to compare mean vote share percentages between constituencies visited by the Prime Minister and those not visited during the official campaign period.

Welch's t-test was chosen over the standard t-test because it does not assume equal variances between groups, making it more appropriate for the dataset where the number of visited constituencies (n = 73) differs substantially from non-visited constituencies (n = 470) (Ruxton, 2006).

The analysis covers two datasets, corresponding to the 2019 and 2024 elections, and evaluates whether Modi's campaign visits had a statistically significant effect on BJP vote share in each year. Beyond the statistical comparison, this section also considers how shifts in campaign strategy, particularly the growing emphasis on populism and identity politics, may have shaped voter behaviour across the two election cycles (Jaffrelot, 2021; Cox, 2017).

4.1.1: Impact on Vote Share: 2024 Elections

A defining feature of Modi's electoral strategy has been his populism—positioning himself as the voice of the common people against the political elites (Meijers and Zaslove, 2020). His emphasis on Hindu nationalism has played a crucial role in reinforcing this image, making his campaign visits more than just logistical exercises. Instead, they serve as a direct appeal to voters who see him as an outsider challenging the status quo (Jaffrelot, 2021).

This section tests whether this populist strategy was more effective in 2024 than in 2019, particularly in terms of its statistical impact on vote share.

Welch's T-Test Results (Complete output in Appendix A)

Welch's two-sample t-test was conducted to compare the BJP vote share between constituencies visited by Modi and those not visited during the 2024 general election. Table 4.1.1 summarises the results.

Metric	2019	2024
Mean Vote Share (PM Visit)	44.51%	43.82%
Mean Vote Share (No PM Visit)	45.78%	40.49%
t-value	0.45317	-2.0546
p-value	0.653	0.041 (significant)
95% Confidence Interval	(-0.04%, 0.07%)	(-6.51%, -0.14%)

Table 4.1.1: Welch's t-test results comparing BJP vote share in constituencies visited vs. not visited by PM Modi during the 2019 and 2024 general elections. See Appendix A for R output details.

The t-test results for the 2024 elections indicate a statistically significant difference in BJP vote share between constituencies that received a PM visit and those that did not. The mean vote share was 43.82% in visited constituencies and 40.49% in non-visited constituencies. The p-value of .041 falls below the conventional .05 threshold, suggesting that the difference is statistically significant. The t-value of -2.055, along with a 95% confidence interval (-6.51%, -0.14%) that does not include zero, further reinforces this conclusion.

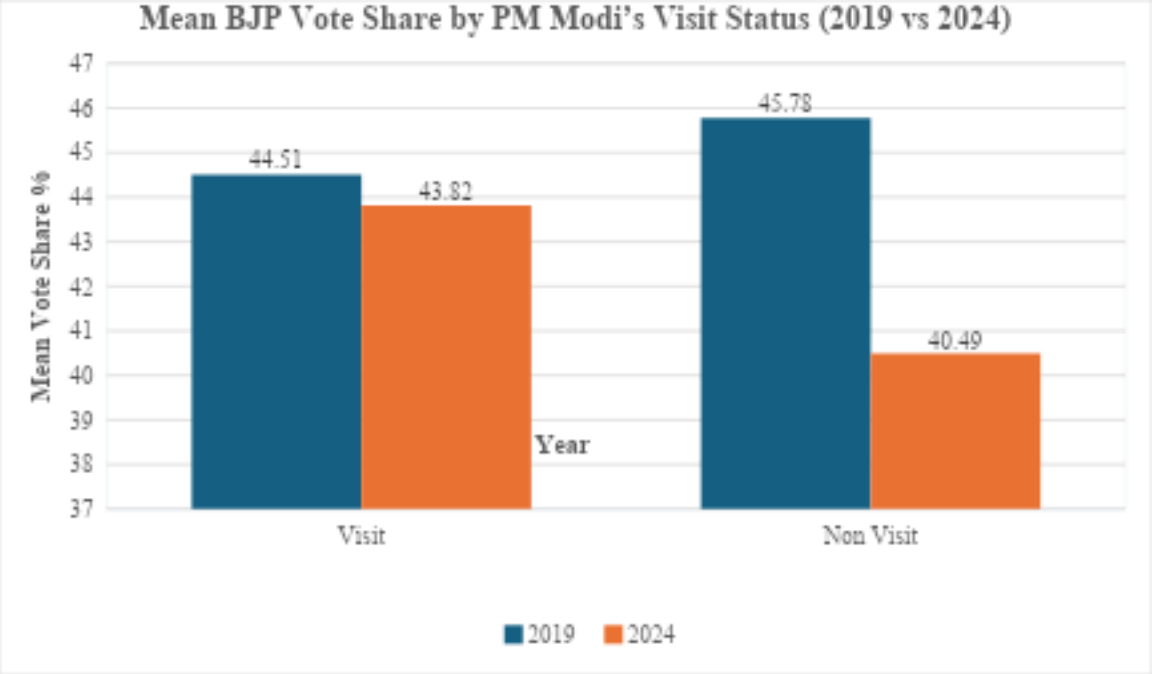

Figure 4.1.1: Mean BJP Vote Share in Constituencies visited vs. not visited by PM Modi during the 2019 and 2024 general elections.

Source: Author's Analysis

The results suggest that Modi's campaign visits contributed to shaping electoral outcomes, either by mobilising voter support or reinforcing existing loyalty. However, while the difference is statistically significant, the practical impact of a 3.33 percentage point increase raises important questions. Was

this margin enough to flip marginal seats, or did it merely consolidate BJP support in already favourable areas?

This interpretation aligns with the populist strategy central to Modi's appeal (Jaffrelot, 2021; Cox, 2017). His 2024 campaign messaging, deeply rooted in Hindu nationalist identity (Chhibber & Verma, 2018), framed him as the 'common man's leader' standing against entrenched elites. Direct interaction with constituents during campaign visits likely amplified this populist appeal, strengthening emotional bonds with the base.

Moreover, in the broader political context, the opposition fragmentation, regional dynamics, and the dominance of national narratives must be considered when evaluating these results (Ziegfeld and Jain, 2024; Vaishnav, 2017). Modi's campaign fits Cox's (2017) definition of populist leadership as a performative enactment of popular sovereignty, directly linking leader presence to voter emotional engagement.

4.1.2: Impact on Vote Share: 2019 Elections

In contrast to the 2024 election results, as shown in Table 4.1.1, the 2019 elections indicate no statistically significant difference in the BJP vote share percentages between constituencies visited by PM Modi and those that were not.

The mean vote share was 44.51% in visited constituencies and 45.78% in non-visited constituencies. The p-value of .653 exceeds the conventional .05 significance threshold, suggesting that campaign visits were not associated with any meaningful difference in vote share. The t-value of 0.453 and the

95% confidence interval (-0.04%, 0.07%), which includes zero, further support the conclusion that PM visits did not impact electoral outcomes in 2019 (Ruxton, 2006).

The absence of a measurable effect from PM Modi's campaign visits in 2019 can be attributed to the broader political context. The BJP's 2019 was dominated by a powerful nationalist surge following the *Pulwama attack* and the *Balakot air strikes* (Ziegfeld and Jain, 2024). These events triggered a rally around the flag effect, unifying the voters around national pride and security, thereby reducing the marginal impact of individual campaign interventions.

While Modi's campaign visits did not produce a statistically significant shift in vote share during the 2019 elections, this finding does not imply a weak populist appeal. On the contrary, Modi's leadership in 2019 was deeply steeped in populist rhetoric, particularly through the anti-corruption narrative symbolised by the *"Chowkidar"* (watchman) campaign (Jaffrelot, 2021; Meijers and Zaslove, 2020). His portrayal as the protector of the common man against corrupt elites resonated nationally, contributing to an emotionally charged electoral environment.

However, this populist mobilisation was primarily national in scope, driven by symbolic narratives amplified through mass media, rather than through constituency-specific campaigning. The emotional consolidation around Modi's image as a strong, incorruptible leader (Jaffrelot, 2021) likely diminished the additional influence of local campaign visits.

This phenomenon can also be understood through Samuel S. Eldersveld's psychological theory of voter behaviour, which emphasises the emotional over the rational factors in electoral decision-making (Eldersveld, 1989). The Pulwama terror attack and subsequent Balakot airstrikes created an atmosphere of national trauma and pride that resonated deeply with the collective identity. In such

emotionally charged contexts, voters are less influenced by campaign logistics, such as constituency visits, and more by symbolic leadership. Modi's image as a strong protector of the nation fulfilled voters' psychological need for security and pride, diminishing the additional persuasive value of his physical presence on the ground. His appeal was already embedded in the national consciousness through these emotional triggers, rendering the mobilising function of campaign visits less impactful in terms of vote share shifts.

Additionally, Modi's leadership and messaging in 2019 were also largely unchallenged due to the weakness of the opposition. The Congress party and other regional challengers failed to articulate a cohesive counter-narrative (Chhibber & Verma, 2018), further consolidating voter support for the BJP at a national level. In such a scenario, a campaign served more as symbolic reaffirmations than as strategic interventions capable of significantly altering voter behaviour.

The 2024 general elections marked a significant shift in India's political landscape, contrasting with 2019. While the BJP retained power, it experienced a reduced majority, relying on coalition partners (Vaishnav and Mallory, 2024). This shift was influenced by the opposition's strategic focus on caste and constitutional issues, which resonated with a broader range of voters (Acharya and Kaushik, 2024). Combined with economic and societal concerns, these dynamics altered voter preferences. The election results highlighted the growing importance of adaptive campaign strategies in an increasingly competitive environment (Shamim, 2024).

While the 2019 results reveal little measurable impact of campaign visits on vote share, the next section examines whether Modi's visits influenced vote change over time between the two elections.

4.1.3: Vote Change Analysis 2024

While the previous analyses focused on absolute vote share (the percentage of votes received by the BJP in each constituency), this section examines vote change, which measures the percentage differences in the BJP's performance between the 2019 and 2024 elections. This metric helps assess whether PM Modi's campaign visits contributed to improving the BJP's electoral position relative to its previous performance, rather than merely boosting its absolute standing in 2024.

Metrics	2024
Mean Vote Change (No PM Visit)	42.62%
Mean Vote Change (PM Visit)	44.36%
t – value	-1.0792
p – value	0.2815 (not significant)
95% Confidence Level	(-4.92%, 1.44%)

Table: 4.1.2: Summary of Welch's t-test results for vote change (2019–2024) in constituencies visited vs. not visited by PM Modi. See Appendix A for R output details.

The t-test results indicate no statistically significant difference in vote change between constituencies visited by PM Modi and those that were not. While the mean vote change was marginally higher in visited constituencies (44.36%) compared to non-visited ones (42.62%), the p-value of 0.2815 exceeds the conventional 0.05 significance threshold. Additionally, the 95% confidence interval (-4.92% to 1.44%) contains zero, reinforcing the conclusion that campaign visits did not systematically influence vote shifts.

Despite a slight increase in vote share in visited constituencies, the absence of major shifts in voter dynamics suggests that Modi's populist appeal in 2024 primarily reinforced existing support rather than persuade undecided voters. Modi's populism, deeply rooted in identity-based politics and Hindu nationalism (Jaffrelot, 2021; Chhibber & Verma, 2018), appears to have solidified his core base without significantly expanding it. His visits, framed within broader populist narratives, may have mobilised loyalists more effectively than converted new voters (Meijers and Zaslove, 2020).

This pattern presents an important contrast to the absolute vote share analysis. While Section 4.1.1 showed a statistically significant difference between visited and unvisited constituencies in 2024, the vote change analysis reveals that Modi's visits did not drive substantial electoral shifts compared to 2019. One likely explanation is that many of the constituencies targeted for campaign visits were already strongholds for the BJP. As Vaishnav (2017) argues, in contexts where incumbency advantages are strong, leader-led visits are more likely to consolidate rather than transform electoral outcomes.

Moreover, the lack of a significant vote change highlights the role of broader structural and regional factors. Elements such as opposition strength, local candidate appeal, or regional political dynamics may have influenced shifts in voter behaviour more than campaign visits alone (Ziegfeld and Jain, 2024).

Thus, while Modi's 2024 campaign visits likely reinforced existing supporters, they did not fundamentally alter constituency-level voting patterns. This finding supports Mudde's (2019) argument that populist success is often unforeseen in reinforcing cultural identities rather than winning over ideologically distant groups. In Modi's case, emotional salience is particularly around

Hindu nationalist themes that strengthen loyalties but did not necessarily generate significant new electoral gains (Bermeo, 2016).

While the statistical findings provide empirical insight into the effectiveness of Modi's direct electoral interventions, they also open broader questions about how the BJP's strategic shift toward identity-based mobilisation and its heavy reliance on symbolic leadership, which reshaped its outreach model between 2019 and 2024. The next section turns to the evolution of Modi's rhetorical strategy, examining the growing centrality of cultural nationalism and digital populism in contemporary Indian electoral campaigns.

4.2: Strategic and Rhetorical Shifts in Modi's Campaigns (2019-2024)

The t-test analyses outlined in section 4.1 revealed a clear shift in the strategic impact of PM Modi's campaign visits between 2019 and 2024. In 2019, visits had no measurable effect on vote share, whereas in 2024, visited constituencies showed a statistically significant 3.33-point increase. This numerical difference reflects a broader transformation in the BJP's campaign strategy—from policy-driven appeals to identity-based mobilisation (Jaffrelot, 2021; Chhibber & Verma, 2018).

While populism and Hindu nationalism are often treated as distinct, this study views them as interdependent in Modi's campaign approach. Following Mudde's (2007) definition, populism provides the rhetorical structure, which is a moral division between "the people" and "the elite", while Hindu nationalism supplies the ideological content defining "the people" as culturally unified, Hindu majority (Hansen, 1999; Girvin, 2023).

Hindu nationalism does not merely accompany populism; it anchors it. It gives Modi's populist appeals emotional and cultural specificity, allowing national identity, political belonging, and dissent in explicitly religious terms (Mudde, 2019; Anderson & Damle, 2018).

In 2024, the BJP's campaign placed far greater emphasis on cultural symbolism, religious identity, and emotional resonance (Udupa, 2019; Banaji, 2018). Modi's visits appeared less focused on persuasion and more on reinforcing affective bonds with his support base. Campaign events operated less as sites of policy discussion and more as rituals of ideological reaffirmation (Jaffrelot, 2021).

To unpack this rhetorical evolution further, the next section analyses the content of Modi's speeches across the two election cycles, highlighting the shift from governance-focused to identity-centric mobilisation.

4.2.1: From Anti-Corruption Narratives to Cultural Nationalism

The shift from 2019 to 2024 in the statistical significance of PM Modi's campaign visits reflects deeper transformations in the BJP's rhetorical strategy. To understand this evolution, it is essential to examine how Modi's public messaging transitioned from governance-driven themes to identity-centred appeals. Voter behaviour in India is deeply tied to emotion, identity, and leader perception (Chhibber & Verma, 2018; Jaffrelot, 2021).

As Eldersveld's (1989) psychological theory of voter behaviour suggests, electoral decisions are not purely rational calculations. Rather, they are shaped by emotional connections, symbolic meaning, and voters' desire to see their personal and cultural identities reflected in political leadership.

In this framework, voters align themselves not only with policies but with the stories and values embodied by a leader. Leaders like Modi have effectively crafted such narratives—linking national pride, religious identity, and the promise of cultural revival into emotionally compelling messages that resonate with large segments of the electorate (Mudde, 2019; Udupa, 2019).

Political speeches have historically been a cornerstone of electoral campaigns in India, providing a direct channel between the leaders and the electorate (Ziegfeld and Jain, 2024). Modi's campaign addresses between 2019 and 2024 to illustrate a strategic narrative evolution around identity, religion and national security (Jaffrelot, 2021; Banaji, 2018). These speeches reflect the evolving political priorities and demonstrate shifts in voter engagement strategies over two election cycles of 2019 and 2024.

His 2019 messaging largely focused on governance achievements and anti-corruption, invoking the *"Chowkidar"* (watchman) trope to frame himself as the protector of the ordinary citizen against elite wrongdoing (Jaffrelot, 2021; Banaji, 2018). This narrative of moral authority aligned with the populist strategy of framing politics as a struggle between righteous citizens and corrupt establishments (Meijers and Zaslove, 2020).

While PM visits in 2019 did not produce a statistically significant impact on BJP vote share, in 2024, constituencies where Modi campaigned experienced a measurable 3.33 percentage point increase. This correlation points to a shift in mobilisation strategy: from policy persuasion to emotional consolidation rooted in religious and nationalist messaging.

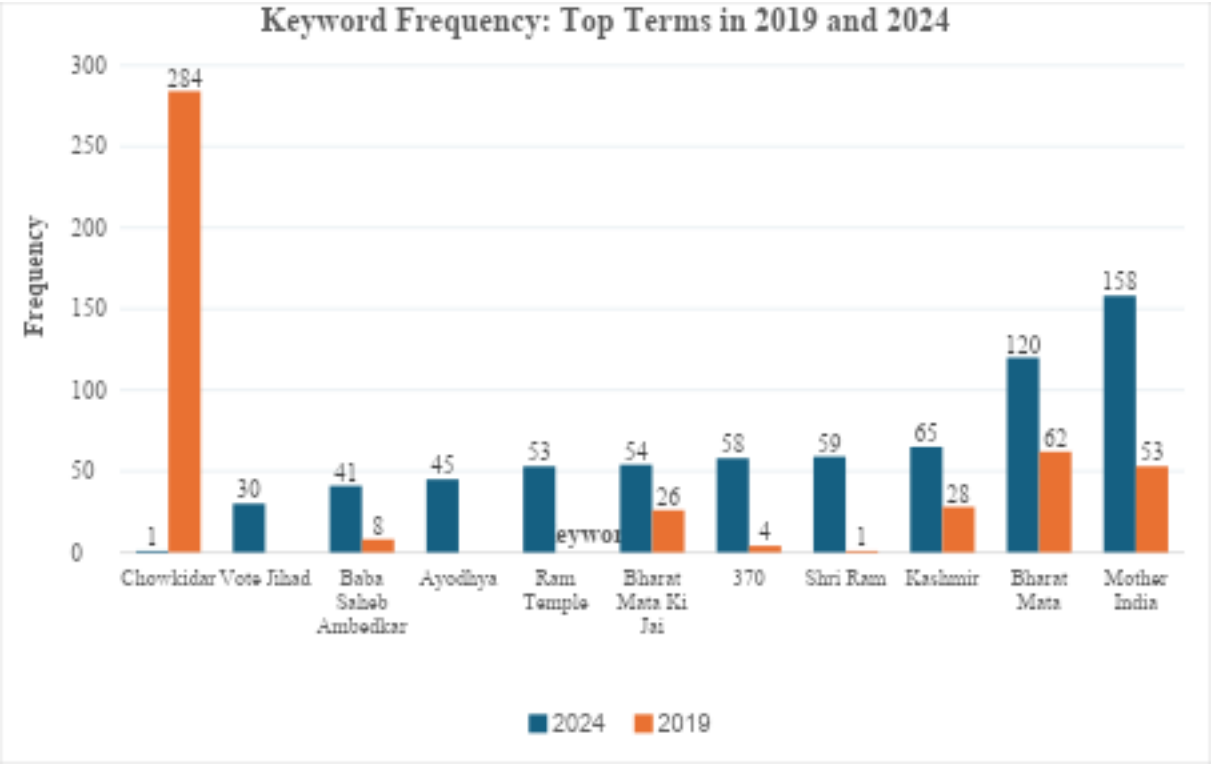

Figure 4.2.1: Comparative Keyword Frequency in Modi's Campaign Speeches (2019 and 2024)

Source: Author's Analysis

Note: Keyword frequency analysis based on speech transcripts collected from PMO, BJP, and PIB sources. Full keyword list and counts are provided in Appendix C

The Figure 4.2.1 chart illustrates this rhetorical transition vividly. The surge in religious and cultural symbolism is particularly striking: references to *"Mother India"* tripled from 53 in 2019 to 158 mentions in 2024, while references to "*Shri Ram*" surged from a single mention to 59.

Perhaps most compelling is the emergence of entirely new religious narratives: terms such as "*Ram Temple*" (53 mentions) and "*Ayodhya*" (45 mentions) were absent in 2019 but became central

frames in 2024. The appearance of "*Praan Pratishtha*" with 9 mentions in 2024, further underscores this shift towards religious themes.

This shift in rhetorical strategy aligns with Jaffrelot's (2021) argument that Modi's leadership not only mobilises short-term electoral support but also advances the long-term ideological goals of Hindu nationalist statecraft, embedding religious identity into the heart of political mobilisation.

Importantly, while PM Modi's visits in 2024 were associated with a statistically significant rise in vote share in visited constituencies, the analysis of vote change suggests these visits did not drive major electoral realignments. This points to a campaign strategy less focused on persuading new voters and more on reinforcing existing ideological loyalties (Vaishnav, 2023). The parallel rise in Hindu nationalist rhetoric is evidenced by the increasing dominance of religious symbolism that indicates a deliberate strategy to consolidate the BJP's core base rather than broaden its appeal (Banaji, 2018; Girvin, 2023).

The disappearance of the "*Chowkidar*" trope further supports this interpretation. In 2019, "*Chowkidar*" framed Modi's anti-corruption narrative and appeared 284 times; and only once in 2024. This rhetorical retreat mirrors the statistical findings: Modi's physical campaign presence had no measurable effect on vote share in 2019, whereas the pivot to religious nationalism coincided with a stronger, more effective mobilisation in 2024 (Ziegfeld and Jain, 2024).

Finally, the lack of a coherent counter-narrative from the opposition allowed Modi's symbolic messaging to dominate the political field uncontested. In the absence of an alternative emotional and ideological vision, his synthesis of cultural pride, Hindu identity, and national strength became the

hegemonic language of political engagement, further reinforcing his appeal with the core supporters (Mudde, 2019; Laclau, 2005).

4.2.2: Digital Reinforcement of Populist and Identity Appeals

While Modi's rhetorical pivot toward Hindu nationalism was delivered through speeches, its political impact was dramatically amplified through digital ecosystems. This section examines how digital media not only extended Modi's populist and identity-based messaging but fundamentally restructured how voters emotionally engaged with political leadership, aligning closely with frameworks proposed by Mudde (2007) and Cox (2017) on populist personalisation.

Cas Mudde (2007) conceptualises populism as a "thin-centred ideology" that lacks a comprehensive worldview and thus attaches itself to more established ideologies such as nationalism or religion to sustain emotional relevance. Modi's shift from economic populism in 2019 to religious nationalism in 2024 reflects this fluidity (Oza, Williams and Lipika Kamra, 2024). The populist core claims to represent the 'real people' against corrupt elites also remained intact, but its ideological packaging evolved based on what resonated most with voters. This strategic adaptability is a central strength of populism and explains its varying forms across electoral cycles (Mudde, 2007).

However, not all aspects of the previous campaign were abandoned. References to "Kashmir" and "Article 370", for instance, increased substantially from 34 mentions in 2019 to 153 in 2024, signalling that territorial nationalism remained a core component of the BJP's political identity even as broader messaging shifted.

A crucial differentiator in 2024 was the scale of digital mobilisation. Unlike 2019, when campaign visits were largely in-person audiences, the 2024 election witnessed real-time social media amplification of Modi's appearances (Sardesai, 2020). The BJP's IT cell strategically disseminated Modi's campaign speeches and rally clips through WhatsApp groups, Twitter, and Facebook, extending his presence beyond physical events (Leake and Chhibber, 2024). This hybrid model, which combines physical rallies with digital ecosystems, allowed highly targeted constituency-specific content to circulate rapidly, reinforcing Modi's populist narrative at both the local and national levels (Udupa, 2019; Yadav, 2024). This strategic use of digital ecosystems marks not just a logistical extension of campaigning, but a structural transformation of voter engagement itself.

This dynamic reflects a new phase of personalist populism. As Cox (2017) observes, populist leaders often act as the moral embodiment of "the people"; in Modi's case, technological tools like *Mann Ki Baat*, WhatsApp broadcasts, and YouTube streams reinforced this embodiment by constructing a direct, unmediated emotional pipeline to voters. Unlike traditional rallies mediated by journalists or opposition narratives, these platforms created hyper-personalised, omnipresent messaging streams. Kumar (2022) finds that online polarisation in India not only reinforces group identities but also erodes deliberative democratic spaces. As also seen in every retweet, WhatsApp forward, or Facebook share, Modi's symbolic presence became further embedded more deeply into private social networks (Banaji, 2018; Bolsover, 2019).

While the BJP's organisational structure remained, the digital campaign model was increasingly around Modi's personal brand, emotional resonance, and symbolic authority rather than collective

party identity. This was not simply a communication strategy, rather, it acts as a redefinition of political engagement itself.

As Udupa (2019) argues, this shift constituted a form of "ideological domestication," where everyday conversations, particularly on WhatsApp, became saturated with emotionally charged political content. This aligns with theories of "algorithmic populism," where emotional intensity, rather than factual accuracy, drives virality and political efficacy (Yadav, 2024). BJP's 2024 campaign thus did not merely translate rhetorical themes into digital formats; it actively reshaped how voters emotionally and culturally experienced leadership in the digital public sphere.

This shift towards a more polarised, identity-based digital discourse was also visible in the introduction of new terms. Phrases like "*vote jihad*" (30 mentions) and "*vote bank politics*" (28 mentions), absent in 2019, became integral to the 2024 narrative. This explicit sharpening of communal binaries mirrors Mudde's (2019) framework of right-wing populism, which merges nationalism, nativism, and strongman leadership to frame electoral competition as a cultural battle to reclaim a threatened majority identity.

Perhaps the most significant symbolic shift was the integration of religious milestones, particularly the Ram Temple construction, into electoral messaging. This development reflects not just a tactical electoral strategy but a deeper ideological evolution, embedding religious pride and the promise of cultural revival directly into the heart of the BJP's national narrative.

Together, the rhetorical evolution and digital reinforcement of Modi's 2024 campaign created a new model of voter mobilisation, blending populist leadership, cultural symbolism, and algorithmic

reach. The following section reflects on the broader theoretical implications of this shift, situating these findings within the larger debates on populism, identity, and democratic resilience.

4.3: Discussion and Theoretical Implications

The preceding analysis highlights a structural evolution in Modi's campaign strategy between 2019 and 2024, but beyond these immediate electoral effects, the transformation carries broader theoretical significance for understanding populism, leader-centric politics, and the future stability of India's democracy.

The contrast between the two election cycles reinforces key insights from populism scholarship. As Mudde (2007) and Laclau (2005) argue, populism hinges less on fixed ideology than on the symbolic construction of a virtuous 'people' against a corrupt elite. Modi's evolving campaign rhetoric: from anti-corruption governance slogans in 2019 to religious identity mobilisation in 2024, illustrates this flexibility. His leadership style exemplifies the adaptive core of populism: the ability to recalibrate emotional appeals based on the prevailing anxieties and aspirations of the electorate.

The strategic divergence across the two elections further illuminates this shift. In 2019, the nationalist surge after *Pulwama* and *Balakot* reduced the marginal utility of individual campaign interventions. By contrast, in 2024, Modi's visits were tactically concentrated in competitive constituencies where consolidating Hindu voters was crucial (Vaishnav, 2015). However, beyond logistics, Modi's presence itself became an act of populist performance—symbolically reaffirming a cultural majority perceived as under threat (Cox, 2017).

Moreover, digital mobilisation significantly amplified this strategy. Modi's speeches in 2024 were not only physically delivered but also algorithmically scaled, creating a hybrid experience of presence that bypassed traditional media filters (Yadav, 2024; Udupa, 2020). This digital reinforcement intensified affective loyalty while embedding identity-based narratives into everyday discourse.

Increasing personalisation however introduces structural fragilities. As Weisskircher, (2020) and Laclau (2005) warn, leader-centric populist movements are often volatile, heavily reliant on individual charisma. BJP's 2024 success was deeply tied to Modi's symbolic presence. Whether this emotional intensity can be institutionalised post-Modi remains an open question.

Ultimately, the evolution between 2019 and 2024 illustrates how emotional appeals, identity politics, and digital ecosystems have reconfigured India's electoral terrain (Sardesai, 2020). Modi's leadership has blurred the boundary between political authority and cultural representation, transforming him into a larger-than-life figure central to the BJP's narrative. This fusion, while electorally potent, creates long-term vulnerabilities in a democracy premised on institutional resilience rather than charismatic centrality.

Can the party sustain the emotional intensity of its base without his charisma, or will the temporary ideological staging of Hindu nationalism be enough? The durability of such populist mobilisation hinges not only on ideological continuity but on affective loyalty to the leader as a symbol of cultural reclamation (Taggart, 2000; Mounk, 2018). Future research should explore whether the BJP can institutionalise the Modi model or whether the 2024 campaign represents a high-water mark in leader-centric populist strategy. Either way, the comparison between 2019 and 2024 offers a critical lens through which to understand how

populism, nationalism, and digital mobilisation now converge at the heart of Indian electoral politics.

Having traced the strategic, rhetorical, and structural shifts in Modi's campaign between 2019 and 2024, the following chapter offers a broader synthesis. It reflects on the key findings, evaluates their implications for democratic politics, and outlines avenues for future research.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This paper has examined how Prime Ministerial visits and campaign rhetoric influenced voter behaviour across India's 2019 and 2024 general elections, focusing on Hindu nationalist messaging and constituency-level targeting. By combining constituency-level vote share analysis with speech content analysis, the study offers new insights into how symbolic leadership and emotionally coded narratives shape electoral outcomes in contemporary India.

The findings reveal a clear shift in campaign strategy between the two elections. In 2019, Modi's visits had a limited measurable impact, and his messaging focused on governance and anti-corruption. By 2024, however, his campaign was grounded in identity politics, with a sharp increase in religious symbolism and a statistically significant rise in vote share in visited constituencies. This indicates a move away from persuading undecided voters toward consolidating affective loyalty among the core base.

These patterns reflect a broader transformation in Indian electoral politics, from issue-based campaigning to emotionally driven, leader-centric mobilisation. Modi's image functioned not just as a political brand but as a symbol of cultural identity, moral authority, and national belonging. His

physical and digital presence became tools of ideological reinforcement rather than information delivery.

Methodologically, this study bridged a gap between narrative analysis and electoral data, showing how affective rhetoric can produce measurable electoral outcomes. It contributes to broader debates on populism, political communication, and identity politics in digitally mediated democracies.

However, the findings also raise critical concerns. As campaigns become increasingly centred around emotional resonance and symbolic affirmation, the space for deliberation, dissent, and pluralism may narrow. The BJP's electoral model, effective as it may be, relies heavily on Modi's personal appeal. The party's future ability to sustain this model without his charismatic leadership remains uncertain.

Therefore, future research should explore the long-term effects of digitally amplified populism and its role in reshaping voter expectations, institutional norms, and democratic resilience. Comparative studies across other democracies undergoing similar shifts could also deepen our understanding of how identity, media, and leadership now intersect in electoral politics. Moreover, studies could also examine whether emotional mobilisation retains its power across changing socio-economic conditions, particularly in contexts of economic downturn or leadership transitions

Ultimately, this study shows that Prime Ministerial visits and campaign rhetoric are not merely tactical moves, they are part of a broader political project. In Modi's case, they reflect a strategy that fuses identity, affect, and authority to redefine how leadership is performed and how political loyalty is cultivated in contemporary India. By tracing this evolution across two election cycles, the paper

contributes to a deeper understanding of how narrative, presence, and affect now function as core instruments of electoral strategy in contemporary India.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, campaign visit data relies on publicly available records, which may omit informal or unreported events. The speech dataset, while broad, is weighted toward high-profile events, potentially underrepresenting more localised or region-specific messaging. Additionally, keyword frequency analysis captures patterns but not tone or context, and the use of translated speeches may limit cultural nuance. While the statistical results identify meaningful correlations, they do not establish causality. Finally, this study focuses on Modi's campaign strategy, without including opposition narratives or voter perspectives, which future research could explore through interviews, ethnography, or comparative content analysis.

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Glossary

Term	Definition
Ayodhya	A town in Uttar Pradesh considered the birthplace of the Hindu deity Ram. Central to Hindu nationalist discourse due to the Ram Temple dispute.
Balakot Airstrikes	Indian military strikes conducted in Pakistan-administered territory in 2019, following the Pulwama attack. Used politically to signal national strength.
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	India's ruling right-wing party, aligned with Hindu nationalist ideology. Led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
Chowkidar	Hindi for "watchman"; used as a 2019 campaign slogan to present Modi as a guardian of the nation and an anti-corruption figure.

Goods and Services Tax (GST)	A nationwide indirect tax reform introduced in 2017 to unify India's fragmented tax system. Promoted as a major governance achievement under Modi.
Hindutva	An ideological belief system advocating that India is fundamentally a Hindu nation. Forms the cultural foundation of the BJP's political stance.
Jai Shri Ram	A religious chant meaning "Hail Lord Ram." Commonly used at BJP rallies to invoke Hindu identity and unity.
Lok Sabha	The lower house of India's Parliament, whose members are directly elected in general elections.
Mann Ki Baat	A monthly radio programme hosted by PM Modi to speak directly to citizens, blending policy talk with symbolic messaging.
Modi Model	A political approach associated with PM Modi that combines personal charisma, Hindu nationalist rhetoric, strongman imagery, and digital outreach.
Praan Pratishtha	A Hindu ritual in which a deity's idol is ceremonially infused with life. Referenced in the consecration of the Ram Temple.
Pulwama Attack	A 2019 suicide bombing in Kashmir that killed 40 Indian soldiers. Politically significant for triggering nationalistic responses in the election.

Ram Temple	A newly built Hindu temple in Ayodhya, long demanded by Hindu nationalist groups. Became a central religious symbol in the 2024 BJP campaign.
Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)	A Hindu nationalist volunteer organisation and ideological parent of the BJP. Influences its cultural and political positions.
Vote Bank Politics	A term used in Indian discourse to describe the practice of targeting specific communities for electoral gain, often criticised as divisive.
Vote Jihad	A communal term used in some BJP-aligned rhetoric to suggest Muslims are voting strategically to influence outcomes—controversial and polarising.
WhatsApp Nationalism	A phenomenon where nationalist political messages are circulated via WhatsApp, often in emotionally charged, locally tailored formats.
Ujjwala Yojana	A flagship government welfare scheme launched under Modi to provide subsidised gas connections to rural households, particularly women.
Article 370	A constitutional provision that granted special status to Jammu & Kashmir. Its abrogation in 2019 was presented by the BJP as a nationalist achievement.
Sanatan Dharma	A Sanskrit term referring to the "eternal" or "universal" tradition in Hinduism. Occasionally invoked in political speeches for religious emphasis.

Appendices

Appendix A: Statistical Analysis Outputs

This appendix provides the outputs from Welch's t-tests conducted in R software to compare BJP vote share and vote change across constituencies visited and not visited by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the 2019 and 2024 general elections.

Appendix A.1: Welch's t-test Output – 2024 Vote Share

```
T-test results for Vote Share Percentage 2024:

        Welch Two Sample t-test

data:  Elections_2024$Vote_Share_Percentage by Elections_2024$PM_Visits
t = -2.0546, df = 274.39, p-value = 0.04087
alternative hypothesis: true difference in means between group 0 and group 1 is not equal to 0
95 percent confidence interval:
 -6.5126369 -0.1391286
sample estimates:
mean in group 0 mean in group 1
       40.49083        43.81671
```

Figure A.1: Welch's t-test results for 2024 vote share

Appendix A.2: Welch's t-test Output – 2019 Vote Share

```
T-test results for Vote Share Percentage 2019:

        Welch Two Sample t-test

data:  Elections_2019$Vote_Share_Percentage by Elections_2019$PM_Visits
t = 0.45317, df = 47.705, p-value = 0.6525
alternative hypothesis: true difference in means between group 0 and group 1 is not equal to 0
95 percent confidence interval:
 -0.04354192  0.06887514
sample estimates:
mean in group 0 mean in group 1
      0.4578074       0.4451408
```

Figure A.2: Welch's t-test results for 2019 vote share

Appendix A.3: Welch's t-test Output – 2024 Vote Change

The following output presents the Welch's t-test results comparing BJP vote change across visited and non-visited constituencies in 2024.

```
T-test results for Vote Change 2024:

        Welch Two Sample t-test

data:  Elections_2024$Vote_change by Elections_2024$PM_Visits
t = -1.0792, df = 252.63, p-value = 0.2815
alternative hypothesis: true difference in means between group 0 and group 1 is not equal to 0
95 percent confidence interval:
 -4.915506  1.435308
sample estimates:
mean in group 0 mean in group 1
       42.62046        44.36056
```

Figure A.3: Welch's t-test results for 2019 vote share

Appendix B: Campaign Speech Dataset

This appendix provides a detailed summary of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaign speeches analysed in this paper. It includes the state, year, and publicly available source links for each speech, covering both the 2019 and 2024 general election periods.

Note: The following campaign speeches by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, collected from official government and party websites, were used for content analysis. Individual speeches are not directly cited in the main text but serve as primary sources for the rhetorical and keyword analysis presented in this paper.

Appendix B.1: 2024 Campaign Speeches

Speech ID	State	Year	Link

1	Koderma, Jharkhand	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/hi/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-koderma-jharkhand-582407
2	Barabanki, Uttar Pradesh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/hi/17th-may-2024-text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-a-public-meeting-in-barabanki-uttar-pradesh-582505
3	Dhar, Madhya Pradesh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-dhar-madhya-pradesh-582160
4	Junagadh, Gujarat	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-junagadh-gujarat-582500
5	Mahbubnagar, Telangana	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/hi/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-mahabubnagar-telangana--582281
6	Dhuaraha, Uttar Pradesh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-dhaurahra-uttar-pradesh-582121
7	Dhumka, Jharkhand	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/hi/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-dumka-jharkhand-582904

8	Banswara,Rajasthan	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/hi/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-banswara-rajasthan-581787
9	Gurdaspur, Punjab	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-gurdaspur-punjab-582874
10	Mandi, HP	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-mandi-himachal-pradesh-582781
11	Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/prime-minister-narendra-modi-attends-public-meeting-in-ghazipur-uttar-pradesh-25th-may-twenty-twenty-four-582726
12	Mathurapur, Uttar Pradesh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/prime-minister-narendra-modi-attends-public-meeting-in-mathurapur-west-bengal-582865
13	Bhiwani, Mahendragarh, Haryana	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-bhiwani-mahendragarh-haryana-582665
14	Dwarka, West Delhi	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/prime-minister-narendra-modi-attends-public-meeting-in-west-delhi-22nd-may-twenty-twenty-four-582629

15	Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/prime-minister-narendra-modi-attends-public-meeting-in-prayagraj-uttar-pradesh-582598
16	Champaran, Bihar	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/prime-minister-narendra-modi-attends-public-meeting-in-east-champaran-and-maharajganj-bihar-582596
17	Medinipur, West Bengal	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-a-public-meeting-in-medinipur-west-bengal-582601
18	Bhadohi, Uttar Pradesh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-bhadohi-uttar-pradesh-582438
19	Saran, Bihar	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-saran-bihar-582368
20	Hajipur, Bihar	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/prime-minister-narendra-modi-attends-public-meeting-in-hajipur-muzaffarpur-and-saran-bihar-582329
21	Barrackpore, West Bengal	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-barrackpore-west-bengal-582310

22	Hooghly, West Bengal	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/prime-minister-narendra-modi-attends-public-meeting-in-barrackpore-hooghly-arambagh-and-howrah-west-bengal-12th-may-twenty-twenty-four-582307
23	Odisha	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/11th-may-2024-text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-a-public-meeting-in-kandhamal-odisha-582282
24	Odisha	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-arambagh-west-bengal--582311
25	West Bengal	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-howrah-west-bengal-582365
26	Jharkhand	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-lohardaga-jharkhand-582219
27	Junagadh, Gujarat	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-junagadh-gujarat-582500

28	Chikkaballapur	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-chikkaballapur-karnataka-581644
29	Jalandhar, Punjab	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-jalandhar-punjab-582830
30	Shimla, Himachal Pradesh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-shirmaur-shimla-himachal-pradesh-582755
31	Nalbari	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-nalbari-assam-581559
32	Bishnupur, West Bengal	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/19th-may-text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-a-public-meeting-in-bishnupur-west-bengal-582574
33	Purulia, West bengal	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-a-public-meeting-in-purulia-west-bengal-582572
34	Pratapgarh, Uttar Pradesh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-pratapgarh-uttar-pradesh--582471

35	Jaunpur, Uttar Pradesh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-jaunpur-uttar-pradesh-582498
36	Lalaganj, Uttar Pradesh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-lalganj-uttar-pradesh-582472
37	Banaskantha, Gujarat	2024	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEvwSSSzj3o
38	Sabarkantha, Gujarat	2024	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_LiSiTYsRU
39	Palamu, Jharkhand	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-palamu-jharkhand-582123
40	Jamnagar, Gujarat	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-jamnagar-gujarat-582369
41	Surendranagar, Gujarat	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-surendranagar-gujarat-582496

42	Anand, Gujarat	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-anand-gujarat-582504
43	Balurghat	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-balurghat-west-bengal-581527
44	Alathur, Kerala	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-alathur-kerala-581477
45	Mysuru, Karnataka	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/14-april-2024-text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-a-public-meeting-in-mysuru-karnataka-581444
46	Bastar, Chhattisgarh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-bastar-chhattisgarh-581225
47	Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-saharanpur-uttar-pradesh-581178
48	Rudrapur, Uttrakhand	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-addressing-public-meeting-in-rudrapur-uttarakhand-581044

49	South Goa, Goa	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-south-goa-581952
50	Munger, Bihar	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-munger-bihar-581843
51	Araria, Bihar	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-araria-bihar--581862
52	Malda Uttar, West Bengal	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-malda-west-bengal-581841
53	Morena, Madhya Pradesh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/25th-april-text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-a-public-meeting-in-morena-madhya-pradesh-581791
54	Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-shahjahanpur-uttar-pradesh-581839
55	Aonla, Uttar Pradesh	2024	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGEdOaxa_ic

56	Agra, Uttar Pradesh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-speech-at-public-meeting-in-agra-uttar-pradesh-581818
57	Sagar, Madhya Pradesh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-sagar-madhya-pradesh-twenty-twenty-four-581758
58	Betul, Madhya Pradesh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-betul-madhya-pradesh-581784
59	Jangir Champa, Chhattisgarh	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-janjgir-champa-chhattisgarh-581728
60	Tonk Sawai, Rajasthan	2024	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-tonk-sawai-madhopur-rajasthan-581729

Appendix B.2: 2019 Campaign Speeches

Speech ID	State	Year	Link
1	Jaipur, Rajasthan	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-jaipur-rajasthan-544806

2	Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-bahraich-uttar-pradesh-544789
3	Muzaffarpur, Bihar	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-muzaffarpur-bihar-544761
4	Barrackpore, West Bengal	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-barrackpore-west-bengal-544770
5	Kannauj, Uttar Pradesh	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-kannauj-uttar-pradesh-544751
6	Mumbai, Maharashra	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-mumbai-maharashtra-544758
7	Banda, Uttar Pradesh	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-banda-uttar-pradesh-544748
8	Darbhanga, Bihar	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-darbhanga-bihar-25-april-2019-544742
9	Koderma, Jharkhand	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-koderma-jharkhand-544769
10	Bolpur, West Bengal	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-bolpur-west-bengal-544731
11	Bagalkot, Karnataka	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-bagalkot-karnataka--544601

12	Chikodi, Karnataka	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-chikodi-karnataka--544602
13	Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-moradabad-uttar-pradesh-544545
14	Ahmednagar, Maharashtra	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-ahmednagar-maharashtra--544518
15	Latur, Maharashtra	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-latur-maharashtra--544501
16	Tripura	2019	
17	Koraput, Odisha	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-koraput-odisha-544330
18	Gohpur, Assam	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-gohpur-544322
19	Moran, Assam	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-moran-544320
20	Kendrapara, Odisha	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-kendrapara-odisha--544719
21	Rudrapur, Uttrakhand	2019	https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-public-meeting-in-rudrapur-uttarakhand-544261

Appendix C: Keyword Frequency

This appendix presents the keyword frequency analysis from Narendra Modi's campaign speeches during the 2019 and 2024 Indian general elections. The selected 23 keywords were grouped into thematic categories based on their relevance to governance, religious nationalism, identity mobilisation, and polarising language. The table below shows the number of mentions for each keyword in the speeches analysed.

Keyword	Category	2019 Count	2024 Count
Mother India	Religious/Cultural Symbols	53	158
Bharat Mata ki Jai	Religious/Cultural Symbols	26	54
Vote Jihad	Religious/Cultural Symbols	0	30
Devbhoomi	Religious/Cultural Symbols	0	7
Shri Ram	Religious/Cultural Symbols	1	59
Ayodhya	Religious/Cultural Symbols	0	45
Baba Saheb Ambedkar	Religious/Cultural Symbols	8	41
Chowkidar	Political References	248	1
370	Political References	4	58
370 Article	Political References	2	30
Kashmir	Political References	28	65
Sanatan Dharma	Community and Identity	0	1
Bharat Mata	Community and Identity	62	120

Ram Temple	Community and Identity	0	53
Praan Pratishtha	Community and Identity	0	9
Anti National	Social and Political Movements	2	11
Love Jihad	Social and Political Movements	0	3
Uniform Civil Code	Social and Political Movements	0	3
Vote bank politics	Polarizing Language	0	28
Hindustan	Polarizing Language	2	6
Diwali	Festivals and Rituals	1	2
Kumbh Mela	Festivals and Rituals	1	0
Navratri	Festivals and Rituals	1	6

Table C.1: Frequency of Thematic Keywords in Modi's Campaign Speeches (2019 vs. 2024)

‘Männerparteien’? Understanding the gender gap in support for the populist radical right

Maha Shaikh, 2nd Year Essay

BSocSc (Hons) Politics and International Relations

Abstract

The gender gap in electoral support for populist radical right parties (PRRPs) has been widely theorised in the field of gendered political behaviour, with a general trend of men voting for PRRPs more than women. However, there is little agreement in the literature on the nature and causes of the radical right gender gap (RRGG). This paper examines how cross-national variation in sociopolitical contexts, party strategies and intersectional cleavages affect ideological alignment with and electoral support for PRRPs. It highlights gaps in the literature and the need for more cross-national and intersectional examination of how female and male voters are differently attracted to and deterred from PRRPs to understand who PRRPs are appealing to, and how this is driving political polarisation across cleavages of gender, race, economics and age.

Introduction

The ‘gender gap’ has long been a focus in the study of gendered political preferences and voting behaviour, and over the past two decades, a growing body of literature has addressed how women and men differ in their support for populist radical right parties (PRRPs). Once marginal parties, PRRPs across Europe and beyond now enjoy growing popularity, electoral success and governmental influence (Mudde, 2019; Aktas, 2024). Examining gendered patterns of support for

the populist radical right, both in ideology and at the ballot, is vital for a nuanced understanding of the rise of these parties, their strategies and their electorates. In general, men vote more for PRRPs than women do, in what Givens (2004) termed the 'radical right gender gap' (RRGG). This aligns with the broader 'modern gender gap' where men are more right-wing and women are more left-wing (Inglehart & Norris, 2000). PRRPs are often perceived as "männerparteien," men's parties (Mudde, 2007, p. 118), and supporters of the far-right are often stereotyped as the 'left-behind, male, white working-class' (Allen & Goodman, 2021, p. 135); however, as this paper will explore, this assessment is only partly accurate.

The existence of the RRGG is widely agreed-upon (Harteveld & Ivarsflaten, 2018), though there is much cross-national variation in its size and characteristics (Immerzeel, et al., 2015). There is disagreement about its causes, often because of massive variation in the political and social contexts in which PRRPs operate. This paper addresses how gendered support for PRRPs – ideologically and electorally – differs across contexts and intersectional variations. Firstly, I examine how similar ideological alignment with PRRPs generally translates into electoral support for men, but not for women. Secondly, I analyse how, though appealing to the same core populist ideologies, strategically gendered positions and rhetoric of PRRPs can differently attract male and female electorates. Thirdly, I assess how identities such as race and generation intersect with gender to affect support for PRRPs, highlighting the importance of studying women and men as heterogeneous, not homogeneous, groups. I focus on the populist radical right in Europe, although for the case of intersectionality, the only literature available was on the US. I consider patterns of behaviour for both women and men, though men's political behaviour is often under-theorised (Ralph-Morrow, 2022, p. 26). I conclude that, to understand the nuances of the RRGG, it is essential to understand how cross-national variation in sociopolitical contexts, party strategies, and intersecting cleavages affect ideological alignment and voters' choices at the ballot.

The RRGG: translating ideological preferences into votes

Populist radical right parties, as termed by Cas Mudde (2007, p. 293), are characterised by a core ideology of nativism, authoritarianism and populism. The term is used interchangeably with reference to 'the far-right'. Their political issues include concerns about immigration, security, corruption and foreign policy (Betz, 1993, p. 413; Mudde, 2019, p. 31). According to Ignazi's (1992) 'silent counter-revolution' hypothesis, their rise reflects the salience of these issues to voters, as well as increasing polarisation and institutional distrust across Europe.

Over past decades, women have become more left-leaning than men for reasons including generational shifts in cultural differences between men and women (Inglehart & Norris, 2000, p. 451), secularisation, and women becoming more economically left-wing (Shorrocks, 2018). However, the existence of a gender gap in support for far-right ideologies has long been contested (Givens, 2004, p. 50), with Mudde (2007, p. 118) arguing that the RRGG cannot be attributed to women having a greater level of feminism or progressiveness that deters them from the far-right. There is no consistent gender gap in preferences for policies that are main issues for PRRPs, and women hold the same levels of nativism, authoritarianism and discontent with democracy as men do (Harteveld, et al., 2015).

Despite the similar levels of ideological alignment with PRRPs between women and men, the RRGG persists, as women are likely to attach lower salience to these attitudes than men, and determine their vote choice less by ideology (Harteveld & Ivarsflaten, 2018, p. 369). Studies have shown that women "do" politics differently from men, and tend to prioritise others in their vote choice. Harteveld et al (2015) argue it is to do with moderation, that women vote for different reasons than men and do not place as much significance on a party's political programme. Instead, they may consider PRRP's poor reputation within the political system; may prioritise different functions of a democratic system, and attach greater importance to the protection of minority rights

which PRRPs deprioritise (Jansesberger & Rhein, 2024, p. 15); and may be more inclined to vote for established parties over newer unfamiliar parties (Mudde 2007, p. 118). In contrast, men are more inclined to prioritise ideological preference over these factors.

Appealing to gendered electorates

PRRPs take different approaches to attract gendered voters. Some parties appeal to women voters to reduce the gender gap, while others double down on reinforcing male support. They take their core PRR ideologies – that women and men are equally aligned with – and strategically present them through gendered rhetorics that differently attract and deter women and men voters.

Attracting women: cultural progressiveness

Perhaps contrary to expectations, some culturally progressive attitudes predict greater far-right support for women, whereas, more unsurprisingly, social conservatism predicts greater far-right support for men (Allen & Goodman, 2021, p. 147). For women, this seems contradictory: how can liberal values be reconciled with nativist, authoritarian and populist ideologies and drive support for PRRPs?

Women are more likely to support PRRPs when nativist and populist ideas are embedded in progressive, woman-oriented rhetoric. Though anti-immigrant, anti-Islam narratives clash with the protection of minority rights that are salient for women (Jansesberger & Rhein, 2024, p. 15), PRRPs position their progressive, liberal positions on gender in the constructed threat to European women from Muslim and migrant communities and perceived non-European/non-Western culture (Chueri & Damerow, 2022, p. 942). This framing resonates with nativist ideologies and allows women to support anti-immigration positions through the lens of gender protection, even if they reject overtly patriarchal or sexist rhetoric. This rhetorical strategy is only used by some parties, and, in general, most women remain deterred by the far right's association with xenophobia or anti-minority sentiment (Milosav et al., 2025, p. 1).

Attracting men – masculinity & anti-gender attitudes

PRRPs that aim to attract men often appeal to the same nativist ideologies but through distinctly masculinised rhetoric. Men are significantly more attracted than women to PRRPs that display such masculinised characteristics in their leadership and rhetoric (Sauer, 2020, p. 23). Individuals who ascribe to masculine characteristics are more likely to support PRRPs, partly due to sexism and perceived threats to 'traditional' masculinity from 'gender ideology' and feminism (Coffé, et al., 2023, p. 1).

Parties like the English Defence League and the Dutch Party of Freedom strategically attract gendered voters by using rhetoric that constructs Muslims and migrants as dangerous threats to national and cultural values (Ralph-Morrow, 2022, p. 39), similar to the parties discussed in the sections prior. However, they frame the consequent need to protect 'vulnerable' women through the rhetoric of male strength and dominance, which attracts individuals who ascribe to nativist and hypermasculinised ideologies.

Much of this research is case-specific, looking at the masculinised rhetoric of individual parties such as the EDL and VOX in Spain. Further comparative research is needed to understand broader patterns of masculinity driving PRRP support across national contexts.

The French RRGG

One case that highlights the nature of women's attraction to the far-right is the success of the National Rally (RN) in closing and eliminating their gender gap over the 2012, 2017 and 2022 French presidential elections, under Marine Le Pen's leadership (Elliott & Clifton, 2023, p. 46; Mayer, 2022, p. 445). Descriptive representation alone does not significantly attract women voters (Chueri & Damerow, 2022, p. 929), but Le Pen employed several strategies to reduce the RN's RRGG. She softened the party's image through the use of more moderate rhetoric and by presenting

herself as a maternal, protective figure against the presented migrant and Islamic threat, rather than confrontational and hyper-masculinised (Elliott & Clifton, 2023). This distanced the RN from its previous harsh image, legitimising and mainstreaming the RN in France's electoral arena (Knapp, 2022, p. 511). This links to studies on how, among other factors, harsh party perceptions and a lack of liberal values deter women from voting for PRRPs (Harteveld & Ivarsflaten, 2018).

Le Pen's success in eradicating the gender gap can be compared to the performance of Éric Zemmour in 2022, when he ran for president as the leader of Reconquête, a newly formed PRRP. His election campaign took a more provocative, radical and masculinised approach, with harsh anti-migrant and Islamophobic rhetoric not cloaked in progressiveness as Le Pen had done. While Le Pen had no gender gap in 2022, women were half as likely to vote for Zemmour compared to men, indicating a recreation of the RRGG in France (Mayer, 2022). This confirms that men are more receptive to provocative, masculinised rhetoric, while women are deterred, even when there is no gender gap in underlying populist ideological views in an electorate. This case highlights how support for PRRPs is dependent on party and leader-specific contexts.

Intersectionality

Though feminist theory has long stressed the importance of intersectionality when studying gender (Hancock, 2007), it is often missing in the study of gendered political attitudes and behaviour, with most studies treating women and men as homogenous groups. Some studies have looked at the intersections of different cleavages influencing the RRGG, but this is limited, often because of a lack of data (Coffé, et al., 2023). This section shows how two key cleavages – race and generation – intersect with gender to impact the extent to which women and men voters support PRRPs at the ballot.

The USA: Intersections of gender & race

Since the 1980s, women in the USA have been more likely to vote Democrat than Republican (Junn & Masuoka, 2019), including in recent US elections. The Republican party has been considered a

PRRP – one that is mainstreamed in the US's two-party system - since Donald Trump set out his extremely nativist, populist and increasingly authoritarian MAGA agenda (Arhin, et al., 2023, p. 572). The party's RRGG was expected, especially due to the hostile sexism of Trump's electoral campaigns (Cassese & Barnes, 2018). However, we can look beyond gender to see patterns of racialised gendered voting behaviour that nuance the understanding of gendered support for PRRPs.

A majority of white women have consistently voted Republican, contrary to expectations that they would favour Democrats, highlighting how the female vote in the US is not unified (Cassese & Barnes, 2018; Junn & Masuoka, 2019; Wolf et al., 2025). Kim and Junn (2024, p. 701) argue that viewing women as a monolith is whitewashing, as white women have been the only group of women voting Republican by a majority (Junn & Masuoka, 2019). For white women, their racial positionality is more salient than concerns about sexism or gender policies, and so they endorse Trump's hostile sexism to maintain the benefits of racial privilege offered by the right-wing authoritarian MAGA agenda (Cassese & Barnes, 2018, p. 696). Wolf et al's study (2025, p. 236) examines how, in contrast, women of colour, especially black women, are the only group to not align with right-wing authoritarian ideology. They attribute this to their experiences of dual marginalisation of race and gender, which puts them strongly at odds with Trump's anti-immigrant, patriarchal rhetoric and deters them from voting for him.

Many of these studies focus on intersectionality in women's voting patterns, but it is equally important to look at heterogeneity among men. As the studies anticipated, most white men voted for Trump. Their privileges within patriarchy and white supremacy are assured, and so there is no cross-pressure to deter them from voting for Trump (Wolf, et al., 2025, p. 223). More complex is how race and gender intersect for men of colour. In 2024, defying expectations, the majority of Latino men also supported Trump despite the Republican party's clear anti-immigration stances

(Wolf, et al., 2025, p. 222). This shows how, for these men of colour, and, to a lesser extent, Black men, the appeal of gender-traditional and masculinised parties is more salient than the assertion of white supremacist hierarchies. This has been linked to men's sexism driving PRRP support, but as Hickel and Deckman (2022, p. 1398) point out, we must also be careful not to reproduce harmful stereotypes. For example, about Latinos being particularly sexist, as their study found that sexist Latinos were not more likely to support Trump than non-Latino sexists.

As Wolf, et al. (2025, p. 221) point out, there is both variation within gender by race and within race by gender, with different groups attaching different salience to populist ideologies due to their racial and gendered positionalities. Similar literature on the impact of race in cases outside the US is lacking, though I anticipate that the growing success of the far-right will necessitate the expansion of this field of study in European countries with ethnic diversity and will soon fill the gaps.

Generational gender gaps

There is increasing attention in the literature on the 'gender-generation gap' (Shorrocks, 2018), with a limited number of studies addressing the RRGG among cohorts. Younger men are especially more likely to vote for parties that emphasise national identity and anti-immigration policies, such as PRRPs (Shorrocks, 2022), and initial studies concur that the RRGG has variation along generational lines, widening with younger cohorts. In the 2024 European Parliament elections, PRRPs had an unprecedented level of electoral support from young voters, primarily driven by young men (Milosav, et al., 2025, p. 1). Additionally, between 2019 and 2024, young men have had the largest increase in propensity to vote for PRRPs, which has not yet translated into actual vote choice but may well do so in subsequent elections (Abou-Chadi, 2024, p. 4). On the other hand, young women are among the most progressive and least inclined to support PRRPs (Milosav, et al., 2025, p. 1).

There is still some uncertainty as to whether these trends are due to cohort, generation or period effects, and so it is unclear as to what young men are reacting to differently than young women (Off, et al., 2025). More research is needed into how the far-right's use of social media platforms like TikTok to target young people (Cartes-Barroso, et al., 2025) may have gendered effects that attract young men more than women. Given the influence of hypermasculinity and sexism in driving support for PRRPs, it would also be interesting to examine the impact of more general sexist and anti-feminist rhetoric in online spaces and from non-political figures, such as influencers like Andrew Tate.

These factors have also been explored in conjunction with each other and with other factors. Studying the interplay of education, cohort and gender, Schäfer and Steine (2025, p. 21) found that, contrary to expectations, the radical right does not have a stronghold among younger low-educated men, as the generational widening of the education gap in far-right support applies similarly to men and women. Cassese and Barnes (2018, p. 697) examine heterogeneity among white women along the cleavages of college education and household income, with white women without college degrees and women from low-income households more likely to vote for Trump. Contrary to the stereotype of far-right supporters being 'white working-class' and male (Allen & Goodman, 2021, p. 135), these intersectional studies highlight variations across age and gender.

Conclusion

This paper examined how men and women differ in their ideological alignment with and electoral support for PRRPs, mainly across Europe but also the US. I argued that the general trend is of a 'radical right gender gap' where women vote for PRRPs less than men, despite the two groups sharing similar levels of populist ideological attitudes. However, there are inconsistencies in this trend due to cross-national and party-specific variation, highlighted by the disappearance of the gender gap for the RN in France. I explored how men and women are further attracted to PRRPs by different gendered rhetorics, such as masculinity and progressiveness. Lastly, I considered how it

is always possible to further nuance the study of the RRGG by considering the intersections of gender with demographic features such as race, generation, class and education.

There were many factors beyond the scope of this paper, such as how the RRGG varies across different types of elections, gendered attraction to different leadership styles, and further discussion on the intersectionality of class, education and religion. Additionally, due to constraints, I was only able to give an overview of some of the arguments in the literature, but all could have been explored further. The literature on the RRGG that informed this paper was often contradictory and incohesive. Given the variation in national context, party strategies, and social cleavages, as well as the rapid evolution and growth of PRRPs between election cycles, the RRGG is not universal or fixed. There are numerous factors to consider and limitations in the data available (Coffé, et al., 2023), so, unsurprisingly, theories on the existence and causes of the RRGG are divergent.

I have identified gaps in the literature that limit our ability to truly understand the nuances in the size and characteristics of the RRGG. Future research could examine the impacts of social media and period factors on the emerging gender-generation radical right gap to understand why young boys are particularly attracted to the far-right. Studies could also look beyond Europe and the US to comparatively study the RRGG in countries such as India and Brazil with established PRRPs in government. Lastly, I recommend deepening the study of intersectionality in the RRGG outside of the US, because of its value in revealing heterogeneity in gender groups and revealing the complexities of gendered political preferences and voting behaviour for the far-right.

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