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Cover Design by Sawyer Kuzma '26
Typesetting by Nitzarandini Jimenez '23

Lead Editors

Jillian Beaster '28
Sawyer Kuzma '26
Juli Rodarte '26
Adriana Voloshchuk '27

Editorial team

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inter-text@lakeforest.edu

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Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

Thank you for picking up a copy of the 7th volume of *Inter-Text: An Undergraduate Journal for the Social Sciences and Humanities*. As we look back on the 2025-2026 academic year, we understand the tumultuous period in which the United States, and the world as a whole, finds itself in. Amidst the political, social, and economic anxieties here and abroad, we hold ourselves responsible to acknowledge the difficulties that come with being conscientious citizens of an ever-changing world.

Inter-Text is an academic and collaborative Journal that aspires to be a place of security and comfort for all students. We, as a student organization, strive for the betterment in academic greatness for all of our editors and authors. It is our mission to utilize our intellectual abilities for the common good of all of our communities, regardless of said community's background and cultural heritage.

The 7th publication of this Journal could not have been possible without the diligent work of our new and returning editors. This year, we received nearly 50 submissions to be assessed by our editorial board through a competitive and extensive review process that evaluated each submission's clarity of argument, use of evidence, structure, and language and grammar. In total, we have accepted twelve articles for this year's edition of *Inter-Text*.

We bestow deep gratitude to the authors who have had their work accepted by the Journal. This volume could not have been completed without their collaboration with our editors. The work that is published here is of the highest caliber among the student body of the college. Authors take the time to edit and alter their writing in order to present the highest quality of work. The improvements made upon the selected articles have made an edition of *Inter-Text* that rivals the editions of years prior.

We hope you enjoy this copy of Volume 7, as it represents the academic passion and excellence of a variety of authors who embody the wide scope of ideas found within our campus. It is a Journal meant to broaden the mindsets of each reader who comes across this compilation of work. In a world filled with increasing misinformation, political turmoil, and suppression of challenging ideas, we are proud to act as a place of refuge and representation for the social sciences and humanities.

Thank you for support of the Journal and its continuous pursuit of academic excellence, and we are proud to present Volume 7.

Sincerely,
The Editors

[Research Articles]

[Historical Perspectives on Religion]

Saladin

A Medieval Archetype of Righteous Muslim Leadership

[NOA HELMER]

On Saladin's deathbed, he was read the words of the Qur'an: "There is no other God but He, and in Him is my trust."¹ At that moment "the Sultan smiled, his face illuminated, and he gave up his spirit to his Lord."² This final display of righteousness cemented Saladin's character as one of ultimate piety and virtue. In this paper, I will explore how the Muslim author Baha ad-Din employs his portrayal of Saladin to represent an ideal Muslim ruler whose values and actions are consistent with those outlined in the Qur'an. I will begin by introducing the figure of Saladin before reviewing the nature of the Qur'an and Baha ad-Din's written work. I will then juxtapose Baha ad-Din's portrayal of Saladin with the Muslim ideals laid out in the Qur'an, specifically righteousness, charity, equitability, and reverence towards God.

Yusuf ibn Ayyub, known also as Salah ad-Din—meaning "righteousness of the faith"—or Saladin, came into power in Egypt after the death of his uncle, Asad ad-Din Shirkuh, in 1169. Asad ad-Din was sent to Cairo by Nur ad-Din Zengi, the ruler in Palestine, and he managed to topple the existing Fatimid ruler, who was part of the Shia sect of Islam. Saladin helped to establish the Ayyubid Dynasty, and he aimed to restore Sunni rule in Egypt, allying with Nur ad-Din until the latter's death in 1174. Thereafter, Saladin successfully took over Nur ad-Din's territories, uniting Northern Egypt and all of Syria under one ruler—himself. During this time, he was given two additional honorary titles, resulting in his full name and title of al-Malik al-Nasir Yusuf ibn Ayyub Salah ad-Din. As Sultan, Saladin was on relatively good terms with the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem and the other cru-

1 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, ed. Francesco Gabrieli (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 251.

2 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 251.

sader states due to his relationship and the resulting truce with King Baldwin IV, who then died in 1185. After a Christian noble broke the truce, Saladin declared war in 1187, and he managed to reconquer most of the territories previously under Christian rule as part of the crusader states, including the city of Jerusalem itself. This sparked the call for the third crusade, which ended when Richard I Lionheart and Saladin finally signed a truce a year before Saladin's death in 1193.

Baha ad-Din became a part of Saladin's service in 1188 and remained a loyal member of his household until the Sultan's death.³ Under Saladin, he was made Qadi—a judge of religious law—to the army, and wrote a biography of the Sultan in which he provides historians with the most complete portrait of Saladin, dictated by his sincere devotion and admiration for the Sultan.⁴ Although his devotion and admiration may have resulted in a more positive depiction of Saladin than in reality, this is beneficial to my exploration. I am not aiming to compile a complete and factually accurate reconstruction of Saladin, but rather to explore how Baha ad-Din employs his portrayal of Saladin to exemplify Muslim ideals. Thus, an idolized portrait of Saladin further aids in the formation of that image. Baha ad-Din covers the many archetypal qualities that Saladin possesses, supplementing his observations with specific anecdotes and descriptions of particular occurrences.⁵ Additionally, he provides a thorough account of the events leading up to Saladin's death, as well as those occurring shortly thereafter.⁶

The Qur'an was recorded after the founding of Islam in the early seventh century, and is the driving text for Muslim piety.⁷ It is believed by Muslims to be the word of Allah as directly revealed to Mohammed, an Arab prophet who had mystical visions that led to the recording of the Qur'an.⁸ The Qur'an is regarded in Islam as a more important text than even the Bible in Christianity, as it is believed to be the direct teachings of God to Mohammed.⁹ The Qur'an outlines the ideals and guidelines of every aspect of Muslim life and faith, with the excerpts provided within this source focusing on the Islamic view of war and interfaith relations.¹⁰ This source will serve as a crucial piece of evidence to determine the values of Muslims and the attributes devout Muslims believe ideal Muslim rulers to possess and embody.

The first quality Baha ad-Din highlights is that of righteousness.¹¹ Verses 113–115 in sura 3 of the Qur'an describe righteous Muslims as those who pray

3 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, xxix.

4 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, xxix.

5 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 87-113.

6 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 246-252.

7 The Qur'an, in *The Crusades: A Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. S. J. Allen and Emilie Amt (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 8.

8 The Qur'an, in *The Crusades*, 8.

9 The Qur'an, in *The Crusades*, 8.

10 The Qur'an, in *The Crusades*, 8.

11 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 88-90, 92, 96-98, 100, 102, 105-107, 110, 250.

“through the night,” “fall prostrate” during prayer, advocate righteousness and forbid evil, and “hasten to do righteous works.”¹² The Qur’an also states that God is aware of those who are righteous, and that “any good deed they do will not go unrewarded.”¹³ Baha ad-Din’s examples of Saladin’s righteousness are abundant throughout his writings.¹⁴ Beginning with the prayer aspect, Baha ad-Din explains that if Saladin woke up during the night, he would make two raka’at—the series of prostrations and elevations involved in canonic prayer—otherwise performing them before morning prayers.¹⁵ He continues to describe how Saladin would even dismount from his horse if the hour of prayer befell him during his travels, and how he only omitted the canonic prayers at the end of his life due to his lack of consciousness.¹⁶ Throughout Baha ad-Din’s biography of Saladin, he continuously stresses the prominent and frequent role prayer plays in Saladin’s daily habits and lifestyle.¹⁷

Moving to the latter of the Qur’an’s requirements for righteousness, these can be seen by Saladin’s steadfast devotion to Islam. When Saladin was in his room at night, he would ask anyone who was still awake to recite suras from the Qur’an while he listened.¹⁸ Additionally, Saladin was often moved to tears by hearing the Qur’an recited and enjoyed hearing hadith—sayings of the prophets—“delivered by a profound scholar of tradition and doctrine.”¹⁹ He was quick to fill any voids in his day with righteous activities such as praying and hearing recitations of the Qur’an and hadith. Saladin was also always eager to help those who needed it, often listening to litigants to aid in administering justice.²⁰ “Whether on journeys or at home,” Saladin was “always ready to receive the supplications addressed to him and to remove the abuses brought to his notice. Every day he ordered the pleas to be collected and opened the Gate of Justice.”²¹ This not only shows his fervor to perform righteous acts but also shows his selflessness and charitability, the next virtue Baha ad-Din emphasizes in Saladin.²²

Charitability comes from verse 195 of sura 2 in the Qur’an, which states that “you shall spend in the cause of God” and that “you shall be charitable; God loves the charitable.”²³ Saladin was indeed exceedingly charitable throughout his lifetime: “he died without leaving a large enough estate to be subject to it, for his

12 The Qur’an, in *The Crusades*, 9.

13 The Qur’an, in *The Crusades*, 9.

14 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 88-90, 92, 96-98, 100, 102, 105-107, 110, 250.

15 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 88.

16 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 88, 250.

17 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 88-90, 92, 98, 100, 106, 110, 250.

18 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 89.

19 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 90.

20 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 93.

21 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 93.

22 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 88, 96-97, 100, 107, 110, 251.

23 The Qur’an, in *The Crusades*, 9.

extra-canonical gifts had consumed all his wealth.”²⁴ The Sultan, “ruler of all those lands, died leaving forty-seven Nasirite *drachmas* of silver in his treasury and a single piece of Tyrian gold whose weight I have forgotten. He used to give away whole provinces; when he conquered Amida, Qara Arslan’s son asked him for it and he gave it to him.”²⁵ As an accomplished leader who conquered vast spans of land, Saladin was presented with an unfathomable degree of wealth throughout his lifetime. Rather than hoarding it all for himself, he enthusiastically handed out both money and land to others. Saladin was “as generous when he was poor as when he was rich, and his treasurers kept certain reserves concealed from him for fear that some financial emergency might arise. For they knew that the moment he heard of their existence he would spend them.”²⁶ His commitment to charity regardless of his financial circumstances shows his true generosity and enjoyment in sharing his wealth.

Not only was he charitable in monetary aspects, but also in assisting those in search of the faith. A well-known scholar and mystic who dedicated himself to learning and acts of piety came to visit Saladin in Jerusalem, having seen his pious acts.²⁷ After meeting with Saladin, the man left without saying goodbye, so as to not disturb Saladin.²⁸ Upon hearing this, Saladin searched for the man to apologize for not seeing him prior to his departure and encouraged him to come visit again.²⁹ Once he did, Saladin received him with great joy and showered him with many gifts for the man, his family, and his neighbors to give to them upon his return.³⁰ During both of these encounters with the man, Saladin engaged in theological activities and encouraged the man’s religious zeal.³¹ He was generous with his fortune and his time, sharing both with all whom he encountered.

The penultimate trait Baha ad-Din illustrates through Saladin is that of equitability.³² Verse 8 of sura 60 in the Qur’an proclaims that “God loves the equitable.”³³ During one of his many public justice sessions, a man from Damascus came with a complaint against Taqi ad-Din, Saladin’s nephew.³⁴ Despite his nephew being “one of the people he loved and respected most, he did not allow personal feelings to affect his judgement.”³⁵ Saladin still listened to the complaint, examined the case, and received the plea as if it were any other person that was

24 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 88.

25 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 96.

26 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 96.

27 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 109-110.

28 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 110.

29 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 110.

30 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 110.

31 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 110.

32 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 94-96, 109, 111-112.

33 The Qur’an, in *The Crusades*, 11.

34 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 94.

35 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 94.

involved.³⁶ As a fair and just ruler, he was able to set aside his feelings and personal ties in the name of justice, and expeditiously acted in accordance with the law. On top of remaining impartial when complaints were brought against family, he remained open to listen to complaints brought against him as well.³⁷ An old man came to face Saladin and asserted that “the defendant is the Sultan himself, but this is the seat of justice and we have heard that you are not partial in your judgements.”³⁸ Saladin proceeded to listen to the man’s grievance and state that “we must act in this matter as the law requires.”³⁹ The Sultan proceeded to admit his wrongdoing and “ordered that the man should be given a garment of honour and a large gift of money.”⁴⁰ This occurrence is a key example of Saladin’s “humility and submission to the Law,” and showcases his truly just and equitable character.⁴¹

The final virtue highlighted by Baha ad-Din is Saladin’s ascription of his victories to God.⁴² Verse 10 of sura 8 in the Qur’an explains that “victory comes only from God. God is almighty, most wise.”⁴³ On the day of the battle between the Muslims and the Franks on the plain of Acre, the center of the Muslim ranks was broken.⁴⁴ Despite this, Saladin “stood firm with a handful of men until he was able to withdraw all his men to the hill and then lead them down into battle again.”⁴⁵ After the Sultan’s army defeated the Frankish forces, Saladin was content in knowing that “God gave the Muslims victory over their enemies.”⁴⁶ Saladin did not attribute his victory to himself, but rather to God, who enabled all of His followers in Saladin’s army to claim victory over enemies of God and the faith.

Baha ad-Din’s portrait of Saladin as righteous, charitable, equitable, and reverent towards God displays the virtues of an ideal Muslim ruler who is aligned with the values defined by the Qur’an. As Baha ad-Din worked in close proximity to Saladin for the final five years of the Sultan’s life, he was able to utilize the various stories and anecdotes he had observed of Saladin and his life throughout his work to illustrate how Saladin embodies the ideals designated within the Qur’an. Baha ad-Din’s portrayal can be framed as part of a larger practice in which historical writings and narratives serve to define and reinforce the qualities of legitimate and ideal Muslim leadership. This situates Saladin as a model used to articulate and perpetuate Islamic religious ideals of the medieval period. Exploring this depiction also opens broader questions regarding how medieval Muslim

36 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 94.

37 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 94-96.

38 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 94.

39 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 94-95.

40 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 95-96.

41 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 96.

42 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 99.

43 The Qur’an, in *The Crusades*, 11.

44 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 99.

45 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 99.

46 Baha ad-Din, in *Arab Historians*, 99.

authors employed narratives and historical writings to convey moral instruction and to promote virtuous conduct within the medieval Islamic world.

Julian of Norwich's Anxiety

Sin and Salvation

[MATTHEW DILLON]

In perhaps the most well-known and popular quote to emerge from her *Revelations of Divine Love*, Julian of Norwich wrote, "Jesus, who in this vision informed me of all that I needed to know, answered with this assurance...all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."¹ In my view, this quote serves as the most succinct summary of the contents of what has been described as one of the most intricate theological texts of medieval England, which is made all the more astonishing because it was written by a woman.² Throughout the two texts composed by Julian, she attempts to convey to her readers what she was shown in 16 mystical "showings" or visions given to her by the Holy Trinity. God's mercy, love, forgiveness, and "courteousness" towards all of humankind are a central and recurring focus in her theology.³ In seeking to explain how on the last day, "the Holy Trinity shall make well all that is not well," Julian presents us with her theology regarding the nature of both sin and salvation from the unique perspective of not only a woman, but an astute theologian living through a tumultuous time of change and uncertainty.⁴

In this article, it is Julian's teachings (or as she would insist, God's teachings which He revealed to her) regarding sin and salvation I will be focusing on and exploring. First, I will provide a detailed source analysis, covering what little biographical information we have of Julian's own life and the times in which she wrote out her *Revelations*. In this analysis, I will pay careful attention to how

1 Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love: Short Text and Long Text*, trans. Elizabeth Spearing and A.C. Spearing (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 79.

2 Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 22.

3 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Short Text*, 7.

4 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 86.

Julian maneuvers to avoid accusations of heresy from the ever watchful eye of the institutional Church, at a time in which the English Church felt particularly threatened by heresy. Then, I will elucidate on Julian's showings regarding sin, including what she was shown regarding the nature of sin, what constitutes sin, and the role sin plays in the salvation of humankind. Then I will present the implications of her teachings regarding salvation. In both of these sections, it would be impossible to explain her view regarding sin and salvation without also focusing on Julian's views of the character of God, and how she at times affirmed and at others departed from the orthodox teachings of the medieval Catholic Church. I will conclude with a brief summary of Julian's theology and its relationship to "Holy Church."

Biographical details regarding the author of *Revelations of Divine Love* are sadly very few. We do not even know her real name. Despite being known as Julian of Norwich, this title emerged from the fact that she lived as an anchoress at St. Julian's church in Norwich, a prosperous, mercantile port city in northern England.⁵ What we can say with certainty is that she (the first undoubtedly female English author) was born somewhere likely north of Norwich in approximately 1342—she tells us she received her revelations in 1373, at 31 and a half years of age.⁶ As a result of her visions, which God told her to share with everyone, she composed two texts. First the *Short Text* soon after she received her showings, and later expanded on her original writing in a substantially larger *Long Text* some time in the 1380s.⁷ From what we can tell, Julian, unlike other female mystics of her day, did not dictate her visions to a man, but wrote the texts herself in vernacular Middle English.⁸

For a woman of her time, she was clearly highly educated, though she describes herself as, "uneducated" or unlettered, meaning she (allegedly) did not receive rhetorical training in Latin.⁹ It should be made clear, however, that any assertion of "ignorance" is a fallacy, and that Julian's prose shows her to have been incredibly erudite, and familiar with both the Vulgate Bible and classical philosophical texts.¹⁰ Julian's claim of ignorance is in line with a trope among Christian authors, who desired to be humble (or to at least appear so), and often gestured to their supposed lack of knowledge, or inability to write anything useful for their readers.

Regarding her background, we can infer that Julian may have come from a middle-class merchant family involved in the textile trade, or from an even more upper-class life of "material comfort;" we deduce this from the fact that Julian

5 Spearing, *Revelations of Divine Love*, xi.

6 Spearing, *Revelations of Divine Love*, viii, x.

7 Spearing, *Revelations of Divine Love*, xii-xiii.

8 Spearing, *Revelations of Divine Love*, xvi-xvii.

9 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 42.

10 Colledge and Walsh, *Showings*, 19-20.

employs mercantile language such as buying, compensating, and selling.¹¹ It appears that even while living as an anchoress she kept a maid in her employ, which would certainly indicate a comfortable background.¹² Scholars speculate that Julian was possibly an unmarried daughter, or even a widowed mother at the time of her spiritual visions, which may explain the “centrality of motherhood” found in the *Long Text* which she composed.¹³ “Dame Julian” is also independently attested to in the *Book of Margery Kempe*, in which Margery sought Julian out for spiritual advice; however, it appears from this text that Julian was most likely not disclosing that she had received spiritual visions.¹⁴ It seems that Julian kept her writings fairly private while she was alive, with her *Revelations* only gaining more widespread popularity in the seventeenth century.¹⁵ The texts may have been circulated via word of mouth among other women religious, but we cannot be certain of this.¹⁶

All to say, the information that we have regarding Julian presents us with a highly educated female theologian and teacher, living precisely in a time when the tolerance for women having any sort of spiritual prerogative, let alone teaching, was at an all-time low. The preceding twelfth and thirteenth centuries had seen a large increase in female religious life and saw the founding of many new religious orders and houses for women, particularly in continental Europe.¹⁷ The rapid expansion of the religious opportunities for women evidently made certain powerful male clerics in the fourteenth century (when Julian lived) hostile to any kind of spiritual authority held by women. This suspicion resulted in women being, “over-represented in the major heresies of the twelfth and fourteenth centuries.”¹⁸ The suspicion of female piety was even more intense in England at this time than it was in continental Europe, as England was even more patriarchal and had no tradition of female visionaries.¹⁹ Along with the general intolerance of female spirituality, England was roiled in the Lollard heresy, a reformist group that was iconoclastic, anti-clerical, and opposed to eucharistic adoration.²⁰ As the Church sought to rid England of Lollards, anyone who deviated even slightly from official Church teaching was quickly accused of heresy.

No doubt aware of the danger writing her visions would put her in, Julian begins the *Short Text* by emphasizing her belief in “paintings of crucifixes...

11 Spearing, *Revelations of Divine Love*, x.

12 Colledge and Walsh, *Showings*, 18.

13 Spearing, *Revelations of Divine Love*, x.

14 Colledge and Walsh, *Showings*, 18-19.

15 Colledge and Walsh, *Showings*, 21.

16 Spearing, *Revelations of Divine Love*, viii.

17 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 15-16, 20.

18 Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 16.

19 Spearing, *Revelations of Divine Love*, xvii-xviii.

20 Samuel Fanous and Vincent Gillespie, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 118.

in the likeness of Christ's passion according to the teaching of the Holy Church."²¹ She also emphasized her adherence to the Church's teachings, and was especially careful to indicate her deep reverence and love of the "holy rites" of the Church such as Holy Unction and the Eucharist.²² Seeking to avoid accusations that she is circumventing the authorities of clerics, she rather debases herself, saying she is a "poor, worldly and sinful creature," and "God forbid you should say or assume that I am a teacher...for I am a woman ignorant, weak and frail."²³ While she attributes her visions and writings fully to God, she seems to show us (perhaps) her inward opinion and poses the question, "just because I am a woman, must I therefore believe that I must not tell you about the goodness of God, when I saw...his wish that [the vision] should be known?"²⁴ It should be said there is no doubt that Julian was a pious Catholic. She displays an orthodox Christology, affirms Mary as the Mother of God, and is staunchly trinitary. In fact, her theology is underpinned by these orthodox dogmas. However, regarding sin, salvation and the character of God, it is clear she had great difficulty accepting the teachings of the Church when she had direct revelations which contradicted them. There thus emerges a pattern: when Julian puts forth a teaching that is at odds with orthodoxy, it is quickly followed by lines affirming her devotion to "Holy Church," particularly regarding what she was shown of sin and salvation, which I will now explore.

While contemplating how Christ's Passion overcomes the "Fiend" (i.e. the devil) and reduces him to nothingness, Julian exclaims, "Ah, wretched sin! What are you? You are nothing. For I saw that God is all things: I saw nothing of you."²⁵ While in the temporal world, Julian saw "sin" all around her, in her vision, she did not see it. This perception of sin, however, was not relegated to only herself or her fellow religious. To put the enormity of this statement into context, one must understand that Julian was shown all of creation by God, which she described as follows: "in this vision, [God] showed me a little thing, the size of a hazel-nut, laying in the palm of my hand...I looked at it and thought, 'What can this be?' and the answer came to me, 'It is all that is made.'"²⁶ It was in this "thing" which Julian saw no sin. In her anxiety to know about the nature of salvation, Julian struggles with this revelation; however, as she cannot reconcile the teachings of "Holy Church" with what God has shown her. In response to her conundrum, God replies, "what is impossible to you is not impossible to me. I shall keep my word, in all things and I shall make all well."²⁷

Here we can observe the difference in Julian's understanding of God's character as opposed to the institutional medieval Church. The prevailing me-

21 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Short Text*, 3.

22 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Short Text*, 5.

23 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Short Text*, 9-11.

24 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Short Text*, 11.

25 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Short Text*, 35.

26 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Short Text*, 7.

27 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 86.

dieval interpretation of God's character and role as judge was quite harsh. Take for example the way God is described in the text of Requiem Mass, which was chanted at medieval funerals. The text of the Requiem describes the terror of Judgement Day, exclaiming, "what trembling there will be when the Judge shall come to weigh everything strictly."²⁸ Christ as the Judge is described as a "King of awful majesty," and the text contains many prayers begging for Christ's mercy and forgiveness.²⁹ The painful flames of Hell and Purgatory were a major focus in the piety in the medieval period, and caused great anxiety for many regarding their eternal salvation. As much as there is a focus on God's merciful character in medieval writings, God's wrath and judgement weighed heavily on the minds of most Christians. Many were so afraid of God's wrathful judgement, that they would not even take Communion out of fear of burning in Hell. Scholar Caroline Walker Bynum describes the terror of receiving the host among the medieval laity, writing, "many pious people in the later Middle Ages developed, along with a frenzied hunger for the host, an intense fear of receiving it."³⁰ The prevailing characterization of God in the late medieval period, as the harsh and strict judge, is quite a contrast to Julian's description of God. According to Julian, God is "courteous," and filled with such love for humanity that He hurts when we hurt, and is filled with compassion toward humankind. Theologian Kerrie Hide describes Julian's understanding of salvation, relying on Julian's usage of the middle English word "oneing," meaning to be "united, joined, blended, or fused" with God.³¹ To Julian, humanity is not separated from Christ, but is "eternally knotted and oned in God," as all of "creation is already one in the body of Christ."³² To Julian, Christ did not suffer on the cross as payment for the debt of sin, but did so out of His desire to grant the "gift of peace" to humanity.³³ Hide describes how Julian differed from standard medieval piety, writing,

"Julian's exploration of sin is distinctive because instead of focusing on human guilt, Christ rejects the popular images of Julian's day that stressed human willfulness as well as developed extensive lists and categories of sin...There is no sense [in Julian's writings] of Christ focusing on sin or blaming or condemning human beings. Christ sees the nothingness of sin, lovingly enters into the pain that it causes, and makes all things well. Human nature does not need to focus on sin, but on the desire of Christ who is love. Salvation is about loving."³⁴

Thus, Julian reinterprets the meaning of sin and what role it plays in hu-

28 "Requiem Mass (Missa Defunctoris)," *Latin Mass Funeral*, June 23, 2023, <https://www.latinmassfuneral.com/requiem-mass/>.

29 "Requiem Mass (Missa Defunctoris)."

30 Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 58.

31 Kerrie Hide, in *Christian Theologies of Salvation: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. Justin S. Holcomb (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 161, 163.

32 Hide, in *Christian Theologies of Salvation*, 164-165.

33 Hide, in *Christian Theologies of Salvation*, 170.

34 Hide, in *Christian Theologies of Salvation*, 167.

mankind's salvation. She provides us with a definition, telling us sin is, "all that is not good;" in particular, the "shameful humiliation" that Christ bore for all humankind.³⁵ Julian goes on to tell us that the worst sin ever committed was the sin of *Adam*. "Adam's sin was the greatest harm that was ever done or ever shall be."³⁶ In sharp contrast with the mainstream narratives from the beginning of Christianity regarding sin, Eve and her sin is never mentioned once in Julian's theology. We must however understand that Julian is not placing the blame on the first man Adam; but it would appear that when referring to "Adam," Julian is gesturing to humankind in general, as she states, "in the sight of God, all men are one."³⁷ This goes along with Julian's belief that her vision was for everyone, not only her. This generality comes from Julian's understanding that God does not see us in particular but in general, as one soul. With God viewing humankind in general, Julian explains further and tells us the Lord even sees our sins in general, not in particular.³⁸

God informed Julian that she, along with everyone else alive, will sin, but that "I [God] am keeping you very safe."³⁹ In Julian's theology, the soul, which is a part of God, cannot consent to sin, as the, "two [body and soul] are divided one part outward the other inward."⁴⁰ It is only our outward, mortal bodies which sin, a situation which Julian describes as, "the cursing of the flesh, without the agreement of the spirit, and to this, God attaches no blame."⁴¹ God does not attach blame to sins, as our spirits do not willingly consent to sin. Sin is the result of our separation from God, and as a result of this separation we suffer here on earth, for to Julian "sin" is the cause of all our mortal sufferings. Instead of drawing the ire of a wrathful, vengeful God, our sins elicit only compassion and pity towards us from Christ.

In our sinful state, Christ not only pities us, but willingly and continually suffers with us, and will never leave us alone in our bodily sufferings until the last day.⁴² When, due to our frail mortal nature we stumble into sin, God addresses us thus, "My darling, I am glad you have come to me. I have always been with you in all of your misery, and now you can see how much I love you and we are united in bliss."⁴³ God does not blame us for our sins, as according to Julian, there can be no anger in God. It is an "impossibility."⁴⁴ Julian asks to see Hell and Purgatory, but sees nothing and later on in her text concludes, "there is no hell but sin," which

35 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 79.

36 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 81-82.

37 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 118.

38 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Short Text*, 25.

39 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 93.

40 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 69.

41 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 69.

42 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 71.

43 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 97.

44 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 112.

seems to be choosing to live a life devoid of love and peace.⁴⁵ For it is only that “we think” God must be angry with us for our sins, but Julian tells us that we cannot see the way that God sees and that all sin has a purpose, and as Christ says, “sin is befitting.”⁴⁶ Still Julian repeatedly insists she adheres to the teachings of the Church, but when she presents us with two seemingly irreconcilable theologies, she leaves us with inconclusive mystery.

Sin is “befitting” because to Julian our sin is not to our shame but our glory, and the more we love God in our state of sin during our lives the more we are rewarded for our perseverance by God in heaven. Julian is very clear she is not encouraging sin, and that a soul that willingly chooses to sin cannot be saved, and living in sin on earth to Julian is even worse than hell.⁴⁷ Unchosen or accidental sin, as she tells us, plays an essential role in our salvation in that it causes our suffering, which drives us to search for God, and without searching for God, there cannot be salvation.⁴⁸ Throughout her writings, Julian makes many references to “all that shall be saved,” i.e. the elect that will go to heaven. While Julian speaks in some ways which certainly affirm the teachings that anybody outside the Church is damned, her numerous other conclusions about the nature of sin and how God feels and acts toward humankind are contradictory. Among the saved of humankind, Julian states salvation is, “for all men who are or shall be of goodwill.”⁴⁹ Later on, she emphasizes how different our human reason is from that of God’s and says that it is through our own feelings of disgust toward our own sin that we feel that we deserve hell, but God does not feel the same.

In fact, there is a transformative aspect of Julian’s revelation regarding sin and salvation, in that when we die, Christ—just as He did with His own Atonement—turns the greatest possible harm into the most beautiful good.⁵⁰ While on earth we suffer from sin, in heaven our sufferings are rewarded and transformed by God into glory: “Just as various sins receive various punishments, according to how serious they are, in the same way they will be rewarded with various joys in heaven according to how much pain and grief they caused the soul on earth.”⁵¹ Through God’s grace, and our contrition and compassion, we are made worthy of heaven and through these three attributes, “all souls come to heaven.”⁵² It would then appear that salvation for our souls, which to Julian are naturally drawn to God, rests on their ability to show goodwill, live in love and peace, and maintain a steadfast trust in God’s mercy. For the Lord is love, and the very foundation of

45 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 94, 98.

46 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 97.

47 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Short Text*, 27.

48 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Short Text*, 25.

49 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Short Text*, 21-22.

50 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Short Text*, 21.

51 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 94.

52 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 96.

our existence and every good intention in us is not from Him, but rather is Him.⁵³

In conclusion, *Revelations of Divine Love* imparts to its reader, an innovative, miraculous, and deeply moving theology of divine love. Julian of Norwich's delicate and mellifluous language seeks to assure her reader that so long as they seek God they should rest assured that all shall be well. Julian's life and writings are distinct in the medieval period. As an educated woman, she took centuries of male dominated theological discourse focused on humankind's guilt and sin, and reinterpreted them in the light of her personal experience of Christ's all-powerful love. While she attempted to bring her vision into line with the centuries-old theology of the Church, in the end, it seems she could not, and admits that in comparison to her revelation, the Church's "lower judgement," which so routinely condemned so many to Hell, was just that, the lower judgement of humankind, which cannot see as God sees.⁵⁴

53 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 96.

54 Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love: Long Text*, 106.

Reading Against the Grain

Interpreting Hostile Sources on Religious Minorities In Early Modern Europe

[JUANITA MUIGAI]

In the early modern period, when it came to religion, the mainstream Church dominated everything it touched. It asserted itself so fully that no other religion could thrive alongside it. Such was the case for the Moriscos and Anabaptists trying to maintain their own cultural identity in a world determined to create homogeneity. *The Trial and Martyrdom of Elizabeth*, a seventeenth-century Anabaptist account of Dirks' interrogation and execution in Amsterdam (1549) and *Doubting Conversion: The Spanish Inquisition Investigates a Morisco* (1622) a legal record of the Inquisition's investigation of Diego Díaz in Cuenca, Spain.¹ Both sources illuminate how institutions sought to regulate belief and behavior, revealing the theological and social pressures faced by religious minorities. In this paper, I will analyze the sources, provide a methodology to my approach in using hostile sources such as these, and evaluate the insights they offer into the mechanisms of religious persecution, the construction of communal identity, and the ways in which institutional power sought to regulate belief and behavior in early modern Europe.

Examining *The Trial and Martyrdom of Elizabeth Dirks* through its production reveals its constructed purpose, moving beyond the surface narrative. The document is an excerpt from *Martyr's Mirror*, a seventeenth-century martyrology compiled by T. J. van Braught. The trial took place in 1549 in Amsterdam. Dirks—an Anabaptist woman from Friesland—had fled a convent and became associated with the Anabaptist leader Menno Simons. Dirks was arrested and questioned by Catholic authorities on the grounds of heresy. The text is not ac-

1 Denis R. Janz, ed., *A Reformation Reader: Primary Texts with Introductions*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 157-160; "Doubting Conversion: The Spanish Inquisition investigates a Morisco (1622)," in *Lives Uncovered: A Sourcebook of Early Modern Europe*, ed. Nicholas Terpstra (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 217-220.

quired from judicial records but from Martyr's Mirror, a compilation of martyr's testimonies made by Dutch Anabaptists to honor their co-religionists who died. Nevertheless, while it may have been stylized or condensed by Anabaptist editors, we cannot discount its origin as a trial record. Thus, the document functions dually: as a reflection of Catholic judicial procedure and as a curated Anabaptist narrative of resistance and martyrdom.

The formal construct of the source demonstrates a dual nature. Firstly, it takes on a dialogue style that reproduces a question-and-answer format, typical of heresy proceedings. Dirks is labeled as "Elizabeth" while her interrogators are labeled as "Lords." There are doctrinal questions regarding baptism, mass, ecclesiastical authority, and forgiveness of sins.² In addition to that, and perhaps more intriguingly, there are features of martyrology that become apparent on a keener read. Dirks' resolve, her endurance despite torture, and her unwillingness to confess is palpable. For instance, when presented with respite from torture she responds, "Ask me, and I shall answer you: for I no longer feel the least pain in my flesh, as I did before."³ From this, we can deduce that the text serves a descriptive purpose and a prescriptive one. It provides an account for legal proceedings and simultaneously promotes a moral ideal. Furthermore, the record can be considered a reasonably accurate representation of her own beliefs; despite being a Catholic trial document, she appears remarkably learned and articulate, traits not presented in the interest of the Church. This suggests that the document holds a degree of reliability. Given its prescriptive aim to shape community identity, the intended audience was clearly other Anabaptists. We can therefore infer that the editors of *Martyrs Mirror* were seeking to exhort their brethren amid persecution while affirming core Anabaptist doctrines despite said persecution. Dirks is portrayed as a spiritually literate and disciplined woman who is unflinching, and unapologetic about her convictions. Her answers reflect theological positions taken by the Anabaptists. For example, she rejects the Mass as a sacrament, denies the priest's authority to absolve sins, articulates a soteriological position in which Christ is both necessary and sufficient for salvation, and—most controversially among other Christians—refuses to accept the validity of infant baptism.⁴

The reliability of the account is complicated by several factors. The first layer of complication is that it is a Catholic trial record (a hostile source). Early modern legal transcripts were already shaped by significant filtering, as a clerk would summarize or reframe dialogue to meet legal standards. The fact that Dirks was being tortured further complicates reliability, as testimonies given under duress are not reliable by nature. A second layer is the hagiographical bias introduced by its martyrological presentation. The editors of the text emphasize Dirks' heroism and theological eloquence, and they may have amplified or simplified aspects of the interrogation to serve spiritual goals. Taking these factors into

2 Janz, *A Reformation Reader*, 158.

3 Janz, *A Reformation Reader*, 159.

4 Janz, *A Reformation Reader*, 158.

consideration, the source cannot be treated as a fully transparent account but can be used as a potentially factual interrogation with strong editorial intention.

A similar but institutionally distinct form of filtering is evident in the second source, *Doubting Conversion: The Spanish Inquisition Investigates a Morisco* (1622). It is an official legal document that records the prosecution of Diego Diaz, a meat cutter from Belmonte, Spain. Due to it being an inquisitorial proceeding, it reflects the priorities of the Spanish Inquisition. The record was produced at Cuenca in 1622.⁵ This was a time when the Inquisition aimed to identify and punish apostasy among forcibly converted populations. The fundamental question this source cannot resolve is: how many Moriscos (or conversos) were not genuine in their Christian faith? Despite being expelled from Spain in 1609-1614, some Moriscos (Muslims who converted to Christianity) remained and were always the subject of suspicion of secret apostasy. This sets up the source for a tense climate of surveillance and suspicion.

Several parties take credit for the authorship of the source. Diaz provided an initial confession and a defense. The source notes that he did not sign them because he was illiterate.⁶ His statements in the prosecution are written by the notary, Baltassar Irigoyen y Alamos, while the charges against him were formulated by the prosecutor, Doctor Alonso de Vallejo.⁷ The source belongs to the genre of Inquisition court proceedings. It includes an initial confession, accusation, and a written defense. The transcript included proposed evidence that Diaz was a false convert. They accused him of being a “Mohammedizer” on the grounds of avoiding pork, neglecting Mass, changing his shirt on Fridays, and cooking with olive oil instead of lard.⁸

The intended audience of the document was the Tribunal of the Holy Office, which was responsible for determining guilt, sentencing, and punishing. On one hand, Diaz’s purpose is to defend his innocence by affirming his Christian identity and challenging the credibility of his accusers, notwithstanding the overwhelming amount of institutional power held by the prosecution.⁹ On the other hand, the prosecution’s purpose was to draw up evidence enough to condemn Diaz or possibly torture to elicit further confession.¹⁰

When viewed through this prosecutorial lens, even the most mundane details of Díaz’s life become charged evidence. Superficially, the document reveals the daily practices of a Morisco in early seventeenth-century Spain. It records Diaz’s food choices, clothes, hygiene, work habits, and religious observance. These mundane activities are filtered through the lenses of suspicion and inferring Is-

5 Terpstra, *Lives Uncovered*, 217.

6 Terpstra, *Lives Uncovered*, 219.

7 Terpstra, *Lives Uncovered*, 218.

8 Terpstra, *Lives Uncovered*, 218.

9 Terpstra, *Lives Uncovered*, 220.

10 Terpstra, *Lives Uncovered*, 219.

lamic loyalty from trivial actions.¹¹

Considering all of this, reliability concerns arise from the source. Firstly, Díaz's true statements may not be well represented by the scribes who recorded them due to his illiteracy. Moreover, the threat of torture—requested by the prosecutor—renders the testimony suspect.¹² In addition to that, Díaz cannot make a spontaneous statement as he can only answer questions. The use of cultural markers instead of questioning intent as evidence for apostasy reveals a discriminatory aspect of the prosecution. These factors indicate that the text is shaped far more by coercion, cultural prejudice, and institutional priorities than by the authentic voice of the accused. Ultimately, the source reveals mechanisms of Inquisitorial suspicion, and the criminalization of Morisco cultural practices.

Despite being separated by local, temporal, and confessional differences, these sources are appropriate to compare because they share a common structure, purpose, and methodological challenges. Both sources originate from an interrogation proceeding where the religious minority is questioned by a powerful institution. Both authorities in the sources come into the proceeding with pre-conceived notions which affects how the questions are framed and consequently, the answer given. Despite having different theological targets, both sources frame the religious minority through hostile interpretive lenses. Because of these parallels, both sources address the same fundamental methodological problem: how to extract trustworthy historical data from records that were created to punish, coerce, or denigrate the people they portray. Thus, contrasting the two highlights the unique challenges encountered by various minority communities while also shedding insight on more general trends in early modern governmental power, religious monitoring, and the literary production of deviance.

Because both documents were produced by institutions hostile to the individuals they describe, my approach relies on methods suited to reading adversarial or disciplinary sources. I examine each text through reading against the grain, identifying what the documents reveal unintentionally about belief, authority, and social control. I treat doctrinal statements, accusations, and patterns of questioning as evidence of the priorities and assumptions of the institutions that produced these records. I also attend to the limits of these documents by considering what they omit, idealize, or distort. This methodological caution allows me to use these hostile records not for the 'truth' about Dirks or Díaz, but to reconstruct the ideological and disciplinary frameworks that sought to define them.

In the face of a myriad of reliability concerns, *The Trial and Martyrdom of Elizabeth Dirks* still provides us insight regarding Elizabeth Dirks' theological positions, which in the face of Catholic questions were defiant stances. The source is a repository of Anabaptist attitudes. First, I will evaluate the theological position that earned them the name "Anabaptist" (re-baptizer) from other Chris-

11 Terpstra, *Lives Uncovered*, 218-219.

12 Terpstra, *Lives Uncovered*, 219.

tians. Anabaptists not only reject baptism but also reject the idea that salvation can be gotten during baptism. This is demonstrated by one of Dirk's responses, "No, my lords, all the water in the sea could not save me; but salvation is in Christ (Acts 4:10)." This quote powerfully separates the physical act of baptism from the spiritual reality of salvation. It reliably shows that for Anabaptists, baptism was an outward sign of an inward, pre-existing faith, and had no salvific power in itself—a direct rebuttal of Catholic (and Lutheran) infant baptism theology. Secondly, Dirks articulates the Anabaptist posture towards communion. When asked about the Holy Sacrament, she responds with, "I have never in my life read in the Holy Scriptures of a holy sacrament, but of the Lord's Supper." She favors "Lord's Supper" instead of sacrament, with its implications of priestly mediation, and by doing so, underscores the Anabaptist approach toward communion. To them, it is a memorial practice and symbolic ordinance that was instituted by Christ. According to Catholic ecclesiology, the church is conceived as the locus of God's real and abiding presence on earth. Dirks responds to a question about whether she considers the church the physical house of God with, "No, my lords, for it is written: 'Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, "I will dwell in them and walk in them." 2 Corinthians 6:16.'" Her response questions sacramental and institutional authority found in church buildings and liturgical spaces. It also aligns with broader Anabaptist theology, which emphasized the gathered community of believers over ecclesiastical hierarchy or material sanctuaries. In the interrogation setting, her scriptural citation functions not simply as a doctrinal clarification, but an assertion of a competing vision of where divine presence resides and who has access to it.¹³

Furthermore, the source provides an account of the reality of persecution and martyrdom for Anabaptists. The source states that she was tortured by the use of thumbscrews until she bled. The source concludes when she is sentenced to death by drowning. Her sentence is reminiscent, rather sadistically, of core Anabaptist teaching of rejecting infant baptism.¹⁴ Equally significant is the source's challenge to assumptions about women's passivity in the Reformation era. The interrogators say, "We say that you are a teacher, and that you seduce many."¹⁵ They saw her as somebody who could organize, persuade and instruct others—roles that were usually assumed by men. From the concern of the authorities, we can infer that Dirks exercised influence within her community to an extent which was considered a threat to the orthodox order. What's more, her ability to cite scripture is not only a sign of biblical literacy but also a sign of interpretive confidence, which underscores her authoritative role.

While the preceding analysis highlights what the document can disclose, it is equally important to acknowledge the substantial limits of what it cannot. It cannot provide an objective reconstruction of Dirks' interrogation, her physi-

13 Janz, *A Reformation Reader*, 158.

14 Janz, *A Reformation Reader*, 160.

15 Janz, *A Reformation Reader*, 157.

cal experience, or the experience of Anabaptists in other regions of Europe. The dialogue has perfect citations and rebuttals while the actual proceedings must have been fragmented and less rhetorically polished. Finally, because it presents a single, idealized Anabaptist voice, the document cannot illuminate the internal diversity of the movement or the range of theological and political positions held by other Anabaptist groups.

From the Inquisition interrogation of Diego Diaz, there is some information that we can reliably extract. This information includes: the ideological and legal framework of the Inquisition, the machinery of power and procedure, and the social and cultural landscape. Diaz's accusations reflect the Inquisition's priorities. We can deduce that the Inquisition was seeking a cultural homogeneity in Spain despite having Moriscos—formerly Muslim converts to Christianity—who were distinct culturally from the Castilian Christians. Going from this premise, the Inquisition viewed specifically, often mundane, acts as evidence of apostasy. Specifically, the Inquisition interpreted mundane, daily acts as signs of heresy. For instance, Diego Diaz is accused of not eating pork (eating pork is prohibited in Islam). This reliably tells us that dietary laws were a key marker of religious identity and that adherence to them was seen as a deliberate rejection of Christianity. The Inquisition made no exceptions for dietary preferences or palate differences; eating pork was a proof of true conversion. Furthermore, the Inquisition closely policed outward expressions of piety. He is accused of not owning a rosary and failing to instruct his children on the Christian faith.¹⁶ These accusations demonstrate that the Inquisition was policing religious adherence. Finally, the source reveals how language and cultural expression were also suspect. Diaz is accused of speaking Arabic and singing Moorish songs.¹⁷ This reveals that language and culture were inextricably linked to faith in the eyes of the authorities. The preservation of Arabic itself was suspected. Though not explicitly stated, the Inquisition court glorifies the concept of "Limpieza de Sangre" (purity of blood). This is the main reason that Diaz is a suspect in the first place. The document reliably illustrates that conversion was often not considered sufficient; "blood" and lineage were seen as determinants of belief. This idea is demonstrated by the quote, "Asked to declare if he was descended from Moors or Moriscos or from any other bad sect reproved by our Holy Catholic faith, and if on different occasions some people who were disgusted with him had called him "Moor."¹⁸

Beyond the content of the accusations, the formal construction of the trial record reveals the Inquisition's distinctive methodology. The structure of the questions themselves is particularly telling. For example, the Inquisition used leading questions instead of the standard open-ended question. The question, "Why has he not heard Mass on Sundays or festivals of obligation?" was

16 Terpstra, *Lives Uncovered*, 218.

17 Terpstra, *Lives Uncovered*, 219.

18 Terpstra, *Lives Uncovered*, 217.

used, rather than the open-ended “Do you hear Mass on Sundays?”¹⁹ Notably, the document fails to list witnesses from the prosecution. However, Diaz brings to question the credibility of his accusers and alleges malicious intent on their end. This defensive move is revealing; it implies that accusations could stem from personal vendettas within a broader culture of surveillance in Inquisition Spain. While their motives are unclear, their existence is a reliable data point. It proves that the Inquisition relied on a community-level informant system. The fact that a neighbor, a servant, or even a family member testified against Diaz reveals a society fractured by mutual suspicion. Besides that, the very existence of this case in 1622 is significant considering that Moriscos were expelled from 1609-1614 and Muslims were forced to convert a century before then. Due to this, we can glean that there was still a notable Morisco presence; the Inquisition remained consistently paranoid about the “Morisco problem” long after the expulsion and that crypto-Islamic practices, or at least cultural habits perceived as such, persisted stubbornly.

In conclusion, both *The Trial and Martyrdom of Elizabeth Dirks* and *Doubting Conversion: The Spanish Inquisition Investigates a Morisco* (1622) both reveal more about the authorities that produced them than the people they condemned. The Anabaptist martyrology and the Inquisition transcript are not transparent accounts of Dirks or Díaz, but documents of institutional power. Their biases become evidence. When it comes to these hostile sources, it is better to analyze how and why things are said more than what is said. By doing so, we uncover the mechanisms of control in early modern Europe: one community shaping memory through persecution, another enforcing conformity through surveillance.

19 Terpstra, *Lives Uncovered*, 218.

[Reconstructing African Narratives]

Humanizing African History

Africa and the Atlantic World

[CASPER BADOVINAC]

The role of Africa in the Atlantic world has often been reduced and decentralized. Historical perspectives are often plagued by Eurocentric biases that would render Africans irrelevant in their own history, or distorted through a dependent lens that would paint them as passive victims of European domination. Neither of these views offer Africans much agency in their own narratives, nor do they allow much room for the complexity that often makes for much more accurate history. Scholars such as Thornton, Rodney, Lovejoy, and Knight have made efforts to refocus such a massive part of African history back on Africa. They renarrate the Atlantic World as one as much defined by African culture, politics, and economics as European influences. Through this restructuring, it is easier to understand many of the economic reasons behind African participation in the slave trade, and to understand the massive impacts Africans had on the Atlantic world whether free or enslaved. It's possible to achieve a much more nuanced understanding of the slave trade and its effects on African development by grounding in the economically secure but politically complex Africa that entered the Atlantic trade. From there, through diving into the impacts the Haitian revolution had on the Atlantic world, the immense contributions of free and enslaved Africans to Atlantic history can be further unraveled. This overarching narrative of African actors consistently shaping the course of history in the Atlantic world undermines historical depictions of European superiority and myths of 'backwards' and inferior African societies. Instead we see Africans as equal players in the global game, showing movement and initiative that would come to define the Atlantic world.

The Africa that entered into Atlantic trade was neither backwards or passive, but was instead economically and militarily secure. In this way it was not European domination that precipitated the expansion of the slave trade, but African and European actors seeking capital and political gains. From the begin-

ning, "African manufacturing was... quite capable of providing for the continent's needs.¹ In fact Europeans "offered nothing to Africa that Africa didn't already produce" while Europe who "could not afford to release the labor required to tap the Americas," desperately needed African labor to achieve her goals.² While Africans desired European products as symbols of wealth, Europeans came to Africa with a desperation to encourage the export of slaves. Rather than a backwards society, Europe encountered a self-sufficient one, not only in the matter of imports and exports, but on a military front. The West African navy was "fully capable of protecting its own waters," and in many cases European raiders met ample resistance or complete defeat when attempting to obtain slaves via kidnapping.³ The Europeans were strong-armed by this military opposition into meeting the Africans on their own trade terms for the labor force they so desperately needed. In response, Europeans needed to turn the tides of trade in their favor through less direct means.

In this period of warring conflict throughout Africa, Europeans positioned themselves to be beneficiaries of these wars as African warlords sought to build their own fortunes through Atlantic trade. Africa was defined by "communalism [which] meant political fragmentation" along much smaller fracture points than European feudalism-entering-capitalism.⁴ This incredibly diverse period of smaller ethnic-kinship groups fighting to centralize power resulted in many wars in Africa's interior.⁵ Normally, even in a society set up to enslave those defeated, those enslaved would go on to bolster the economy of their conquerors. Even if traded to neighboring states, their labor would have put Africa as a whole in competition with Europe within capitalism over time. Instead, with captured slaves now being sold to Europe for short term economic gain, the long term security of Africa's economic growth was at stake. No matter who won the Baule wars, no matter if England or Portugal ended up with the slaves post-trading, "Europe benefitted from whichever of the two nations won the conflict."⁶ In this way, individual warlords trading for monetary gain and personal interests that would normally build centralized feudal states over time only served to benefit Europe economically.

It is important to note that this feudal warring behavior is the exact type of capital accumulation and centralization that served Europe in earlier periods. To avoid playing into the "backwards" myth, it is important to clarify it is not the

1 John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World 1400-1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 44.

2 Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 44; Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (D.C.: Howard University Press, 1974), 78.

3 Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 37.

4 Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 79.

5 Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 56, 58.

6 Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 79.

African states warring nature and warlord's quest for personal gain that weaponized the slave trade against Africa. Instead the natural progression through Marx's economic stages of development is interrupted by the exporting of labor accrued by war to Europe. In Rodney's table on page 97, the stagnation of the African population is compared to the growth in population of Europe and Asia. By exporting the labor force that could have allowed them to compete in the capitalist arena on a global scale, Africa's development is not hindered by "inferiority" but by the continual robbing of the means of production. While the slave trade was only "one sector in a complex, internal, African trade," its continuation was the only aspect capable of undermining the economic stability of the rest.⁷

The question then rises, then why engage in it at all? The personal gain of merchants and warlords cannot be understated, and in many ways must be emphasized to avoid dehumanizing Africans as passive actors in their own history. However, this is coupled with a fundamentally different understanding of slavery than the chattel slavery that would result in the Americas from the Atlantic slave trade. Beyond the societal structures of kinship systems, this arose from an "African social system... not backwards or egalitarian but only legally divergent."⁸ The African legal system recognized slaves, and not land, as "the only form of private, revenue-producing property."⁹ From this distinction arises two separate ways of owning the means of production. In the European practice, wealth is derived from landholding. In the African practice, where landholding was corporate, slaves served as the accumulation of wealth, "and were the functional equivalents of free tenants and hired workers in Europe."¹⁰

It is in this legal and cultural difference, with slavery widely prevalent throughout Africa and structurally different, that African participation in the slave trade must be understood. As the main form of economic mobility in Africa, "when Europeans... offered to buy slaves, it is hardly surprising they were almost immediately accepted."¹¹ When this fundamentally different legal and economic structure is taken out of its African context and exported en masse to Europe and the Americas, the slave trade warps in Africa. Not because Africans were not economically successful, but rather because Europeans were not interested in participating in the same economic game. As Europeans gained ownership of two of the factors of production- labor and land- it became increasingly easier to maximize the wealth out of the Americas. As that labor was bought via completely culturally normative means in Africa and exported to a wholly different economic system, it drained the labor force that embodied African wealth. This would create a gap that would only continue to widen as the slave trade grew and European colonies used slave labor to bolster European wealth. Capital, which was "relatively

7 Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 57.

8 Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 76.

9 Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 74.

10 Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 87.

11 Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 94.

unimportant before the Industrial Revolution” became yet another factor of production that was dominated by European ownership.¹² In the period leading to industrialization and colonial rule, African participation in the slave trade can be seen not as a result of European economic dominance, but rather a key factor in its development. In turn, the underdevelopment of Africa is not a base state of the continent but a direct result of European intervention.

Even within this context of industrialization and colonial rule, enslaved Africans’ contributions continue to shape the economic and political landscape of the Atlantic world. This can be illustrated in perhaps no clearer way than with the case of the Haitian revolution. Before Haiti, the Atlantic world was entrenched in the supremacist narratives that colonial rule and race based enslavement were the natural order. The reality of the Haitian Revolution undermined not just the planter class’ control over the economic system, but the fundamental tenants of liberty and equality so adored by white enlightenment thinkers. In “fifteen turbulent years... exploited slaves successfully liberated themselves and radically and permanently changed” the entire structure of Haitian society.¹³ Every element of this idea depicts a reason that this event created “a ‘terrified consciousness’ among the rest of the slave masters in the Americas,” and shook the Atlantic world as a whole.¹⁴ The speed at which over a hundred years of French occupation was ousted left even the longest running colonial institutions unnerved. The revolution’s radical nature, radical even in the aftermath of the French and American revolutions, struck fear into the hearts of white supremacists. Enlightenment ideals that spoke to the evils of political slavery and universal equality within the comfortable structure of white supremacy took on dangerous new forms within the black community. There was no greater threat to a society built on white supremacy than previously enslaved Africans with “personal freedom that undermined their relationship to their masters and the plantation, and jeopardized the wealth of a considerable number of those who were already free.”¹⁵

Perhaps nothing could be more frightening than the permanent changes to Haiti’s structure. This “living proof of the consequences of not just black freedom, but... black rule,” showed Africans free and enslaved throughout the world that black revolution and sovereignty was possible.¹⁶ It destroyed the notion that enslaved Africans were removed from their humanity and capability, and fundamentally undercut the narrative of white supremacy. The reality of the revolutionary consequences to enslavement haunted every slave owner the world over. Haitians did not just affect the slave-holding populations of the Atlantic world, in many ways they became the driving fear beyond political policies the world over

12 Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 85.

13 Franklin Knight, “The Haitian Revolution,” *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 1 (February 2000): 104, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2652438>.

14 Knight, “The Haitian Revolution,” 113.

15 Knight, “The Haitian Revolution,” 110.

16 Knight, “The Haitian Revolution,” 114.

that sought to double down in an attempt to prevent similar revolts. The fear of black freedom, and more so of black rule, was matched in the bolster to enslaved populations' confidence throughout the Atlantic world. As a result "antislavery movements grew stronger... colonial slaves themselves became increasingly more restless... [and] whites lost the confidence... to maintain the slave system indefinitely."¹⁷ Haiti offered a view of what was possible, and the legitimacy of making that possibility a reality, in a way that would shape the Atlantic world forever after.

Far from passive participants in Atlantic history, Africa and Africans drastically shaped the Atlantic world. Recontextualizing Atlantic history with African narratives given the focus they deserve illustrates a complex and powerful Africa competing internally and on a global capitalist scale. Even within the slave trade itself, African agency cannot be denied as warlords competed for control of the continent and entered trade with Europe as economic equals. Beyond that, enslaved Africans continued to shape the course of history through events such as the Haitian revolution in ways that undermined the structure of slave-holding itself. Without considering Africans' robust effects on the Atlantic world, it is impossible to understand the history of the Atlantic accurately. Eurocentric historical accounts are not the product of a lived history of white supremacy, but rather white supremacist ideals warping the depiction of a rich international history including Africans' impact on a global scale. To recentralize African history in the Atlantic narrative is to continue a long history of combating racist practices by acknowledging that no amount of interference can rob Africans of their humanity. The story of human history, and Atlantic history, is also an African story.

17 Knight, "The Haitian Revolution," 114.

The Impact of Systemic Gender Inequalities on Women's Participation in South Africa's Informal Economy

[TIYANDZA SENAMILE MNGOMEZULU]

Introduction

In the crowded alleys of Johannesburg's street markets, Promise Mazondi joins other women every day to sell all kinds of red meat such as beef, pork and lamb, and cow heads. They face countless challenges, from unpredictable earnings to restrictive policies, yet they have built a powerful support system. When one vendor's child is sick, others pitch in to help; when one is in debt, they lend a helping hand. For these women, resilience isn't just a word—it is a way of life forged in adversity.

In post-apartheid South Africa, many individuals hoped to find secure and well-paying jobs that would allow them to live comfortably. High unemployment has led to an expansion in the informal sector, where “among 6.8 million working women, almost 2 million were working informally, the largest groups being informal traders, agricultural workers and workers in private homes (domestic workers).”¹ The overlapping systems of oppression such as gender, race, and class not only underscore the main factor that pushes women into informal work but also highlight how their majority presence in the informal sector could create a space for fostering networks of solidarity among women striving to sustain their livelihoods.

While systemic gender inequalities in South Africa's informal economy marginalize women by reinforcing economic and social barriers—including urban policies rooted in colonial legacies, the undervaluation of women's labor, and the lack of childcare and protection from violence and harassment—these

1 Christiane Horwood et al., “A Descriptive Study to Explore Working Conditions and Childcare Practices among Informal Women Workers in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa: Identifying Opportunities to Support Childcare for Mothers in Informal Work,” *BMC Pediatrics* 19, no. 382 (October 2019): <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12887-019-1737-7>.

same inequalities also cultivate resilience, as women transform exclusion into empowerment through innovative strategies and collective action. By applying an intersectional feminist lens, this paper will explore how these dynamics reflect broader global trends in the neoliberal structuring of informal economies, demonstrating the critical role of gender in shaping both the challenges and strategies within marginalized economic systems.

Women's significant representation in South Africa's informal economy underscores why they deserve particular focus in any examination of this sector. Statistics from the Labor Research Service reveal that "47.6% of women are employed in the informal sector, compared to only 30.6% of men."² This disparity reflects the systemic barriers women face in accessing formal employment. As Meyiwa et al. observe, "the majority of women have no space in the formal sector, and they tend to swell the ranks of workers in the informal economy."³ The marginalization that women face in the formal economy through gender discrimination pushes them toward informal work, where they encounter further challenges. By focusing on women—who make up close to half of South Africa's informal economy—this paper sheds light on the colonial legacy of urbanization and its lasting impact on women, as well as the influence of neoliberal economic governance on urban policy schemes. It also examines the systemic undervaluation of women's labor, persistent pay disparities, vulnerabilities such as lack of childcare and exposure to gender-based violence, global trends shaping these challenges, and the resilience strategies women employ to navigate and counter these systemic barriers.

Gendered Challenges in South Africa's Informal Economy

The combination of inadequate childcare, law enforcement harassment, and the trauma associated with gender-based violence reflects the broader systemic barriers that impact women's participation in South Africa's informal economy. This section first examines the colonial and neoliberal foundations of these challenges and highlights how, from a feminist perspective, these obstacles are deeply entrenched in historical and systemic inequalities that disproportionately marginalize women today.

In the South African urban context, the exclusion of informal workers is deeply rooted in a colonial legacy. As Mba and Mzileni argue, there are lasting effects of what was once a city governed by a colonial state divided into two

2 Labour Research Service, "Women's Human Rights in the Informal Sector," August 22, 2023, <https://www.lrs.org.za/2023/08/22/womens-human-rights-in-the-informal-sector/>.

3 Thenjiwe Meyiwa et al., "Black Women's Lived Experiences of Informal Street Trading in East London, South Africa," *Journal of Intercultural Communication* 24, no. 2 (June 2024): 162, <https://doi.org/10.36923/jicc.v24i2.812>.

different zones of racial categorization.⁴ In postcolonial South Africa, informal workers face systemic challenges where their rights and needs are subordinated to the priorities of neoliberal urban development. This is disguised as “class categorisation in bureaucratic speech.”⁵ Such divisions perpetuate inequality by targeting informal workers—predominantly poor Black people—under the guise of maintaining urban order and cleanliness.

This systemic exclusion is further complicated by the gendered dynamics of the informal economy. As Skinner and Rogan observe, the “post-apartheid informal economy is characterized by a large degree of heterogeneity” and is “highly gendered in its segmentation.”⁶ Women, who form a significant portion of this sector, often occupy roles that are more precarious and make less of a living wage for themselves compared to their labor. This structural segmentation highlights how the informal economy reproduces broader social and economic hierarchies, reinforcing the legacies of apartheid and colonial urban planning. Meyiwa et al. note that street vendors, who are predominantly Black women, frequently face harassment by law enforcement.⁷ Specifically, vendors reported experiences such as “avoiding fines or having their goods confiscated,” which undermines their economic security.⁸ Such practices exemplify how compounded economic vulnerability interplays with gendered disparities to disadvantage women informal workers.

Similarly, the exclusion of street vendors from urban spaces highlights the intersection of economic marginalization and class-based inequalities. Benjamin Etzold emphasizes that “the rights of access to public space are crucial livelihood assets of the urban poor” engaged in the informal sector.⁹ However, these rights are frequently denied, limiting the economic opportunities of these workers. This denial often results in the removal of street vendors from their selling spots, effectively excluding them from economic participation to “maintain the cleanliness of [what was once] a white settler’s town.”¹⁰ This denial has a distinctly gendered impact, as “in most countries of the Global South, the street

4 Thembi Mba and Pedro Mzileni, “Stokvels and Livelihoods of Black Women Street Vendors in Urban South Africa,” *African Journal of Development Studies*, special issue 1 (June 2023): 172, https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-aa_affrika1_v2023_nsi1_a9.

5 Mba and Mzileni, “Stokvels and Livelihoods of Black Women,” 172.

6 Michael Rogan and Caroline Skinner, “The South African Informal Economy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the South African Economy*, ed. Arkebe Oqubay, Fiona Tregenna, and Imraan Valodia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 3, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780192894199.013.33>.

7 Meyiwa et al., “Black Women’s Lived Experiences,” 162-171.

8 Meyiwa et al., “Black Women’s Lived Experiences,” 168.

9 Benjamin Etzold, “Selling in Insecurity, Living with Violence: Eviction Drives Against Street Food Vendors in Dhaka and the Informal Politics of Exploitation,” in *Street Vending in the Neoliberal City: A Global Perspective on the Practices and Policies of a Marginalized Economy*, ed. Kristina Graaff and Noa Ha (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 5, <https://doi.org/10.3167/9781782388340>.

10 Mba and Mzileni, “Stokvels and Livelihoods of Black Women,” 172.

food trade is largely in the hands of women,” urban renewal schemes frequently demolish their workplaces, while urban planning fails to integrate informal economic activities into city layouts.¹¹ Hence, intersectional feminist frameworks reveal how these policies not only erase women’s economic contributions but also reinforce patriarchal control over urban spaces.

In addition, systemic gender inequalities manifest as pay disparities and the undervaluation of women’s labor across both formal and informal sectors, a key feminist critique of capitalist systems. Michael Rogan and Laura Alfers demonstrate that, even though women’s participation in the labor force has increased since the end of apartheid, this shift has not led to meaningful financial gains. Instead, “the overrepresentation of women in informal employment has been identified as a key source of gender inequality in the labor market.”¹² This is largely due to “the gendered structure of earnings and occupations within the informal economy.”¹³ These dynamics align with feminist critiques of neoliberalism, which emphasize how market-driven policies exploit women’s unpaid and underpaid labor to sustain broader economic systems. As Comins highlights, this results in heightened exposure to insecurity, harassment, and economic instability for women, where “the non-recognition of the economic value and contribution of women’s unpaid labour persists,” and the legitimacy of their labor is continuously undermined.¹⁴ The gendered structure of earnings restricts women’s access to not only financial resources but also social protections, forcing them into economic vulnerability and necessitating reliance on informal work for survival. This underscores the structural challenges within South Africa’s informal economy and the need for women to engage in resourceful efforts to survive within these constraints.

Furthermore, women in South Africa’s informal economy face the dual pressures of contributing as income earners in the productive economy while fulfilling caregiving responsibilities in the reproductive economy. Unlike women in the formal economy, who may have access to childcare services or work more stable hours, these women often lack such support, intensifying the challenges they face. The absence of formal childcare options forces women to juggle precarious work conditions with family responsibilities, as Horwood et al. notes that “mothers relied on family members to take care of the child while they were working.”¹⁵ While some supportive environments allow women to keep infants at workstations, facilitating breastfeeding, such supportive environments remain rare, with most women operating in unsanitary and unsafe public spaces as street

11 Etzold, “Selling in Insecurity,” 18.

12 Michael Rogan and Laura Alfers, “Gendered Inequalities in the South African Informal Economy,” *Agenda* 33, no. 4 (2019): 92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2019.1676163>.

13 Rogan and Alfers, “Gendered Inequalities,” 92.

14 Lyse Comins, “South Africa’s Gender Pay Gap Leaves Women Behind,” *Mail & Guardian*, August 28, 2024, <https://mg.co.za/business/2024-08-28-south-africas-gender-pay-gap-leaves-women-behind/>.

15 Horwood et al., “A Descriptive Study,” 4.

vendors.¹⁶ This lack of support not only compromises their ability to fulfill their roles as mothers and caregivers but also to participate fully in economic activities.

The intersection of gender-based violence and economic vulnerability is particularly pronounced for women navigating South Africa's informal economy. Loretta Pyles highlights that women who experience severe physical abuse are often left more traumatized, which limits their ability to work in the formal sector and drives them toward informal economic activities out of desperation.¹⁷ Despite the overwhelming challenges, women demonstrate resilience. As Pyles notes, "in a sample that experienced psychological abuse at a rate of 97 percent, almost one-third still managed to start a small business at least once."¹⁸ This statistic underscores the determination of women to leverage the informal economy as "a coping skill for dealing with poverty and violence."¹⁹ Through their agency, these women navigate an oppressive environment and transform it into an opportunity for survival and independence.

Global Context

The experiences of violence against women in South Africa's informal economy mirror similar struggles across other global contexts, demonstrating the pervasive nature of neoliberal policies on informal economies worldwide. Etzold describes how vendors in Dhaka—20% of whom are women—face heightened risks of eviction, harassment, and exploitation. He notes that the eviction drives against hawkers were legitimized through "powerful narratives that delegitimize the street economy," a dynamic similar to patterns observed in South Africa.²⁰ By framing street vendors as a nuisance, state authorities erode public support for the informal street economy and justify repressive and exclusionary actions that deepen the economic vulnerability of informal workers. Additionally, in the context of Dhaka, women's roles in the informal economy, while crucial, are often "invisible." Women are typically involved in the home-based preparation of food sold by men on the streets or in the preparation of home-cooked meals, a pattern documented by Etzold.²¹ However, framing vendors as burdens to society rather than contributors to the economy in any context reveals how systemic oppression renders women's critical roles invisible. These parallels also underscore the need for women's resilience in the face of their worldwide oppression, offering diverse perspectives for global feminist thought.

16 Horwood et al., "A Descriptive Study," 2.

17 Loretta Pyles, "Economic Well-Being and Intimate Partner Violence: New Findings about the Informal Economy," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 33, no. 3 (2006): 119, <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.3183>.

18 Pyles, "Economic Well-Being," 118.

19 Pyles, "Economic Well-Being," 123.

20 Etzold, "Selling in Insecurity," 7.

21 Etzold, "Selling in Insecurity," 18.

Resilience and Collective Action

Despite the systemic challenges rooted in the colonial composition of the modern city, South African women prove not to be passive victims of systemic inequalities but rather active agents engaging in collective action to counter economic exclusion efforts in an inherent knowledge economy, similar to the agency described against gendered expressions of violence towards women above. They leverage collective strategies, such as stokvels, to survive and thrive in the informal sector. As defined by the National Stokvel Association of South Africa, a stokvel is “a type of credit union in which a group of people agree to contribute a fixed amount of money to a common pool weekly, fortnightly or monthly.” Mba and Mzileni discuss how stokvels “create strong solidarity networks of caring for each other, teaching each other financial literacy, and growing sustainable streams of wealth.”²² Women transform street vending into “self-empowerment pedagogy” that challenges patriarchy, poverty, and indignity.²³ These collective strategies not only provide economic resilience but also foster a sense of community and empowerment, illustrating how women in South Africa’s informal economy use the power of community to redefine their socio-economic realities.

Stokvels, as a form of African feminism, demonstrate the power of community-based financial solutions to challenge the neoliberal organization of urban life. This approach, highlighted by Gwendolyn Mikell, contrasts sharply with Western feminist ideologies, which, as some African women have argued, emphasize “a movement defined by extreme individualism, by militant opposition to patriarchy, and, ultimately, by a hostility to males.”²⁴ In contrast, African feminism draws strength from cultural traditions that legitimize female organizations and collective action, creating a framework where women work together for their mutual benefit. These strategies are deeply rooted in “African communal, historical, symbolic, and experiential constructs, rather than in cultural constructs based on Western individualism and competition.”²⁵ By transforming marginalization into opportunities for empowerment, these acts of collective action embody the tension between exclusion and empowerment and redefine urban life through solidarity and mutual support.

To cope with multi-layered vulnerabilities such as financial struggles, women employ innovative strategies. For example, Meyiwa et al. describe the “half a loaf is better than no bread” approach in which vendors lower prices for certain marginalized racial groups to ensure affordability, while charging higher prices for foreign customers.²⁶ This is in response to the unfavourable nature of the value of the South African rand against foreign currencies. Despite limited

22 Mba and Mzileni, “Stokvels and Livelihoods of Black Women,” 175.

23 Mba and Mzileni, “Stokvels and Livelihoods of Black Women,” 174.

24 Gwendolyn Mikell, “African Feminism: Toward a New Politics of Representation,” *Feminist Studies* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 406, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178274>.

25 Mikell, “African Feminism,” 407.

26 Meyiwa et al., “Black Women’s Lived Experiences,” 168.

formal education and knowledge of foreign exchange, these women demonstrate remarkable adaptability in integrating such considerations into their business practices. These examples illustrate how systemic inequalities not only create obstacles for women in South Africa's informal economy but also compel them to develop creative strategies for economic survival in the face of persistent adversity.

Furthermore, female leadership plays a critical role in advocating for better working conditions and access to social protections for informal workers. Organizations like the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), described as the "first International Labor Federation run by women for work dominated by women," exemplify this leadership.²⁷ South African women working in the informal economy are "pioneering movements to demand rights, including health insurance, pensions, and better pay," while pushing back against the societal undervaluation of labor.²⁸ During the height of the pandemic, informal workers' unions in South Africa, often led by women, stepped in to support some of the most vulnerable members of society when formal authorities fell short. These unions developed innovative solutions, including socially distanced methods for accessing food ration stations and collaborations with police to conduct welfare checks on home-based women workers, as documented by Barry. Such actions highlight how female-led initiatives not only address immediate crises but also pave the way for sustainable protections and improvements for informal workers.

Conclusion

By applying an intersectional feminist lens, this paper argued that while systemic gender inequalities significantly marginalize women in South Africa's informal economy, these challenges have also inspired collective resistance among women. This paper explored how urban policies rooted in colonial legacies, the undervaluation of women's labor, and the lack of childcare and protection expose women to economic insecurity. At the same time, women demonstrate agency through strategies like stokvels and other initiatives to sustain their livelihoods, transforming exclusion into empowerment.

These findings underscore the need to center women's voices and experiences in policymaking and urban governance. Where is a good place to start? In fueling the collective strength demonstrated by women in the informal economy. Their initiatives offer a powerful blueprint for change, proving that even under repressive conditions, solidarity can drive transformative progress. Governments and international organizations must adopt intersectional approaches that recognize the compounded effects of gender, race, and class on economic participation. This can be accomplished by integrating feminist voices

27 Eloise Barry, "Meet the Women Leading the Global Fight for Workers' Rights in the Informal Economy," *Time*, November 17, 2021, <https://time.com/6120121/women-informal-economy-ford-foundation-grant/>.

28 Barry, "Meet the Women Leading the Global Fight."

into urban planning, including designing inclusive city spaces that accommodate informal economic activities while safeguarding the rights and dignity of marginalized workers.

Without such reforms, the cycle of exclusion and exploitation will persist, jeopardizing the social well-being of South Africa's most vulnerable workers. Ultimately, addressing gendered inequalities in informal economies requires a shift in how we value labor, community, and care. Women's resilience strategies not only highlight their agency but also provide a roadmap for reimagining economic systems to prioritize equity and collective well-being. In this way, the struggle of women in South Africa's informal economy becomes a powerful testament to the transformative potential of feminist principles in achieving global justice.

Reparations for African Americans

A Lockean Debate for a New Political Order

[SHELLANE SHETTLEWORTH]

“Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness,” the innate rights of all men, is perhaps the most famous line of the Declaration of Independence.¹ However, many remain unaware of its philosophical roots in John Locke’s assertion of the fundamental human rights to life, liberty, and property.² The Founding Fathers, the writers of this famous document, were highly influenced by John Locke through their European political and academic backgrounds.³ While for some American Founders, such as Thomas Jefferson, Lockean theory was more implicitly evident within their writing, others, such as Alexander Hamilton, directly cited his rhetoric as a source for understanding American independence.⁴ This Lockean influence persists not only in the Declaration of Independence, but also in the body of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.⁵ However, despite the proliferation of Lockean principles in the American governmental structure, the claims of equality of man did not extend to enslaved African Americans and later attempts to integrate them within the American social contract have ultimately failed, thus necessitating a new political order, as asserted by Locke.

Locke establishes that slavery is only justifiable after war or forfeiture of rights and cannot be an inherited, permanent position, a direct contrast to the

1 Tohid Asadi, “En Route to the US Constitution: Founding Fathers and Lockean Philosophy,” *Historia Constitucional: Revista Electrónica de Historia Constitucional* 16, no. 16 (September 2015): 412, <https://doi.org/10.17811/hc.v0i16.429>.

2 Matthew Miyamoto, “Political Legacy: John Locke and the American Government,” (Undergraduate thesis, University of Oregon, 2016), 20.

3 Asadi, “En Route to US Constitution,” 419.

4 Miyamoto, “Political Legacy: John Locke and the American Government,” 1-3; Asadi, “En Route to US Constitution,” 414-15, 418.

5 Miyamoto, “Political Legacy: John Locke and the American Government,” 1.

American institution of slavery.⁶ In chapter four of his renowned text, Locke discusses slavery.⁷ Firstly, he defines the liberty of man both in the natural state and when in society.⁸ In the natural state, liberty means to be free from any superior power, only being ruled by natural law.⁹ In contrast, when in society, liberty means to be unrestrained from any law other than those from the established legislative power, enacted within its mandate and consented to by the commonwealth.¹⁰ Consequently, just as man cannot rightly take his own life as it acts against the preservation aspect within the law of nature, no man can voluntarily enter into slavery, as it would give another person absolute power over himself, where that person can decide his death.¹¹ Instead, Locke declares complete slavery as a continuation of the state of war.¹² Hence, elements of the Constitution and the conditions of slavery juxtapose Locke's natural rights theory on freedom and consent. In the body of the Constitution, the government made slavery constitutional by counting slaves as three-fifths of a person to calculate the allotted representatives for Southern states. By reducing the value of a slave to three-fifths of a white person, the American government disregarded African Americans' Locke's claim of the innate equality of all men. Furthermore, slavery denied Black Americans the "property rights of use, ownership, or management" of their labor.¹³ This denial goes against Locke's definition of property, which states that men create their property when they combine their labor with nature.¹⁴ The final contradiction between American slavery and Locke's rhetoric is its hereditary nature. Through Locke's argument, the enslavers would not have legitimate power over the life, liberty, or property of children born from slaves, making them freemen by right. Thus, the Lockean principles which helped to develop the American nation are incompatible with its institution of slavery.

Consequently, within Locke's philosophical framework of a political society, African Americans would be entitled to corrective justice. John Locke argued that reparations from the offender are necessary to repair the damage caused by a crime or violation of rights, as is the case for slavery.¹⁵ Reparations must give the "satisfaction due to any private Man, for the damage he has received," and this

6 John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, trans. Jonathan Bennett (Early Modern Texts, 2008), 10, <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/locke1689a.pdf>.

7 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 9-10.

8 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 9.

9 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 9.

10 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 9.

11 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 9-10.

12 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 10.

13 Adrienne D. Davis, "The Case for United States Reparations to African Americans," *Human Rights Brief* 7, no. 3 (2000): 4.

14 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 11.

15 Bernard Boxill and J. Angelo Corlett, "Black Reparations," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2024, sec. 2.

right stems from the right of self-preservation.¹⁶ Scholars argue that Locke's use of "some person or another" allows for the recognition of generational damage, permitting descendants to make a claim for the inequalities caused by slavery and the government's inaction to remedy their ancestors' original harm.¹⁷ Furthermore, the descendants of the enslaved and the enslavers have inherited their right to reparations and debt of repayment, respectively, as those rights and debts are considered property which each has inherited.¹⁸ This interpretation establishes financial compensation to the descendants of the enslaved for the injustices their ancestors faced as well as the inequalities they suffered due to the historical legacy of slavery.

However, Brian Smith reframes Locke's reparative rhetoric not as property or financial restoration but as the reclamation of ancient liberties as he considered the enslaved to be conquered people.¹⁹ This lens of analysis emphasizes not only the loss of passing down property but also the loss of the right to choose their political community.²⁰ Locke defines conquest as an invalid source of political authority regardless of whether the conquest was unjust or lawful.²¹ Unjust conquest is akin to robbery, and thus the aggressor gains no right over the life of the victim while the victim, or their descendant, has their natural right "to seek the relief of the law" for their self-preservation.²² On the other hand, with lawful conquest, the conqueror has despotic power only over the conquered, and shall receive only "reparation for the damages received and the costs of the war."²³ However, he asserts that this reparation has to maintain the rights of the innocents, such as a wife or child, as the law of nature demands the preservation of property to "the greater right of those who are in danger of perishing without it."²⁴ Hence, Locke maintains that if the conqueror already has sufficient resources, they should relinquish part of their claim to reparations.²⁵ Additionally, the children of the conquered are freemen and are entitled to revolt against any government forced upon them until they have "laws [they have consented to] ... and also ... allowed property [they are entitled to]."²⁶ Through Smith's argument, the enslaved and their descendants are conquered people who were under unjust subjugation. The hereditary and second-class nature of slavery meant that African Americans were denied political rights, and restricted from seeking a legal

16 Boxill and Corlett, "Black Reparations," sec. 2.

17 Boxill and Corlett, "Black Reparations," sec. 2.

18 Boxill and Corlett, "Black Reparations," sec. 8.

19 Brian Smith, "John Locke on Historical Injustice: The Redemptive Power of Contract," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 24, no. 4 (2024): 9.

20 Smith, "John Locke on Historical Injustice," 7.

21 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 58.

22 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 58.

23 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 59-60.

24 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 61.

25 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 61.

26 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 62-63.

appeal as they had “no court other than that of the [conquerors].”²⁷ Consequently, the descendants of the enslaved have the right to resistance until they have renegotiated the social contract and to create a new political order “agreeable to the parties living in the generational wake of historical transgressions.”²⁸ Thus, true corrective justice would require the establishment of, and agreement to, new laws created by equal input from the descendants of the enslaved and enslavers, not simple improvements to the current political order. As a result, this Lockean reframing of slavery as conquest would explain the failure of the Reconstruction Amendments, which only added to the political order without reconstructing it.

The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments are commonly known as the Reconstruction Amendments because they aimed to provide African Americans with equality after the Civil War.²⁹ Yet, given that Black Americans have faced persistent marginalization, the amendments ultimately achieved minimal success. The Thirteenth Amendment prohibited slavery and involuntary servitude except as a punishment for crime within territories under U.S. jurisdiction, drawing similarities to Locke’s definition of just conquest as this punishment would serve as reparations for the crime committed.³⁰ The Fourteenth Amendment granted African Americans birthright citizenship with accompanying rights and privileges to life, liberty, and property, and due process and equal protection under the law, directly providing the fundamental rights defined by Locke.³¹ Finally, the Fifteenth Amendment provided all citizens, regardless of their race or previous servitude, the right to vote, allowing them to be equal participants in the social contract as Locke emphasizes.³² These three Amendments represent the goals of the Post-Civil War era to acknowledge their place as equal citizens to white Americans.

Unfortunately, African Americans continue to face several disparities despite shedding their slavery status. Black Codes and their successor, the Jim Crow laws, which lasted until the 1960s, were used to restrict the lives of ex-slaves, “dictating... [their] work hours[,] duties[, and] behaviour” while the government provided white Americans with preferential treatment.³³ Furthermore, the government neglected issues affecting African Americans by providing little assistance to erode educational and economic disparities.³⁴ In some instances, the government exacerbated these inequalities, such as having more restrictions when providing Black farmers with loans in comparison to those given to white

27 Smith, “John Locke on Historical Injustice,” 3-4.

28 Smith, “John Locke on Historical Injustice,” 4.

29 Davis, “Case for United States Reparations,” 4.

30 Edieth Y. Wu, “Reparations to African-Americans: The Only Remedy For The US Government’s Failure To Enforce The 13th, 14th, And 15th Amendments,” *Connecticut Public Interest Law Journal* 3, no. 2 (2003): 344.

31 Wu, “Reparations to African-Americans,” 347.

32 Wu, “Reparations to African-Americans,” 357.

33 Wu, “Reparations to African-Americans,” 344-346.

34 Wu, “Reparations to African-Americans,” 353.

farmers with similar credit scores, dropping the percentage of Black farmers to 1%.³⁵ Additionally, there were a “myriad of roadblocks” stacked against African Americans’ right to vote as white Americans used racial violence, claims of voter fraud, and literacy and financial requirements to impede Black people from voting.³⁶ These issues have persisted as African Americans face “entrenched patterns of disadvantage and structures of inequality” in sectors such as education, housing, and employment.³⁷ In particular, Black Americans face mass incarceration, which also results in the loss of voting rights; sub-proletarianization, which leads them to depend on their physical labor under conditions similar to those experienced in slavery; and hyper-segregation, which creates “[an] urban, black ‘underclass.’”³⁸ Therefore, despite the attempts of the Reconstruction Amendments to provide equality, the unfavorable reality of current African Americans ultimately showcases their limitations and explains the ever-present desire for reparations.

Since the abolishment of slavery, there have been no reparations given to African Americans.³⁹ After the Civil War, there was a notion of compensation to be given to African Americans for injustices suffered under slavery. In 1865, General Sherman’s “Special Field Order No. 15” guaranteed each African American family 40 acres of land and authorized loaning them mules, leading to the coined promise of “40 acres and a mule.”⁴⁰ However, President Andrew Johnson overturned this plan, leaving the recently freed Black Americans with limited resources.⁴¹ Approximately a century later, advocacy for reparations resurfaced slightly within the Civil Rights Movement.⁴² Two influential documents were ‘The Black Manifesto’ by activist James Forman, which demanded financial compensation from churches and synagogues which benefited from slavery, and *The Case for Black Reparation* by Professor Boris Bittker, which argued that financial compensation should be used for long-term institution building rather than individual payments.⁴³ However, these texts did not provide an adequate push for a reparations movement.⁴⁴ It was not until compensation was given for the atrocities committed in World War II to Japanese Americans and Holocaust survivors that the legislative push for African American reparations began to pick up more steam,

35 Wu, “Reparations to African-Americans,” 353.

36 Wu, “Reparations to African-Americans,” 357-359.

37 Thomas McCarthy, “Repairing Past Injustice: Remarks on the Politics of Reparations for Slavery in the United States,” *Global Dialogue* 14, no. 2 (2012): 112, 114.

38 McCarthy, “Repairing Past Injustice: Remarks on Politics of Reparations,” 115.

39 John Torpey, “Paying for the Past?: The Movement for Reparations for African-Americans,” *Journal of Human Rights* 3, no. 2 (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1475483042000210702>; William Darity Jr. et al., “Black Reparations in the United States, 2024: An Introduction,” *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 10, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2024.10.2.01>.

40 Torpey, “Praying for the Past,” 172-173.

41 Torpey, “Praying for the Past,” 173.

42 Torpey, “Praying for the Past,” 173.

43 Torpey, “Praying for the Past,” 174-175.

44 Torpey, “Praying for the Past,” 175.

using those cases as precedents.⁴⁵ In 1989, Detroit Congressman John Conyers proposed legislation to investigate whether slavery created systemic difficulties and to provide restorative solutions if proven to be the case.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, this bill never moved out of committee. More recently, there have also been class-action lawsuits brought to the courts aimed against private companies for “their history of complicity with slavery” such as the case of *Farmer-Paellmann v. Fleet-boston Financial Corp.*, filed March 26, 2002.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, this lawsuit, like all similar claims made on behalf of the descendants of the enslaved, even ones made against the government, failed.⁴⁸ The courts provided reasons such as sovereign immunity, statutes of limitations, and the fact that previous slavery compliance was legal for their times.⁴⁹ Thus, the slavery-induced property and liberty violations remain unresolved.

Due to these failures, scholars have investigated the political, social, and philosophical obstacles to reparations, ultimately concluding that there is a need for institutional recognition and reform, proving Locke’s arguments. In 2022, scholars conducted a study consisting of 2,857 participants to investigate public opinion on symbolic reparations for slavery in the U.S.⁵⁰ They discovered that white Americans disagreed with reparations because of their feelings of deservingness and their perception that it was “the inability of Black Americans to bridge the inequality gap.”⁵¹ In particular, the scholars noticed that many of them resisted possible negative connotations of their racial identity regarding their ancestors’ role in slavery.⁵² Thus, they conclude that attaining racial justice for the legacy of slavery is not simply about appealing to the factual nature of its legacy, but rather confronting the views of deservingness that are conditioned by racial identity.⁵³ Consequently, the authors emphasize the need for symbolic reparations, such as governmental acknowledgement, apologies, and curricular reforms as well as material reparations, such as “direct monetary compensation, or funding for community/public policy initiatives.”⁵⁴ Other scholars, such as Sujaya Rajguru, also note a holistic framework to address America’s history of slavery and systemic racial discrimination. This strategy, informed by corrective measures taken in South Africa, Peru, and Guatemala, involves four main components: amendments to the Constitution; the establishment of a Truth and Histo-

45 Torpey, “Praying for the Past,” 175-176.

46 Torpey, “Praying for the Past,” 175.

47 Darity Jr. et al., “Open Access Black Reparations: An Introduction,” 7.

48 Darity Jr. et al., “Open Access Black Reparations: An Introduction,” 7.

49 Darity Jr. et al., “Open Access Black Reparations: An Introduction,” 7.

50 Ashley V. Reichelmann et al., “Racial Identity, Reparations, and Modern Views of Justice Concerning Slavery,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 86, S1 (2022): 554, <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfac018>.

51 Reichelmann et al., “Racial Identity, Reparations, and Modern Views of Justice,” 569.

52 Reichelmann et al., “Racial Identity, Reparations, and Modern Views of Justice,” 570.

53 Reichelmann et al., “Racial Identity, Reparations, and Modern Views of Justice.”

54 Reichelmann et al., “Racial Identity, Reparations, and Modern Views of Justice,” 553.

ry Commission; educational reform on slavery history; and reparations. Notably, although Rajguru recommends amending the Constitution with rhetoric “[acknowledging] the trauma the United States and its people [have] faced,” the use of South Africa as a model asserts a more radical approach, a rewritten Constitution.⁵⁵ After the injustices of Apartheid, South Africa created a new Constitution with its preamble asserting that “the people of South Africa, [r]ecognise the injustices of [their] past . . . and [b]elieve that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in [their] diversity,” amongst other changes.⁵⁶ In Lockean understanding, this rewritten Constitution denotes a new social contract after the egregious racial discrimination that occurred. Therefore, the United States with such similar history would also require a new constitutional political order.

In conclusion, on account of the Founding Fathers, the philosophies of John Locke are the cornerstone of the American nation, and thus, unsurprisingly, the argument for collective justice for African Americans for the harms of slavery would be no different. Through an analysis of Lockean principles regarding conquests and historical recollection of the failures of reparations, this research showcases that the push for justice should not be considered through merely financial compensation, but by means of institutional reestablishment of the American political order to provide true liberty and equality for African Americans. Consequently, this paper adds to the broader understanding of collective justice and the requirement of a new social contract to achieve its goals. Future research can investigate the specific steps required to make this new political order feasible for the American context.

55 Sujaya Rajguru, “Fulfilling the Promises of Our Preamble: A Holistic Approach to Transitional Justice in the United States,” *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 58, no. 1 (2023): 373, <https://journals.law.harvard.edu/crcl/wp-content/uploads/sites/80/2023/04/Fulfilling-the-Promise-of-Our-Preamble.pdf>.

56 Rajguru, “Fulfilling Promises of Our Preamble,” 375.

[International and Domestic Affairs]

The Cambodian Genocide

Theoretical Limitations in International Humanitarian Responses

[PAIGE HUMPHREY]

The Cambodian genocide exposes the gaps between International Relations (IR) theory and humanitarian practice, revealing how global power politics can undermine commitments to protecting human rights. Understanding why the international community failed to intervene in the Cambodian genocide calls for a layered analysis that brings multiple IR approaches into conversation. Realism, liberal institutionalism, and postcolonial Global IR approaches each highlight different aspects of the international response, particularly the extent to which Cold War geopolitical priorities overshadowed humanitarian concerns. Together, these perspectives reveal how theoretical blind spots shaped global inaction and contributed to devastating consequences for Cambodia, setting the stage for the atrocities that unfolded.

Between 1975 and 1979, Cambodia endured a period of extreme violence, as the Khmer Rouge regime under Pol Pot sought to remake Cambodian society through an extreme agrarian revolution. After capturing Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, in April 1975, they “want[ed] to enforce the ideology of communism” into Cambodian culture, “destroying family, religion, education, the fabrication of” culture, targeting perceived enemies ranging from intellectuals to ethnic minorities.¹ These ideological and coercive policies produced mass famine, disease, forced labor, and systematic execution, all of which constitute humanitarian and human rights violations. By the time the Vietnamese forces toppled the regime in

1 Channy Chhi Laux, “Voices for Freedom: Surviving the Cambodian Genocide,” Virtual conversation, streamed April 19, 2022, hosted by Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, 3:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0lEoZWmlh0k>; David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (London: Routledge, 2018), 458-60.

January 1979, roughly a quarter of the population had died.²

Despite the magnitude of these atrocities, the international community took no meaningful steps to intervene or even publicly condemn the violence as genocide while it unfolded. Cold War dynamics constrained political will and shaped how states handled the humanitarian crisis, directly influencing global inaction. Within this broader Cold War framework, superpower rivalry and anti-communist containment priorities meant that strategic alignment often outweighed humanitarian concerns, leading some Western states to tolerate, or even diplomatically support, the Khmer Rouge as a counterweight to Vietnamese and Soviet influence. The United States, still reeling from the Vietnam War, was reluctant to re-engage militarily in Southeast Asia and struggled to assess the scale of violence due to Cambodia's profound isolation.³ China's backing of the Khmer Rouge as a strategic counterweight to Soviet-supported Vietnam further protected the regime from unified international pressure.⁴ When Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978-79, driven by broader conflict and national security concerns, many Western and regional states condemned the action less as a humanitarian intervention than as a violation of sovereignty.⁵

Strong sovereignty norms, particularly toward revolutionary postcolonial governments, hindered attempts to classify the atrocities as genocide or mobilize collective action.⁶ Cambodia's marginal standing within the Global South further obscured Cambodian voices and limited international awareness of their suffering during the genocide.⁷ These intersecting geopolitical, institutional, and structural factors help account for the global community's inaction during the genocide, and analyzing this pattern requires explanations offered by major IR approaches, which demonstrate the factors that contributed to the global response.

Realism provides the most direct explanation for international inaction during the Cambodian genocide by emphasizing power politics, national interest, and the structure of the international system. According to classical realists, states prioritize survival and strategic advantage above moral considerations.⁸

2 Ben Kiernan, *Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 458-460.

3 William Shawcross, *Sideshow* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), 353.

4 Chenyi Wang, "The Chinese Communist Party's Relationship with the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s: An Ideological Victory and a Strategic Failure," CWIHP Working Paper 88 (Wilson Center, December 13, 2018).

5 James Lutfy, "Humanitarian Intervention: The Invasion of Cambodia," *NYLS Journal of International and Comparative Law* 2, no. 1 (1980): 144.

6 Craig Etcheson, *After the Killing Fields: Lessons from the Cambodian Genocide* (Westport: Praeger, 2005), 89.

7 Donald W. Beachler, "Arguing about Cambodia: Genocide and Political Interest," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23, no. 2 (2009): 224, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hgs/dcp034>.

8 Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 5.

Structural realists like Kenneth Waltz argue that the anarchic international system compels states to act according to the logic of the balance of power.⁹ These principles are clearly reflected in the global response to Cambodia between 1975 and 1979.

For the United States, China, and their allies, the overriding priority was countering Soviet influence in Southeast Asia. Although the Khmer Rouge was a violent and unpredictable regime, it was also strongly anti-Vietnamese and aligned with China, making it a useful strategic actor in the regional balance of power. Vietnam's 1978 intervention, which toppled the Khmer Rouge and ended the genocide, was viewed primarily through this geopolitical lens. Because Vietnam was allied with the Soviet Union, Western and Chinese policymakers interpreted the invasion as an act of regional expansion rather than a potentially humanitarian act.¹⁰ Realism predicts such behavior: humanitarian concerns are subordinate to preventing adversaries from gaining influence.

This logic also explains the United States and China's joint decision to support the Khmer Rouge's continued representation at the United Nations after 1979.¹¹ Keeping Democratic Kampuchea's seat served to delegitimize Vietnam's new client government in Phnom Penh and weaken Soviet regional power. Even when evidence of genocide was publicly available, major powers had little incentive to intervene militarily or diplomatically. From a realist perspective, the international community's failure was not an anomaly but a predictable consequence of strategic competition. Realism thus identifies the Cold War power structure, not moral failure, as the primary driver of global inaction.

While Realism highlights strategic motivations, Liberal institutionalism explains the procedural and structural failures of the international system to mobilize a coordinated humanitarian response. Liberal institutionalist theorists such as Robert Keohane argue that international institutions facilitate cooperation by reducing uncertainty and creating shared norms, but their effectiveness depends on state consent and enforcement mechanisms.¹² The Cambodian case underscores the inherent limitations of institutions that lack independent authority. During the genocide, the United Nations had minimal capacity to verify reports of atrocities, and Cold War divisions effectively paralyzed any effort to respond. Cold War politics often turned discussions of genocide into political rhet-

9 Kenneth Waltz, "The Anarchic Structure of World Politics," in *International Politics: Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues*, 8th ed., ed. Robert J. Art and Robert Jervis (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007), 31.

10 Casey Elmhirst, "Delayed Justice: How US Actions Paved the Way for the Khmer Rouge and Prevented Justice in Cambodia" (Undergraduate thesis, Chapman University, 2023), 21, <https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1159&context=vocesnovae>.

11 Bernard Nossiter, "U.N. Assembly, Rebuffing Soviet, Seats Cambodia Regime of Pol Pot," *New York Times*, September 22, 1979, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/09/22/archives/un-assembly-rebuffing-soviet-seats-cambodia-regime-of-pol-pot-the.html>.

12 Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 85.

oric rather than concrete action, as accusations were filtered through ideological rivalry and concerns about setting precedents that might later be used against powerful states or their allies. Competing geopolitical interests, particularly the reluctance of major powers to legitimize Vietnamese intervention or alienate strategic partners, further prevented the Genocide Convention from being effectively invoked or enforced in any meaningful way.¹³ Decades later, the UN's mandate "for the assistance of the United Nations and the international community in bringing to justice those persons responsible for the genocide and crimes against humanity during the rule of the Khmer Rouge from 1975 to 1979" stands as a stark reminder of that earlier inaction.¹⁴

From a liberal institutionalist perspective, international institutions exist to establish and enforce norms. Human rights norms during this period were too underdeveloped to meaningfully challenge the primacy of state sovereignty, even in the face of atrocities. As Amnesty International emphasized, "serious human rights violations have taken place in the country... Under international standards, it is the responsibility of the governmental authorities... to bring to justice according to international standards for fairness those against whom there is credible evidence that they perpetrated political killings or torture."¹⁵ Despite this, the international community largely condemned Vietnam's removal of the Khmer Rouge. The prevailing norm of non-intervention took precedence over humanitarian concerns, highlighting how state sovereignty was institutionally prioritized. "The international outcry against the Khmer Rouge in the United Nations corridors in New York was muffled by diplomatic maneuverings. Incredibly, big power machinations awarded Cambodia's contested seat in the United Nations to the regime of Pol Pot," revealing institutions structurally incapable of responding to mass atrocities even when credible evidence and principled demands for justice existed.¹⁶ The case of Cambodia demonstrates a gap between the normative goals of liberal institutionalism, protecting human rights and promoting cooperation, and the practical limitations of institutions that prioritize state sovereignty over humanitarian protection.

Postcolonial and Global IR perspectives provide a deeper critique by highlighting how historical hierarchies and Western-centric knowledge struc-

13 Suzanne Hill, "The Cold War and the Genocide Convention: A History of the United States' Refusal to Ratify," *The Macksey Journal* 1, article 193 (2020): 15, <https://mackseyjournal.scholasticahq.com/article/21856>.

14 Hans Corell, "Agreement between the United Nations and the Royal Government of Cambodia Concerning the Prosecution under Cambodian Law of Crimes Committed during the Period of Democratic Kampuchea," *Audiovisual Library of International Law*, June 6, 2003, <https://legal.un.org/avl/ha/abunac/abunac.html>.

15 "Kingdom of Cambodia: Amnesty International's Position and Concerns Regarding the Proposed "Khmer Rouge" Tribunal," Amnesty International, April 24, 2003, <https://www.amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/asa230052003en.pdf>.

16 Benny Widyono, "The Spectre of the Khmer Rouge over Cambodia," United Nations, April 1, 2008, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/spectre-khmer-rouge-over-cambodia>.

tures shaped global indifference to Cambodian suffering. Postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said argue that dominant narratives in international politics devalue non-Western lives and prioritize Western strategic interpretations of Events.¹⁷ In Cambodia, evidence of mass killings was filtered through Cold War discourse, which reduced the genocide to a regional proxy conflict rather than a human catastrophe requiring urgent action. A central insight from Postcolonial IR is that not all states' voices carry equal weight. Vietnam, a Global South actor with direct knowledge of Khmer Rouge crimes, was dismissed as a Soviet puppet when it attempted to justify its intervention.¹⁸ This delegitimization reflects broader patterns of epistemic inequality, which Western states define as acceptable parameters of international action.

Amitav Acharya critiques traditional IR frameworks for erasing regional perspectives and global pluralism.¹⁹ The Cambodian genocide illustrates this problem: although Southeast Asian states like Vietnam and Laos raised early concerns about Khmer Rouge brutality, their assessments were largely ignored in favor of great-power interpretations. Moreover, humanitarian suffering in the Global South often receives less moral urgency due to colonial legacies that categorize certain populations as peripheral or less politically relevant. This theoretical approach reveals that inaction was not simply the outcome of strategic or institutional limitations but also the result of racialized and colonial hierarchies embedded within global politics. Postcolonial and Global IR thus reframe Cambodia not merely as a Cold War casualty but as a case of structural neglect rooted in unequal global power relations.

The international failure to prevent or intervene in the Cambodian genocide cannot be explained by a single theoretical approach. Realism exposes the strategic motivations that led major powers to tolerate the Khmer Rouge rule and oppose Vietnam's removal of the regime. Liberal institutionalism highlights the weakness of international organizations, which lack both consensus and enforcement mechanisms to respond to mass atrocities. Postcolonial and Global IR perspectives reveal deeper structural hierarchies that rendered Cambodian suffering politically invisible within dominant Western frameworks. Together, these approaches show that global inaction resulted from the convergence of geopolitical rivalry, institutional paralysis, and systematic marginalization of Global South voices.

The genocide had devastating consequences of the Cambodian people, leaving lasting social, economic, and psychological scars. Cambodia continues to

17 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 291, https://monoskop.org/images/4/4e/Said_Edward_Orientalism_1979.pdf.

18 Wang, "Chinese Communist Party's Relationship with the Khmer Rouge."

19 Amitav Acharya, *The End of American World Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014); Amitav Acharya, "Towards a Global International Relations?" in *International Relations Theory*, ed. Stephen McGlinchey, Rosie Walters, and Christian Scheinpflug (Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing, 2017).

confront the long-term consequences of this legacy, reflected in persistent poverty, inequality, and continuing political challenges. International institutions, though stronger than in 1975, still struggle to consistently uphold humanitarian norms, as seen in uneven responses to crises elsewhere in the world. Cambodia's tragedy thus illustrates the limits of humanitarian norms in a world structured by power and inequality. The complicity, or inaction, of the international community during the Khmer Rouge atrocities underscores the need for an inclusive, equitable, and enforceable framework for preventing future atrocities.

Constitutionalizing the Barracks

How Militaries Entrench Power in Thailand and Burma

[MIN KYAW]

Introduction

Across the field of civil-military relations, scholars have long examined how constitutional design shapes democratic transitions and the role of armed forces in politics. A key assumption in transitions and the role of the military is that negotiated guarantees such as amnesty clauses, reserved legislative seats, or formal advisory roles can incentivize militaries to gradually withdraw from direct governance.¹ This pattern has been observed in countries like Indonesia and South Korea, where constitutional arrangements initially preserved the military's political influence but eventually facilitated a transition toward sustained democratic rule.² Yet this expectation does not hold universally.

This contrast raises a central question. Why do some countries that constitutionally formalize military authority fail to progress towards durable democratic governance? Two Southeast Asian countries —Burma and Thailand—stand as significant counterexamples. Both countries possess some of the most politically entrenched military institutions in the world, and despite periods of elections and constitutional reform, they have institutionalized mechanisms to reassert political power, consolidate political authority, and justify interventions. Understanding why some militaries maintain such enduring influence requires examining the historical, institutional, and political contexts that shape civil-

1 Juan J. Linz, "Transitions to Democracy," *The Washington Quarterly* 13 (1990): 4-222; Wendy Hunter, "Continuity or Change? Civil-Military Relations in Democratic Argentina, Chile, and Peru," *Political Science Quarterly* 112, no. 3 (1997): 453-75.

2 Lay Cornelis, "Democratic Transition in Local Indonesia: An Overview of Ten Years in Democracy," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik* 15, no. 3 (2012): 207-19; Hun Joo Kim, "Tracing the Development of Peace and Conflict Studies in South Korea," *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 11, no. 1 (2023): 33-57, <https://doi.org/10.18588/202305.00a337>.

military relations.

This paper argues that constitutional mechanisms enabling military persistence do not operate uniformly across cases; rather, their effects depend on distinct political conditions. In Burma, entrenched military economic interests and accelerated civilian reforms generated conditions for intervention, whereas in Thailand, the institutionalized alliance between the monarchy and military, reinforced by deep societal polarization, normalized recurrent coups and obstructed democratic consolidation. To investigate these dynamics, this study adopts a comparative case study approach using constitutional texts, historical records, and existing scholarship to trace how institutional design interacts with broader political conditions.

Theoretical Foundations and Scholarly Debates

Many scholars in this field begin by conceptualizing military regimes and civil-military relations. Civil-military relations, as defined by scholars, particularly from the West, are concerned with the subordination, balance of power, and authority between elected civilian governments and the armed forces, which many regard as the hallmark of a healthy democracy.³ In regard to military regimes, early typologies distinguished them based on how closely the military controlled executive decision-making.⁴ But Huntington argues that we should not just look into executive control but also take into consideration the military's influence on other areas of the government and the public, which would allow us to define military regimes better. Building on that, Perlmutter's definition of military regimes is focused on the idea of centralized executive control by the military, abolishment or full control of the legislature, and the bureaucracy as a blend of civilian and military control. This type of regime was common in Latin America during the second half of the 20th century, where threats from the revolutionary left or fractioning of opposition gave the militaries justification and legitimacy for their involvement in domestic politics.⁵ While there were only three military regimes in Latin America during the 1930s, by the 70s, all but four became military or military-dominated regimes after a series of coups. Instead of a distinction between civilian and military rule, almost the entirety of the region experienced a blurred line between the two, with juntas or military-backed governments exercising direct control over legislative, executive, and sometimes even judicial functions.⁶

3 John Mark Mattox, "The Philosophical Foundations of the Civil-Military Relationship," *National Defense University Press*, July 15, 2025, <https://ndupress.ndu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/4244994/the-philosophical-foundations-of-the-civil-military-relationship/>; Melissa Crouch, "Pre-Emptive Constitution-Making: Authoritarian Constitutionalism and the Military in Myanmar," *Law Society Review* 54, no. 2 (2020): 487-515.

4 Marie-Eve Reny, "A Typology of Military Regimes," Zhejiang University, 2023, https://researchgate.net/publication/367434182_A_Typology_of_Military_Regimes.

5 Mark J. Ruhl, "Changing Civil-Military Relations in Latin America," *Latin American Research Review* 33, no. 3 (1998): 257, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0023879100038504>.

6 Ruhl, "Changing Civil-Military Relations in Latin America," 257.

Many of these so-called “involvements” came to an end in the last decades of the 20th century as the end of the Cold War, economic recessions, human rights abuses, and losses in warfare undermined their claim to political authority. Argentina’s defeat in the Malvinas/Falklands War of 1982, Chile’s horrendous human rights track record under Pinochet, and Brazil’s lingering economic stagnation during the 80s are some events that contributed to the slow but certain erosion of the military’s legitimacy as a governing institution.⁷ Hunter then argues that in response, several militaries across Latin America were forced to initiate “controlled transitions,” a negotiated process which ceded formal political power while retaining informal influence through constitutional safeguards and political veto powers. These transitions happened through a constitutional framework developed by the militaries themselves, allowing them to shape the rules of the new political order before stepping back from direct governance. Chile, for example, had nine seats in the senate reserved for unelected officials, a military dominated National Security Council, and political veto power for Pinochet and his general.⁸ Such arrangements tie back to pacted transitions, a core concept in democratization theory described by Linz and Stepan, where opposition forces and authoritarian elites negotiate mutually acceptable arrangements to manage political change.⁹ The role of the militaries in the region gradually diminished as unrestrained electoral competitions gave way to constitutional amendments and were later prosecuted for involvement in several human rights violations [except Chile until 2004].

Building on those findings, scholars then question why militaries, or authoritarian regimes would voluntarily create or endorse constitutional frameworks that might eventually constrain their own power. In other words, the question is not why they transitioned, since there has been extensive literature on the external and internal causes, but rather why they chose constitutionalism as their form of retreat. Negretto argues that militaries choose to write constitutions to facilitate their long-term objectives of political, social, and economic transformation and to enhance their influence over post-transition democratic governments. As unrestrained elections, the direct consequences of the constitution took root and constitutional amendments were introduced, militaries began to lose their direct grip on power. The reason why they were willing to allow this could be the subject of a separate paper and is not the primary focus of this research. The idea is, however, to highlight how regimes use constitutional frameworks and provisions during transitional periods, allowing for the emergence of genuine civilian authority and to show it worked, at least in the case of Latin America. A liberal view of the role of the military in a democracy—military subordination to civilian executive authority—has been solidified.

7 Hunter, “Continuity or Change?” 453-75.

8 Rodrigo Delaveau Swett, “Chile 1980 (Rev. 2021) Constitution” *Constitute Project*, 1980, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Chile_2021.

9 Linz, “Transitions to Democracy,” 4-222.

Teo mentioned that it is, however, crucial to comprehend that the core assumption of civil-military rule made in Western literature cannot be easily transplanted to Southeast Asia, especially Burma and Thailand.¹⁰ The notion revolving around the military's subordination to civilian governments and the legitimacy of the civilian democratic rule simply does not work. He challenged the western model by effectively giving three arguments; 1) Southeast Asian militaries do not have institutional legacies of subordination to civilian rule, 2) civilian politicians are not trusted, and 3) religion, ethnicity, history, tradition, and economic preferences all retain considerable political significance. They have played a significant role in the nation's struggle for independence, in the nation's foundation years [Burma], or in the transition from one regime to another [Thailand].¹¹ These factors fostered a political environment where the military's involvement in governance is normalized rather than contested. In both countries, the armed forces are positioned consistently as the ultimate arbiters of national unity and stability, reinforcing the belief that the military is indispensable to the state.

The two societies are more amenable to deference to authority and paternalism, and as a result, they are more willing to surrender their individual rights in return for community harmony and state security than their counterparts in the West.¹² These factors help explain why Thailand has had at least ten coups since becoming a constitutional monarchy and Burma has undergone four since independence in 1948. But this does not suggest that both Burma and Thailand have not attempted to pursue democratic reforms/transitions. Like their Latin American counterparts, both militaries in Burma and Thailand sought to institutionalize their influence through constitutional and legal mechanisms—Thailand adopted their democratic “Thai People’s” constitution in 1997 whereas Burma took steps towards reformation with the 2008 “Nargis” Constitution. The constitution of Thailand was seen as a huge step towards democratization with several features seen in a democratic state, while still allowing the military to retain influence through an oversight mechanism; whereas Burma’s was labeled a survival strategy for the military regime rather than a deliberate process of liberalization.¹³ Nevertheless, both constitutions were widely accepted to be

10 Marcus Teo, “Constitutional Civil–Military Dynamics in Southeast Asia,” *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 20, no. 1 (2022): 237–71.

11 Muthiah Alagappa, *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804779234>.

12 Mark Beeson, Alex J. Bellamy, and Bryn Hughes, “Taming the Tigers? Reforming the Security Sector in Southeast Asia,” *The Pacific Review* 19, no. 4 (2006): 449–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512740600984804>.

13 Kittipong Kittayarak, “The Thai Constitution of 1997 and Its Implication on Criminal Justice Reform,” (2001): 1–11; Aurel Croissant and Jil Kamerling, “Why Do Military Regimes Institutionalize? Constitution-Making and Elections as Political Survival Strategy in Myanmar,” *Asian Journal of Political Science* 21, no. 2 (2013): 105–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2013.823797>.

a stepping stone towards democratization processes and created structured pathways for the gradual expansion of civilian authority.

However, the transition phases came to a halt when Thailand staged a military coup in 2014, while in Burma, the military seized power in 2021, reversing the results of 2020 general elections. Unlike Latin American cases where the military ceded formal authority while maintaining influence through constitutional mechanisms, both Burma and Thailand saw their militaries fully reassert control. Despite drafting the constitutional frameworks and provisions that provided significant authority, they reverse transitions rather than negotiating a slow and partial retreat. This phenomenon illustrates the extent of their authority and leverage. In fact, Macdonald in his 2018 piece argues that the existence of political allies and cohesiveness of the military, degree of unification of domestic opposition elements against the militaries, and international pressures and influences allows both militaries to become two of the most resilient and enduring politically active militaries in the world.

In brief, despite guarantees of constitutional power, Burma and Thailand saw reversals in their democratic transition process, with both militaries reasserting control when they chose to. There is limited literature on why this occurs, unlike the cases in Latin America where it has been extensively studied. This gap forms the basis of this paper, seeking to understand the conditions and factors that led to the reversal of democratic transitioning processes in the two Southeast Asian countries. This paper aims to shift the focus of civil-military relations studies and democratic backsliding using authoritarian constitutions to Southeast Asia, where two of the most persistent and politically dominant institutions coexist.

While Latin American militaries eventually ceded formal authority and allowed genuine democratic consolidation to emerge through a negotiated constitutional framework, the Southeast Asian experience, especially the likes of Burma and Thailand, followed a unique pathway. Despite similar institutional patterns of constitutional design, Burma and Thailand's democratic transitions were neither the product of external pressure nor a genuine internal commitment to a liberal reform. Rather, it was a carefully orchestrated process by the military itself, designed to safeguard their interests while gaining support both internationally and domestically. Both militaries, unlike their Latin American counterparts, never intended to fully withdraw as political actors. Instead, they constructed a constitutional and political architecture that allowed them to retreat strategically and reverse the democratic transition process at any moment they deem necessary.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research design that integrates both historical and contemporary evidence to analyze democratic consolidation and civil-military relations in Burma and Thailand. The analysis draws on credible multilingual news sources in Burmese, Thai, and English from the 1930s to 2025, which includes but is not limited to *Myanmar Now*, *Reuters*, *The Times*, *Bangkok Post*, *TNN*, and *The*

Irrawaddy. This helps represent domestic narratives of the events and how they are understood not just from the outside but also from within. It also captures local political perspectives that foreign sources might miss or misunderstand. In addition, the research incorporates reports from human rights organizations, civil-society organizations, parliamentary records, constitutional documents, and policy papers. Amnesty International and Justice for Myanmar are two examples whose reporting provides detailed documentation of economic influences, human rights violations, and some classified military resources. To supplement these sources and solidify the evidence, virtual interviews with civil-military experts, members of the opposition, activists, and politicians were conducted. These provided first-hand insight into elite strategies, political decision-making, and professional commentary on civil-military relations.

This study also recognizes the limitations of this methodology. Reliance on news media, reports, and interviews may introduce bias, as these sources reflect particular perspectives or selective reporting. The current conflict in Burma and the political sensitivity surrounding the military in Thailand also limit the availability of consistent datasets. The use of multilingual sources also raises the risk of inaccuracies or misinterpretation of nuanced political language. These constraints could constitute potential gaps in interpretation, and the findings must therefore be understood as informed approximations rather than definitive measurements.

Burma's Unfinished Transition

Understanding the reversal of Burma's democratic transition requires looking beyond institutional design and frameworks. The military, in this case the Tatmadaw, whose extensive economic and institutional power provided it with both the means and motivations to reverse democratization once its interests were threatened. The civilian government's inability to unite diverse political constituencies, coupled with its assertive approach towards reformation, intensified the Tatmadaw's sense of insecurity, thus hastening the collapse of the transition. The Tatmadaw remains one of the largest and most powerful institutional actors not just in the country, but also in the region. They are ranked 36th globally in military strength and 19th in Asia, according to GlobalFirepower's list of 2025. Since Burma's independence in 1948, the Tatmadaw has positioned itself as the guardian of national sovereignty and unity, defending against the retreating Chinese nationalist forces and the Burmese Communist Party during the fifties. This self-perception as the ultimate protector of the nation has allowed the military to legitimize its political involvement and justify recurrent interventions in civilian governance. Their influence extends not just to its coercive capacity and the bureaucracy but also over the economy.

Tatmadaw's Economic Empire

The Tatmadaw owns and operates private companies, such as Myanmar

Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL) and the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC), dominating major sectors of the national economy, including banking, construction, healthcare, insurance, manufacturing, natural resource extraction, trading, and telecommunications. General Nyo Saw, the current head of the government and former quartermaster of the Tatmadaw, serves as the chairperson of MEC, while Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the leader of the 2021 coup, is the chairperson of MEHL.¹⁴ International businesses have also partnered directly with these military-owned conglomerates, investing in or conducting joint ventures in key sectors. Companies such as Kirin and JCB from Japan, POSCO from South Korea, and firms from China, Singapore, and Thailand have collaborated with MEHL and MEC, providing the Tatmadaw with financial resources and access to the international market.¹⁵ According to a document from Amnesty International in 2020, these ventures bring in a total of \$18 billion in dividends alone, allowing the Tatmadaw to fund its operations independently of civilian oversight and sustain its political dominance.

Despite the vast wealth generated by the Tatmadaw and its conglomerates, their economic power was not explicitly protected under the 2008 constitution in the same way as its political authority. The trajectory shifted significantly in 2015 with the election of a fully civilian government, led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. For the first time in five decades, civilian authorities have the space to influence economic policy and challenge the Tatmadaw's monopolistic control over strategic industries. Non-state actors, including human rights organizations and advocacy groups, started pressuring the government to ensure the Tatmadaw is held accountable and transparent in its ventures. This pressure intensified after the 33rd and 99th light infantry divisions which were embroiled in a series of human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and forced relocation of minorities, were also found to be receiving dividend payments from military-owned corporations.¹⁶

The civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi began to swiftly investigate the conflicts of interest, marking a rare and bold attempt to challenge the military's entrenched economic influence. The head of the government's anti-corruption committee was revealed to be one of the board members of the

14 "Myanmar Military's Business Supremo in Spotlight," *The Irrawaddy*, August 17, 2022, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-militarys-business-supremo-in-spotlight.html>; "ဦးပိုင်နဲ MEC တို့ ဘယ်လို စီးပွားရေးတွင် လုပ်နေလေ့၊" *BBC News မြန်မာ*, August 7, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/burmese/burma-49272042>.

15 "Myanmar Military Gets Billions from Profitable Business: Amnesty," *Al Jazeera*, September 10, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/10/myanmar-military-gets-billions-from-profitable-business-amnesty>.

16 Simon Lewis, Clare Baldwin, and Andrew R. C. Marshall, "How Myanmar's Shock Troops Led the Assault That Expelled the Rohingya," *Reuters*, June 26, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/myanmar-rohingya-battalions/>; CNA, UN Report Calls for Sanctions against Myanmar Military-Linked Businesses, YouTube video, 4:10, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lalzVSiZlw>.

MEHL, who held significant shares and was receiving dividends yearly. Several port authorities of Burma's most profitable ports and the heads of the Internal Revenue Department were also later discovered to hold directorial positions within the military-led corporations.¹⁷ After several instances of public backlash and immense pressure from the government, they later had to resign from their positions within the corporations. The momentum built up as many non-state actors continued to urge foreign companies to withdraw from joint ventures—arguing that continued business cooperation indirectly funded human rights violations. Two South Korean civil-society coalitions and Myanmar activist groups filed complaints against five South Korean businesses that have commercial ties with the Tatmadaw, including the steel giant POSCO and LOTTE, one of the largest hotels and resort chains in Asia.¹⁸ Similarly, Kirin Beer was criticized for its continued partnership, and several Singaporean companies were questioned by their national parliament about their business activities in Burma publicly.¹⁹ Even powerful local institutions began to reconsider their relationships with the Tatmadaw. KBZ Bank, one of the largest private banks, and its president, being a close ally of the generals, chose to temporarily halt any business activities after public pressure both from the government and the public.²⁰

These developments represented one of the few moments in contemporary Burmese history when the military's economic dominance faced meaningful resistance from multiple fronts: the government, the private sector, and civil society. This push revealed not only the scale and reach of the Tatmadaw's economic capabilities but also how the civilian government attempted to use economic pressure as a means of rebalancing civil-military power. However, it would be wrong to assume the military's reverse democratization attempt was largely due to mounting economic pressure. The civilian government moved with unusual swiftness, launching investigations and pressing for results at a pace that unsettled the Tatmadaw. This sense of urgency was also evident in their broader political reform agenda, which sought to restructure key institutions and assert greater oversight over areas historically dominated by the military.

Reform Era with Aung San Suu Kyi

The Burmese constitution drafted by the Tatmadaw explicitly barred anyone with a foreign spouse or children to be the president, an article many

17 Nyan Hlaing Lin and Sa Htun Aung, “ဆိပ်ကမ်းအာဏာပိုင်နှင့် အကောက်ခွန်အကျိးအကုန်စုံဦးဦးပိုင်ဒါရိုက်တာအဖွဲ့ဝင်အဖွဲ့ကြိုက နတ်ထွက်,” *Myanmar Now*, July 17, 2020, <https://myanmar-now.org//mm/news/4119/>; Hlaing Lin, “အဝတ်လိုက်စားမှုတိုက်ဖျက်ရေးကော်မရှင်ဥက္ကဋ္ဌပင်လျှင် ဦးပိုင်ရှယ်ယာရှင်ဖွဲ့နုး,” *Myanmar Now*, June 15, 2020, <https://myanmar-now.org//mm/news/3905/>.

18 “တပ်မတော်ပိုင် ဦးပိုင်ကုမ္ပဏီနှင့် လက်တွဲဖျက်ရန် KBZ ကြံ့ပြမ်းနုဟေ့ဆို,” *Myanmar Now*, September 10, 2020, <https://myanmar-now.org//mm/news/4473/>.

19 “Myanmar Military's Business Supremo in Spotlight,” *The Irrawaddy*.

20 “တပ်မတော်ပိုင် ဦးပိုင်ကုမ္ပဏီနှင့် လက်တွဲဖျက်ရန် KBZ ကြံ့ပြမ်းနုဟေ့ဆို,” *Myanmar Now*.

consider a deliberate mechanism to prevent the widely popular Aung San Suu Kyi from attaining political leadership. But as soon as the civilian government attained power, the parliament activated article 217, which states the parliament shall have the authority to confer functions and powers upon any authoritative body or person to be deemed to transfer to the President functions and powers vested in any administrative body, or person concerned under the existing law.²¹ This law allows Aung San Suu Kyi to be instated as the “State Counsellor,” a de facto prime ministerial position that effectively has authority over both the executive and legislative branches despite constitutional barriers preventing her from assuming the presidency.

Within their first term, the civilian government initiated a series of bold moves aimed at limiting the military’s entrenched power—a tactic some argue was too reckless and short-sighted. Professor Macdonald, a civil-military expert on Southeast Asia at Dalhousie University, mentions that transitions are often long and tedious. The opposition will have to abide by the pre-set rules regardless of their urgency or political ambitions. Failure to do so can provoke institutional backlash and undermine the transition process. Among these efforts were attempts to challenge the system of reserved parliamentary seats allocated to the Tatmadaw and constitutional provisions that restricted who could assume the presidency.²²

These initiatives were met with persistent opposition from the military, whose representatives frequently stood up in parliament or, in some cases, refused to vote, to voice their dissent. A recurring justification used by the representatives was that the attempt to amend the constitution should take time and not be “exploited.”²³ In some cases, speeches and arguments made by military representatives were removed from the official parliamentary records, and certain military members were removed from key parliamentary committees—a move the Tatmadaw claimed to be unconstitutional and an infringement on their

21 “မန္တလေး၊ နိုင်ငံ အတိုင်ပင်ခံပုဂ္ဂိုလ် ဥပဒေကြမ်းတင်မယ်,” *BBC News*, March 30, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/burmese/burma/2016/03/160330_state_counsellor; Sithu Aung Myint, “နိုင်ငံတော် ရဲ့ အတိုင်ပင်ခံပုဂ္ဂိုလ်ဆိုင်ရာ ဥပဒေကြမ်း ပြဌာန၊ နောက်ဆက်တွဲ ဘာဖြစ်လာနိုင်သလဲ,” *မီဒီအိအေ*, *VOA News*, April 4, 2016, <https://burmese.voanews.com/a/state-counsellor-dassk/3267463.html>.

22 “ဖွဲ့စည်းပုံ အခြေခံဥပဒေ ပြင်ဆင်ရေး ပူးပေါင်းကော်မတီ ဖွဲ့စည်းရန် အရေးကြီးအဆို တင်သွင်းမှု တပ်မတော်သား လွှတ်တော်ကိုယ်စားလှယ် အားလုံး မတ်တတ်ရပ် ကန့်ကွက်ခဲ့သော်လည်း အဆိုကို ဆွဲနုတ်ရန် မဲခွဲအတည်ပြု” *Eleven Media Group Co., Ltd.*, January 29, 2019, <https://news-eleven.com/article/76819>; Tun Tun, “တပ်မတော် အာဏာလျှော့ချရန် ဖွဲ့စည်းပုံ ပြင်ဆင်ရေး ဥပဒေ မူကြမ်း အဆိုပြုချက်များ,” *The Irrawaddy*, February 1, 2020, <https://burma.irrawaddy.com/article/2020/02/01/214493.html>.

23 Htet Naing Zaw, “တပ်မတော်သားတိုင်း တာဝန်မှ ဖယ်ရုံးခံရမေး တပ်ကိုယူစားလွှာယူမား ကန့်ကွက်ကြပြန်” *ရော့တီ*, *The Irrawaddy*, January 29, 2019, <https://burma.irrawaddy.com/news/2019/01/29/181659.html>; Htet Naing Zaw, “လေးတော်တော် ခြိမ်းခြောက်ရေစီ ‘အိုင်ဂျင်ဂျင်ရယ်ပုနုပီ’ ဟု တပ်မတော်ရှုလေ့” *ရော့တီ*, *The Irrawaddy*, May 14, 2019, <https://burma.irrawaddy.com/news/2019/05/14/191231.html>.

institutional rights.²⁴

Tensions further escalated with attempts to discuss sensitive issues such as the salary and retirement of the commander-in-chief, Min Aung Hlaing. Government officials argue that this matter fell under the purview of the president.²⁵ The Tatmadaw framed these developments as instances of institutional bullying and argued the ruling party's parliamentary majority allowed it to pass laws with minimal resistance, destabilizing democratic norms.²⁶ This brief period illustrated the growing friction between the civilian government's push for reform and the military's insistence on preserving its constitutional privileges. Ultimately, the combination of swift reforms that challenged established authority and growing scrutiny over areas where the military's economic interests were not protected created tensions and worry for the Tatmadaw. While these were not the only pressures shaping Burma's political landscape during the second half of the 2010s, they were perhaps key contributing factors influencing the Tatmadaw's decision to step back from the democratic transition and stage a coup under a fabricated justification in 2021.

Thailand's Interrupted Transitions

Having analyzed Burma, it is instructive to turn to Thailand, where military influence over politics takes on a distinct character. Unlike the Tatmadaw, which largely acts independently, the Thai military shares a longstanding alliance with the monarchy, giving it both legitimacy and strategic advantage in constraining civilian authority. Alongside this, Thailand's political landscape has long been defined by sharp polarization between various factions, such as the royalists, populists, and the reformists. This created openings for the military to intervene several times under the pretext of restoring order, which this paper argues became the reason why Thailand has struggled to achieve sustained democratic consolidation.

Bhumibol and the Generals

The Thai military's major involvement in politics began in the early 1910s, when young military officers tried unsuccessfully to overthrow and replace King Rama VI's Thailand with a Westernized constitutional system.²⁷ Their eventual success came in 1932, with a bloodless coup that transformed Thailand from an

24 “မန္တလေး.” တပ်ကဆွဲခွေးချက်အချို့ လွတ်တော်မူတမ်းကနေ ပယ်ဖျက်,” *BBC News*, November 29, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/burmese/burma-50596872>; Htet Naing Htet, “တပုမတော့သား တဦး တာဝန်မှ ဖယ်ရှားခံရမဲ့ တပုကိုယ့်စားလွယ်ယမ်း ကန့်သတ်ကြ,” *ရောဝတီ, The Irrawaddy*, January 29, 2019, <https://burma.irrawaddy.com/news/2019/01/01/29/181659.html>.

25 Htet Naing Zaw, “တပုခီပုရာထူးဦး ပင့်စင်္ကြံစာ သမဇတ၏ ဆုံဖုတ်ခွင့်ဟု ပြည့်ထောင့် စု ရာထူးဝန် အဖျက်ရဟု.” *ရောဝတီ, The Irrawaddy*, June 1, 2018, <https://burma.irrawaddy.com/news/2018/06/01/160029.html>.

26 Htet Naing Zaw, “လေးတုတော့တင်္ဂြိုဟ်မိကရေစီ ‘အိုင်ဂျက်ဒ်ခံရပုန့်စပီ’ ဟု တပုမတော့ရဟု.” *ရောဝတီ, The Irrawaddy*, May 14, 2019, <https://burma.irrawaddy.com/news/2019/05/14/191231.html>.

27 Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead, *The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004).

absolute monarchy into a constitutional monarchy.²⁸ Rather than stabilizing the political order, the new regime experienced two additional coups just a year later, each driven by rival factions within the military and political elite. Building on this legacy of successive coups, it established a pattern of path dependency, where successive generations of military leaders internalized the belief that the armed forces were the ultimate guardians of national stability and the monarchy.

A crucial factor in this entrenchment was the military's strategic alliance with King Bhumibol Adulyadej, whose reign lasted from 1946 to 2016, the longest on record of any independent Asian sovereign.²⁹ Perhaps the clearest illustration of the Thai military-monarchy alignment is how the success or failure of military interventions has depended on Bhumibol's royal endorsement. In 1973, Thanom Kittikachorn, a long-term premier of Thailand, attempted to further consolidate the military's monopoly over political authority and responded with violence towards dissenters and opposition. Bhumibol intervened directly, for the first time in contemporary Thai history, recognizing that Thanom's violent crackdown threatened national stability and the monarchy's moral authority. He summoned the general to the palace and pressed him to resign and later appointed a civilian prime minister Sanya Dharmasakti in his name.³⁰ Two years later in 1976, the Thai military staged yet another coup under the leadership of the staunch royalist General Thanin—a plot that Bhumibol was aware of and did not oppose.³¹ The events of the 1970s in Thailand established a pattern. The king's involvement in the former crisis and the rapid endorsement of the new junta is further evidence of the perception that interventions aligned with royal preferences would inevitably succeed. The military could act as long as it moved in harmony with the monarchy, and in turn, the monarchy relied on the military to uphold the political order it favored.

These interesting dynamics continued into the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. When the military's moves diverged from the palace's intentions, it faltered, as seen in the failed 1981 and 1985 coups. When it coincided, the pattern of successful intervention reemerged. For example, in 1992, Bhumibol intervened for the second time after the key 1991 coup leader General Suchinda

28 Nakharin Mektrairat, "Khvamkhit khwamru lae amnat kanmuang nai kanpathiwat Sayam 247," *Social Science Association of Thailand* 24, no. 2 (1993): 374-77.

29 "Thailand's King Bhumibol Adulyadej Dies at 88," *Al Jazeera*, October 13, 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/10/13/thailands-king-bhumibol-adulyadej-dies-at-88>.

30 Malcolm W. Browne, "Students Gain Control in Thai Uprising," *The New York Times*, October 16, 1973, <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/10/16/archives/students-gain-control-in-thai-uprising-bangkok-students-gain.html>; "Thailand on Military Alert as Cabinet Resigns," *The New York Times*, May 22, 1974, <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/05/22/archives/thailand-on-military-alert-as-cabinet-resigns-no-major-change-in.html>.

31 Tyrell Haberkorn, "The Anniversary of a Massacre and the Death of a Monarch," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 76, no. 2 (2017): 269-81, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911817000018>.

decided to become an unelected prime minister.³² In a widely televised event, he summoned both Suchinda and the opposition leader to the palace, where both men appeared on their knees before him.³³ Within days, Suchinda resigned, the military withdrew from politics, and elections were restored. Again in 2006, for the third time, Bhumibol mediated and acknowledged another military intervention as Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra expanded his influence over state institutions and consolidated unprecedented electoral support.³⁴ Thaksin's growing influence and political dominance began to threaten the traditional centers of influence, including that of the king. His open challenge towards the "Amart," the established elite networks of politicians, military leaders, and aristocrats, was seen as an effort to undermine the crown's longstanding role as the guardian of national unity and moral authority. Taken together, this series of events demonstrates a pattern as mentioned before and is central to understanding why Thailand has struggled to consolidate democracy. However, this institutional alliance alone does not fully explain the persistence of military dominance. Rather, it interacts with a second factor, Thailand's severe political polarization.

The Politics of Polarization in Thailand

While Thailand's political polarization stretches back to the 1930s, a full account of it would require an entirely separate paper. For the purpose of this study, the analysis will concentrate on the period from 2006 to 2023, beginning with the rise of the Thaksin family and ending with the most recent challenge to the establishment under Pita Limjaroenrat and the Move Forward Party. This 17-year period represents the most intense and consequential phase of Thailand's contemporary polarization. In this paper, the factions are categorized into three different groups: populists, reformists, and royalists. The populists represent the likes of the Thaksin family, a group of people attempting to limit the role of the elites and emphasizing welfare expansions but retaining the status quo—a constitutional monarchy. The reformists are the newcomers like Pita, attempting to reform the entire system which includes but is not limited to the bureaucracy, military, and most importantly the monarchy. The royalists encompass military generals, conservative elites and parts of the urban middle class who see themselves as defenders of the traditional order. The king and the monarchy are the central pillars of national identity and political legitimacy. It is the interaction among these three factions that produce recurring cycles of political deadlocks, and ultimately military interventions.

During his term as prime minister, Thaksin sidelined military officers

32 Kittipong Thavevong, "Times When His Majesty Had to Step In," *The Nation Thailand*, October 31, 2016, <https://www.nationthailand.com/in-focus/30298841>.

33 "Kneeling before a King: The Moment That Shook a Nation," *BBC News*, October 13, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37650466>.

34 Peter Walker, "Thai Military Claims Control after Coup," *The Guardian*, September 19, 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/sep/19/thailand>.

that aligned with the palace such as Tinsulanonda, a former coup leader and prime minister, and openly challenged the authority of Bhumibol.³⁵ He also centralized control over the bureaucracy by appointing officials perceived as loyal to his administration and expanding the scope of executive oversight.³⁶ This intensified elite anxiety that Thaksin was reshaping the political order in ways that marginalized the monarchy's informal authority. Although these were not the only factors, they became one of the justifications for the mass protests and a coup in 2006. The political polarization generated by the rift between Thaksin and the elites also resulted in the emergence of mass-mobilized color-coded movements. Thaksin supporters mobilized as the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship or the "Red Shirts" and his opponents—many of whom were aligned with the elites and the monarchy—formed the People's Alliance for Democracy, or the "Yellow Shirts."³⁷ These opposing movements were met with violent confrontations and national paralysis and reflected a deep structural rift within Thailand's politics.

Although Thaksin was deposed under a coup, his political party Pheu Thai and his sister Yingluck Shinawatra won the elections just a few years later, but it was met with the same fate, and her government did not last long either.³⁸ Violent nationwide protests occurred under her rule, and the opposition sees her as an extension of her brother Thaksin. Political deadlock deepened, and clashes between rival protest groups grew more vicious.³⁹ General Prayut Chan-o-Cha, a firm royalist, staged a coup in 2014, claiming it was necessary to restore order and protect the unity of the Thai people.⁴⁰

The cycle of polarization and military interventions did not end in 2014; it evolved into a new phase with the emergence of a younger reformist generation. This dynamic became apparent with the rise of the Move Forward Party and its leader, Pita Limjaroenrat, a Harvard-educated reformist calling for a comprehensive reconfiguration of Thailand's political order. A key ideology/

35 Joshua Kurlantzick and Pavin Chachavalpongpun, "Prem Tinsulanonda's Legacy—and the Failures of Thai Politics Today," *Council on Foreign Relations*, May 28, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/prem-tinsulanondas-legacy-and-failures-thai-politics-today>.

36 Jacob I. Ricks, "Agents, Principals, or Something in Between? Bureaucrats and Policy Control in Thailand," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 18, no. 3 (2018): 321-44, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jea.2018.17>.

37 "Red Shirt v Yellow Shirt: Thailand's Political Struggle," *The Independent*, August 20, 2010, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/red-shirt-v-yellow-shirt-thailand-s-political-struggle-2057293.html>; "Profile: Thailand's Reds and Yellows," *BBC News*, May 5, 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13294268>.

38 "Yingluck Royally Endorsed 28th PM of Thailand," *Pattaya Mail*, August 9, 2011, <https://www.pattayamail.com/thailandnews/yingluck-royally-endorsed-28th-pm-of-thailand-5350>.

39 "Suthep Declares 'People's Revolt,'" *Bangkok Post*, November 30, 2013, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/382361/suthep-declares-people-revolt>.

40 Adam Taylor and Anup Kaple, "Thailand's Army Just Announced a Coup. Here Are 11 Other Thai Coups since 1932," *The Washington Post*, May 22, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/05/20/thailands-army-says-this-definitely-isnt-a-coup-heres-11-times-it-definitely-was/>.

policy Pita and his party propose is the amendment of the *Lèse-majesté* law that criminalizes defamation, insult, or threat against the king of Thailand and complete reform of the Thai military.⁴¹ These proposals strongly resonated with younger and urban voters, many of whom were frustrated with the power struggles between the populists and royalist factions. But the remaining factions viewed Pita's reform agenda as a direct challenge to the established political order. This tension came to a head-on collision during the 2023 general elections, where Move Forward secured a historic number of seats in the lower house and formed a coalition with several smaller parties.⁴²

Despite this victory, Pita faced institutional resistance from the military-controlled Senate, which blocked his path to premiership.⁴³ The nomination to appoint him as the prime minister was struck down twice, and in a later dramatic move, the Thai constitutional court dissolved the Move Forward Party for violating the constitution—a claim criticized by independent observers as absurd.⁴⁴ In yet another political stalemate, the primary beneficiaries were the Shinawatra family, where Paetongtarn, the daughter of Thaksin, was able to form a coalition under the agreement with the military and assumed the premiership.⁴⁵ This division between the factions and crises often justifies or at least creates the pretext for military interventions or military dominance. When combined with the strategic alliance between the monarchy and the military, these dynamics became crucial to comprehend why Thailand has struggled to achieve sustained democratic consolidation.

Conclusion

The trajectories of Burma and Thailand demonstrate that constitutional guarantees of military authority do not necessarily facilitate a gradual withdrawal from political power nor do they ensure the conditions necessary for democratic consolidation.

This paper argued that two distinct, yet functionally similar dynamics explain these reversals. In Burma, the Tatmadaw's expansive economic interests,

41 Zaheena Rasheed, "Youth Party Galvanises Thai Voters with Promises of Royal Reforms," *Al Jazeera*, May 13, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/13/move-forward-galvanises-thai-voters-with-vows-of-royal-reforms>.

42 Jonathan Head, "Thailand Elections: Voters Deliver Stunning Blow to Army-Backed Rule," *BBC News*, May 15, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-65567781>.

43 "จับตาไหวตนาายกรัฐมนตรีเสนอชื่อ พิธา ลิ้มเจริญรัตน์ ครั้งที่ 2 ทำได้หรือไม่," *TNN Thailand*, July 17, 2023, <https://www.tnnthailand.com/politics/151261/>.

44 "เปิดคำวินิจฉัยฉบับเต็ม ศาลรัฐธรรมนูญ ตัดสิน 'ยุบพรรคก้าวไกล,'" *Thai PBS*, August 7, 2024, <https://www.thaipbs.or.th/news/content/342836>; Panu Wongcha-um and Panarat Thepgrampanat, "Thai Court Orders Election Winners to Abandon Plan to Change Royal Insults Law," *Reuters*, January 31, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thai-court-rule-election-winners-bid-change-royal-insults-law-2024-01-31/>.

45 "'แพทองธาร' ติดอันดับ 29 สตรีผู้ทรงอิทธิพลแห่งปี 2024 จาก Forbes," *Thansettakij*, December 15, 2024, <https://www.thansettakij.com/politics/614571>.

coupled with the rapid pace of civilian reform targeting military monopolies and constitutional privileges, generated security dilemmas within the military elite that ultimately prompted a return to direct rule. In Thailand, democratic backsliding is rooted less in institutional threats and more in a historically constructed alliance between the monarchy and the armed forces, reinforced by deep electoral polarization. Together, these dynamics created a political environment where military intervention is not perceived as exceptional, but rather as a legitimate corrective mechanism.

These findings challenge conventional transition theory, which assumes militaries gradually retreat through negotiated frameworks, and highlight the importance of relative factors such as historical legacies, institutional design, and elite cohesion. Future research should build on these insights in three directions. First, comparative institutional analysis across regions, particularly South Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East may reveal whether Burma and Thailand reflect a broader pattern of “reversible transitions” rather than failed ones. Second, interdisciplinary approaches drawing from political economy and security sector governance could deepen understanding of how military-controlled industries function as barriers to democratization. Finally, longitudinal public opinion and elite attitude studies could clarify how nationalism, monarchy, religion, and identity shape societal tolerance for military intervention.

Gaza and Rent

Declining Public Opinion on Israel and Zohran Mamdani's Victory

[NOAH SKOIJEN]

Introduction

For decades, American public and elite support for Israel was very strong. When Hamas attacked Israel on October 7th, 2023, President Joe Biden “swiftly condemned the October attacks, reaffirmed Israel’s right to self-defence, and pledged both diplomatic and military support to Israel.”¹ However, in the years since the attack, Israel has been accused of genocide in their conduct of the war. Now, “half of voters in the United States believe Israel is committing genocide in Gaza,”² losing Israel much of the American public’s previously high support. Recent polling suggests that younger Americans, especially Democrats, are far less sympathetic to Israeli policy,³ creating a partisan realignment within the Democratic Party’s base. In the years since October 7th brought Israel and Gaza to one of the brightest spotlights of American politics, the crisis has been a thorny issue for candidates and a wedge issue within the party. Examples of this wedge include the uncommitted movement during the 2024 Democratic primary, as well as potential protest votes for candidates like Jill Stein or Cornel West or potential Democratic voters staying home during the general election. In the 2024 election, the Democrats were caught flat-footed on the issue, with the party elites generally

1 Nils Lukacs and Corina Lozovan, “America’s 2024 Election and Europe’s Middle East Dilemma,” *German Institute of Global and Area Studies* (2024), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep64407>, 2.

2 John Power, “Half of US Voters Believe Israel Committing Genocide in Gaza, Poll Says,” *Al Jazeera*, August 28, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/28/half-of-us-voters-believe-israel-committing-genocide-in-gaza-poll-says>.

3 Maya Sweedler, “How American Views on Israel and Antisemitism Have Changed Since Oct. 7,” *The Associated Press*, October 6, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/poll-october-7-israel-hamas-american-jews-059d4fd0232a9c5958b89f6e193a4873>.

not evolving their position in the face of changing public opinion. Now, looking at the 2025 Democratic primary for Mayor of New York City, we see Democratic Socialist Zohran Mamdani winning both the primary and the general election against former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo. Mamdani made headlines for calling Israel's actions in Gaza "genocide."⁴ Meanwhile, Cuomo "cast himself as a champion of Israel's war effort and Jewish New Yorkers," even "[volunteering] to defend Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, in international criminal court."⁵ Mamdani's support rose with his focus on affordability and careful rhetoric addressing Democrats' concerns about Gaza. To the surprise of many Democrats, Mamdani ended up winning the primary, showing that Democrats can win elections while criticizing Israel. In the words of Benjamin Oreskes, "Mamdani's victory in... [the] election... may have scrambled what had been a clear political imperative for candidates in the city: the need to support Israel."⁶ Indeed, Mamdani's anti-Israel stance isn't just 'not disqualifying,' but to many voters a sign of character and a reflection of public opinion.

Essay Outline

To understand this shift in perception of Israel and American support for Israel, and how this shift has both negatively and positively affected Democratic campaigns in the past year, I will first touch on how foreign policy issues broadly impact American elections and how this connects to Israel and Gaza. I will then examine the perception of Israel and American support during the pre-October 7th status quo, as well as the aftermath of Hamas' October 7th attack. I will then show that, since the October 7th attack, public opinion on Israel and supporting Israel has gone considerably down, as well as examining the demographic data behind this trend. I will look at the 2024 presidential race and how the Democrats' position on Israel not being tuned to public opinion hindered their chances in the election. I will then turn to New York City, examining its politics and demographics, as well as New Yorkers' public opinion on Israel. I will focus on New York because, due to its status as the largest city in the country, as well as "a major cultural capital of America, what happens in New York has the potential to affect the shape of change elsewhere in the nation."⁷ Finally, I will show how these factors allowed Zohran Mamdani to win the Democratic primary for New

4 Jeffery C. Mays, "Israel and Antisemitism Loom Large as Issues in the N.Y.C. Mayor's Race," *The New York Times*, May 19, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/19/nyregion/israel-gaza-antisemitism-mayor-nyc.html>.

5 Nicholas Fandos and Dana Rubinstein, "Mamdani's Comment on 'Intifada' Motto Fuels Tension in Mayor's Race," *The New York Times*, June 21, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/19/nyregion/mamdani-globalize-intifada.html>.

6 Benjamin Oreskes, "Challengers Take on N.Y. House Democrats, Targeting Their Ties to Israel," *The New York Times*, November 25, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/25/nyregion/israel-congress-mamdani-challengers.html?smid=threads-nytimes>.

7 Nancy Foner, *In a New Land: A Comparative View of Immigration* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 184.

York Mayor despite (or, in some cases, even because of) his positions on Israel, showing that support for Israel is no longer a necessity for Democratic politicians in the 21st century.

Foreign Policy's Impact On Elections

The relationship between foreign policy and public opinion has been well fleshed out. For example, Holsti argues that “because voters are perceived as punishing incumbent candidates or parties for foreign policy failures... or rewarding incumbents for successes... decisions by foreign policy leaders may be made in anticipation of public reactions.”⁸ The incumbent’s handling of salient foreign policy issues can certainly impact voters’ choices. Focusing on terrorism as the salient foreign policy issue in the 2004 presidential election, Nicholas F. Martini and Samuel Schutt found that “salient foreign policy issues viewed to be favorably handled by the incumbent have the potential to alter voting calculations to favor the incumbent.”⁹ Though “the potency of [Gaza] is... limited and not the main deciding factor,”¹⁰ Mohammed Sinan Siyech and Akanksha Narain assert, “the war in Gaza has made foreign policy an important determining factor in US elections.”¹¹ As such, if voters see the incumbent Democratic party as having failed in the Middle East, they may punish them by withholding their vote. While most voters won’t be swayed by this single issue, in elections as close as 2024 it’s absolutely worth noting the subset of voters that did punish Democrats.

Measuring Opinion On Israel

Opinion on Israel can be divided into a number of different aspects. We can gauge the public opinion on these different aspects by asking a variety of questions to poll takers. One question is about whether someone approves or disapproves of how Israel is conducting the War in Gaza. Another question (that, anecdotally, seems to have been asked more recently compared to other questions) is about whether someone believes Israel is committing a genocide against the people of Gaza. Yet another question is if the respondent believes the United States should provide more, less, or the same amount of arms to Israel, or if the U.S. should condition aid. It follows that, if someone believes Israel is committing genocide, then they would want the United States to stop arming Israel or to condition the aid. Then, there’s the broad question of which side of the conflict

8 Ole R. Holsti, *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 60-61.

9 Nicholas F. Martini and Samuel Schutt, “Diverted from the ‘Correct Vote’? Foreign Policy Influence on Electoral Behavior,” *Social Science Quarterly* 100, no. 1 (2019): 259-71, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26613236>, 259.

10 Mohammed Sinan Siyech and Akanksha Narain, “How the Gaza Conflict Influenced Trump’s Victory,” *Observer Research Foundation*, December 7, 2024, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/how-the-gaza-conflict-influenced-trump-s-victory>.

11 Siyech and Narain, “How the Gaza Conflict.”

someone sympathizes with more. It would follow that if someone believes that Israel is committing a genocide in Gaza, they would lean more to the Palestinians and away from Israel. Israel would also see less support if someone disapproved of the way in which Israel is conducting the war, though not necessarily to the Palestinians. Therefore, though these different factors don't all mean the same thing, in sum they comprise Israel's public support.

National Public Opinion Before And Following October 7th

Since the events of October 7th, 2023 brought much more public attention to the Middle East, it's worth examining what national public opinion thought of Israel both before and immediately after the attack. "Over the last few decades, Americans of both parties have generally been more sympathetic toward the Israelis than the Palestinians."¹² For the 20 years before the attack and Israel's response, over 50% of Americans sympathized more with Israel, with the amount sympathizing more to the Palestinians never went above 26%.¹³ Elite rhetoric spoke highly of continuing to support Israel militarily and diplomatically, citing "unbreakable bonds,"¹⁴ with the nation. Pro-Israel lobbies, like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and Christians United for Israel (CUFI), "express unequivocal support for U.S. security assistance to Israel,"¹⁵ with "near congressional unanimity in support of providing aid to Israel without conditions or use limitations."¹⁶ For a long time, "aid to Israel was the third rail; it wasn't even in the frame of discussion."¹⁷ Politicians could feel the power of the pro-Israel lobby, in a 2009 interview, Jimmy Carter said "it's politically impossible... for any member of Congress to make a public statement condemning or criticizing the policies of Israel."¹⁸ The former President said, "it would be political suicidal for them to do so."¹⁹ If members of congress came out publicly about this situation, "their seats would be in danger,"²⁰ he continued. This support served as a strong

12 Sweedler, "How American Views."

13 Sweedler, "How American Views."

14 Barack Obama, "Remarks of President Barack Obama To the People of Israel," *The White House: Office of the Press Secretary*, March 21, 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/03/21/remarks-president-barack-obama-people-israel>.

15 Jeremy M. Sharp, "U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel," *Congressional Research Service*. February 18, 2022, https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/RL/PDF/RL33222/RL33222.49.pdf, 1-2.

16 Sharp, "U.S. Foreign."

17 Hadar Susskind, "For the Good of Both Countries, U.S. Military Aid for Israel Must Be Conditional," *Time*, June 16, 2021, <https://time.com/6073637/u-s-military-aid-israel-must-be-conditional/>.

18 Philip Weiss, "Carter Describes 'Political Suicide' of Criticizing Israel," *Mondoweiss*, January 29, 2009, <https://mondoweiss.net/2009/01/carter-describes-political-suicide-of-criticizing-israel/>.

19 Weiss, "Carter Describes."

20 Weiss, "Carter Describes."

foundation for even higher support after October 7th. One week after the attack, “two-thirds of Americans [said] the United States should publicly support Israel in the war.”²¹

National Public Opinion Since Gaza

Public opinion on Israel and support for Israel has evolved dramatically since the October 7th attacks. According to a Times/Siena poll “American support for Israel has undergone a seismic reversal, with large shares of voters expressing starkly negative views about the Israeli government’s management of the conflict.”²² Lisa Lerer and Ruth Igielnik (2025) note that “much of the shift in views on Israel has been driven by a sharp decline in support by Democratic voters.”²³ This is especially pertinent context to Mamdani’s victory in the primary. What caused this downward shift? By late August, 2025, “half of voters in the United States believe Israel is committing genocide in Gaza,”²⁴ according to a Quinnipiac poll.

Public Opinion and Demographics Behind This Change

There are many demographic aspects of this decline in support for Israel. According to a Pew Research Center poll from April 2024, “younger Americans are more likely to sympathize with the Palestinian people than the Israeli people.”²⁵ According to the same poll, 41% of young Democrats or lean-Democrats sympathize with the Palestinians more, with only 7% sympathizing with Israel more. This decline in views on Israel is seen in Jewish Americans as well; according to a poll by the Washington Post, “many American Jews sharply disapprove of Israel’s conduct of the war in Gaza, with 61 percent saying Israel has committed war crimes and about 4 in 10 saying the country is guilty of genocide against the Palestinians.”²⁶

Effects of Gaza on the 2024 Election

For Joe Biden and, later, Kamala Harris, Democrats’ opinion on Gaza was

21 Montanaro Domenico, “Americans Strongly Support Israel, But There Are Generational and Racial Divides,” *NPR*, October 13, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/10/13/1205627092/american-support-israel-biden-middle-east-amas-poll>.

22 Lisa Lerer and Ruth Igielnik, “Americans’ Support for Israel Dramatically Declines, Times/Siena Poll Finds,” *The New York Times*, September 29, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/29/polls/israel-gaza-war-us-poll.html/>.

23 Lerer and Igielnik, “Americans’ Support.”

24 Power, “Half of U.S.”

25 Laura Silver, “Younger Americans Stand Out in Their Views of the Israel-Hamas War,” *Pew Research Center*, April 2, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/04/02/younger-americans-stand-out-in-their-views-of-the-israel-amas-war/>.

26 Naftali Bendavid, Scott Clement, and Emily Guskin, “Many American Jews Sharply Critical of Israel on Gaza, Post Poll Finds,” *The Washington Post*, October 6, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/10/06/jewish-americans-israel-poll-gaza/>.

a real issue. Andrea Shalal examined the results of the 2024 presidential election in Michigan and noted that besides economic concerns, “local opposition to U.S. support for Israel’s wars in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon also loomed over the campaign.”²⁷ The disconnect between the Democrats and their voters was not only over Gaza, but its impact also cannot be ignored. Bursts of this could be seen in the ‘uncommitted movement’ that protested Biden’s policy on the war, winning 700,000 ballots in the primaries.²⁸ This is noteworthy, as large portions of these votes came from “swing states where elections have been determined by as few as 10,000 or 20,000 votes.”²⁹ While there were many voters who picked ‘uncommitted’ in the primary, it’s hard to say if Gaza alone was enough to lose Democrats the state. However, the movement was a sign of discontent in the base and the Democrats should’ve heeded said discontent. Shalal (2024) examines exit polling and notes sharp changes from between 2020 and 2024, including a 29% decrease in Dearborn votes for Democrats.³⁰ This loss of Dearborn is crucial to note, as it is “the biggest U.S. city with a majority-Arab population.”³¹ During the general election, the Trump campaign “blasted text messages and mailers to... mostly Democratic-leaning Arab Americans in Michigan in the last months, portraying Trump as a ‘president of peace.’”³² This emphasis on Trump as a candidate who would end the war is a crucial aspect. This is not to say that Kamala Harris lost Michigan entirely from Arab Americans’ anger about Gaza, but in margins as thin as the 2024 election, it would be foolish to ignore this factor. Beyond Michigan, Halah Ahmad argues that “the true electoral impact of the genocide was its contribution to a plunge in voter turnout.”³³ According to the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, “not liking the candidates was the most common reason given by youth who did not vote in 2024.”³⁴ Of the college-educated youths who didn’t vote, 28% cited their distaste for both of the candidates. Overall, of Americans “who voted for Biden in 2020 and cast a ballot for someone besides Kamala Harris in 2024,” 29% cited ‘ending Israel’s violence

27 Andrea Shalal, “Kamala Harris’ Michigan Loss Highlights Democrats’ Weak Spots,” *Reuters*, November 10, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/harris-michigan-loss-highlights-democrats-many-weak-spots-2024-11-10/>.

28 Halah Ahmad, “Depressing the Vote: Genocide and 2024 US Presidential Race,” *Al-Shabaka*, February 25, 2025, <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/depressing-the-vote-genocide-and-2024-us-presidential-race/>, 1.

29 Ahmad, “Depressing,” 1.

30 Shalal, “Kamala Harris”

31 Shalal, “Kamala Harris’

32 Shalal, “Kamala Harris’

33 Ahmad, “Depressing,” 3.

34 Alberto Medina, Kelly Siegel-Stechler, and Sara Suzuki, “Young People and the 2024 Election: Struggling, Disconnected, and Dissatisfied,” *Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement*, January 15, 2025, <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/2024-poll-barriers-issues-economy>.

in Gaza.³⁵

New York Politics and Demographics

Something I did not at all understand until I actually spent time in the city is that New York's size and diversity goes beyond description. As such, I can only highlight the major trends affecting the primary, though there is likely much that will be missed. New York's 2025 elections are fascinating, public opinion-wise, due to a combination of having a much higher Democratic voter base (around 60% in September 2025)³⁶ as well as its large Jewish and Muslim populations. Partisan-wise, the city really is a Democratic stronghold. In the 2024 election, which Democrats lost nationally, a total of 1,903,344 New Yorkers voted for Harris, outpacing Trump's 838,838 votes,³⁷ a ratio of over 2-1. The city's strong support for Democrats continues at the congressional level. According to the 2025 Cook Partisan Voting Index, 10 of the 11 congressional districts in New York City are represented by Democrats, with 9 of those 10 having a Democratic lean of +19 or above.³⁸ Racially, the city is very diverse. In the 2020 census, just under 2.5 million New Yorkers (~28%) identified as Hispanic or Latino, just under 1.8 million (~20%) identified as non-Hispanic Black, and just under 1.4 million (~16%) New Yorkers identified as non-Hispanic Asian.³⁹ Turning to age, about 80% of New Yorkers are over the age of 18, with 14% of New Yorkers are in their 20s.⁴⁰ 14% of the population isn't high, but young voters had an outsized role in the primary; "voters aged 18 to 29 had the highest turnout of any age group at 35.2%."⁴¹ New York has a lot of religious diversity; the city is home to the largest Jewish popula-

35 *IMEU Policy Project*, "New Poll Shows Gaza Was a Top Issue for Biden 2020 Voters Who Cast a Ballot for Someone Besides Harris," *Institute for Middle East Understanding Policy Project*, 2025, <https://www.imeupolicyproject.org/postelection-polling>.

36 "Cross-Tabs: September 2025 Times/Siena Poll of the New York City Mayoral Election," *The New York Times*, September 9, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/09/09/polls/nyc-mayor-poll-likely-voters.html>.

37 Board of Elections in the City of New York, *Statement and Return Report for Certification: General Election 2024 – President/Vice President (Citywide)*, December 3, 2025.

38 *The Cook Political Report* and David Wasserman, "2025 Cook PVISM: District Map and List (119th Congress)," *The Cook Political Report*, April 3, 2025, <https://www.cookpolitical.com/cook-pvi/2025-partisan-voting-index/district-map-and-list>.

39 *U.S. Census Bureau*, "New York City: Race," *data.census.gov*, 2025, <https://data.census.gov/table?q=new+york+city+r>.

40 "New York, NY." *Census Reporter*, 2023, <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US3651000-new-york-ny/#:~:text=New%20York%2C%20NY%20%2D%20Profile%20data,80+>.

41 Madonna Hernandez, "Voter Turnout in NYC's 2025 Primary Hits Decade-High," *NYC Votes*, October 16, 2025, <https://www.nycvotes.org/news-and-press/articles/2025-primary-election-turnout-soars/>.

tion outside of Israel⁴² and has a similarly-sized Muslim population.⁴³ Jewish New Yorkers represent a large amount of voters, especially the Hasidic community. According to Emma G. Fitzsimmons, “elected officials rarely embrace positions that could antagonize Hasidic leaders, who typically encourage their community to vote as a unified bloc.”⁴⁴ Candidates in city elections, such as Andrew Yang in 2022, will often make a “calculated investment,”⁴⁵ hoping this focus on issues prioritized by Hasidic New Yorkers, such as religious education, would “make meaningful inroads into the Hasidic Jewish community,” so “its bloc of votes could help carry him to victory.”⁴⁶ The Satmar Hasidic group’s endorsement of Eric Adams “may have helped him come out ahead in the [2021] crowded mayoral primary.”⁴⁷ Muslim New Yorkers also have, according to Moustafa Bayoumi, “steadily become a political force,”⁴⁸ since the post-9/11 Bush and Obama administrations, during which Muslim New Yorkers had “little influence in city politics.”⁴⁹ He notes that “Mamdani is their most accomplished expression.”⁵⁰

New York Public Opinion on Israel

Though New Yorkers contribute to the national public opinion, it’s worth examining public opinion on Israel within the city itself. For one, though New York has a large population of Jews, one must not assume, as seen in the perception of Israel by American Jews discussed above, that a large population of Jewish people means large support for Israel. Since we’re looking at New York in order to understand Zohran Mamdani’s victory, I will focus on New York public opinion on Israel around the mayoral election, which is worth noting as it exists in a different national and international context compared to the 2024 election. City-wide, a Times-Siena poll on the Mayoral election from September of 2025 asked New Yorkers whether they sympathized with Israel or Palestinians more. The poll reported that the net sympathy (adding up all the respondents who sympathized with one group over another) for Palestinians was 46%, compared to the

42 Mays, “Israel.”

43 Moustafa Bayoumi, “From Scapegoats to City Hall: How New York Muslims Built Power and Shaped Zohran Mamdani,” *The Guardian*, October 24, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/oct/24/zohran-mamdani-muslim-new-yorkers-sept-11>.

44 Emma G. Fitzsimmons, “How the Hasidic Jewish Community Became a Political Force in New York,” *The New York Times*, 30 October, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/30/nyregion/hasidic-political-power-new-york.html>.

45 Fitzsimmons, “How the Hasidic.”

46 Fitzsimmons, “How the Hasidic.”

47 Julia Gergely, “From Borough Park to Upper West Side: How Jews Voted, and Fared, in NY Elections,” *The Times of Israel*, November 3, 2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/from-borough-park-to-upper-west-side-how-jews-voted-and-fared-in-ny-elections/>.

48 Bayoumi, “From Scapegoats.”

49 Bayoumi, “From Scapegoats.”

50 Bayoumi, “From Scapegoats.”

net sympathy for Israel at 29%.⁵¹ Crossing this data over with the vote preference, we find that, among Mamdani voters, support for Palestinians trumps support for Israel 78% to 6%.⁵² Interestingly, Cuomo's supporters definitely have a lean, but not nearly as large as the one among Mamdani's supporters. Specifically, 41% of Cuomo supporters were more sympathetic to Israel than Palestinians, with 26% being the opposite.⁵³ Looking at the breakdown of New Yorkers' net support for Israel and net support for Palestine by age, we see that a whopping 69% of New Yorkers ages 18-29 side more with the Palestinians, with just 17% supporting Israel more.⁵⁴

Campaign Rhetoric on Israel and Antisemitism

Mamdani has long been advocating publicly for the Palestinian cause.⁵⁵ He even participated in “a hunger strike outside the White House to build support for a cease-fire, in November of 2023,⁵⁶ almost a year before he announced his candidacy. Mamdani was careful to frame his stance on Israel's conduct as genocide as not, as Cuomo asserted, antisemitism,⁵⁷ but as a response to the facts; “I will always be clear in my language and based in facts: Israel is committing a genocide,”⁵⁸ he wrote on X on Halloween, 2024, while sharing an interview in which he asserts that his use of the word genocide is backed up by both scholars and the majority of Democrats.⁵⁹ Mamdani focused on ensuring voters understood that his stance on Israel did not mean he would ignore the issues facing Jewish New Yorkers; responding to attacks from Cuomo, Mamdani “said fighting antisemitism would be a focus for him as mayor, and... pledged to increase funding for hate crime prevention by 800 percent.”⁶⁰ During the general election, Mamdani shifted his rhetoric on the controversial phrase ‘globalize the Intifada,’ telling business leaders he would “discourage,” it.⁶¹ Indeed, though the majority

51 *Times/Sienna*, “Cross-Tab.”

52 *Times/Sienna*, “Cross-Tab.”

53 *Times/Sienna*, “Cross-Tab.”

54 *Times/Sienna*, “Cross-Tab.”

55 Nicholas Fandos, “How Zohran Mamdani Came to Embrace the Palestinian Cause,” *The New York Times*, October 9, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/08/nyregion/zohran-mamdani-israel-palestine.html>.

56 Fandos, “How Zohran.”

57 Mays, “Israel.”

58 Zohran Kwame Mamdani (@ZohranKMamdani), “I will always be clear in my language and based in facts: Israel is committing a genocide,” *X (Twitter)*, October 31, 2025, <https://x.com/ZohranKMamdani/status/1852100165655802038>.

59 Mamdani, “Based in Facts.”

60 Liam Stack, “Mamdani Has Long Criticized Israel. His Opponents Attack Him for It,” *The New York Times*, June 25, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/25/nyregion/mamdani-gaza-israel.html>.

61 Gloria Pazmino, “In a Shift, Mamdani Tells Business Leaders He Will Discourage Use of the Phrase ‘Globalize the Intifada,’ Sources Tell CNN,” *CNN*, July 16, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/07/16/politics/mamdani-business-leaders-meeting-new-york>.

of Jewish voters went to Cuomo in the general election,⁶² “about one-third voted for Mamdani.”⁶³ Meanwhile, Cuomo sought to curb Mamdani’s support. Benjamin Balthasar highlights the “racialization of Mamdani’s religious identification as a Muslim,”⁶⁴ during the primary. In a campaign mailer in which Mamdani’s face was darkened and his beard “exaggerated,” Mamdani is portrayed as rejecting Israel (“supports the BDS movement against Israel”) and Jewish rights (“refuses to recognize Israel as a Jewish state”).⁶⁵

Affordability

While much national attention was focused on Mamdani’s position on Israel and Gaza, it was not the race’s deciding factor. Instead of focusing on foreign affairs, Mamdani spent much of his time focusing on affordability during the primary. Mamdani’s campaign website was filled with affordability-focused policy proposals, such as a proposal from early February that promises “Zohran will triple the City’s production of publicly subsidized, permanently affordable, union-built, rent-stabilized homes.”⁶⁶ This push responded to the high concerns about affordability in the city, with local journalist Pat Kiernan noting in late March that “affordability takes center stage in the mayoral race.”⁶⁷ Mamdani himself highlighted the importance his campaign’s focus on affordability had on the primary; in an interview on the day of the primary election, Mamdani said “what has powered our campaign’s rise from 1% in the polls to being just a hair’s breadth away from City Hall is this focus on an economic agenda that will deliver a New York City that working- and middle-class New Yorkers can actually afford.”⁶⁸ This focus on affordability, along with savvy political moves like cross-endorsing with Brad Lander,⁶⁹ carried Mamdani to a surprising primary victory. After the prima-

62 Eric Levenson, “From ‘Mazel Tov’ to ‘Conflicted,’ Jewish New Yorkers React to Zohran Mamdani’s Mayoral Win,” *CNN*, November 6, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/11/06/politics/jewish-new-york-mamdani-mayor>.

63 Levenson, “From ‘Mazel Tov.’”

64 Benjamin Balthasar, “Mamdani’s Judeo-Bolshevik Threat: On Islamophobia, Demographics, and Radical Politics,” *Spectre*, August 1, 2025, <https://spectrejournal.com/mamdanis-judeo-bolshevik-threat/>

65 Balthasar, “Mamdani’s.”

66 “Housing By and For New York,” *Zohran for New York City*, February 2, 2025, <https://www.zohranfornyc.com/policies/housing-by-and-for-new-york>.

67 Pat Kiernan, “Affordability takes center stage in mayoral race as New Yorkers struggle with living expenses,” *Spectrum News New York 1*, March 27, 2025, <https://ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/mornings-on-1/2025/04/02/affordability-takes-center-stage-in-mayoral-race->.

68 Amy Goodman, “NYC Mayoral Primary Day: Zohran Mamdani on Building a Movement & Campaigning for an Affordable City,” *Democracy Now!* June 24, 2025, https://www.democracynow.org/2025/6/24/zohran_mamdani_nyc_mayoral_race_cuomo.

69 Nicholas Fandos, Benjamin Oreskes, Emma G. Fitzsimmons, and Jeffery C. Mays, “How Zohran Mamdani Stunned New York and Won the Primary for Mayor,” *The New York Times*, July 1, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/01/nyregion/how-mamdani-won-campaign-mayor.html>.

ry, the candidates were now campaigning for the New York vote, not just the New York Democrat vote. Joe Anuta (2025) highlights an evolution in Mamdani and Cuomo's rhetoric, noting that, after the primary, the "two contenders have each moderated their positions to different degrees as they seek to build a broader coalition of voters."⁷⁰ He also notes that "many voters have simply grown weary of the unrelenting discussion of something that has little to do with the practical realities of running city government."⁷¹ To paraphrase a number of social media comments, the candidates were for Mayor of New York, not Mayor of Tel Aviv. Like in the primary, affordability was high on voters' minds; "the cost of living was the most important issue to voters in New York City."⁷² Specifically, affordable housing was high on voters' priorities, with "seven in 10 voters in New York [saying housing cost] was a major problem where they live."⁷³ This included renters, "who made up more than half of the electorate,"⁷⁴ and who Mamdani won in the elections.⁷⁵ Mamdani campaigned even harder on affordability, with his social media accounts posting multiple videos a day highlighting the issue and his solutions. One such video, posted on his Instagram on October 29th, serves as a good example of this rhetoric; "politicians are not bystanders to the affordability crisis," reads the caption, "we can lower the cost of living and make life easier for New Yorkers in real and meaningful ways."⁷⁶ The video itself shows Mamdani mentioning the Adams' administrations rent hikes and highlighting three ways in which the city government can improve New York's affordability.⁷⁷ Mamdani's efforts paid off; in September, 49% of all likely voters said he would do the best job on affordability, 26% higher than the next highest candidate.⁷⁸

Conclusion

In conclusion, negative or positive reactions to foreign policy often causes voters to either support or punish the incumbent. Israel's actions in Gaza broke the high standing it enjoyed for so long in American public opinion, especially within the Democratic party and among the youth vote. The Democrats were punished by voters who saw them as failing to end the crisis in Gaza, adding

70 Joe Anuta, "Israel, Gaza Take Back Seat to Affordability in NYC Mayoral Race," *Politico*, September 25, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/09/25/israel-gaza-take-back-seat-to-affordability-in-nyc-mayoral-race-00580990>.

71 Anuta, "Israel, Gaza."

72 Fred Backus and Jennifer De Pinto, "Here's What CBS News Exit Polls Told Us About the 2025 Elections," *CBS News*, November 5, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/exit-poll-2025-new-york-new-jersey-virginia-california/>.

73 Backus and De Pinto, "Here's What CBS."

74 Backus and De Pinto, "Here's What CBS."

75 Backus and De Pinto, "Here's What CBS."

76 Zorhan Kwame Mamdani (@zohrankmamdani), "Politicians are not bystanders to the affordability crisis," *Instagram*, October 29, 2025 [*Not Bystanders* 2025].

77 Mamdani, "Not Bystanders."

78 *Times/Sienna*, "Cross-Tabs."

to their many difficulties in the 2024 election. New Yorkers' support for the Palestinian cause has increased along with the rest of the country's, and the city's demographics and partisanship allowed Zohran Mamdani to be loudly critical of Israel without it being a dealbreaker for voters. This, paired with the amount of New Yorkers who actively agree with and support Mamdani's position on the conflict, allowed him to win against Andrew Cuomo by campaigning on affordability, which was a massive priority for New Yorkers. Mamdani's victory has created a new political ceiling for anti-Israel Democratic candidates. "In a number of congressional races across New York City, challengers are betting that the success of Mr. Mamdani... portends a potential vulnerability for pro-Israel incumbents."⁷⁹ Democratic elites must now face the fact that a pro-Israel stance is no longer assumed in voters or in candidates, and in some cases may even be a detriment to the campaign. The sooner Democratic leadership understands this shift, the sooner they can refine their strategies to keep up with this years-long development.

79 Oreskes, "Challengers."

[Political Influences on Identity Building]

All Our Feet Are Still Halfway in That Pool

Remembering a Pandemic in the Information Age

[PETER PIPER HUIZENGA]

Introduction

Historical pandemics set a general precedent for the devastation that health crises cause society, and COVID-19 is no exception.¹ This anthropological qualitative research study examines the common recollection of events that happened in 2020, and the similarities and dissimilarities between the nature of remembering previous pandemics and the current memories of COVID-19 five years after the fact. Remembering the political events that took place during quarantine is immediately salient in the post-lockdown world. Collective memory, which is fallible, is inclined to forget, distort and misremember pandemic events.² COVID-19 is extremely well documented, thanks to widespread archival technology. The amount of readily available information on life during the pandemic seems to contrast with the narratives of earlier epidemics. One would assume that an extensive digital record should militate against the compulsory forgetting associated with prior health crises. However, when one of my participants, VR, stated, “It was more empty everywhere. You were a little more cautious

1 World Health Organization, “WHO Director-General’s Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing – 5 May 2023,” May 5, 2023, <https://www.who.int/news-room/speeches/item/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing---5-may-2023>.

2 Henry L. Roedinger and K. Andrew DeSoto, “Forgetting the Presidents,” *Science* 346, no. 6213 (2014): 1106-1109, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1259627>; Henry L. Roedinger and K. Andrew DeSoto, “The Power of Collective Memory: What do Large Groups of People Remember—and Forget?” *Scientific American*, June 28, 2016, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-power-of-collective-memory/>; Scott Hershberger, “The 1918 Flu Faded in Our Collective Memory: We Might ‘Forget’ the Coronavirus, Too,” *Scientific American*, August 13, 2020, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-1918-flu-faded-in-our-collective-memory-we-might-forget-the-coronavirus-too/>; Laura Spinney, *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How it Changed the World* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2017), 12.

about everything” he was referring to “everything” in a both material and digital sense. Pervasive loneliness during the pandemic is heavily documented, and immediately resonant to those who experienced lockdown for any sort of extended period.³ Teenagers and young adults between 13-20 years old in 2020 recall the COVID-19 pandemic in the same impressionistic way that previous pandemics were and are communally remembered. Despite the wealth of evidence provided by digital technologies, pandemics continue to distort the perception of time and consequent production of memories.

Demographic

My demographic was selected for ease of access, as most Lake Forest College students were between 13 and 20 years old at the onset of the pandemic, which allows my participant population to act as a transferable population to individuals who experienced quarantine at a similar age. The project is based in and focused on the US, but 3/13 of my participants were in a different country during the pandemic (Nepal, Mongolia, Austria/Italy), which lends credibility to the transferability of this project to non-US American populations. As my main recruitment method was discussing the project with my peers, my sample is largely made up of prior acquaintances.

Interviews

Following the centering of individual personal memories of the pandemic, my interview questionnaire was set up to briefly describe impactful 2020 US events (such as the killing of George Floyd and the 2020 election results) in the order that they happened, and then to ask what each participant remembered about each event. The questions were designed for a US audience, which I explained to all participants. This questionnaire system was instituted after I re-focused my project, meaning that the first three interviews were taken using a different format (though many of the same issues and events were relevant). The altered project initially proved too great a body of research for 12-15 pages, which is why the redesigned project narrowed the topic to address the documentary aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Design Specifics

The interview system following its redesign took between 40 minutes

3 Natasha Parent, Kyle Dadgar, Bowen Xiao, Cassandra Hesse, et al., “Social Disconnection During COVID-19: The Role of Attachment, Fear of Missing Out, and Smartphone Use,” *Journal of Research on Adolescence: The Official Journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence* 31, no. 3 (2021): 748-763, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12658>; Gaia Sampogna et al., “Loneliness in Young Adults During the First Wave of COVID-19 Lockdown: Results from the Multicentric COMET Study,” *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 12 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2021.788139>; Jo Aleida Van der Sloot and Christin-Melanie Vaclair, “Covid-19 Lockdown Loneliness and Mental Health: The Mediating Role of Basic Need Satisfaction Across Different Age Groups,” *Journal of Adult Development* 31 (2023): 346-358, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-023-09469-0>.

to an hour depending on the participant. The dataset collected provided me with what participants remembered without aid from their own documentation (a few participants mentioned not remembering things they had felt were important previously, and, after consulting old text messages, I myself realized that I had no memory of topics I had once discussed at length; (see Cohen 2025; Velasco et al. 2022).⁴ This collection method focused attention on what is remembered upon immediate reflection, rather than what is known to have happened, but is not easily recalled.

Analysis

In conjunction with interviewing, I used a combination of deductive and inductive coding to analyze the thirteen collected interviews, with an overall total of six codes (one deductive, five inductive). My deductive analysis is based in the existing theory of “pandemic time” and examines how my dataset aligns with previous research into the topic, using the 2022 study *Lost in Pandemic Time: A Phenomenological Analysis of Temporal Disorientation During the COVID-19 Crisis* by Pablo Velasco et al. as a touchstone. The integration of time distortion during the pandemic provided me with the supported theme of “temporal disorientation” or the simplified “*time distortion*” in my coding system. My inductive data analysis functioned in a similar manner, but instead based categorization on recurring ideas in the dataset itself rather than a preexisting theory. The themes I identified independently are *violence in practice*: the switch between knowing something “in theory” and “in practice”, in reference to both physical violence and health crisis related violence; *societal unpreparedness*: descriptions of the world being unprepared for a pandemic, of signals of what was to come; *powerlessness*: hopelessness and frustration with society, apathy/disconnection from the self; *isolation & social cost*: feeling alone or disconnected from peers both during and following the pandemic, on both an individual and societal level; and finally, *change*: how the world and its people have been changed in the aftermath of COVID-19.

Acknowledgement

My positionality as a researcher presented a variety of challenges, the most prominent being that the material under examination is extremely charged in terms of personal grief (many people lost someone to COVID-19) and descriptions of violence and bigotry (as I brought up topics such as masking, vaccination, and antiblack hate crimes explicitly). It was very important that I clearly state what I will be discussing and how I expected them to respond, especially as a white person in a position of power (as a researcher, albeit a student one, I held

4 Kate Cohen, “The Five Years We Can’t Remember,” *The Washington Post*, March 6, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/interactive/2025/pandemic-memory-covid-lockdown-forgetting/>; Pablo F. Velasco et al., “Lost in Pandemic Time: A Phenomenological Analysis of Temporal Disorientation During the COVID-19 Crisis,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 22 (2022): 1121-1144, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-022-09847-1>.

authority in the power dynamic). To approach this, I explained my expectations very clearly in my script and in general, as I did and do not feel it was necessary to ask anyone to divulge sensitive information. For an example, I started each interview (following my consent script) by saying “every answer that you give is the correct answer.” My initial research question was largely unrelated to COVID-19, which is why the interview script that was used for participants ML, AM, and MD differ slightly in structure from the other responses. On the analytical front, the final version of my coding system underwent between four to six revisions, while my thesis had a large quantity of variations as the scope of my research narrowed. Following the completion of the majority of my interviews, both my coding system and thesis went through several iterations, as the scale of the project made the original conceptual framework infeasible. For brevity, every participant will be referred to using their assigned initials rather than their full pseudonym.

The Before Times, The After Times

The majority of my participants described experiencing different variations and extents of time distortion when reflecting on the pandemic. Velasco et al. define five categories of temporal disorientation in their study: temporal rift; temporal vertigo; impoverished time; tunnel vision; and spatial and social scaffolding of time.⁵ This paper will not address tunnel vision or spatial and social scaffolding of time, as their unique characteristics are based intrinsically within the experience of time amidst the pandemic, rather than upon reflection. These two categories would have likely appeared in my interview data were my sample larger, or my questions oriented to only investigate the concept of pandemic time. I will address each of the remaining three categories in the following section, using quotes from my dataset to exemplify how this project corroborates and challenges the findings by Velasco et al.⁶

Temporal rift is defined as the separation between pandemic time and pre-pandemic time, referring to life before lockdown as the “before times” or an otherwise definitively different era.⁷ While my dataset does not specifically address the distinction between “before” quarantine and “during” quarantine, one intriguing aspect is that every participant I interviewed had a specific and relatively detailed moment that they realized the pandemic was, to quote participant JM, “really happening.” This is something I would be intrigued to pursue in follow-up research on frequently overlapping experiences, as there is little available information in this regard, despite common consensus being that people will remember the moment that they felt COVID-19 become realized in their day-to-day

5 Velasco et al., “Lost in Pandemic Time,” 1127.

6 Velasco et al., “Lost in Pandemic Time,” 1121-1144.

7 Velasco et al., “Lost in Pandemic Time,” 1127-1128.

lives (this is seen in other forms of crisis; see Heshmat).⁸ As it stands, I attribute the lack of direct mention to temporal rift by definition to the simple fact that the Velasco et al. study involved 149 individual responses while this project included thirteen, in conjunction with the Velasco et al. study being focused on pandemic time as a concept, while my questionnaire addressed pandemic time only in part.⁹

The second category, temporal vertigo, is the compression of the perception of pandemic time, making time both long and short or concurrently fast and slow.¹⁰ This sentiment was relevant to my research, with an alteration. Participant AC had an inverted perspective on temporal vertigo, stating, "I don't really remember a lot of details. [2020] feels like decades ago." The most interesting aspect of this statement is that while in the Velasco et al. study, participants commonly felt that while days would drag on, months passed very quickly, AC expressed the opposite idea (while still aligning with the theory itself, flipped), as her perception of 2020 placed it assuredly in the past.¹¹ I would postulate that this is an inversion of not just temporal vertigo in terms of the compression and extension of the passage of time, but of temporal rift as well, with the "after times" following the "during times" of COVID-19. The distinction between "during" and "after" is most prominent in my interviews on the topic of vaccination – while all of my participants expressed that they were vaccinated, the majority had a generalized sense of when they received their initial dose, saying something akin to "as soon as/sometime after they became available to the general public." JM is an example of the trend of remembering the event only in general terms, defining the difference between the relevance of vaccination mid pandemic and post pandemic, stating, "...I don't remember when I got my first vaccine. I remember being in line, but not, actually getting it. A few months after release? I need to find my vaccination card. I remember being scared about that card. Like when I get boosters now, I don't need to think about the card the way I did." Their statement indicates that the distinction between pandemic time periods is not entirely controlled by individuals, but also by the necessary tempo of events during a health crisis.

The idea that the pandemic created an alternative temporal experience in the relationships between time before, time during, and time after is relevant in the third category of impoverished time, which is the most prevalent in my data. Impoverished time is defined as the result of long-term monotony and how it interacts with the "texture of time," creating a flattened effect.¹² The majority of my interviews reference this aspect of time distortion. Participant SV stated, "It's all a blur looking back, time was just: wake up, eat breakfast, do something like read

8 Shahram Heshmat, "Why Do We Remember Certain Things, But Forget Others?" *Psychology Today*, October 8, 2015, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/science-choice/201510/why-do-we-remember-certain-things-forget-others>.

9 Velasco et al., "Lost in Pandemic Time," 1125.

10 Velasco et al., "Lost in Pandemic Time," 1129-1130.

11 Velasco et al., "Lost in Pandemic Time," 1131.

12 Velasco et al., "Lost in Pandemic Time," 1131.

a book or play a game, sleep, do it all again.” Participant MD has the same feeling, “...this isn’t real, what’s happening in the world now isn’t real. [...] It just felt like a blur, genuinely.” This idea shared amongst participants is emulative of a greater societal trend of time during quarantine being dulled or simplified in retrospect.¹³ In an article for *The Washington Post*, Richard Sima quotes Dr. Norman Brown to explain, “‘I would say the pandemic, for many people, will be remembered as this kind of gray interlude,’ Brown said. ‘And for some people, it will be a life-changing kind of event or period. And they’ll remember differently.’”¹⁴ When asked how history will remember COVID-19, Brown says, “‘In order to really kind of staple one’s autobiographical memories into history, history has to take your life and turn it on its head,’” while Dr. William Hirst offers a more general predicament, “‘...the question is, do we feel the moral imperative not to let the story end with us?’”¹⁵ Participant HA expressed exactly what she remembers from the pandemic, saying, “When I think of 2020, I think of the BLM movement, COVID, George Floyd, all of those.” An individual’s recollection of events is colored by what the people around them remember, and just as previous pandemics indicate, monotony damaged the quality of time itself, and therefore what mattered to the group overtook individual experiences, even to the people who experienced them.¹⁶ My participants occasionally expressed that things had been altered without their recognition of said change in the moment. ML expressed that she had no frame of reference for what her high school was like before COVID-19; BP talked about how the pandemic changed how he understood the US and the US educational system; but VR simply said, “Maybe, there were things that changed without me even noticing it.” The dissolution of temporal “footholds” makes it difficult to remember things before, during, and after with any clarity, as events are consolidated internally into a very long sentence lacking punctuation.¹⁷

The common aspects of temporal disorientation in my dataset were concurrent with how the 1918 flu was commonly recalled before 2020, using *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World* by Laura Spinney as my primary comparative source. In *Pale Rider*, the 1918 pandemic was described as being remembered “...personally, not collectively. Not as a historical disaster, but as millions of discrete, private tragedies.”¹⁸ My interviews confirm that this has remained the case for the 2020 pandemic, especially in retrospect. One example of the pandemic as a private experience is participant RA, who brought up when their mother caught COVID-19 and was quarantined, and they had feared that their mother would die without them being able to speak with her again.

13 Richard Sima, “Science of Forgetting: Why We’re Already Losing Our Pandemic Memories,” *The Washington Post*, March 13, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2023/03/13/brain-memory-pandemic-covid-forgetting/>.

14 Sima, “Science of Forgetting.”

15 Sima, “Science of Forgetting.”

16 Spinney, *Pale Rider*, 12-14; Velasco et al., “Lost in Pandemic Time,” 1131-1132.

17 Velasco et al., “Lost in Pandemic Time,” 1132-1133.

18 Spinney, *Pale Rider*, 12-13.

Alternatively, SV lived with frontline healthcare workers, both his mother and sister being full time nurses, and he described how their exhaustion and desperation grounded his experience of the pandemic in the wider world. Another participant, TG, realized mid-interview that what they were describing was them and their brother being bullied for wearing a mask. They were discussing how returning to in-person instruction changed for them post pandemic, and said, "...I was wearing a mask outside, and a couple guys were walking by and coughed at me. To try and scare me, to get me sick. They would be horrible to my brother for masking, and me. They bullied me! I haven't ever, I haven't realized that before, like, right now." The reason that the different experiences between participants were used as examples is to confirm that the 1918 pandemic and the 2020 pandemic are both remembered in fragments despite their high death counts, in part because of the all-consuming nature of each individual's private tragedy.¹⁹ While RA laughingly dismissed the fear of their mother dying when reflecting on it five years in the future, that fear was founded in fact of what could have happened, and what did happen to many people across the world.²⁰ SV basing his understanding of reality in the situation of his mother and sister due to the distortion of his own day-to-day experience (see his longer quote above in [1.3]) was a rational decision, despite it being emotionally charged. His recollection emphasizes that it is the combination of individual time disorientation (impoverished time most prominent in this case, as monotony flattened experiences that would have otherwise been memorable) and the personalization of grief that makes it difficult to remember pandemic events, even if the grief in question is not an immediately locatable loss.²¹ TG's realization exemplifies how even these moments of private tragedy may be ignored for an individual's wellbeing, with them later saying, "I just blocked it all out." As stated in my thesis, while it is not the only way that events are societally remembered, the distortion of memory in the majority of individuals creates a foundation for being ignored by the community at large (see Young 2023).²² To conclude this section with an oft-quoted passage from *Pale Rider*, "Memory is an active process. Details have to be rehearsed to be retained, but who wants to rehearse the details of a pandemic?"²³ The different reasons for not wanting to rehearse the details of a pandemic are extensive, and my dataset indicates alongside supporting literature that a vital aspect of forgetting pandemic events results from an altered perception of time before, during, and after COVID-19, just as it was for the Spanish flu.

19 World Health Organization, "WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks"; Spinney, *Pale Rider*, 12.

20 Cliff Yung-Chi Chen, "Grieving During the COVID-19 Pandemic: In-Person and Virtual 'Goodbye,'" *Omega* 89, no. 3 (2022): 1176-1192, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228221090754>.

21 Sima, "Science of Forgetting."

22 James E. Young, "Remembering the Victims of COVID-19: From Personal to Civic to Reparative Memory," *Memory Studies* 16, no. 3 (2023): 646-650, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980231162321>.

23 Spinney, *Pale Rider*, 168.

The Loneliness Pandemic

A second recurring aspect in my dataset shows that loneliness was unrelenting despite contemporary digital connection. Technology often acted as a contributing factor to isolation during the pandemic, despite societal hopes to the contrary. The consistency of loneliness in my participants' answers was linked by the majority to failed attempts to connect digitally, either as themselves or as a social group (classmates, friend groups, etc.). While we were discussing online schooling and Zoom breakout rooms, JM described how they were given directions by their teacher to engage with their peers in the smaller call rooms, saying, "We wouldn't talk live. We would just text in the little chat. It's strange, looking back." While an attempt was made, this quote exemplifies the failed attempts at meaningful digital connection on a wider societal scale.

Support for this concept comes from the World Happiness Report 2021, which identified risk factors for being negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with notables being the quality and quantity of social relationships, and social media use having both negative and protective effects (Okabe-Miyamoto and Lyubomirsky 2021, 134-136).²⁴ Individuals already at risk for loneliness in 2020 reported increased loneliness, and the at-risk individuals reporting the most were youth.²⁵ The causes for feelings of isolation are personalized to each individual, especially upon reflection, with the only certainty being that "...relatedness (i.e., connectedness) during COVID-19 [is] associated with greater well-being."²⁶ This is supported by how the majority of my participants described loneliness, an example being TR saying that she felt intensely isolated from life outside of herself, another being SV saying, "...the people who I knew, it was really hard for me during COVID because they didn't reach out. I feel like I grew up more." While many memories may be altered when remembered after the fact, the recollection of loneliness differs very little from loneliness at the time, as based on a 2021 study by Natasha Parent et al. which states in its conclusion, "...while the majority of adolescents felt connected to others in the time of the COVID-19 global pandemic, a subset of youth felt socially disconnected, and previous work indicates that these are likely to be those most at risk for maladaptive outcomes."²⁷ My participant sample was largely made up of this subset (or demographic), and

24 Karynna Okabe-Miyamoto and Sonja Lyubomirsky, "Social Connection and Well-Being During COVID-19," in *World Happiness Report 2021*, ed. John F. Helliwell, Richard Layard, Jeffrey D. Sachs, and Jan-Emmanuel De Neve (New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2021).

25 Sampogna et al., "Loneliness in Young Adults," 4-5; Van der Sloot and Vauclair, "Covid-19 Lockdown Loneliness and Mental Health," 352.

26 Tirill F. Hjuler, Daniel Lee, and Simona Ghetti, "Remembering History: Autobiographical Memory for the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdowns, Psychological Adjustment, and Their Relation Over Time," *Childhood Development* 94, no. 1 (2025): 67, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.14131>; Okabe-Miyamoto and Lyubomirsky, "Social Connection and Well-Being," 135.

27 Parent et al., "Social Disconnection During COVID-19," 760.

the feelings expressed in my research align with the results of the studies at the time.²⁸ The widespread consensus between individuals in my dataset suggests that this subset may be larger than postulated in the Parent et al. study, being more closely align with the generalized “youth” demographic examined in an alternative 2021 study by Gaia Sampogna et al. The effect of loneliness on their generation was referenced by the majority of interviewees, with RA mentioning that when reintegrating in school they would run away when approached, and how “...little kids in my neighborhood, they didn’t know how to like, talk to people or play outside. You could throw a ball towards them and they would just stare.” JM echoes this, and compares themselves and their community, “I think a lot of people I know, we were like, mildly agoraphobic. And if you had social anxiety, it just made it worse.”

For my participants, the monotony of the pandemic was a contributing factor to their isolation from their peers. My Black participants were exceptions to this, both expressing how they remained inside, or walked with company with parental permission in the months following the murder of George Floyd. ML expressed the conjunction of disconnection from their peers and despair related to current events in their immediate response to George Floyd’s murder, stating, “... it was a moment where I felt so different from everyone I knew because all of my social circles in middle school. and high school too. were white, and like. I was the only Black person and I felt like, they could watch it happen but couldn’t understand it in the same way as me. Like that could BE me!” My other Black participant, AM, talked about how she very rarely left the house due to fear of COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter protest pushback, despite their neighborhood being mostly people of color, and when I asked why her mother felt it was necessary, she said, “It was just the world in general.” AM described how pervasive fear was at the time and how the threat of police violence intermingled with the health threat, with ML addressing that common fear, saying, “There was an underlying sense of worry in the house, a lot of asking back and forth, ‘is this person doing okay?’”²⁹

My data suggests that the persistence of loneliness as a constant attribute of COVID-19 for a specific portion of the population worked in tandem with widely experienced temporal disorientation, enforcing both the distortion of time and individual isolation in youth inclined towards worsened well-being as a result of the pandemic.³⁰ My participants had precise and well-supported thoughts on how COVID-19 impacted their lives, the majority of participants feel-

28 Parent et al., “Social Disconnection During COVID-19,” 760-761; Sampogna et al., “Loneliness in Young Adults.”

29 Claudia Wallis, “Why Racism, Not Race, is a Risk Factor for Dying of COVID-19,” *Scientific American*, June 12, 2020, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-racism-not-race-is-a-risk-factor-for-dying-of-covid-191/>.

30 Velasco et al., “Lost in Pandemic Time,” 1123; Parent et al., “Social Disconnection During COVID-19,” 750; Okabe-Miyamoto and Lyubomirsky, “Social Connection and Well-Being,” 140; Sampogna et al., “Loneliness in Young Adults,” 352.

ing socially disadvantaged in both career networks and general social circles. TG expressed frustration with the persistence of online-based instruction, saying, "... in a lot of my bio classes there's a lot of pre-lectures and online pre-things that I can tell are products of the pandemic, that I would've preferred to be done in person! I think people are still designing in case they need to go online, because what if we get sick? All our feet are still halfway in that pool." In contrast, when discussing the onset of the pandemic, participant BP said, "...people were like 'oh it's just like the common cold, it'll go away,' and then somehow it turned into this, like, the bubonic plague." These two quotes illustrate the difference between beginning and late societal responses to the pandemic. The dismissal of the seriousness of the health crisis has been extensively studied, as the death toll from the pandemic became politicized.³¹ What is remembered and what is forgotten of pandemic experience follows the lines of our contemporary political divisions, in addition to individual grief practices.³² A parallel instance of social memory construction comes from the 1918 flu and its contemporary comparisons with the Great War. The privileged status of the Great War as an intense human drama, that allowed for both direct and vicarious participation, overshadowed the flu epidemic in public memory, which could only be experienced as a monotonous, vague, and inhuman threat.³³

My participants reported a chasm in experience during 2020, from naive to the onset to desolation as the year progressed. This supports my thesis, in that what we remember is decentralized from our personal memories, not just due to temporal distortion, but also social structures that politicize health and loneliness for our times, as earlier structures had during the 1918 epidemic. When I asked JM about the 2020 election, specifically as they were then unable to vote, they said, "It felt insane, and it feels insane, and I remember at the time feeling so much despair. So much despair. And now, I think I feel that less. [...] . But then, it all felt so hopeless, I couldn't vote, I couldn't do anything." For my participants, their ongoing mental and physical health is entwined with the impoverished time, isolation, fear, and loneliness of the pandemic itself. Their perception of their own lives has been altered by the very experiences that they cannot recall neutrally, since their memory making was impeded by monotony, terror, anxiety, and grief, an obstacle that has continued into the present moment.

31 Marcus Cheatham, Heidi Hancher-Rauch, Jodi Brookins-Fisher, Alexis Blavos, et al., "Politics Spread COVID: Developing a Public Health Response," *Health Promotion Practice* 23, no. 5 (2022): 729-34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248399221118012>; Meredith Neville-Shepard, "Masks and Emasculation: Populist Crisis Rhetoric and the 2020 Presidential Election," *American Behavioral Scientist* 68, no. 1 (2021): 97-111, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642211011223>; Yoshiko Iwai, Zahra Khan, and Sayantani DasGupta, "Your Patriotism Will Not Protect You: Anti-Masking Movements and the 'War on Terror,'" *Literature and Medicine* 39, no. 2 (Fall 2021): 212-216, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lm.2021.0019>.

32 Yung-Chi Chen, "Grieving During the COVID-19 Pandemic: In-Person and Virtual 'Goodbye,'" *Omega* 89, no 3. (2022): 1176-1192, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228221090754>.

33 Spinney, *Pale Rider*, 12-16.

Conclusion

Based on my research, the perspective of pandemic events in teenagers and young adults post pandemic can vary greatly from what is expressed in research completed at the time. Many questions could be asked in follow-up studies. How do people across age groups differentiate between the periods of before, during, and after the pandemic? How does race interact with the response to health crises?³⁴ Why were the moments that my participants realized that the pandemic was “really happening” so similar (attributable to sample size or a wider trend)? How has continued grief been affected by the distortion of time during the pandemic? On another line of thinking, I suspect that the theory of temporal rift per Velasco et al. has been replicated as expressed by AC, creating a rift at not just the beginning but also the end of the pandemic, the confirmation of which requires study on a larger scale. The results of my research indicate that the effects of the pandemic on teenagers and young adults need to be further examined as they currently stand, as while the previously mentioned and extremely valuable research done during the pandemic provides a portion of the experience, each individual has a different perspective of themselves and their pandemic experience in retrospect, and as such express a different understanding of their private tragedy. The 2020 pandemic replicates the 1918 pandemic in terms of how we remember events as a group in terms of public commemoration, and while the historical record for the COVID-19 pandemic will be far more extensive than its predecessor, there is a strong probability that it will follow prior pandemics into near-total oblivion.³⁵

34 Wallis, “Why Racism, Not Race”; Bandana Purkayastha, “Divided We Stand: What the Pandemic Tells Us About the Contemporary US,” *Social Movements and Politics During COVID-19* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.51952/9781529217254.ch008>.

35 Mouaz H. Al-Mallah, “The Way Ahead: Life After COVID-19,” *Methodist DeBakey Cardiovascular Journal* 17, no. 5 (2021): 83-88, <https://doi.org/10.14797/mdcvj.1056>.

Riot Grrrl as Rhetorical Intervention

The Construction of Girlhood in the 1990s

[ATALA JOHNSON]

Kathleen Hanna's "Riot Grrrl Manifesto" from *Bikini Kill Zine 2* and "The Glory On Highway 69" from the zine *Girl Germs* are two texts that emerged amid the male-dominated punk music culture. These texts gave rise to a subculture full of women who sought to challenge patriarchal expectations of gender, reject the normalization of abuse, and foster alternative spaces for women to share their experiences without fear of censorship. I will analyze how these texts helped cultivate the Riot Grrrl movement by applying Bitzer's theory of the rhetorical situation, Palczewski's theory of publics, and Fraser's theory of counterpublics to understand the material's role in the movement's foundation. Self-proclaimed Riot Grrrls thoughtfully communicated their doctrine through zines, a non-mainstream and self-published form of media, thereby enabling networks of solidarity that helped create a shared feminist consciousness and identity among Riot Grrrls. These two texts preserve political ideology that speaks directly to the beginning of Riot Grrrl, and the agent of communication, the zine itself, functions as a political entity.

Kathleen Hanna's "Riot Grrrl Manifesto," published in *Bikini Kill Zine 2*, explicitly states the motives, demands, and cultural ideals that the Riot Grrrl movement was founded on. Hanna's call to action outlines the urgent need for unfiltered feminist dialogue that had not previously been accessible to women in the punk music community. She believes this is accomplishable through self-published zines to ensure the sanctity and safety of fellow Riot Grrrls in sharing their experiences and desires. Hanna wrote, "BECAUSE viewing our work as being connected to our girlfriends-politics-real lives is essential if we are gonna figure out how what we are doing impacts, reflects, perpetuates, or DISRUPTS the status

quo.”¹ Intertwining the constraints of these women’s real lives with the need for collective political action in their subculture is the manifesto’s primary goal: to radicalize others to resist the dominant, misogynistic culture of punk that has silenced these women.

Girl Germs was foundational to the Riot Grrrl movement because it developed a space for dialogue among Riot Grrrls, not exclusive to the physical realms of punk. Molly Neuman’s zine, *Girl Germs*, exemplifies the conversations about identity, sexual liberation, and power that Riot Grrrls contributed to zines. *Girl Germs* features artwork, testimonies, and handwritten notes from readers and the zine’s founders that highlight the unfiltered feminist narrative forming at the time. This form of grassroots communication was community-building in that it created a space where women could understand their personal accounts in relation to a broader feminist critique of patriarchy in the early 1990s. One contributor wrote, “I never knew that punk rock was anything but a phallic extension of the white middle-class male’s frustrations.”² Sexism was inherent within the punk culture, and women knew that the scene was not fostered with a space for them in mind. *Girl Germs* demonstrated to readers that their internal struggles with finding belonging in a subculture that did not carve out space for them were significant in reshaping punk music and, ultimately, re-defining female identity in the third wave of feminism.

In analyzing the Riot Grrrl movement as a series of rhetorical acts, I will apply Lloyd Bitzer’s theory to examine the sociopolitical conditions that prompted the movement. Bitzer’s concept of the “rhetorical situation,” as defined by his 1968 text, hypothesizes that the existence of rhetorical discourse responds to preexisting conditions of the rhetorical situation.³ My analysis follows the origins and development of the Riot Grrrl movement by demonstrating how the discourse executes three components of Bitzer’s framework: the exigence, the audience, and the constraints. Bitzer argues that the rhetorical situation presents itself when an exigence emerges that demands a response. The exigence is characterized by its sense of urgency, abnormality, and deficiency, functioning as the emergency that is imposed on the audience.⁴ The audience consists of those capable of being affected by the exigence and who can take the action needed to solve the exigence. Bitzer acknowledges that there are constraints, tangible and ideological, that inhibit the amount of action and means of communication that the audience can exert, immediately or in time, to resolve the exigence.⁵ Through applying Bitzer’s framework, the Riot Grrrl movement’s inception can be un-

1 Kathleen Hanna, “Riot Grrrl Manifesto,” *Bikini Kill Zine* 2, 1991, www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/riotgrrrlmanifesto.html.

2 Molly Neuman et al., “The Glory on Highway 69,” *GIRL GERMS*, 1992, 22.

3 Lloyd F. Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 1, no. 1 (1968): 2, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40236733>.

4 Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 8.

5 Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 8.

derstood by examining how its dialogue responded to sociopolitical exigencies through the zines and lyricism, which I am evaluating as deliberate rhetorical acts against the sexist conditions of the punk community.

Bitzer's recognition of constraints amplifies the effectiveness of analyzing Riot Grrrl through a theoretical lens that concentrates on the marginalization of communities. To expand on this idea, I will implement Palczewski, Fritch, and Ice's theory of publics and Nancy Fraser's theory of counterpublics to study how Riot Grrrl facilitated the dialogue that attracted the mainstream media. Publics, as defined in *Rhetoric in Civic Life*, are "formed by people coming together to discuss common concerns, including concerns about who they are and what they should do, and as a result constructing social reality together."⁶ This theory clarifies how the social reality that constructed the punk scene facilitated the evolution of the Riot Grrrl as a counterpublic. Fraser defines counterpublics as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs."⁷ Through the lens of Bitzer's rhetorical situation, it is possible to identify where and when people began to come together, who they were, and the common concerns that united them. However, Fraser's concept of counterpublics is more accurate to the historical context of Riot Grrrl as a critique of mainstream norms. Viewing Riot Grrrl as a counterpublic is a testimony to the dialogues being held in this rhetorical space about identity formation.

In relation to Bitzer's rhetorical situation, the exigence that prompted Riot Grrrl's emergence is very clearly stated in early zines, particularly *Girl Germs*. Created by Bratmobile singers Molly Neuman and Allison Wolfe, *Girl Germs* was an outlet for political activism, personal stories of abuse, and community-building through segments to which readers can contribute their own writing. The zine explains that "the idea was formulated by several female Olympians, who saw an opportunity to demarginalize the role of girls in the convention and punk rock."⁸ The "idea" refers to the very origin of the movement—an event known as Girls' Night, which took place on August 20, 1991, in response to the marginalization of women in the punk scene of Olympia, Washington. The early 1990s were an era when women were forced to congregate in corners of punk spaces as spectators and "groupies." Girls' Night was the first intentional opportunity for women to perform their own music on stage and participate in the audience as autonomous contributors to punk culture. Punk women demanded that they were no longer viewed as extensions of their boyfriends or male bandmates. This event, as interpreted through the lens of Bitzer's concept of exigence, marks the

6 Catherine Helen Palczewski et al., *Rhetoric in Civic Life* (United States: Strata Publishing, 2022), 266.

7 Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 67, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466240>.

8 Neuman et al., "The Glory on Highway 69," 22.

critical conditions that provoked Riot Grrrl's rhetorical intervention.

Applying Bitzer's concept of constraint within the rhetorical situation allows me to analyze Riot Grrrl's contributions to the third wave of feminism and understand why the movement eventually dissipated over time. The central constraint was the movement's lack of intersectionality. Riot Grrrl was created to address the exigencies of white, cisgender women. Bitzer's concept of the audience is identifiable as cisgender white women because the political activism did not give platforms to transgender women or women of color. For example, the "Sista Grrrl Riot" scene developed to provide black girls, who felt excluded in this predominantly white scene, an opportunity to participate in Riot Grrrl's activism and cultural practices. Critiques also appeared within the movement itself. Heavens to Betsy critiqued the white feminism of Riot Grrrl in a song titled "White Girl", which confronts Riot Grrrl's appeal to white guilt activism, rather than advocating for racial justice and inclusion. As feminism transitioned into the fourth wave, its focus broadened to examine how racism, sexism, transphobia, and other systems of oppression intersect. The conversations about intersectionality transformed how young women fought for sexual liberation.

Analyzing the formation of the Riot Grrrl movement by applying Palczewski, Fritch, and Ice's theory of publics clarifies how Kathleen Hanna's "Riot Grrrl Manifesto" established a space for understanding girlhood as a political experience in America, which I am analyzing as the deliberate construction of a social reality. Hanna's manifesto explicitly outlines the demands of Riot Grrrl, contending that young women need a discursive space where their concerns and experiences are not overshadowed by men in the punk scene. Hanna's statement that "[Riot Grrrls] must take over the means of production in order to create our own meanings" highlights zine production as a means by which young women can define their identities without external interpretation.⁹ According to Palczewski, Fritch, and Ice, publics are formed by people who come together intentionally to construct social reality through shared concern.¹⁰ Interpreting the manifesto through this lens, I believe it positions itself as a foundational text in building an alternative feminist punk culture. Through the framework of Nancy Fraser's theory of counterpublics, this dialogic space can also function as an oppositional sphere that challenges the male-centered dominant culture of punk, which is what causes Hanna to envision a reality where girlhood is fully integrated into punk culture.

Relating Fraser's theory of counterpublics to Riot Grrrl's development reveals how Kathleen Hanna explicitly states what Fraser called the "oppositional interpretation of their identities, interests, and needs" in the "Riot Grrrl Manifesto."¹¹ Hanna said that Riot Grrrls "seek to create revolution in our own lives every

9 Hanna, "Riot Grrrl Manifesto."

10 Palczewski et al., *Rhetoric in Civic Life*, 266.

11 Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 67.

single day by envisioning and creating alternatives to the bullshit Christian capitalist way of doing things.”¹² In this context, I am examining the dominant public as the Christian capitalist society that forces patriarchal norms onto young women. Riot Grrrl, by rejecting its values and building its own communicative space, functions as a counterpublic that is an alternative cultural sphere fostering identity formation devoid of patriarchal expectations. Hanna’s excerpt frames Riot Grrrl as a methodical political force aimed at disrupting the culturally prescribed implications of girlhood. Rather than accepting the identities imposed on them by their oppressors, Riot Grrrls insist on defining themselves with their own words.

Riot Grrrl’s self-representations in their own published alternative media do not fully align with the mainstream media’s coverage of their agenda and work. During the early 1990s, as the dominant culture grappled with the transition between the second and third wave of feminism, popular magazines introduced the underground world of zines to a much larger audience, sparking discussions about feminist identity on a much broader scale. In this next section, I examine how scholars analyze the mainstream media engagement with zine culture and the ways that the Riot Grrrl’s communications were distorted when filtered through mainstream channels of communication.

In the early 1990s, the dominant public began to reflect on the cultural and political legacy of the feminist movements of the past few decades. This period witnessed the mainstream media’s ever-changing attitudes toward content that was identified as feminist and their role in specifying which ideologies qualified as feminist. A pivotal point for feminism occurred in 1991 when Anita Hill’s testimony against Judge Clarence Thomas was nationally televised. This display of resistance against sexual harassment and gender inequality exposed to the public the urgencies of feminist politics. Gemma Griffiths noted, “reports that offered up the 1990s as the so-called ‘post-feminist age’ either prematurely celebrated that feminism had fully achieved its aims or suggested that feminism had in some way failed.”¹³ Mainstream media outlets of this time translated elaborate feminist concepts into naïve personal narratives that misrepresented to audiences the complexities of feminist activism and desires. Feminists that were coming of age during this trial understood that second wave of feminism had not failed in its ideals, but the discourse needed to transform to address the growing conditions that shaped women’s lives in the United States. The polarization between those who regarded feminism as gratuitous and the emerging generation of young feminists who aimed to expand the movement influenced the decade’s cultural politics.

The media’s postfeminist lens believed that feminism was a bygone era in politics, but also acknowledged that there is now a group of young women that

12 Hanna, “Riot Grrrl Manifesto.”

13 Gemma Griffiths, “The Politics and Aesthetics of 1990s Punk Women’s Writing: Reading Riot Grrrl after Kathy Acker and Against the Anti-Feminist Backlash,” *LJMU Research Online* (2020): 22, <https://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/13180/>.

face new responsibilities in the capitalist society, producing a cultural fascination with “girlhood” as a period for women before they are empowered agents within normative society. Girl revolutions in the early 1990s existed within a cultural moment that recognized the newfound construction of girlhood. Anita Harris says, “[Through] the cultural fascination with girlhood and the modes of governmentality by which their bodies, labour, and behaviour are regulated [...], young women emerged as their own phenomenon: a category [...] seen to have their own values, perspectives, and political objectives.”¹⁴ Incorporating Harris’ analysis into my understanding of girl revolutions during this time, I understand how the texts I have analyzed from the Riot Grrrl era respond to not only the existing conditions of the punk scene, but the conversations that the dominant public were holding about the agency that young women should hold.

Elaborating on the cultural attraction to girlhood, our modern-day interpretation of the young feminists’ response to the culture’s evaluation of girlhood derives from their engagement with youth-oriented magazine publications. I have studied how the Riot Grrrls recognized and documented their identities through zine coverage, but most girls across the United States did not have access to zine culture until it hit the pages of their favorite magazines. While the mainstream media outlets debated the authority and influence of girlhood in day-to-day life, publications such as *Sassy* arranged for a section called “Zine Corner” to educate young girls about the arising zine scene.¹⁵ Through this decision to inform a larger non-punk audience about the underground world of zine culture, *Sassy* guided the attention surrounding girlhood-ism toward the attestations of girls expressing themselves within that culture. Rather than being the subject of scrutiny and the gender-performance-police, zines allowed girls to dictate the narrative being pushed about their identity politics. Jessica Rosenberg and Gitana Garfalo identify the strain between mainstream coverage and individual self-perception saying, “Some girls have felt that the press coverage has distorted the message of Riot Grrrl, while others have felt it is just another tool to let people know about the movement.”¹⁶ The relationship between the patriarchal depiction of girlhood as promoted by the dominant culture and the lived experiences of young women underlines the prominent disconnect between the representation of girlhood and the reality of life as a young woman. That gap was filled with grassroots networks that hold space for authentic expression about identity. However, despite the distortion of the Riot Grrrl movement once it hit mainstream outlets, a broader audience was called to think about how they think about their own identities in

14 Anita Harris, “gURL Scenes and Grrrl Zines: The Regulation and Resistance of Girls in Late Modernity,” *Feminist Review* no. 75 (2003): 40, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1395861>.

15 Janice Radway, “Girl Zine Networks, Underground Itineraries, and Riot Grrrl History: Making Sense of the Struggle for New Social Forms in the 1990s and Beyond,” *Journal of American Studies* 50, no. 1 (2016): 7, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44162970>.

16 Gitana Garofalo and Jessica Rosenberg, “Riot Grrrl: Revolutions from Within,” *Signs* 23, no. 3 (1998): 810, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3175311>.

general. This change in cultural consciousness exhibits that the zine acted as a political agent, rebelling against dominant structures of media representation.

The dominant public's first impression of Riot Grrrl is inherently opposed to the status quo because the zine itself acts as a political entity. Comstock explains this phenomenon saying, "Composed of 'rants' against the homogenizing effects of mass culture and popular media, zines forego the grammar, layout, content, and distribution methods of conventional publication."¹⁷ Comstock recognizes that Riot Grrrl zines are comprised of young female rhetoricians re-envisioning what "girlhood" means to Americans in the 1990s, and that allows me to interpret that the disconnect between dominant media and underground zine culture stems from the radical and nonconventional methods that Riot Grrrls articulated their feminist ideals.¹⁸ The mainstream impression of Riot Grrrl was a diluted version of the movement, they believed. Once consumers embraced the slogan "girl power," the Riot Grrrl movement's activist-driven, nuanced calls to action lost credibility as they were reduced to content for a shallow capitalist vision. Lindsay Wright examines this as the movement's decline, saying, "Given the misrepresentation of Riot Grrrl in the mainstream media as well as overselling the commodified concept of girl power, Riot Grrrl's momentum appeared to slow in the mid to late 1990s."¹⁹ The excessive media coverage pulled Riot Grrrl away from its DIY punk roots, presenting how integral zines were to the core of Riot Grrrl.

Building on the sources that I have chosen to explore Riot Grrrl's relationship with mainstream media outlets, the contextual issue at hand is the strained relationship between prominent cultural beliefs about the role of women in society and underground feminist movements of the early 1990s. Scholars, such as Griffiths, Harris, and Comstock explore how feminist action during this time contradicted the portrayal of feminism as a failed political experiment. While capitalism attempted to navigate the emergence of girlhood as a social category, a new generation of feminists subverted their newfound expectations by contributing to alternative media scenes, specifically zine culture. The dynamic between mainstream media and Riot Grrrls represents how third wave feminists rejected the portrayal of girlhood as a passive phase of life, insisting that they do have sociopolitical agency in contemporary society.

The texts I have analyzed, alongside the scholarly interpretations of the Riot Grrrl movement's formation and cultural impact, demonstrate that Riot Grrrl was a deliberate act of rhetorical intervention in the cultural and political construction of girlhood in the early 1990s. The conversations held in these zines al-

17 Michelle Comstock, "Grrrl Zine Networks: Re-Composing Spaces of Authority, Gender, and Culture," *JAC* 21, no. 2 (2001): 384, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20866409>.

18 Comstock, "Grrrl Zine Networks," 384.

19 Lindsay Wright, "Do-It-Yourself Girl Power: An Examination of the Riot Grrrl Subculture," *James Madison Undergraduate Research Journal* (2016): 55, <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1018&context=jmurj>.

lowed young women to navigate their identities together amid the “postfeminist” era. My application of these theories from Bitzer, Palczewski and colleagues, and Fraser has allowed me to trace the conscious organization of this movement, as well as its eventual decline. I believe the most significant insight from my study is the effect of commodification on activist groups: when media corporations monetize a grassroots movement, they strip it of its authenticity and cultural power. Riot Grrrl’s trajectory exhibits how subcultures are best preserved when they remain in the hands that molded them.

Partisan Bias and Political Decision Making

Role of In-Group Favoritism in Political Perception

[CAITLIN MULCAHY, MAYA SZAL, LIAM THUMSER, AND LILLIAN VANPELT]

Abstract

Political partisanship influences individuals' perceptions and decision-making processes through in-group favoritism, as explained by Social Identity Theory. This study examines how partisan bias affects agreement with political statements based on the perceived political affiliation of the speaker. Sixty-five participants rated neutral political statements attributed to either a Republican or Democratic leader. A 2x2 mixed ANOVA revealed that participants showed greater agreement with statements when they believed the speaker was from their own party, regardless of content, with Republican participants exhibiting a stronger bias. These findings highlight the role of partisan bias in shaping political perceptions and underscore its contribution to polarization, emphasizing the need for strategies to mitigate its impact on political discourse.

Introduction

The three most recent U.S. presidential elections (2016, 2020, and 2024) have been marked by increasing political polarization, with party identity playing a dominant role in shaping voters' attitudes and behaviors.¹ Political alignment increasingly influences how people perceive politics, and partisanship begins to play a stronger role in the way individuals perceive and respond to arguments. This divisive nature of politics is being amplified by the spread of misinformation and biased media. It is important that we reach a deeper understanding of the social driver of this political decision-making. The implications can drive policies to move away from political polarity and prioritize informed voting behaviors in

1 "Vanderbilt Unity Index White Paper," Vanderbilt Project on Unity and American Democracy, Vanderbilt University, n.d., 6-9, <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/unity/about/>.

the United States. This study aims to explore the role of partisan bias in shaping political perceptions and how it influences the way individuals assess political information.

Social Identity Theory and In-Group Favoritism

Humans, by nature, value their social identities to an extent that can affect their attitudes and behaviors. Membership in certain groups, whether in-group or out-group, helps shape one's social identity. Tajfel and Turner introduced the Social Identity Theory, which is an examination of the dynamic between personal identity and social identity within a single person.² They argue that once people have identified with a social group, they will often favor their in-group members and values. Further, research has found that this in-group favoritism is often partnered with a bias against out-groups.³ Brewer et al. suggest that people feel the need to both be distinct and to be included, introducing the idea that self-esteem comes from the status fulfillment of in-group needs.⁴ Since self-esteem is so closely related to social identity and group memberships, people are heavily influenced by their in-groups, especially when their groups are of high status.⁵ Thus, the more meaningful and intense group identifications the greater the influence is on attitudes and behaviors.

The social identity theory centers around the idea that people will strongly identify with their social or political groups, thus it is seen that political partisanship influences political ideologies, leading to further polarization. Haslam et al. found that group membership is highly influential in stereotyping, which is necessary to understand when considering in-group favoritism.⁶ They found that participants were more likely to believe a stereotype that aligns with their group's ideas and is presented by an in-group member, and less likely to agree when an out-group member presents the stereotype, or if it is incompatible with their group's views.⁷ Thus, discussion with members of the opposite political party becomes difficult when opposing groups refuse to believe certain statements.

2 Henri Tajfel and John Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33-48.

3 Marilynn B. Brewer, Jorge M. Manzi, and John S. Shaw, "In-Group Identification as a Function of Depersonalization, Distinctiveness, and Status," *Psychological Science* 4, no. 2 (1993): 88-89, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.1993.tb00466.x>; S. Alexander Haslam et al., "Stereotyping and Social Influence: The Mediation of Stereotype Applicability and Sharedness by the Views of In-group and Out-group Members," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 35, no. 3 (1996): 391-94, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.1996.tb01103.x>; Tajfel and Turner, "An Integrative Theory," 33-48.

4 Brewer, Manzi, and Shaw, "In-Group Identification," 88-89.

5 Brewer, Manzi, and Shaw, "In-Group Identification," 88-89.

6 Haslam et al., "Stereotyping and Social Influence," 391-92.

7 Haslam et al., "Stereotyping and Social Influence," 382-92.

It also becomes easier to persuade members of an in-group when messages reinforce existing group identities, especially when politics is framed using “us versus them” language. Research shows that political party cues can heighten awareness of group membership and encourage individuals to view others primarily as members of political groups rather than as unique individuals.⁸ People tend to conform to the positions of their political in-group rather than evaluating policies objectively and through the lens of their internal values when primed with the “us” vs “them” concept.⁹ As a result, it is implied that when politicians emphasize partisanship and the division between parties, they are increasing the chances that people will prioritize their party’s beliefs over their own personal beliefs.

Additionally, research has found that political partisanship is used as cues for voting in elections. A study on the North Carolina elections found that inconsistent systems of ordering candidate names on ballots lead to voters accidentally voting for someone they did not intend to, because they expected the candidate of their party to be in a particular spot on the ballot.¹⁰ This study suggests that people may simply support a candidate based on party affiliation, rather than individual values. It seems probable that when presented with an idea or quotation they believe is affiliated with a politician from their party, people will be more likely to endorse that concept, even if it goes against what they truly believe.

Partisan Bias in Perception and Memory

Past research has shown that in-group favoritism is correlated with political bias, but past work has also explored how political bias and group favoritism affects perception and even memory. Van Bavel and Pereira introduce the idea that political parties continue this idea of “us” versus “them” that the Social Identity Theory proposed.¹¹ When it comes to partisan bias, individuals will align with a party that is most like their personal ideology. However, researchers have found that attitudes about certain policies often align with party affiliation rather than an individual’s ideology. There is a disconnect between party alignment and what that individual truly believes. Generally, the individual will choose an option

8 Kim Mannemar Sønderskov and Jens Peter Frølund Thomsen, “Contextualizing Intergroup Contact: Do Political Party Cues Enhance Contact Effects?” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (2015): 49-50, 53-54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0190272514560761>.

9 Geoffrey L. Cohen, “Party Over Policy: The Dominating Impact of Group Influence on Political Beliefs,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 85, no. 5 (2003): 819-21, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.5.808>.

10 Alessandro Arlotto et al., “Ballot Design and Electoral Outcomes: The Role of Candidate Order and Party Affiliation” (arXiv preprint, 2025), 18-19, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2507.16722>.

11 Jay J. Van Bavel and Andrea Pereira, “The Partisan Brain: An Identity-Based Model of Political Belief,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 22, no. 3 (2018): 213-24, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2018.01.004>.

that is more aligned with their party rather than what they believe. What is most interesting is when a party's belief and an individual's own belief conflict, members will experience cognitive dissonance. Rather than abandoning their belief in their party, individuals will double down on those beliefs, consequently losing their own.¹² This was shown by a study done on cult members. When cult members were confronted with the fact that their doomsday was never going to happen, instead of abandoning belief in the cult, they increased their commitment to that cult (Festinger, 1964).¹³ According to these studies, we can see that party affiliation can come before an individual's personal ideologies.

Not only does party affiliation tend to come before personal ideologies, but affiliation can also affect how ideologies are interpreted. People tend to filter learned information through the lens of their political affiliation causing them to interpret their personal ideologies in accordance with their party values. This effect is known as confirmation bias, where individuals seek out or give more weight to information that supports their pre-existing beliefs and reject information that contradicts them.¹⁴ A study done by Johnson and Judd demonstrates that partisan affiliation can significantly influence both perception and memory.¹⁵ Johnson and Judd found that individuals were more likely to remember and correctly attribute statements that align with their existing beliefs, reinforcing the idea that political bias shapes how we process information.¹⁶ When it comes to partisan affiliation, people tend to prioritize information that is consistent with their political identity, which encourages the likelihood that they will accurately recall and endorse statements that support their party's views. On the other hand, when confronted with statements or information that disagree with their beliefs, individuals are more prone to misattributing these false aligning statements, potentially forgetting them, misinterpreting them, or even assigning them to the wrong source.¹⁷ This bias can lead to an altered memory that distorts the recall of certain events or messages to fit with their party alignment.

This selective memory and perception pattern reflects how partisan bias can polarize both the way we perceive the world and the way we remember it, contributing to further polarization of political divides. For instance, if a person is strongly aligned with a political party, they might remember a policy or statement made by an opposing party in a more negative way, while exaggerating the positive aspects of their own party's actions. This distortion can persist even when confronted with new, contradictory evidence. Van Bavel and Pereira's research

12 Van Bavel and Pereira, "The Partisan Brain," 215-16.

13 Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), 207-8, <https://doi.org/10.1037/10030-000>.

14 Joel T. Johnson and Charles M. Judd, "Overlooking the Incongruent: Categorization Biases in the Identification of Political Statements," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 45, no. 5 (1983): 978-96, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.45.5.978>.

15 Johnson and Judd, "Overlooking the Incongruent."

16 Johnson and Judd, "Overlooking the Incongruent."

17 Johnson and Judd, "Overlooking the Incongruent."

suggests that people's attachment to their political party may overshadow their ability to objectively assess facts or beliefs, reinforcing the social divide that grows between "us" and "them."¹⁸ This divide becomes very prominent in the media and how things are displayed throughout content.

Media, Political Discourse, and Out-Group Animosity

Over the last decade, social media has made an incredible impact on society. It is used for virtually anything, from entertaining videos to spreading important news. However, a growing concern is how it has played a role in American politics. Partisan affiliations have been hypothesized to influence online behavior, such as sharing true or false information.¹⁹ Consistent with the Social Identity Theory, in-group content will have more interaction than that of the out-group. However, it has been found that in the United States, out-group negativity is stronger than in-group positivity.²⁰ Thus, out-group animosity is a strong predictor for social media engagement. Posts about out-group members or ideologies elicit negative emotions such as anger or mockery and in turn generate more engagement on social media.²¹ Additionally, the effect of out-group language increases with politicians.²² The research done by Rathje et. al, suggests that political messaging that elicits negative emotions will have a wider spread, whether it is true or not.²³ Thus, eliciting strong emotions out of constituents becomes politicians' main goal rather than spreading truthful messages on social media.

To begin to understand how certain political elites gain massive followings on social media, it is important to understand language as a tool for social media engagement. Consistent with the findings above, political elites (presidents, senators, representatives) sharing messages using moral-emotional language – beliefs, opinions and values – strongly correlates to a larger spread of content.²⁴ In the presidential candidate comparison, Trump benefited more from moral-emotional language than Clinton.²⁵ Regarding ideologies, those with more conservative ideologies tend to interact with and spread moral emotional language

18 Van Bavel and Pereira, "The Partisan Brain," 215-16.

19 Steve Rathje, Jay J. Van Bavel, and Sander van der Linden, "Out-group Animosity Drives Engagement on Social Media," *Psychological and Cognitive Sciences* 118, no. 26 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2024292118>.

20 Alan I. Abramowitz and Steven W. Webster, "Negative Partisanship: Why Americans Dislike Parties But Behave Like Rabid Partisans," *Political Psychology* 39, no. S1 (2018): 119-35, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12479>.

21 Rathje, Van Bavel, and van der Linden, "Out-group Animosity."

22 Rathje, Van Bavel, and van der Linden, "Out-group Animosity."

23 Rathje, Van Bavel, and van der Linden, "Out-group Animosity."

24 William J. Brady et al., "An Ideological Asymmetry in the Diffusion of Moralized Content on Social Media Among Political Leaders," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 148, no. 10 (2019): 1802-13, <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000532>.

25 Brady et al., "An Ideological Asymmetry," 1805, 1808.

a lot more than those that hold liberal ideologies.²⁶ This moral contagion effect illuminates the way in which political elites gain exposure and followings, which can have great implications on political discourse in the media. Social media favors male politicians that use a large amount of moral – emotional language, suggesting that message style and moral-emotional framing can drive engagement regardless of whether a message is substantively informative.²⁷ Statement content ultimately seems to matter less than how it is presented and the person who is saying it, leading us to question if partisan identity could influence the way individuals interact with political messages.

In-group favoritism and out-group animosity, as well as political messaging all contribute to the growing political polarization of the United States and several other two-party countries. In-group praise, or messages that cast a positive light on the in-group, lead to stronger attitudes and greater self-reported polarization.²⁸ Similarly, messages that are derogatory towards the out-group tend to have the same effect on attitudes and self-polarization. Thus, studies have shown that biased, opinionated messaging techniques lead to more polarization than balanced news presenting both arguments.²⁹ However, the greatest predictor of polarization is congenial news, or evidence-based news. Although it is comforting to know that evidence-based news is highly regarded by those that engage with it, not everyone does. As we have seen in the past, polarization comes as a heavy price due to the nature of biased political presence on social media.

Aim of Current Study

Past research has shown that individuals are highly influenced by in-group favoritism, as people tend to favor those within their own political party and have biased perceptions of those outside it. Studies on partisan bias have further analyzed how political identity shapes the way individuals perceive information, and people often prioritize party affiliation over objective content. Additionally, research on media has shown how media sources echo out-group animosity and in-group praise by reinforcing content that deepens polarization.

The aim of the current study is to investigate the extent to which partisan bias influences perception of political statements. Building on previous research on in-group favoritism and partisan bias, this study seeks to examine how individuals' agreement with political statements is influenced by the perceived political affiliation of the person making the statement. We hypothesize that participants will show greater agreement with political statements when they believe the

26 Brady et al., "An Ideological Asymmetry," 1806-8.

27 Brady et al., "An Ideological Asymmetry," 1806-10.

28 Magdalena Wojcieszak et al., "What Information Drives Political Polarization? Comparing the Effects of In-group Praise, Out-group Derogation, and Evidence-based Communications on Polarization," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 27, no. 2 (2022): 325-52, <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211004418>.

29 Wojcieszak et al., "What Information."

statement is attributed to a figure from their own political party, even when the statement has no political affiliation (neutral).

Method

Participants

A convenience sampling method was applied to recruit participants. The participants included 65 adults, who were between 18 and 65 years old ($M = 25.1$). Participants were recruited through the 9 AM Psychology 221 Group 1, earning credit by inviting at least 10 participants. A power analysis was conducted using G*power to show that 24 participants were needed to achieve a power of 0.8. There were no ethical concerns as participant data was kept anonymous from the research team and each participant consented to the research study. A debriefing statement was provided at the end of the survey. Participants were not compensated.

Design

Two variables were measured or manipulated, the political affiliation of neutral statements and participant party identity. Neutral statements were randomly assigned to a political figure with a specific party affiliation. All participants saw the same neutral statements. For the second variable, participants self-reported their party identity, Democratic or Republican, which was a quasi-independent variable. Agreement with the neutral statements was assessed.

Materials

To assess perception and agreement on political statements, our survey gave ten neutral statements regarding politics, meaning no political affiliation was attributed to the statement. A Likert Scale of Agreement was used to assess agreement level with the neutral statements. Ten statements had either a Democratic or Republican leader at the end of the statement, suggesting the statement came from that leader (e.g., "Building strong international relationships benefits the people of the United States of America – Donald Trump"). There were five statements associated with Republican leaders, and five statements associated with Democratic leaders. Participants were required to provide their political identity, either Democratic ($n = 44$) or Republican ($n = 21$). Additional data was collected on age and level of education.

Responses to the Likert scale were coded numerically to quantify agreement levels. The four-point scale consisted of the following values: Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Agree = 3, Strongly Agree = 4. This coding method allowed for the assessment of agreement across different statements. Higher scores indicated stronger agreement with the presented statement.

Procedure

After providing informed consent, participants completed an online survey that was distributed using Microsoft Forms. They were then presented with the 10 neutral statements, where they were then asked to rate their agreement with the statements. After the 10 Likert statement answers, participants moved to a section that consisted of demographic questions, including political affiliation, age and education level.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed to compare responses between neutral statements and those attributed to political figures, examining potential shifts in agreement based on source attribution. Average scores of agreements with democratic statement representatives and average scores of agreements with republican statement representatives were analyzed for each participant. Jamovi was used to run a 2 x 2 factorial ANOVA. Excel was used to create figures as a visual representation of the results found in Jamovi.

Results

A 2 x 2 mixed ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of participant party affiliation (Democratic vs. Republican) and speaker party affiliation (Democratic vs. Republican) on agreement ratings. Participant party was treated as a between-subjects factor and speaker party was treated as a within-subjects factor.

The analysis revealed a significant interaction between participant party and speaker party, $F(1, 63) = 15.38, p < .001, \eta^2 = .059$, indicating that agreement with statements depended on whether the speaker shared the participant's political affiliation (see Figure 1).

There was also a significant main effect of participant party, $F(1, 63) = 6.41, p = .014, \eta^2 = .064$. Democratic participants ($M = 3.59, SE = 0.051$) gave higher overall agreement ratings than Republican participants ($M = 3.37, SE = 0.074$; see Figure 2).

The main effect of speaker party was not significant, $F(1, 63) = 0.52, p = .474, \eta^2 = .002$.

Post hoc Tukey tests were conducted to examine the interaction. Republican participants showed significantly greater agreement with statements attributed to Republican speakers ($M = 3.50, SE = 0.08$) than Democratic speakers ($M = 3.24, SE = 0.09$), $t(63) = 2.82, p = .032$ (see Figure 1). Democratic participants also rated Democratic speakers ($M = 3.68, SE = 0.06$) higher than Republican speakers ($M = 3.51, SE = 0.06$), $t(63) = -2.82, p = .032$ (see Figure 1).

Simple effects analyses further supported this interaction. Republican participants showed significantly higher agreement with Republican speakers ($M = 3.50, SD = 0.39$) than Democratic speakers ($M = 3.24, SD = 0.58$), $t(20) = 2.35, p = .029, d = 0.51$. Democratic participants also showed significantly higher agreement

with Democratic speakers ($M = 3.68, SD = 0.31$) than Republican speakers ($M = 3.51, SD = 0.38$), $t(43) = -3.17, p = .003, d = -0.48$.

Figure 1. *Interaction Effect Between Speaker Party Affiliation and Party Identity of Participant*

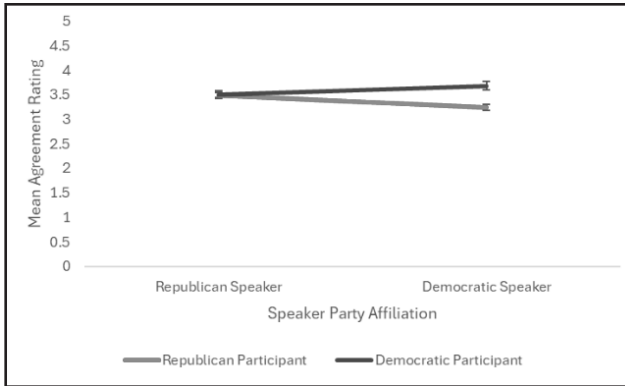
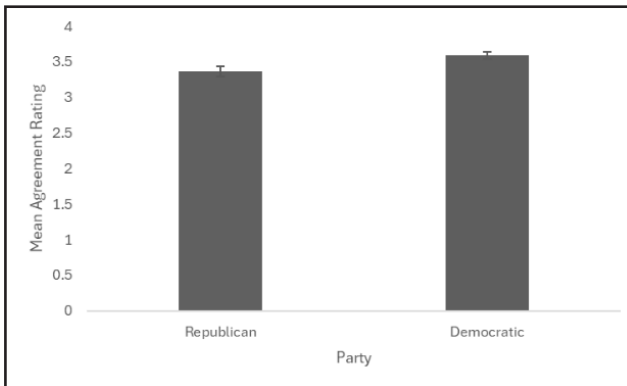


Figure 2. *Mean Agreement Ratings Based on Participant Party Alignment*



Discussion

The study investigated the role of partisan bias in shaping individuals' agreement with politically neutral statements based on the perceived political affiliation of the speaker. Consistent with our hypothesis, results showed that participants were significantly more likely to agree with statements when they believed the speaker was affiliated with their own political party, despite the statements themselves being politically neutral. Interestingly, the effect was particularly larger among Republican participants, who showed a potentially larger

susceptibility to bias than Democratic participants. This research reflects the Social Identity Theory, which suggests that individuals show in-group favoritism and are more receptive to information that originated from members of their own group.³⁰ Specifically, we saw that people's attachment to their political party overshadows their agreement with a statement, similar to the findings in Van Bavel and Pereira's research.³¹ Having strong ingroup identities reinforces the idea of "us" versus "them", creating a prominent divide.

Other research has provided different methods to the same overshadowing shown in our results. Lyons and Utych investigates the extent of in-group favoritism in political contexts by asking whether Americans will discriminate in favor of in-group partisan (and against opposite partisans) *even when no party labels are provided*.³² They report two studies in which participants were shown only facial photographs of individuals and asked to make judgments without any political information. Subsequently, the researchers found that people consistently inferred others' partisanship from subtle facial cues alone and then acted on those perceived affiliations when making decisions. In hiring scenarios, participants tended to favor candidates for whom they assumed to share their own party identity, demonstrating bias in the absence of explicit cues. Like our findings, where agreement was based more on speaker affiliation than content, this study shows that partisan bias operates even without explicit signals, highlighting how deeply political identity can shape perception and decision-making.

Past research has also elaborated on the divide that political partisanship creates. Like results found in Castle and Stepp, our study also suggests that there is an implication for political polarization.³³ Our results indicated that participants responded differently to neutral statements based on their political affiliation. Castle and Stepp found similar results when looking at the predictability of polarization based on partisanship.³⁴ Participants were first presented with ten political issues. Then, the issues were presented with either a liberal or conservative framing. Participants were asked how much they sympathized with the debate. The researchers took their responses and generated a measure of polarization on each issue. Most interestingly, they found that public opinion generally tended to remain at the center of distribution when given a political statement without a partisan framework. Yet, they found that when partisanship is introduced, it has a strong impact on the polarization of individual issues.³⁵ Partisanship can impact

30 Tajfel and Turner, "An Integrative Theory," 33-48.

31 Van Bavel and Pereira, "The Partisan Brain."

32 Jeffrey Lyons and Stephen M. Utych, "Partisan Discrimination Without Explicit Partisan Cues," *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 10, no. 1 (2022): 288-305, <https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.6491>.

33 Jeremiah J. Castle and Kyla K. Stepp, "Partisanship, Religion, and Issue Polarization in the United States: A Reassessment," *Political Behavior* 43 (2021): 1311-35, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-020-09668-5>.

34 Castle and Stepp, "Partisanship."

35 Castle and Stepp, "Partisanship."

the way participants respond and interact with political issues, a similar result to ours. Even though individuals tend to lean towards the middle of the political spectrum, when presented with a politicized framework, partisanship and group identity will overpower individual beliefs. Thus, as we suspected, there is evidence that a strong predictor of polarization is party affiliation.

An additional factor studied that affects politicization and partisanship is personality. In our study, there was an effect detected when evaluating how self-reported Democrats and Republicans respond to neutral statements regardless of the politician saying the statement. To understand this, research was done on the personality differences of Democrats and Republicans. Past research on partisan personality has shown that liberals tend to be more open to new experiences and have higher agreeableness.³⁶ Interestingly, individuals who have higher emotional stability and conscientiousness tend to lean more Republican, or conservative.³⁷ However, in the study done by Gerber et al., though openness to new experiences was significantly higher for Democrats, agreeableness did not significantly differ across the two parties.³⁸ These results show that though measuring personality can lead to different results, there are trends in differing personalities between parties. Democrats being more open can be a cause for having higher agreement ratings across the board. Thus, looking into personality can provide some more clues as to why Democrats were more likely to respond with higher agreement ratings to neutral statements than Republican participants.

In analyzing the methods of our study, several limitations should be considered. First, the sample size of 65 participants was small, which may limit how well the findings apply to the broader population. A larger sample would provide more reliable results and allow for more generalizability of our findings. Additionally, the sampling method may not represent the views of a wider group considering it consisted of mostly young adults. Most participants were college students, and their political beliefs might differ from those of other age groups or people in different regions, leading to sampling error. Though it is important to note that older adults were included in the sample, there may have been a limited number of them due to the usage of a convenient sampling method.

Another limitation is the lack of a manipulation check, which would ensure that participants correctly identified the political statements as coming from the intended figures. Without confirming this, it's unclear whether the observed effects were due to the correct attribution or misunderstandings. If we were to run a manipulation check, we would make sure to include neutral statements that were not politically affiliated to see if participant responses were solely due to our

36 Christopher A. Cooper, Lauren Golden, and Alan Socha, "The Big Five Personality Factors and Mass Politics," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 43, no. 1 (2013): 68-82, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2012.00982.x>.

37 Alan S. Gerber et al., "Personality and the Strength and Direction of Partisan Identification," *Political Behavior* 34 (2012): 653-88, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-011-9178-5>.

38 Gerber et al., "Personality."

manipulations. Also, while the Likert scale used to measure agreement is common, self-reported surveys can be affected by biases, such as participants trying to answer in ways they believe it is socially acceptable, especially in politically sensitive situations.

Lastly, while the study used a 2x2 mixed ANOVA to analyze the data, it didn't consider other factors that might affect participants' views, such as their level of political interest or exposure to certain political messages. Ignoring these factors might make the results less accurate and provide other explanations for our findings. In the future, we would focus on using a larger, more diverse sample, including a manipulation check, and controlling other factors that could affect participants' responses.

If we could change the study, our first goal would be to address the limitations of the present study, such as acquiring a larger and more diverse sample. Due to the convenience sampling used in the present study, there was not a very diverse spread of age and education level, as most participants were young high school graduates. If we were to restudy about the same topic, our focus in redesigning the study would be sample diversity. Along with gathering a more diverse sample, we would need to perform a manipulation check in our study. We would create a control group in which we would not link the statements to a political representative. This would allow us to determine whether the mere presence of political figures influenced agreement ratings. Finally, we would expand on demographic questions, aiming to analyze how that might influence political identity and agreement ratings.

There are many opportunities for future research that stem from the present study. For example, we did not ask the participants to provide their gender, occupation, religion, or location in the demographics section of our survey. It would be interesting to explore whether any of these factors create significant differences in people's agreements with certain politicians' statements. Another possibility is determining whether the political climate of the community that people inhabit can influence the willingness of agreement level with certain political figures. Perhaps in areas where the political beliefs of the community and the participant are aligned will generate more willing responses, whereas communities where beliefs differ may generate a more reserved response. Further, a person's occupation may be extremely influential in a person's agreement with a statement, regardless of what party they align with. For example, a person who works in business may be more likely to agree with the previously mentioned statement "Building strong international relationships benefits the people of the United States of America – Donald Trump," regardless of the participant's political alignment or the political figure linked to the statement. Politics are complicated, as everyone has different backgrounds and experiences that influence their political views and values, and future research should explore the effects of more demographic factors on agreement with political statements.

Yet undeniably, party identity clearly influences the way people interact

with ideologies, beliefs and political messages. In some ways, it is helpful to have cues from political figures to help the lay person to know what information they should be paying attention to. However, strictly adhering to the values of the group, even when they are not in alignment with one's own, can lead to a loss of personal identity and a spread of outgroup animosity. Political polarization becomes a side effect when society struggles to see the similarities between ingroup and outgroup members. Although this study has recognized this pattern in social behavior, we must go beyond that. There will need to be tangible ways in which we can reduce political polarization and ingroup favoritism, as well as bringing awareness to outgroup animosity. Only then will we be able to achieve collaboration in our political sphere.

[Feature Articles]

The True Tragedy of “Oedipus Rex”

Ignorance and Responsibility

[JILLIAN BEASTER]

In Greek tragedies, as well as in the current day, the debate over whether an individual truly has control over their actions has plagued mankind. This idea has often considered fate and free will as mutually exclusive, while they actually act simultaneously. In *Oedipus Rex*, it would appear that Oedipus' fate is fully predetermined, as he is informed of his life's prophecy twice. Oedipus is told that he will kill his father and marry his mother, and after hearing this, he flees his home to evade this outcome. Nevertheless, his decision to leave Corinth initiates the beginnings of his prophecy's fulfillment. Regardless of his predetermined fate, Oedipus should still be held accountable for his decisions, as his agency proves his culpability. By exploring the concept of moral responsibility, alternative possibilities and culpable ignorance, it is evident that Oedipus is the agent of his actions and should be held accountable, in addition to the impact of his life's prophecy.

Moral responsibility is the concept that people are accountable for each decision they make, and the consequences that choice brings. Oedipus has made choices that have benefited his career, such as when he saved Thebes from a curse by slaying the Sphinx and is rewarded with the throne. Although this instance represents a positive consequence, not all of Oedipus' actions have reaped a similar result. According to philosopher Michael Zimmerman, agency is necessary in taking responsibility and accepting consequences, mentioning that “freedom is thus what may be called a root requirement of responsibly” therefore, any act that results in punishment shows culpability of the actor, ultimately representing the agency in that choice.¹ For example, in *Oedipus Rex*, Thebes falls victim to a curse

1 Michael J. Zimmerman, “Moral Responsibility and Ignorance,” *Ethics* 107, no. 3 (1997): 411, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2382323>.

that can only be lifted by uncovering the murderer of King Laius, demonstrating how even the Gods acknowledge the power of mortals' agency in changing the course of something predetermined. When Oedipus meets with Tiresias, the prophet and messenger of the Gods, Tiresias delivers Oedipus' life prophecy and accuses him of killing King Laius, and that "[he] [is] the murderer whom [he] seeks."² As a prophet, Tiresias represents the Gods' awareness of Oedipus' agency and the significance of his decisions, while also acknowledging the power of the prophecy. Through the interpretation of these interactions, it is determined that fate and free-will are not mutually exclusive. Furthermore, Oedipus' decision to first leave Corinth, kill a man, and marry that man's widow results in his eventual acknowledgment of guilt, as he blinds himself as punishment and insists upon his own exile, showing his accountability. Despite his life's prophecy, Oedipus is still the executioner of these actions as he is considered to be responsible by both the Gods and himself, ultimately proving his agency over his choices.

Oedipus' murder of King Laius represents his obstinate compulsions and how any alternative path would be against his nature. Instead of not acting, Oedipus made decisions based on his inner compulsions that led him to fulfill actions that were predicted by his prophecy. Harry Frankfurt, philosopher, introduces the theory of alternative possibilities, explaining "that a person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise," highlighting that had Oedipus not gone out of his way to murder King Laius, the prophecy would not have been fulfilled.³ However, considering the possibility that Oedipus was coerced by the Gods, thus making the theory of alternative paths false, Oedipus is still accountable as an agent of action and consequences. Oedipus' self-destructive nature simultaneously contributes to his decision making, which ultimately impacts himself and those around him. M. D. Faber, author, says that "[Oedipus'] initial tendency to discharge his aggressive impulses on someone else and his subsequent tendency to discharge those same impulses on himself when he finds himself thwarted in his initial aim," discussing his innately impulsive behavior.⁴ According to Frankfurt, in certain situations "certain actions . . . make it impossible for the person to do otherwise . . . but that do not actually impel the person to act or in any way produce his action," indicating that the agent is always responsible for their actions.⁵ Oedipus' slaying of King Laius shows his impulsiveness, demonstrating that his overpowering and aggressive traits make it impossible for him to act otherwise because of who he is and chooses to be. Even if his actions

2 Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex: An English Version*, trans. Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949), 12, https://happydagger.weebly.com/uploads/1/2/6/2/12621669/oedipus_rex.pdf.

3 Harry G. Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *The Journal of Philosophy* 66, no. 23 (1969): 829-39, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2023833>.

4 M. D. Faber, "Self-Destruction in 'Oedipus Rex,'" *American Imago* 27, no.1 (1970): 41-51, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26302607>.

5 Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities," 830.

are determined by the Gods, his prophecy or his inner compulsions, he still takes accountability as the actor: "I struck him in my rage . . . I killed them all . . . And I myself pronounced this malediction upon myself!"⁶ Thus, Oedipus is responsible for his actions, even under coercion, prophetic influence and inner compulsions.

A key source of Oedipus' lifelong ignorance stems from his early trauma. When Oedipus was a baby, King Laius and Jocasta attempted to kill him in an effort to eliminate any possibility of Oedipus growing to slay his father and marry his mother. John Steiner writes in the National Institutes of Health that the murder attempt "inflicted a severe trauma on the defenseless 3-day-old infant . . . we are obliged to assume that such trauma would have left a significant scar, both physical and psychological."⁷

Since Oedipus was quickly adopted into King Polybos of Corinth's loving family, he was shielded from his true reality throughout his entire life. His upbringing in an idyllic family shielded him from his past, aligning with Freud's observation that such fantasies arise from a deep-seated reluctance to confront reality.⁸ Professor Lutz Goetzmann describes Oedipus's hostile interaction with Laius was an "external event that [is] used as [a] representative for the unrepresented . . . a mobilization of a dispositive for action on the edge of the void, as an effect of this void," revealing that his violence stems from his trauma at the hands of Laius.⁹ It appears that certain situations have the potential to "awaken the trauma and reveal[] the full impact of the disaster" especially if someone has lived a false reality their entire life.¹⁰ Because Oedipus is aware of his prophecy, upon hearing it he is faced with a decision, "[everyone] will eventually have to make sense of the prophetic label and decide whether to accept it, resist it, become it, or overcome it," and this ultimatum combined with his trauma and inner compulsions impacts his choices.¹¹ Ultimately, Oedipus' unresolved trauma at the hands of Laius subconsciously shapes his decisions and fuels his violent tendencies.

Oedipus' most significant flaw is his ignorance and poor judgment, as reflected in his rash decisions that seal his fate. In situations where an inner compulsion or hypnotic suggestion impels someone to act a certain way: "these very circumstances also serve to bring it about that he does whatever it is that he

6 Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 28.

7 John Steiner, "The Trauma and Disillusionment of Oedipus," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 99, no. 3 (2018): 555–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207578.2018.1452570>.

8 Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* 14, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 91.

9 Lutz Goetzmann, "The Crises of Oedipus," *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 92, no.1 (2023): 114, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332828.2023.2187580>.

10 Steiner, "The Trauma and Disillusionment," 565.

11 Richard W. Bargdill, "Fate and Destiny: Some Historical Distinctions Between the Concepts," *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* 26, no. 1-2 (2006): 218, <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0091275>.

does.”¹²After Oedipus makes the decision to kill King Laius, he seems to reconsider his action, believing there may be potential consequences. When Oedipus says “If that stranger and Laius were kin . . . [what] man is more miserable than I?” his poor judgement is reflected and his acknowledgement that he was fully ignorant to the severity of his action, and that he only second guessed himself after he considered its consequence.¹³As argued before, when an agent acts on any decision, they are accountable, or culpable. Zimmerman breaks down his theory of culpable ignorance, where he explains that an actor is culpable for their ignorant behavior and for “behaving as [they] did, even though [they were] ignorant” and for being unaware that their behavior is morally wrong.¹⁴ This assumes that an individual is at fault for behaving “ignorantly only if [they are] culpable for being ignorant . . . and [if] they were in control of that [action].”¹⁵ Zimmerman acknowledges that no one can be directly to blame for their ignorance but “if one is culpable for something but was only in indirect control of it, then one is indirectly, and only indirectly, culpable for it” as well as being indirectly accountable for their ignorance.¹⁶ He continues, mentioning that “if one is indirectly, and only indirectly, culpable for something, X, then one is directly culpable for something else, Y, of which X was a consequence.”¹⁷ Oedipus is only indirectly culpable of fulfilling his prophecy because he is directly culpable for his ignorance which led to the death of his father and his marriage to his mother. Although Oedipus is indirectly accountable for each consequence of his actions, he is directly culpable for his ignorance.

Long before Oedipus, the audience becomes aware of the truth through dramatic irony and metaphor, representing Oedipus’ shortsightedness. Jocasta, Oedipus’ wife and mother, received a prophecy like his own, foreshadowing the truth of their relationship. Jocasta was warned by a prophet that her son would grow to kill her husband, Laius, and take her hand in marriage. Here, the audience is becoming aware that the two received the same prophecy, and this foreshadowing doubles as a form of dramatic irony, as even the audience has a better grasp of the truth than Jocasta and Oedipus. She believes that they evaded their fate by having their child killed: “thus, Apollo never caused that child to kill his father, and it was not Laius’ fate to die at the hands of his son, as he had feared.”¹⁸ Due to this reasoning and her alleged success of besting destiny, Jocasta tells Oedipus that he should “have no dread of [prophecies]” because the one she was given did not come true, so she believes.¹⁹ The irony of Jocasta consoling Oedipus suggests

12 Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities,” 830.

13 Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 28.

14 Zimmerman, “Moral Responsibility,” 414.

15 Zimmerman, “Moral Responsibility,” 414.

16 Zimmerman, “Moral Responsibility,” 415.

17 Zimmerman, “Moral Responsibility,” 415.

18 Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 25.

19 Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 25.

that both characters are blind to reality and are too ignorant to piece together the truth, ultimately conveying the blatant disregard of the truth. As an audience, it is hard to believe that Oedipus could be so blind, even upon hearing his wife (mother) received the same prophecy. Again, Jocasta and Oedipus are ignorant to their true relationship, and Oedipus' self-blinding with Jocasta's brooches represents her contribution to Oedipus' ignorance through her misleading influence regarding prophecies. Oedipus says, once he is blinded, "no more shall you look on the misery about me, the horrors of my own doing! . . . too long been blind to those [for] whom I was searching!" representing his guilt towards believing Jocasta and his indirect culpability of fulfilling the prophecy.²⁰ Tiresias, the blind seer, also plays into the metaphor of blindness as ignorance. Oedipus mocks Tiresias' lack of vision, though Tiresias argues that Oedipus is truly blind by mentioning "I say that you, with both your eyes, are blind . . . you do not even know the blind wrongs that you have done," furthering the metaphor of a physically blind man being able to see the truth about Oedipus more clearly than Oedipus himself.²¹ Since Oedipus has the truth right in front of him, his seeming perpetual blindness shows his ignorance of his true character: "to know one's destiny is to have some insight into what one could be by envisioning what one already is."²² When Oedipus finally realizes the significance of his actions, he holds himself fully accountable by blinding and exiling himself. The dramatic irony of Oedipus' truth and the metaphor of sight and blindness helps the audience recognize Oedipus' ignorance and understand the truth long before he does, highlighting his indirect culpability of certain actions but his direct culpability of ignorance.

The theories of moral responsibility, alternative paths and culpable ignorance can help to understand the story of Oedipus, as his inner compulsions and trauma are responsible for the consequences he faces. Through his self-inflicted punishment at the end of the play, Oedipus himself acknowledges his guilt and cannot live with his shame. His downfall represents the tension between fate and free-will, as he makes decisions driven by inner compulsions and external circumstances that fulfill his fate and inflict the consequences of his actions. His exile and blinding show his moral responsibility and accountability; his pattern of rash decisions and strong characteristics make it impossible for him to act otherwise; his direct responsibility for his ignorance and indirect culpability for the consequences represent that Oedipus must be held accountable for his decisions, no matter what was behind them. Knowing that fate and free will can act simultaneously despite contributions to one's decision like coercion or ignorance, these actors should still be held accountable for their actions. Thus, Oedipus' story ultimately serves as a cautionary tale about the limits of knowledge, the power of destiny, and the enduring responsibility that comes with human agency.

20 Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 45-46.

21 Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 14.

22 Bargdill, "Fate and Destiny," 217.

Realism and Liberalism as Catalysts

Argentina's Withdrawal from the WHO

[NICOLE BUGRIMENKO]

The World Health Organization (WHO) is an intergovernmental organization that encourages cooperation among states and handles global health issues. Shortly after Donald Trump's inauguration, the United States began a process of withdrawal from the WHO after an executive order was signed by President Trump. Currently, under President Javier Milei, Argentina is also planning to withdraw from the WHO. President Javier Milei and Donald Trump have continuously criticized the WHO, particularly regarding the WHO's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as concerns over the organization's alleged influence by China. This raises an important question: Why do global actors, such as national governments, withdraw from international organizations like the World Health Organization, and what factors influence their decision-making and behavior in this context? Argentina's decision to withdraw from the WHO under President Javier Milei is driven by a desire for national sovereignty and ideological alignment with Donald Trump, which can be understood through liberalism's focus on international cooperation and realism's emphasis on state interests and power in a fragmented global system.

Donald Trump and Javier Milei share a close ideological and personal relationship characterized by mutual admiration and shared political views. Following Trump's recent inauguration as president of the United States, Argentina has increasingly mirrored U.S. policies in several areas. Both presidents are described as "dismissive of 'wokeism' and supportive of cost-cutting and deregulation."¹ They are also described as "climate skeptics," and after Trump's re-election in November, Argentina's withdrawal from the UN climate talks in Azerbaijan raised concerns that President Milei might replicate Trump's decision

1 James Grainger, Leila Macor, "Trump and Milei: An Ideological Match, but Can They Work Together?" *Buenos Aires Times*, January 18, 2025, <https://www.batimes.com.ar/news/argentina/trump-and-milei-an-ideological-match-but-can-they-work-together.phtml>.

to exit the Paris Agreement on climate change.² On January 22, 2025, Trump signed an executive order initiating a year-long process to withdraw the United States from the WHO in response to what he deemed the organization's mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic.³ Brad Wenstrup, who is the Chairman of the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic and a former U.S. Representative, said, "the WHO [denied] that COVID-19 was spread via human-to-human transmission, [a claim] based entirely on the word of the Chinese government" and "delayed naming COVID-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern" early on enough.⁴ Brad Wenstrup also claims that this occurred because "the Chinese Communist Party told them the spread was under control" and that "when the WHO produced a report evaluating the possible origins of COVID-19, it became unquestionably evident that the entire report was nothing but more Chinese propaganda."⁵ As Assistant Administrator for Global Health at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Dr. Atul Gawande claims, "we want respect for our sovereignty, and so we also limit how much the WHO can control or demand things of us."⁶ Argentina's and the United States' shared concerns over the WHO's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and affiliation with China have reinforced their mutual stance on limiting external influence and asserting national sovereignty.

Two key theories in international relations—liberalism and realism—offer explanations for Argentina's and the United States' behavior and the dynamics of global cooperation concerning the World Health Organization. Realism is an international relations theory that emphasizes the pursuit of power and national interests as the primary drivers of state behavior. Realism would explain Argentina's decision to withdraw from the WHO as a reflection of the state's desire to prioritize its sovereignty and national interests. Realists argue that states act to prioritize power and security. Argentina likely views the WHO as a mechanism that could undermine its autonomy, especially if it perceives external influences such as China's involvement as contrary to its interests. Alternatively, liberalism is a theory that primarily focuses on cooperation between states and emphasizes the role of international institutions, democracy, and economic interdependence to promote peace and stability. Liberals emphasize the significance of multinational corporations, international non-governmental organizations, and individuals as

2 "Five Ways in Which Argentina's Milei Has Mirrored Trump," *France 24*, June 2, 2025, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250205-five-ways-in-which-argentina-s-milei-has-mirrored-trump>.

3 Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli, "Three Ways That Argentina's Milei Is Trump's Doppelgänger," *WOLA*, <https://www.wola.org/analysis/three-ways-that-argentinas-milei-is-trumps-doppelganger/>.

4 House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, "Hearing Wrap Up: The World Health Organization's Flawed Framework Must Be Reformed," December 14, 2023, <https://oversight.house.gov/release/hearing-wrap-up-the-world-health-organizations-flawed-framework-must-be-reformed/>.

5 House Committee, "Hearing Wrap Up."

6 House Committee, "Hearing Wrap Up."

important actors in political systems. Liberals argue that it is in a state's best interest to work together to address common challenges through diplomacy, trade, security arrangements, and, most importantly, interdependence. Liberals would interpret Argentina's withdrawal from the WHO as a short-sighted and potentially damaging decision that undermines international cooperation.

Argentina's decision to withdraw from the World Health Organization (WHO) can be best understood as a strengthening step for increased sovereignty and control over its own policies through a realist lens. The realism theory emphasizes that states act in their personal self-interest, prioritizing power and security over global cooperation. As claimed in the article *National Identity and Public Attitudes Toward the World Health Organization* by Gal Arieli, "The pandemic will strengthen the state and reinforce nationalism" as the COVID-19 pandemic drove countries, particularly powerful ones such as the United States, to act in a way that reinforced their sovereignty.⁷ Similarly, wealthy states, such as the U.S, that prioritized domestic vaccine access "used the rhetoric of nationalism to justify their decision to prioritize access of members of their own nations to the COVID-19 vaccine rather than cooperating globally by sharing vaccines."⁸ This further exacerbates the realist idea of prioritizing self-interest and that states prioritize their populations over global cooperation.

A rising divide between nationalist and globalist governments shows that states are prioritizing their own interests over commitment to international institutions like the WHO. While Argentina's contribution to the WHO is relatively small (\$8 million for the 2024-25 biennium), the U.S. has provided significant contributions to the WHO, amounting to over \$260 million in assessed contributions.⁹ Therefore, both countries will now be able to redirect these funds for their own benefit rather than contributing to the organization. Furthermore, the division between nationalist states, like the U.S., and globalist entities, such as the European Union, further reinforces realism's core tenet that state actions are primarily driven by the seeking of sovereignty and national interests, as "the nationalists are critical of the WHO and, in the case of the United States, even left the organization temporarily, while the globalists, like the leaders of the EU, support the WHO."¹⁰ The growing divide between nationalist states, such as the U.S. and Argentina, and more globalist entities highlights the realist belief that nations act based on their perceived national interests, even if it means distancing themselves

7 Gal Arieli, "National Identity and Public Attitudes toward the World Health Organization," *Oxford University Press, Oxford Academic*, March 11, 2023, <https://academic.oup.com/ijpor/article-abstract/35/1/edad004/7076106?redirectedFrom=fulltext>.

8 Arieli, "National Identity and Public Attitudes."

9 Elaine Ruth Fletcher, "Argentina Withdraws from WHO, Executive Board Pauses Approval of New Resolutions Pending Cost Reviews," *Health Policy Watch, Independent Global Health Reporting*, May 2, 2025, <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/argentina-withdraws-from-who-executive-board-pauses-approval-of-new-resolutions-pending-cost-reviews/>.

10 Arieli, "National Identity and Public Attitudes."

from international organizations that previously encouraged cooperation.

On the contrary, from a liberal's perspective, the lack of cooperation between states is a setback for global governance. Liberals would focus on overall gains and would argue that the benefits of multilateral cooperation far outweigh the perceived advantages of unilateral decision-making because there is a "need for international cooperation and communication to ensure the health of all the world's citizens."¹¹ Moreover, while both countries spend significant amounts of money on the organization and still criticize the WHO's handling of the pandemic, liberals may argue that "alleged missteps are an unavoidable part of the politics of international cooperation."¹² From a liberal's perspective, intergovernmental organizations such as the WHO are crucial for fostering cooperation during global challenges. Argentina's exit could be seen as a retreat from the collective effort to address global health cooperatively due to domestic political pressures or ideological shifts rather than rationality. However, Argentina's withdrawal from the WHO could also reflect a positive shift as it provides Argentina with an opportunity to strengthen its bilateral relationship with the U.S. by aligning with its values. Currently, "the United States is Argentina's third-largest trading partner," and "Trump's and Milei's alliance is poised to be influential, especially given the lack of other strong U.S. allies in Latin America," allowing both the U.S. and Argentina to strengthen a vital and mutually beneficial bilateral relationship.¹³ Therefore, leaving the WHO may bring the U.S. and Argentina closer together, potentially consolidating political and economic ties.

Although there may be a significant improvement in international relations between Argentina and the U.S., realist theory may predict that two actors leaving an international organization that is responsible for improving public health may set a dangerous precedent for other states and the survival of the World Health Organization. While Argentina's withdrawal may align with U.S. skepticism, it could isolate Argentina from global health cooperation, limiting its influence and future collaboration in international frameworks and potentially deepening global fragmentation. Additionally, the WHO may experience a weaker global influence and, therefore, have increased trouble coordinating international health responses due to decreased financial contributions and political support from states. Furthermore, it may cause other states to follow Argentina and the U.S., which can diminish overall global cooperation as a result of bystander countries observing this shift and seeing that prioritizing national sovereignty over multilateralism may be politically advantageous. This trend could encourage other

11 Donald Lien and Joseph Kortsch, "The Future of the World Health Organization: China and the United States Square Off," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 15, no. 4 (2020): 520-29, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1871191X-bja10047>.

12 Lien and Kortsch, "The Future of the World Health Organization."

13 "The New Relationship between the United States and Argentina," *Latin American Foreign Direct Investment*, January 12, 2025, <https://latamfdi.com/relationship-between-the-united-states-and-argentina/>.

nations, particularly those with rising nationalist sentiments, to follow Argentina and withdraw from critical international organizations.

The Sound of Chicago

Chuck Berry and Chess Records

[SAWYER KUZMA]

The 1950s was a defining era for American music, especially in Chicago, where blues and rock became increasingly popular with the city's growing Black population. Among the countless artists of the time, one stood out: Chuck Berry. By utilizing themes of youth, adventure, and romance in his lyrics, he was able to draw the attention of white audiences, a feat for African American artists at the time. His partnership with the iconic Chess Records – a record label described as “one of the greatest independent labels in history” by Guinness – allowed Berry to skyrocket to fame, selling millions of records during his time with the label.¹ As Chess Records reached the global stage, so too did Berry. In the present day, he is widely regarded as “the father of rock and roll,” as noted by NPR’s Audie Cornish.² By considering the historical context of the Chicago music scene and analyzing the pull Berry’s lyrics had on white audiences, it is possible to observe the immense impact Chuck Berry had on the city’s music scene. With the iconic Chess Records beside him, Chuck Berry became one of America’s most well-known artists and set the standard for generations of musicians to come by relating to American youth with his lyrics, rhythm, and persona.

Chuck Berry was born in 1926 in St. Louis, Missouri, the great-grandchild of former enslaved people.³ At the time, St. Louis was a heavily segregated city, and Berry would eventually leave for California in 1944, only to be arrested for armed

1 Paul McGuinness, “Roll Over, Beethoven: Chess Records And The Rock’n’Roll Revolution,” *uDiscoverMusic*, February 10, 2024, www.udiscovermusic.com/in-depth-features/chess-records-rock-n-roll-revolution/.

2 Audie Cornish, “Chuck Berry Immortalized On Voyager Space Mission,” *NPR*, March 20, 2017, www.npr.org/2017/03/20/520862763/chuck-berry-immortalized-on-voyager-mission-in-space.

3 “Chuck Berry,” *Biography*, Hearst Magazine Media, March 26, 2021, www.biography.com/musicians/chuck-berry.

robbery.⁴ In 1947, Berry was released from prison after serving three years and returned to his hometown to work for his father's construction business until the mid-1950s, when he began taking regular trips to Chicago, entranced by the city's local music scene.⁵ Around the same time, thousands of other African Americans were moving north and west in what is now called the Great Migration, seeking employment and freedom from racial violence.⁶ One of the major destinations for African Americans during this time was Chicago, which had been flooded with Black folk music since the 1910s with the first wave of this mass movement. It was in Chicago that Chuck Berry met Muddy Waters, a famous blues musician who also came up from the South to pursue a career in music. Muddy Waters was the one who recommended Berry to Chess Records.⁷ It was also at the suggestion of Muddy Waters that Berry released his first song, "Maybellene," which reached No. 1 on R&B charts in America and earned him a contract with Chess Records.⁸ This release sparked Berry's road to fame, a journey that began with his partnership with Chess Records.

Throughout the mid-twentieth century, Chess Records signed many Black artists who became foundational in the creation of Chicago Blues, such as Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and Etta James. Bought in 1950 by Jewish brothers Leonard and Philip Chess, who immigrated to the U.S. from Poland, Chess Records was previously known as Aristocrat Labels.⁹ After purchasing the company, the brothers renamed it after their family name, which had been anglicized from Czyz.¹⁰ Despite not being African American themselves, the brothers quickly found themselves surrounded by Black culture in Chicago, especially after Leonard's purchase of the Macambo Lounge in a predominantly Black neighborhood.¹¹ This connection with the African American community is what led to the Chess brothers' interest in blues and rock, and became their first step into the music industry. The company moved quickly, becoming successful nearly overnight with hits such as "My Foolish Heart," "Juke," and *Rocket 88*.¹² Although it would not be until 1955 that the Chess brothers met Chuck Berry, he was quickly brought into the fold once introduced and together they produced several hit singles including "Johnny B Goode," "Rock'n'Roll Music," and "Sweet Sixteen," all of which, McGuinness claims, assisted in broadening Chess Record's scope past their central Black

4 "Chuck Berry," *Biography*.

5 "Chuck Berry," *Biography*.

6 "The Great Migration (1910-1970)," *National Archives*, National Archives and Records Administration, June 28, 2021, www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/migrations/great-migration.

7 "Chuck Berry," *Biography*.

8 "Chuck Berry," *Biography*.

9 McGuinness, "Roll Over, Beethoven."

10 McGuinness, "Roll Over, Beethoven."

11 McGuinness, "Roll Over, Beethoven."

12 McGuinness, "Roll Over, Beethoven."

audience.¹³

Chuck Berry's appeal to white audiences was not simply a coincidence but rather a result of his youthful lyrics that told stories of a life he never lived. With his lyrics about romance, dancing, adventure, and implied sexual activities, Berry captivated the youth of America. This is especially apparent in his hit song "Sweet Little Sixteen," which tells the story of a fashionable teenage girl who sought out famous musicians. Although many interpreted this song, along with many of Berry's others, as a glamorization of this lifestyle, Fryer claims that his lyrics contained a sense of distance and irony that criticized the actions of his song's protagonists.¹⁴ This distance is clear in the song's second and third verses where Berry writes, "She's just got to have / About a half a million / Framed autographs [...] She's got the grown-up blues / Tight dresses and lipstick / She's sportin' high heel shoes / Oh, but tomorrow morning / She'll have to change her trend / And be sweet sixteen / And back in class again."¹⁵ In these lyrics, Berry pokes fun at the girl's enthusiasm, writing "she's just got to have" and emphasizing her excessive need to chase fame. The third verse solidifies this almost mocking tone by reminding the listener that, as much fun as she has, she is still just a girl who has to go back to school when the night is over. In this sense, Berry does not take the girl's passion seriously and implies she is trying to grow up too fast, which is apparent in his saying, "She's got the grown-up blues." The themes of youth that Berry approaches in his lyrics spoke to his initial audience of Chicago's large Black community, putting him at the top of the rhythm and blues charts. His high position on music charts then exposed his music to a wider audience, including white youth. This white audience was captured by the themes of Berry's music, which "[transferred] the repression of blacks, economically and socially, to the repression of youth by adult authority," as can be seen in the rebellious narrative of "Sweet Little Sixteen."¹⁶ Berry took his personal experiences and translated them into a narrative that was more relatable to a white audience, allowing him to find a much wider listening base than other artists of his time. By analyzing the lyrics of "Sweet Little Sixteen," we can understand how Berry criticized the American teenage culture of obsession and sexual maturity, despite becoming a symbol for it himself, and reached a wider audience than other Black artists of his time.

Chuck Berry became not only a symbol of teenage culture and sexual promiscuity but also an iconic figure of Chicago's music scene. Today, Berry remains a legendary musician across the globe, spanning far past his origin city of Chicago. In fact, his influence has reached billions of miles past Earth with the aid of Voyager 1 and 2. In 1977, NASA launched these spacecraft, each carrying a gold-plated record with examples of human culture such as samples of music,

13 McGuinness, "Roll Over, Beethoven."

14 Paul H. Fryer, "'Brown-Eyed Handsome Man': Chuck Berry and the Blues Tradition," *Phylon* 42 no. 1, (1981): 60-72, <https://doi.org/10.2307/274885>.

15 Chuck Berry, "Sweet Little Sixteen," *One Dozen Berrys*, Chess Records, 1958.

16 Fryer, "'Brown-Eyed Handsome Man.'"

nature sounds, and people talking.¹⁷ The goal of these records, called the Voyager Golden Records, was to provide knowledge of human life to any extraterrestrial life forms that may come across them. Placed alongside Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, Berry's music was chosen to represent humanity and preserved with the hope that one day, long after we are gone, we may be remembered. This honor speaks to the impact that Chuck Berry had on not only American music but rock and roll music around the world, and perhaps beyond.

Known to many as the father of rock and roll, Chuck Berry defined Chicago's music scene in the 1950s and '60s with the help of Chess Records, an iconic American recording company. By appealing to American youth with his glamorous lyrics and infectious rhythms, Berry widened Chess Records' audience to include both African Americans and white people, and in doing so brought rock and roll to millions of people around the world. Today, Chuck Berry is remembered as a pioneer of one of music's most popular genres and a massive inspiration to legendary bands such as the Rolling Stones and the Beatles. And perhaps when humans are forgotten as a blip in the grand scheme of the universe, it will be Chuck Berry's voice that remains an artifact of our species as he continues to inspire the universe with echoes of "*Go, go, go, Johnny, go.*"

17 Cornish, "Chuck Berry."

Barnes v. Felix

A Legal Analysis of Excessive Force under the Fourth Amendment

[ADRIANA VOLOSHCHUK]

On April 28, 2016, Ashtian Barnes, a 24-year-old African American, was fatally shot by Officer Roberto Felix on the side of a tollway in Houston, Texas.¹ At 2:40 pm, Barnes was pulled over for multiple tollway violations attached to his silver Toyota Corolla, which was rented in his girlfriend's name.² When asked for the registration of the car, Barnes explained that the vehicle was not his and began searching the passenger seat for the requested paperwork.³ Officer Felix responded by telling Barnes to "stop digging around" and claimed to smell marijuana, although no illegal substances were discovered following the incident.⁴ After failing to find the registration for the leased vehicle, Barnes suggested that they search the trunk instead.⁵ At this point, Felix opened the door of the driver's seat and placed one foot onto the car.⁶ Instead of exiting the vehicle, Barnes, however, turned on his left blinker, signaling that he was planning to merge back onto the highway.⁷ Felix responded by drawing his gun to Barnes' head and shouted, "Don't fucking move!"⁸ As Barnes began to drive forward, Officer Felix jumped onto the car with both feet and began shooting into the vehicle with no visibility to where he was aiming.⁹ One of the bullets

1 *Barnes v. Felix*, 91 F.4th 393 (U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, 2024). For the footage of the encounter, (note: content is graphic), see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gbM_22fUbY.

2 *Barnes v. Felix*, 91 F.4th 393, 395.

3 *Barnes v. Felix*, 91 F.4th 393, 395.

4 *Barnes v. Felix*, 91 F.4th 393, 395.

5 *Barnes v. Felix*, 91 F.4th 393, 395.

6 *Barnes v. Felix*, 91 F.4th 393, 395.

7 *Barnes v. Felix*, 91 F.4th 393, 395.

8 *Barnes v. Felix*, 91 F.4th 393, 395.

9 *Barnes v. Felix*, 91 F.4th 393, 395.

hit Barnes in the torso and, at 2:57 pm, he was pronounced dead at the scene.¹⁰

Janice Hughes Barnes, Individually and as Representative of the Estate of Ashtian Barnes, Deceased (plaintiff) filed a claim against Officer Roberto Felix, County of Harris, Texas (defendant) alleging a constitutional violation.¹¹ Plaintiff sought to assert that the seizure of Barnes by Felix – the shooting – was “unreasonable” and therefore violated Barnes’ Fourth Amendment rights.¹² However, the District Court held that because Felix feared for his life once the vehicle was put in motion, his use of force was justified, and he was granted qualified immunity.¹³ It is to be noted that the District Court used a mode of analysis in Fourth Amendment jurisprudence known as the “moment of the threat” doctrine, which means that the events preceding the moment that an officer felt threatened are irrelevant to the conclusion of whether his use of force was reasonable. This contradicts the federal precedent established by *Scott v. Harris*, which introduced the “totality of the circumstances” doctrine. Using the former standard, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the decision of the lower court.¹⁴ The legal question in both the District Court and the Court of Appeals was whether the use of force by Felix was reasonable, to which they found that it was. However, the appellant, in their appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court (also known as a writ of certiorari) posed a different, very narrow legal question – whether courts should apply the “moment of the threat” doctrine or instead utilize the “totality of the circumstances.”¹⁵ Thus, the Supreme Court granted this case on the merits – if the petitioner prevails, the case will be sent back to the district court for retrial.

In this paper, I will argue on behalf of the petitioner, Ashtian Barnes. Despite the claim by the respondent that the Fifth Circuit is bound to abide by the “moment of the threat” doctrine as held by *Harmon v. City of Arlington*, this directly contradicts the mode of analysis required by federal law, which demands the “totality of the circumstances” doctrine as held by *Scott v. Harris*. Moreover, the killing of a nondangerous fleeing suspect defies federal precedent under *Tennessee v. Garner* and further erodes confidence in our law enforcement.

Although *Harmon v. City of Arlington* does not coin the phrase “moment of the threat,” it does establish the following precedent for the Fifth Circuit – the “brief interval” in which the officer’s life is considered to be at risk is the superseding factor in determining whether an officer met the reasonableness standard when

10 *Barnes v. Felix*, 91 F.4th 393, 395.

11 *Barnes v. Felix*, 91 F.4th 393, 396.

12 *Barnes v. Felix*, 91 F.4th 393, 396.

13 *Barnes v. Felix*, 91 F.4th 393, 396.

14 *Barnes v. Felix*, 91 F.4th 393, 397.

15 Reply Brief for Petitioner, *Barnes v. Felix*, No. 23-1239 (Supreme Court of the United States, filed August 27, 2024), 8, https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/23/231239/323566/20240828110005330_Barnes%20Reply%208-27-24%20Final.pdf.

deciding to employ excessive force.¹⁶ The examination of facts which occurred before this window is either irrelevant or merely performative.¹⁷ Indeed, *Harmon*, which is factually quite similar to *Barnes*, concluded that Officer Bau Tran (appellee) did not violate the Fourth Amendment rights of Terrance Harmon (appellant) when he shot him for fleeing a seizure. The court held that the “brief interval—when Tran [was] clinging to the accelerating SUV” is the only moment that the court must consider “to determine whether Tran reasonably believed he was at risk of serious physical harm.”¹⁸ Although the Fifth Circuit heavily relies on this precedent, the concurring opinion of *Barnes* expresses significant hesitancy to employ such a limiting mode of analysis. Indeed, the usage of the “moment of the threat” doctrine is only employed by three other federal Circuit Courts – the remaining eight utilize the “totality of the circumstances” doctrine which was established by *Scott v. Harris*.¹⁹ Therefore, the legal question presented to the Supreme Court seeks to address a clear split between the federal Circuit Courts and their methodology in addressing claims of excessive force.

Under *Scott v. Harris*, the Supreme Court established that the framework for assessing the reasonableness of an officer’s use of deadly force is a “fact-intensive endeavor” that “depends on the . . . circumstances of every case.”²⁰ The ruling held that the decision made by respondent – Officer Harris – to drive into the petitioner’s car – Timothy Scott – during a high-speed chase and thus paralyzing him in the process, did not violate the petitioner’s Fourth Amendment rights due to the threat he posed to the public.²¹ The court carved out a new mode of analysis known as the “totality of the circumstances” for lower courts to assess whether the use of excessive force is reasonable. For the first time, the Supreme Court accepted video evidence – in this case, dash cam footage – to examine all facts leading up to the alleged use of excessive force. The court examined the following facts which all occurred before the alleged (and denied) constitutional violation: respondent clocked petitioner traveling 73 miles per hour in an area with a speed limit of 55 miles per hour – the officer activated his vehicle lights, initiating the seizure, to which the petitioner responded by accelerating, driving at a speed of which exceeded 85 miles per hour.²² Respondent dispatched other officers, who together, attempted to corner Scott in a mall parking lot. The petitioner was able to maneuver the vehicle out of the trap (although he did hit Harris’ car in the process) and returned once again to the highway.²³ After 6 minutes of a high-speed chase,

16 *Harmon v. City of Arlington*, 16 F.4th 1164 (U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, 2021).

17 *Barnes v. Felix*, 91 F.4th 393, 401.

18 *Harmon v. City of Arlington*, 16 F.4th 1164.

19 *Barnes v. Felix*, concurring opinion by Justice Higginbotham, 400.

20 *Barnes v. Felix*, concurring opinion by Justice Higginbotham, 400.

21 *Scott v. Harris*, 550 U.S. 372 (2007).

22 *Scott v. Harris*, 550 U.S. 372, 374-75.

23 *Scott v. Harris*, 550 U.S. 372, 375.

Officer Harris radioed his supervisor to ask permission to employ the “Precision Intervention Technique” (PIT) – a method which causes the driver to spin out by hitting the rear end of their vehicle – which was granted.²⁴ Upon being hit, Scott subsequently lost control of the wheel, drove off the highway, and, as a result of the crash, was rendered a quadriplegic.²⁵

Conclusively, in *Scott*, the Court held that “Fourth Amendment analysis is necessarily a ‘fact-bound morass of reasonableness’” as the Justices examined a mountain of evidence which occurred before the excessive force claim.²⁶ In simple terms, events that occur before the use of deadly intervention are relevant. Both the District Court and the Fifth Circuit were obligated by federal law to abide by the “totality of the circumstances” doctrine. Yet they did not.²⁷ Indeed, in *Barnes*, the courts implemented the complete opposite standard – under the “moment of the threat” doctrine, “courts are prohibited from looking to what has transpired up until the moment of the shooting itself.”²⁸ Absent from the jury’s analysis, was the fact that Officer Felix was suspicious of Barnes from the moment he pulled him over; absent from their analysis was the fact that Officer Felix claimed to smell marijuana, despite the fact that no illegal substances were later found in the vehicle, and finally, absent from the jury’s analysis – the decision by respondent to step onto the petitioner’s vehicle which drastically escalated the prospect of a deadly encounter.²⁹ The only relevant facts according to the lower courts were (1) the precise moment when Barnes chose to drive, and (2) the milliseconds before the bullets left the barrel of the gun. Such a narrow interpretation deeply offends *Scott*, and in turn, the Fourth Amendment, which, given its fact-intensive nature, requires a holistic interpretation to conclude whether the use of excessive force was unreasonable.

The respondent’s attorney claimed, in the oral arguments, that ordering this case to be sent back to the district court for retrial (a process known as remanding) is “pointless” because the lower court would rule in favor of Felix regardless – the simple fact that Barnes chose to flee is enough to justify the use of excessive force even under the “totality of the circumstances” doctrine.³⁰ Nevertheless, allowing the killing of a non-felon who bears no significant threat to the officer or the public runs counter to federal precedent held by *Tennessee v. Garner*. The petitioner, Edward Garner, after being chased by police for allegedly breaking and entering a residence, began climbing a chain fence to escape. When

24 *Scott v. Harris*, 550 U.S. 372, 375.

25 *Scott v. Harris*, 550 U.S. 372, 375.

26 *Barnes v. Felix*, concurring opinion by Justice Higginbotham, 400.

27 *Barnes v. Felix*, concurring opinion by Justice Higginbotham, 399.

28 *Barnes v. Felix*, concurring opinion by Justice Higginbotham, 399.

29 *Barnes v. Felix*, concurring opinion by Justice Higginbotham, 400.

30 Supreme Court of the United States, *Oral Argument - Audio: Barnes v. Felix*, Docket No. 23-1239 (Jan. 22, 2025), at 49:06, https://www.supremecourt.gov/oral_arguments/audio/2024/23-1239.

the petitioner (who was unarmed) refused to stop after being ordered to do so, officers Elton Hymon and Leslie Wright responded by shooting Garner in the back of the head, pronouncing him dead at the scene.³¹ Officers claimed to have been operating under a Tennessee statute that demanded that “[i]f, after notice of the intention to arrest the defendant, he either flee or forcibly resist, the officer may use all the necessary means to effect the arrest.”³² However, the Supreme Court overruled this statute, arguing that the killing of a non-dangerous fleeing suspect who poses no harm is a use of excessive force. The legal baseline from *Garner* is that the act of taking a life is only justified if it is done to protect one’s own life or the life of another.³³ Officer Felix did not have any prior knowledge of Barnes, other than the fact that his car had outstanding toll violations which are not considered “arrestable offenses under Section 370.177 of the Texas Transportation Code.”³⁴ Although it is obvious per the video footage that Officer Felix was suspicious of something more nefarious, there was no evidence to suggest that at the moment that the petitioner was pulled over, he posed a threat to the respondent or the public. But immediately after sensing that Barnes was attempting to flee, Felix jumped on the car “lest he get away with driving his girlfriend’s rental car with an outstanding toll fee.”³⁵ Therefore, under the *Garner* principle, it was in fact, unreasonable for Felix to employ deadly force on Barnes, who was a nondangerous fleeing suspect.³⁶

Finally, there is concern that upholding the “totality of the circumstances” doctrine will lead to less aggressive policing and, therefore, result in higher crime. But as *Garner* rightfully pointed out, killing a nondangerous fleeing suspect does nothing to deter crime. On the contrary, unnecessary killings contribute to a further loss of confidence in our police force. Indeed, in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd, trust in officers reached a 27-year low as less than half of Americans are confident in the capabilities of their local law enforcement.³⁷ The first reason for this lack of faith is the inequity in police tactics, as “[b]lack drivers were five times likelier to be searched by police than white drivers.”³⁸ The second concerns the lack of accountability for officers who use excessive force.³⁹ Remarkably, the majority of the police force agrees that the institution requires significant reform, as “according to a recent survey of more than 8000 police officers, 72 percent disagreed with the statement that ‘officers who consistently do a poor job are held

31 *Tennessee v. Garner*, 471 U.S. 1 (1985).

32 *Tennessee v. Garner*, 471 U.S. 1, 3.

33 *Barnes v. Felix*, concurring opinion by Justice Higginbotham, 399.

34 *Barnes v. Felix*, concurring opinion by Justice Higginbotham, 399.

35 *Barnes v. Felix*, concurring opinion by Justice Higginbotham, 401.

36 *Barnes v. Felix*, concurring opinion by Justice Higginbotham, 399.

37 Brief of the Cato Institute as Amicus Curiae in Support of Petitioner, *Barnes v. Felix*, No. 23-1239 (Supreme Court of the United States, filed June 2024), 13, https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/2024-06/Barnes_Final.pdf.

38 Brief of the Cato Institute, *Barnes v. Felix*, 13.

39 Brief of the Cato Institute, *Barnes v. Felix*, 13.

accountable.”⁴⁰ The truth is that training officers to anticipate resistance with every civilian encounter makes the country more dangerous – the “moment of the threat” doctrine extends beyond simple traffic stops, as the police are being called upon to answer an increasingly diverse array of public policy issues, specifically those concerning mental health.⁴¹ The “totality of the circumstances” in its administration holds both civilians and law enforcement accountable – *Scott* is one of many cases that prove law enforcement benefits from this holistic approach to evaluating claims of excessive force.

Given the very narrow legal question presented to the Supreme Court, the petitioner is likely to prevail, given that the ruling of the Fifth Circuit court directly challenges federal precedent established in *Scott v. Harris*. Although the Supreme Court will not determine the factual disputes of the case (whether the seizure of Barnes by Felix was reasonable), it is to be noted that the killing of fleeing misdemeanants is considered illegal as held by *Tennessee v. Garner*.

Officer Felix was previously involved in another fatal shooting in 2007, in which he was likewise granted qualified immunity.⁴² In an interview with MSN, the mother of Ashtian Barnes, Janice Hughes Barnes, expressed her disappointment with recent social justice movements, such as Black Lives Matter, which have been unsuccessful at implementing substantive law enforcement reform – “no one is policing the police,” she states.⁴³ By replacing the “moment of the threat” doctrine with a more expansive mode of analysis, the “totality of the circumstances,” the Supreme Court can minimize the prospect of a deadly police-civilian encounter and ultimately begin the process of restoring faith in a central American institution.

40 Brief of the Cato Institute, *Barnes v. Felix*, 13.

41 Brief of the Texas Civil Rights Project as Amicus Curiae in Support of Petitioner, *Barnes v. Felix*, No. 23-1239 (Supreme Court of the United States, filed June 24, 2024), 4, https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/23/23-1239/315543/20240624121554894_23-1239%20TCRP%20Amicus%20Brief%20Final.pdf.

42 David Feith, “Split-Second Decision: Supreme Court Returns to the Question of Police Killings,” *MSN*, April 22, 2024, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/split-second-decision-supreme-court-returns-to-the-question-of-police-killings/ar-AA1xsh04>.

43 Feith, “Split-Second Decision.”

[Biographies]

Author Biographies

Matthew J. Dillon '25

“JULIAN OF NORWICH’S ANXIETY: SIN AND SALVATION”

Matthew is a recent graduate from Mundelein, Illinois. He majored in History and double minored in Politics and Medieval and Renaissance Studies. Matthew submitted to *Inter-Text* because he was encouraged to do so by his professor. During his free time, he enjoys reading, playing the piano and organ, and volunteering at Feed My Starving Children.

Noa Helmer '29

“SALADIN: A MEDIEVAL ARCHETYPE OF RELIGIOUS MUSLIM LEADERSHIP”

Noa is a freshman from Skokie, Illinois. She is majoring in Psychology and double minoring in Legal Studies and Politics. One of her history professors informed her of the Journal. Prior to that class, she had never written a history paper; being proud of the growth she made throughout the semester, she decided to submit the piece she enjoyed writing the most. Noa is a member of the College’s Figure Skating Club and prefers to spend her free time skateboarding, reading, cooking, playing with her cat, and hanging out with her friends.

Peter Piper Huizenga '28

“ALL OUR FEET ARE STILL IN THAT POOL: REMEMBERING A PANDEMIC IN THE INFORMATION AGE”

Peter Piper is a junior from Chicago, Illinois. They are double majoring in Anthropology and French. They submitted their paper to *Inter-Text* because they believe that COVID-19 marks a pivotal point not just in their life, but in the lives of many, if not most, people around the world. Peter Piper is passionate about what is remembered, especially when considering that the things that are forgotten tend to be critical moments regarding social justice and violence against marginalized communities, as is the case for 2020 and the rise in the Black Lives Matter movement. On campus, they are a part of Students for Justice in Palestine, *Tusitala*, and the Songwriter’s Club. In their spare time, they enjoy creating fiber arts and writing poetry, and organizing social justice initiatives. Peter Piper believes in Palestinian liberation and the liberation of all peoples now and in communal memory.

Paige Marie Humphrey '27

"THE CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE AND THEORETICAL LIMITATIONS"

Paige is a junior from Sante Fe, New Mexico. She is double majoring in International Relations and Religion. Paige submitted her paper to *Inter-Text* to communicate more broadly the struggles faced in Cambodia that are often forgotten. She is a member of the Student Academic Advisory Committee for the Religion Department, Delta Gamma, and works as a research assistant to Professor Chen in the History Department. Outside of school, she enjoys traveling and reading because they help her learn about different cultures, places, and perspectives.

Atala Johnson '28

"RIOT GRRRL AS RHETORICAL INTERVENTION: THE CONSTRUCTION OF GIRLHOOD IN THE 1990S"

Atala is a sophomore from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. She is majoring in Communications and double minoring in Journalism and Print and Digital Publishing. Atala submitted to the Journal out of a deep fascination with the Riot Grrrl movement, driven by a passion for talking about its history of advocacy for women's liberation. She is a member of Alpha Phi and *The Stentor*. At her leisure, she loves to go on walks and hang out with her friends.

Min Kyaw '27

"CONSTITUTIONALIZING THE BARRACKS: HOW MILITARIES ENTRENCH POWER IN THAILAND AND BURMA"

Min is a junior from Yangon, Myanmar. He is majoring in Politics and minoring in Public Policy. He submitted his paper to *Inter-Text* because OneDrive warned him about storage limits, so the paper had to find a new home. On campus, he is a member of WMXM, the Career Center, and International Student Support. Min enjoys reading Victorian literature and watching indie movies.

Tiyandza Senamile Mngomezulu '26

"TRADING IN RESILIENCE: WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA'S INFORMAL ECONOMY"

Tiyandza is a senior from Manzini, Eswatini. She is double majoring in Economics and Theatre and minoring in Urban Studies. She submitted a paper because the role of women in the informal economy has long been an interest of hers, both as a topic of academic inquiry and through personal engagement with questions of gender, labor, and development. She also wanted to share this research beyond the classroom and contribute to broader conversations about economic inequality in the Global South.

She is interested in development economics, urban policy, and grassroots approaches to economic justice, particularly in African contexts. Tiyandza is also passionate about storytelling—both through research and through theatre. She has been a tutor at the Writing Center since her sophomore year, contributes to campus theatre productions and serves as the captain of the dance team. Outside of campus, she enjoys going to see live theater productions downtown, writing, reading in local coffee shops, and trying new eateries with friends.

Juanita Muigai '28

“READING AGAINST THE GRAIN: INTERPRETING HOSTILE SOURCES ON RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE”

Juanita is a sophomore from Nairobi, Kenya. She is double majoring in Neuroscience and Economics. She submitted this paper because it allowed her to explore how dominant institutions shaped and constrained religious identity, while also highlighting the voices that are often obscured in historical records. She was especially interested in contributing a methodological perspective, showing how historians can read against the grain of hostile sources to recover meaning and agency. Juanita approaches her work with a strong interest in how institutions shape identity and how historical narratives are constructed through often biased sources. As a Neuroscience and Economics student, she is especially drawn to analyzing systems of power and behavior across disciplines. Writing this paper has sparked an interest in methodological questions, especially how to read against the grain of hostile archives to recover more nuanced understandings of marginalized communities. She is a member of Umoja, UBA, and Nu Rho Psi. She prefers to spend her spare time reading, cooking, writing, and cycling.

Caitlin Mulcahy '26, Maya Szal '27, Liam Thumser '27, and Lillian VanPelt '27

“PARTISAN BIAS AND POLITICAL DECISION MAKING: ROLE OF IN-GROUP FAVORITISM IN POLITICAL PERCEPTION”

Caitlin is a senior from St. Paul, Minnesota; she is majoring in Psychology and is on the women's soccer team. Maya is a junior from Glenview, Illinois, and is double majoring in Psychology and the Nursing Pathway Program. She is a member of Tri Delta and the Health Professions Program. Liam is a junior from East Dubuque, Illinois, and is double majoring in Neuroscience and Spanish. He serves as Student Body President, and is part of Mock Trial, Nu Rho Psi, and Delta Chi. Lillian is a junior from Greenville, South Carolina, and is double majoring in Psychology and Communication; she is also on the women's soccer team and a part of the Psi Chi Honor Society, Lambda

Pi Eta Honor Society, and the Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society.

They submitted their paper to *Inter-Text* because they were really happy with how their study turned out. When they received the survey results in spring 2025, they were excited to see that many people had responded. The strong participation suggested to them that their data captured real patterns in how people evaluate political information and group identity. The project began as a class assignment in Psychology 222: Research Methods and Statistics, but it quickly became more meaningful to them. Studying partisan bias and in-group favoritism helped them see how psychological processes shape everyday political judgments, especially close to their most recent election. This was a good time to capture polarization in their country because these dynamics influence how people interpret news, candidates, and policies. They are very excited to share this beyond their classroom. They did their research under Professor Nora McLean in the Psychology Department.

Shellane Shettleworth '26

"REPARATIONS FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS: A LOCKEAN DEBATE FOR A NEW POLITICAL ORDER

Shellane is a senior from Montego Bay, Jamaica. They are majoring in Politics and Data Science (Computer Science concentration) with a minor in Asian Studies (Chinese language concentration). They submitted their paper to *Inter-Text* because they wanted to publish a piece of their academic work before graduating and because they believe that discussions about proper reparations and recognition for historical atrocities are important. On campus, they serve as the Co-President of Mock Trial and Treasurer Emeritus of Student Government. At their leisure, they like to read Chinese web novels and watch Asian dramas.

Noah Skoien '28

"GAZA AND RENT: DECLINING PUBLIC OPINION ON ISRAEL AND ZOHRAN MAMDANI'S VICTORY"

Noah is a sophomore from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He is majoring in Politics and History. He submitted his paper because he was proud of the final product and wanted to share it. He is a class of 2028 Senator in Student Government and a member of Delta Chi. Noah loves anything to do with Bob Dylan or the Beatles.

Editor

Biographies

Jillian Beaster '28

Jillian is a sophomore from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She is majoring in Politics and Legal Studies, but is also interested about pursuing Education. Jillian joined *Inter-Text* to immerse herself with a community of curious students interested in writing, research, and the humanities. Outside of the Journal, she is a tutor at the Writing Center, intern at Lake Forest Country Day School, and a student leader for the Law and Public Service Pathway. During her spare time she enjoys reading, taking walks outside (especially during the fall), dancing (for fun) and exploring new places with friends.

Gabriel Benjamin '28

Gabriel is a sophomore from San Francisco, California. He is currently majoring in History. Gabriel joined *Inter-Text* to explore the writing and editing process of the Journal, and to learn new things from a variety of writers. His campus activities include being a member of the Social Justice and Student Empowerment Alliance and serving as the music director for WMXM radio. Outside of academics he enjoys reading, drawing, listening to new music, and playing Dungeons and Dragons.

Nicole Bugrimenko '28

Nicole is a sophomore from Buffalo Grove, Illinois. She is double majoring in Economics and Politics, and minoring in Legal Studies. She joined *Inter-Text* to become more engaged on campus and connect with a community of students who share her interests. Nicole is also excited to learn from the diverse writing styles and perspectives of her peers. Outside of academics, she enjoys watching films, trying new restaurants with friends, and enjoying beach picnics nearby.

Sawyer Kuzma '26

Sawyer is a senior from LaSalle, Illinois. They are double majoring in Environmental Studies and Sociology & Anthropology. Sawyer became an editor to gain experience working in an academic journal and to learn more about the diversity of research in the social sciences and humanities. On campus they are a part of the Concert Band and also serve as a tutor for the Writing Center. Sawyer prefers to spend their free time reading comics while listening to Fall Out Boy.

Arthur Misevic '28

Arthur is a sophomore from Northbrook, Illinois. He is double majoring in Politics and Finance, and minoring in Philosophy. He joined *Inter-Text* because he wanted to improve his skills as a writer and to channel his passion towards an organization. Outside of the Journal he is a member of Delta Chi and the president of the Ukrainian Student Syndicate. During his spare time Arthur enjoys reading, running, writing, working out, and urbxing.

Charlotte Radler '29

Charlotte is a freshman from Winnetka, Illinois. She is currently majoring in History and double minoring in AI and Museum Studies. She joined *Inter-Text* because she wanted the chance to leave a physical mark on the college; Charlotte wanted to create something that would survive beyond her, and creating a journal seemed like a really fun and rewarding way to do that. She is also a member of the Lake Forest Equestrian Team and spends her free time reading, crocheting, baking, and hanging out with her dog.

Juli Rodarte '26

Juli is a senior from Vernon Hills, Illinois. They are majoring in History and double minoring in Education and Medieval and Renaissance Studies. They joined *Inter-Text* because Professor Batzell introduced the Journal in a class they took with him, and it piqued their interest in collaborating with others in an academic project. They are also involved in the rugby club and in the Clio Historical Society. Outside of school, they enjoy listening to excessive amounts of music, watching historical documentaries, reading, and spending time with their friends.

Ayush Sharma '28

Ayush is a sophomore from Pune, India. He is double majoring in Sociology and Anthropology and Computer Science. He joined *Inter-Text* to improve his editing and writing skills, and because he is interested in the humanities. His other campus involvements include Collage Magazine, Varsity Handball, being a DJ for WMXM, and the Computer Science Club. Ayush prefers to spend his free time reading books, listening to and discussing music, art, and literature, and playing basketball.

Annabelle Thompson '28

Annabelle is a sophomore from Lombard, Illinois. She is double majoring in English and History and minoring in Editing and Publishing. Annabelle became an editor for the Journal to gain experience in editing and publishing, which is what she intends to pursue after college. Her campus activities include being a part of the women's soccer team, Student Government and *The Stentor*. Outside of school she prefers to spend her time reading, playing soccer, cuddling her cats, and watching movies with her friends.

Adriana Voloshchuk '27

Adriana is a junior from Northbrook, Illinois. She is double majoring in History and Finance with a concentration in Accounting. Adriana joined *Inter-Text* because she believes being exposed to a diverse range of high quality work will improve her writing skills. Her campus activities include the Clio Historical Society, Omicron Delta Kappa, and the Ukrainian Student Syndicate. Adriana prefers to spend her free time building LEGOs, making spreadsheets, playing Nintendo, and reading news on the political economy.

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