



The Diplomatic Envoy



SPECIAL EDITION
Winter 2021



From the Editor

A Note to the Reader



Thank you very much for taking the time to read The Diplomatic Envoy's 2021 Special Winter Edition.

In such uncertain times, reliable journalism and truthful reporting are more important than ever. Attacks on press freedom are becoming increasingly common, yet journalists around the world continue to put their lives on the line to bring stories to light.

With this special edition of the Envoy, we aim to bring you honest reporting and in-depth analysis from some of our best staff writers. Enclosed are seven stories from around the world that touch upon a variety of global issues from Iranian proxy militias to the impact of COVID-19 on women.

On behalf of the Editorial Board, we hope you enjoy reading our 2021 Winter Edition. If you'd like to become a part of our team, please scan the QR code on the back cover of this magazine or reach out to anybody on the Editorial Board.

Hazard Zet Forward!

Jarrett Dang
Editor-in-Chief



SCHOOL OF DIPLOMACY AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

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WORLD'S LARGEST DEMOCRACY IN PERIL: CHANGING POLITICAL TIDES IN INDIA

Hamzah Khan | Staff Writer



India represents the world's largest democracy, with an approximate population of 1.3 billion people residing in the country. Since the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its leader, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, came into power in 2014, there has been a fundamental reshaping of Indian politics with an increasing trend towards undemocratic governance. Along with initiating an unprecedented assault on press freedom, the government has also targeted the Muslim minority population in India through the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and stripped the only Muslim majority state, Jammu and Kashmir, of its semi-autonomous status, which had been in place since 1950. Crackdowns on the press along with the mass disenfranchisement of minorities go against the values of democracy, putting into question the BJP's democratic agenda. According to the 2020 Democracy Report by the V-Dem Institute in Sweden, "India has continued on a path of steep decline, to the extent it has almost lost its status as a democracy." The report further affirms that in the last ten years, academic freedom in India has declined by 13 percent, while freedom of assembly and protest has declined by 14 percent. The reason for this decline is said to be "the dive in press freedom along with increasing repression of civil society in India associated with the current Hindu-nationalist regime of Prime Minister Narendra Modi." Furthermore, the annual Democracy Index by The Economist's Intelligence Unit labeled India as a "flawed democracy" and revealed that it dropped ten places since 2019, now sitting at 51st on the list of democratic countries. The latest report states "The primary cause of the democratic regression was an erosion of civil liberties in the country."

The current head of government, Narendra Modi, has long been criticized for his Hindu nationalist rhetoric and the policies of the BJP. In 2002, he governed as the Chief Min-

ister of the state of Gujarat during mass anti-Muslim riots, during which 1000 people were killed, The New York Times reports. The United States, United Kingdom, and other European nations subsequently imposed a diplomatic boycott on Modi on the basis that he did little to stop the violence against Muslims in his state, reports The Guardian. This boycott was eventually lifted after he became prime minister in 2014.

...the Indian government shut down the internet and placed Kashmir under the direct control of Parliament

Modi has also received criticism for his close ties to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an extremist paramilitary Hindu nationalist organization, whose goal is to turn India into a "Hindu Rashtra," or a purely Hindu nationalist state, The Wire reports. The RSS has been behind many attacks against Muslims, including the burning of the Babri Mosque in December 1992, another report by The Wire affirms. In the aftermath of the attack, the RSS incited religious riots across India, leaving 2,000 people dead. The BJP politicized these events, and four years later came into power for the first time.

Since Prime Minister Modi's election in 2014, RSS vigilantes have been involved in at least 44 cases of lynching of mostly Muslims who were targeted for eating cows, according to Human Rights Watch. These vigilantes have gone largely unpunished and, in some cases, even been encouraged by BJP leaders, says another report by Human Rights Watch. The legitimization of the Hindu Rashtra has started to take shape in India, especially after the 2019 general elections, in which the BJP won a landslide victory and Modi was re-elected Prime Minister.

In August 2019, the Indian parlia-

ment voted to revoke Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which grants the state of Jammu-Kashmir a semi-autonomous status. New Delhi was then given direct rule over the state, Time reports. According to National Geographic, Article 370 was first adopted in 1950 as a compromise between the Indian government and the Kashmiri people. In the lead-up to the 2019 election, the BJP campaigned heavily on the promise of revoking Article 370.

The repeal of Article 370 is especially alarming because this power was meant to reside with the Jammu-Kashmir state legislature instead of the national parliament. However, the BJP bypassed the state legislature by putting Jammu-Kashmir under presidential rule in June 2018 due to increased violence from pro-Pakistan militant groups in the preceding months, reports BBC News. The crisis resulted in nearly 300 deaths, including 40 police officers who were killed in a suicide bombing by a Pakistani-militant group, according to Time.

The night before the announcement was made, the Indian government shut down the Internet and placed the state under the direct control of the Indian Parliament, Time further reports. Large protests erupted in the streets of Kashmir while the whole state remained under lockdown. Today, over a year later, much of the state is still locked down due to the COVID-19 pandemic while limited internet access has been restored.

In December 2020, Jammu-Kashmir held elections for the first time since the status-quo was changed, which did not go well for the BJP. According to DW, the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), a consolidation of multiple pro-independence political parties, won the majority of seats in the local elections. The turnout was over 51 percent - one of the largest showings in recent history - with nearly six million voters casting ballots. Before the election, the BJP had labeled the PAGD as "anti-nationals" and "looters." The BJP's

goal of establishing a “new Kashmir” was largely rejected by the Kashmiri people, showing that India’s democratic infrastructure has not been entirely eroded and can still be built upon.

The lockdown of Jammu-Kashmir involved the longest internet shut down in history, with 213 days of no access to the outside world. This placed India as the only democracy with such a high record of internet shutdowns, according to BBC News. The internet was shut down 95 times in 2019, with 55 of them in Jammu-Kashmir, and 134 times in 2018. The government has instituted internet lockdowns many times in response to protests in large cities, claiming that this action was to prevent further violence. Others believe that they are “strategically used to clamp down on dissent,” reports DW.

Another incident of suppressing protesters occurred in late 2019 mass protests erupted all over India in response to the parliament’s approval of the CAA. This law prohibits migrants and asylum seekers of Muslim faith from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh from becoming Indian citizens. This is the first citizenship law in India’s history that discriminates against a certain group based on religion. The government cracked down on these protests and labeled them as “anti-nationals” or unpatriotic. The police stormed two Islamic universities where they were recorded beating students protesting the new law, according to Time. At least 23 people died in the anti-CAA protests, most of which took place during altercations with the police.

Delhi, India’s capital, was at the epicenter of public unrest and violence, where almost 53 people died in a clash between Muslims and

Hindus in the CAA protests. According to Foreign Policy, the police blamed the violence on Muslim protesters and accused them of trying to overthrow Modi’s government. Amnesty International released a report on the event stating that the police reacted poorly to riots and did not arrest Hindu nationalists who incited the mob through hate speeches on the streets of Delhi right before the violence broke out. According to BBC News, certain members of the police force were involved in killing protesters allowing mobs to target Muslim homes and businesses. Most of those arrested in the aftermath of the violence were Muslim protesters and activists, while many Hindu nationalists accused of inciting the violence were not apprehended. Instead of condemning the actions of the police, Modi’s government

1.9 million people were left out of the NRC and **did not receive citizenship**, more than half of whom were Muslims

applauded them, BBC News reports.

This kind of crackdown on dissent drew many comparisons to the Chinese government’s brutal repression of protests in Hong Kong, although India’s death toll was much higher, reports India Today. Similar to many authoritarian governments, the BJP labels protesters as unpatriotic and justifies their repression by claiming protests threaten national security. The government shut down the internet whenever they please, significantly crippling activist mobilization and the public’s access to information.

In addition to the CAA, the BJP leadership also expressed interest in implementing a National Registry of Citizens (NRC) throughout the whole country, although the law currently only exists in the state of Assam. The NRC was created to keep track of the population of citizens and illegal immigrants in Assam. In 1971, thousands of refugees from neighboring Bangladesh, a Muslim majority country, fled across the border to Assam during the Bangladesh Liberation War. Anti-immigrant sentiment led to the creation of a registry that allowed anyone who came to Assam before March 1971 to become a citizen, whereas immigrants arriving afterward were to be deported.

The NRC was not enforced until 2015, when the government of Assam reauthorized it and called for the deportation of all illegal immigrants, according to India Today. Many people did not have any documentation that could prove they were born in Assam and were rightful citizens. Accord-



Prime Minister Modi is notorious for anti-Muslim rhetoric and Hindu nationalism.
Courtesy of Duncan C. (Flickr)



Jamia Millia Islamia students protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).
Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

ing to Al Jazeera, 1.9 million people were left out of the NRC and did not receive citizenship, more than half of whom were Muslims. Assam also began building detention centers to house the undocumented people. Ultimately, many people who appealed to courts were declared foreigners without a trial.

About 500,000 people that the NRC excluded from its policy are Hindus. Although they are not citizens under the NRC, they can reapply for citizenship and have their rights restored under the CAA. According to The Times of India, the BJP leaders of Assam have already said the Hindus not included in the NRC will receive citizenship whereas the nearly one million Muslims who remained stateless cannot reapply for citizenship and will either be detained or deported. If the NRC in Assam is implemented on a national level, the CAA could effectively strip millions of Muslims of Indian citizenship and render them stateless.

Although Modi's government has halted the implementation of the NRC, other anti-democratic laws put into question India's status as a democracy. India was founded on ideals of equality for all citizens regardless of religion; however, the rise in Hindu nationalism stoked by the BJP threatens India's democratic future, where a

large minority population has no say in the laws that govern its well-being.

The BJP has also attacked the freedom of the press in India, the worst examples of which can be found in the state of Uttar Pradesh, where the state's Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has often been criticized. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), since the 2019 elections, the crackdown on the press has monumentally worsened. Amitabh Bhattacharya, an Indian journalist, stated, "[The BJP] feels it can do anything with impunity, just because it has won two elections in a row," the report affirms.

Multiple journalists have been unfairly detained on trumped-up charges of conspiracy and sedition. In many cases, journalists have been attacked by riled-up mobs while the police refused to protect them. In certain cases, some police officers have also been involved in detaining and tor-

Without a free press, no country can claim to be a functional democracy as the government is free from accountability

turing journalists, CPJ furthers. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has re-implemented an old law called the Epidemic Diseases Act which allows state governments to punish media organizations for spreading misinformation, according to Indian Express. State governments in Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and other BJP-led states have effectively weaponized this into a new "sedition law" to criminalize dissent. According to The Wire, Adityanath's government has also been accused of extrajudicial killings of protesters, activists, and journalists. These killings have prompted the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to send a letter to the Indian government drawing attention to the unlawful killings of people by authorities in Uttar Pradesh. The letter expresses how members of the UN Office "are extremely concerned about the pattern of events: individuals allegedly being abducted or arrested before their killing, and their bodies bearing injuries indicative of torture."

Without a free press, no country can claim to be a functional democracy as the government is free from accountability. The recent crackdown on journalists has created a fear in the minds of anyone wishing to criticize the government. The BJP's nationalist agenda has left many independent international observers concerned about India's status in the free world. The 2020 Democracy Report states that "the first steps to autocracy involve eliminating media freedom and curtailing civil society." The BJP's treatment of minority groups like Muslims threatens the democratic future of India. While the Kashmir elections are promising, unless further changes are brought about, the Hindu Rashtra initiative may be realized sooner than expected, putting into peril the world's largest democracy.

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HOW SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCES GLOBAL POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

Jasmine DeLeon | Staff Writer

Social media platforms are facing a myriad of criticisms, ranging from accusations of contributing to rising anxiety and suicide rates among American teenagers to profiting from selling personal data and compromising individual privacy. The Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 demonstrated that prominent racial justice and equality movements could be organized through digital activism, which gained widespread support and online engagement. Social media is an instrument of political change, but these changes are dangerously consequential. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Capitol riots in the United States, and increase in political polarization, the world is abandoning the perception that social media does not significantly impact domestic and world politics.

As many aspects of people's lives were forced into the digital realm during the pandemic, social media platforms were utilized even more for entertainment, communication, and connection. According to a New York Times analysis of internet usage from January to March 2020, average daily traffic on Facebook skyrocketed 27 percent and 15.3 percent on YouTube since the first U.S. COVID-19 death. In March, Mark Zuckerberg stated in a conference call with reporters that traffic for video calling "exploded" and messaging, particularly on WhatsApp, "doubled in volume," says an additional New York Times report.

Increased engagement and a subsequent rise in power for social media companies like Facebook have resulted in more sinister consequences: the spread of misinformation and disinformation. In September 2020, the World Health Organization and other United Nations agencies issued a joint statement reiterating a global concern over the COVID-19 'infodemic,' or an "overabundance of information" that has led to the widespread dissemination of misinformation and disinformation. The statement also included a call for member states and stakeholders, including social media

platforms, to combat the infodemic.

Nonetheless, the use of social media platforms has interfered in the integrity of elections, incited political violence, and contributed to the spread of misinformation and political polarization around the world.

Recommendation algorithms in social media affect perceptions that contribute to political polarization. "Right now, social media companies like Facebook profit off of segmenting us and feeding us personalized content that both validates and exploits our biases," according to Yaël Eisenstat, a former CIA analyst, diplomat, and Facebook employee at a TED conference in August 2020. Eisenstat continues, "Their bottom line depends on provoking a strong emotion to keep us engaged, often incentivizing the most inflammatory and polarizing voices, to the point where finding common ground no longer feels possible."

Social media platforms are also breeding grounds for the spread of fake news and misinformation, which also contributes to political division. In 2018, three MIT scholars published a study, based on over a decade of data, that found false news spreads on Twitter six times faster than real news stories. Moreover, false news stories were

...false news stories were found to be 70 percent more likely to be retweeted than real news stories

found to be 70 percent more likely to be retweeted than real news stories.

How people consume their news ultimately affects their perceptions of the world and their political views. According to Pew Research Center, "one-in-five U.S. adults say they often get news via social media." Consumption of false information not only creates a misinformed electorate but ultimately makes find-

...the design of social media recommendation algorithms partly contributed to...political violence

ing common ground and engaging in civil discourse more challenging.

The Markup's Citizen Browser Project found that Facebook users who voted for President Joe Biden and users who voted for President Trump in the 2020 election held different views on the January 6, 2021 U.S. Capitol riots – their respective social media feeds showed stories that catered to each group's political biases. Facebook users with differing political beliefs were also shown stories from different sources altogether. Biden voters were more frequently served sources like The Washington Post, The New York Times, and CNN. Meanwhile, Trump voters were more frequently served sources like The Daily Wire, Fox News, and Breitbart.

In parallel, the design of social media recommendation algorithms partly contributed to the political violence in the U.S. Capitol. Dr. James Kimble, a Communications Professor and propaganda expert at Seton Hall University, stated, "Social media enables you to craft an echo chamber," and that there is a "sense of self-selection where all you hear is what you want to hear and you don't hear your opponents," in a recent interview for The Global Current.

The result, argues Kimble, is "disastrous for public discourse" because varying perspectives "do not collide with each other and thus grow more and more strong and seem true to those people." He includes that discourse must be free from threats of violence, asserting that "some of these tweets flirted with the idea of domestic terrorism or encouraged people to be violent to show up at the Capitol."

The U.S. Capitol riots on January 6, 2021 are considered by some experts to be a result of misinformation campaigns and recommendation

algorithms on social media platforms like Twitter, Parler, and Gab. In an interview with The Diplomatic Envoy, Professor John H. Shannon, J.D., of Seton Hall's Stillman School of Business and an expert in digital transformations impact on business, law, and society has one explanation.

While many criticize social media platforms themselves, **state actors** are also guilty of abusing the platforms to **incite violence**

"One of the great strengths and weaknesses on the planet is you can find people with similar views and ideas and theories. Social media moves geography and time constraints we no longer always have to deal with and bring such communities together."

Political communities, such as terrorist organizations, who organize and recruit worldwide through social media platforms, are evidence of this. In 2016, an internal Facebook analysis of German political groups found that "64% of all extremist group joins are due to our [Facebook's] recommendation tools," according to a Wall

Street Journal report from May 2020.

While many criticize social media platforms themselves, state actors are also guilty of abusing the platforms to incite violence. In some cases, governments targeted people in their own countries. In 2018, the UN published a report saying military leaders in Myanmar used Facebook, a popular platform in the country, to conduct a systematic propaganda campaign against Rohingya Muslims, a minority ethnic group with a history of facing persecution in the Buddhist-majority country.

"The role of social media is significant," according to the UN report. "Facebook has been a useful instrument for those seeking to spread hate, in a context where, for most users, Facebook is the Internet. Although improved in recent months, the response of Facebook has been slow and ineffective. The extent to which Facebook posts and messages have led to real-world discrimination."

Cynthia M. Wong, a former Senior Internet Researcher at Human Rights Watch, explained in the Netflix documentary *The Social Dilemma* that this campaign "helped incite violence against the Rohingya Muslims that included mass killings, burning of entire villages, mass rape, and other serious crimes against humanity

that have led to 700,000 Rohingya Muslims having to flee the country."

Social media can invade many facets of daily living, from forming and cementing political opinions to being used as an instrument to promote genocide. On top of that, investigative journalist Carole Cadwalladr presented a startling judgment in her 2019 Ted Talk about Facebook's role in recent elections. Her conclusion addressed "whether or not it is possible to have a free election again." She stated that "as it stands, I don't think it is."

In September 2020, an internal memo by Sophie Zhang, a former data scientist for the Facebook Site Integrity team, was exposed to the public. Zhang found evidence that foreign governments, political parties, and other actors in Honduras, Azerbaijan, India, Spain, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Ukraine were using fake accounts and/or organizing campaigns on Facebook to influence public opinion and elections. Additionally, Zhang stated that she and her colleagues removed "10.5 million fake reactions and fans from high-profile politicians in Brazil and the U.S. in the 2018 elections."

Further evidence shows that social media is being abused to interfere in elections. According to "Challenging Truth and Trust: A Global In-



ventory of Organized Social Media Manipulation,” a report by the Oxford Internet Institute, there is evidence that out of 48 countries examined, 30 have political parties that are deliberately using computational propaganda on social media platforms during elections or referenda.

Two mainstream examples of this deliberate abuse of social media include Russia’s interference in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election and the United Kingdom’s 2016 referendum to leave the European Union. In both cases, the Internet Research Agency (IRA), a company supported by the Russian government, organized disinformation campaigns by writing and posting fake content and creating thousands of fake social media accounts to spread propaganda. The IRA created accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and other social media platforms. Fake content curated by the IRA was retweeted over a staggering two million times and reached over 288 million views on Twitter. Leading up to the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, Russian posts reached 126 million U.S. Facebook accounts, according to a 2019 Park Advisors report sponsored by the U.S. State Department.

In anticipation of the 2020 Presidential election, Facebook suspended the recommendation tab for political groups to try and avoid another election fiasco. After election day on November 3, Facebook temporarily cut off all political ads in the U.S. in order “to reduce opportunities for confusion or abuse” the company stated. Additionally, from October 29, 2020 to December 9, 2020, Instagram temporarily removed the “Recent” tab from hashtag Instagram pages in the United States as a precaution against the spread of misinformation.

In addition to the precautions taken by Facebook and Instagram, some critics and experts have suggested taxing data mining, fixing the algorithm, and even dissolving social media companies all together to prevent further



In a post-Covid era, social media is a critical tool for political activism.
Courtesy of Unsplash

consequences from disinformation campaigns. However, regulation is the resounding suggestion among experts.

Professor John. H. Shannon, speaking on the legal aspects of social media regulation to The Diplomatic Envoy, stated, “They are not enough. This problem will require regulation; regulation is the way we protect the commons. We are in the early stages of trying to regulate a largely unreg-

ulated industry we call technology.” Dr. Viswanathan elaborates on this, claiming “the educational system (at all levels) has mostly failed to help people to think critically” because it has come to view itself as an economic tool. One question that remains is if critical thinking, regulation, or other solutions can ultimately prevent social media’s disastrous impact on political polarization, political violence, and election integrity.

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ulated industry we call technology.”

Dr. Viswa Viswanathan, an Associate Professor of Computing and Decision Sciences at Seton Hall University, concedes that regulation is a possible solution to problems caused by social media, but he does not believe regulation alone is a panacea for all of these issues. A fundamental takeaway is that “people need to know how to think critically or else they will always be targets of exploitation,” asserts Viswanathan.

One reason why misinformation



THE PAST REMAINS: OBSTACLES TO THE DE-NAZIFICATION OF GERMANY

Timothy Georgetti | Staff Writer

Over 75 years after the start of the Nuremberg Trials, the series of military tribunals through which Nazis were punished for their war crimes, the German people are still struggling to reconcile their country's Nazi past. Germany is continuing its de-Nazification efforts, attempting to not only remove all remaining vestiges of the Nazi regime from public life but also educate and fortify new generations against future atrocities.

Deutsche Welle explains that this national effort to overcome the past is so closely linked with the German identity that it is embedded in the German language. The word 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung,' directly translated as 'overcoming the past,' has dominated studies of post-war Germany. However, the country's internalized national guilt over its past failed to prevent a far-right political party from recently rising to power, threatening to deafen continued cries of "never again."

The Alternative for Germany party, or AfD, has recently shifted to the ideological far-right while becoming one of the largest opposition parties in the German parliament, according to BBC News. The leaders of the AfD have been some of the most outspoken critics against the humanitarian policies of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, most notably opposing her decision in 2015 to allow over 1 million Middle Eastern refugees into Germany.

Official AfD publications contain bigoted phrases like "stop Islamization," as well as the radical rhetoric of some of the party's leaders. One AfD Co-chairman's remarks that the Holocaust was nothing more than "just a speck of bird's muck in more than 1,000 years of successful German history," have caused some to draw comparisons between the AfD and Hitler's Nazi party, according to BBC News.

The AfD's growing support among the German public, outspoken contempt for national guilt, and trivialization of the Holocaust have reinvigorated a decades-old national debate in Germany. While people



Protestors demonstrate outside a federal office in Berlin after the election of Thomas Kemmerich.
Courtesy of Martin Heinlein (Flickr)

disagree on how the country's dark past should be addressed, atoned for, and borne in modern times, the conversation greatly increases the importance of the German government's public and legal responses.

The German government and people have pushed back against the rhetoric and the AfD's dogma through two distinct actions. The first, a lawsuit between the government and the country's ex-royal family over property restitution will settle how modern-day Germans whose ancestors directly aided the Nazi regime should bear and atone for the sins of the past. The second, regarding the preservation of one of Hitler's and the Nazi party's most important rally grounds, is aimed at conserving the memory of Germany's Nazi past to safeguard later generations from attempts to obscure it by the AfD and similar groups. According to CNN, in 2020, the German government and the head of the ex-German royal family agreed to a year-long postponement of a lawsuit over the ownership of millions of dollars of priceless historical artifacts, paintings, and land. Foreign Affairs explains that the lawsuit rests on a German property restitution law allowing property seized by the former East German government to be returned to the descendants of their original owners if they did not provide "substantial" support to the Nazi regime. Since the law does not define what

constitutes "substantial" support, the legal debate over how to view and judge the actions of ancestors has renewed public discourse on the subject.

The plaintiff, head of the House of Hohenzollern Georg Friedrich, traces his direct lineage to the Kaisers of Prussia, the precursor to the modern German state. While the House of Hohenzollern was deposed in the early 20th century, they retained much of their property until the division of Germany into two separate countries after WWII, at which time most of the Hohenzollern property was seized by the East German government. According to Deutsche Welle, the Hohenzollern family member accused of "substantially" supporting the Nazis is Friedrich's great-grandfather, Crown Prince Wilhelm. As the head of the House of Hohenzollern in the 1930s, his debated significance to Hitler's rise to power and the establishment of the Nazi regime will ultimately decide if Friedrich and the modern-day Hohenzollern family are entitled to restitution.

While the official jury is still out on whether any of Prince Wilhelm's actions constitute "substantial" support for the Nazis, CNN describes that the consensus among the German public is that the Hohenzollerns are not owed anything. According to Christopher Clark, a historian hired by the Hohenzollern family said in an interview with Der Spiegel that Crown

Prince Wilhelm's actual actions are not disputed by any historian involved with the lawsuit. The debate, however, centers on how each historian interprets the value and importance of those actions. Clark argues that while Prince Wilhelm did publicly support the Nazi regime, his contributions were so trivial that Prince Wilhelm's support should not be considered "substantial," noting that the Nazis would have undoubtedly come to power without it. Opposing historians counter that since Prince Wilhelm believed himself to be a key Nazi ally, his support of the Nazi regime should be considered "substantial." This perspective insists that the actual value of Wilhelm's support to the Nazis is inconsequential to whether his actions should be deemed "substantial," but that rather the question should be determined by his intentions.

CNN finds that most Germans agree with the intention-based assessment of culpability and believe that the Hohenzollern descendants of Crown Prince Wilhelm are not entitled to any restitution. In Germany's current political landscape with rise of the AfD, this public consensus reaffirms German commitment to the idea of national guilt.

Public responses to the Hohenzollern case also represent a wider pushback against far-right parties like the AfD, whose leadership BBC News quotes as insisting that Germany should be "proud" of its actions during both world wars. The continuation of the lawsuit has once again shifted German public discourse to battle the guilt of the state's past and the rise of modern populist parties like the AfD. Some even warn that these parties are thriving on rhetoric and policies eerily similar to the Nazis. The eventual ruling in this lawsuit will demonstrate how the modern-day German government believes the sins of their ancestors should be addressed, atoned for, and even borne by their descendants. It will also be a key benchmark of whether the German government will allow the idea

of national guilt and the need to recognize historical figures as personally culpable for Nazi atrocities to slowly erode or continue to uphold these national values. While the Hohenzollern case is still ongoing, a similar litmus test recently ended in one of Germany's most notorious cities. The city of Nuremberg, in conjunction with the Bavarian provincial government and the German Federal government, has decided to conserve the physical traces of its Nazi past to warn future generations, both in Germany and around the world, of the cost of embracing racist, anti-Semitic, and extremist ideologies like those of the Nazi party. The Smithsonian reports that the city of Nuremberg has decided to begin preservation work on the Reichsparteitagsgelände, the Nazi party rally grounds that span an area of over four square miles and include grand monuments to the Nazi regime. For years, these relics of Germany's Nazi past have sat in disrepair, with much of the area closed to the public due to safety concerns. In 2015, the Nuremberg city government finally began the process of deciding whether these Nazi structures should be destroyed or preserved.

Many critics of the city's current plan to conserve the monuments argue that the city should have opted for a policy of "controlled decay," which will make them safe enough for public access without rebuilding them or restoring their appearance. According to Deutsche Welle, they believe not only that the current conservation effort facilitates the spread of the extremism and bigotry of the Nazis, but also costs an exorbitant amount of public funds, an estimated 85 million euros.

While the city's plan for funding the project has quieted most financial concerns, recent events have amplified critics' concerns that conservation of these physical monuments will also help conserve the extremist ideology of their builders. In 2019, the rally grounds were filled with torch-carrying members of a Neo-Nazi group that posed with the sites due to their

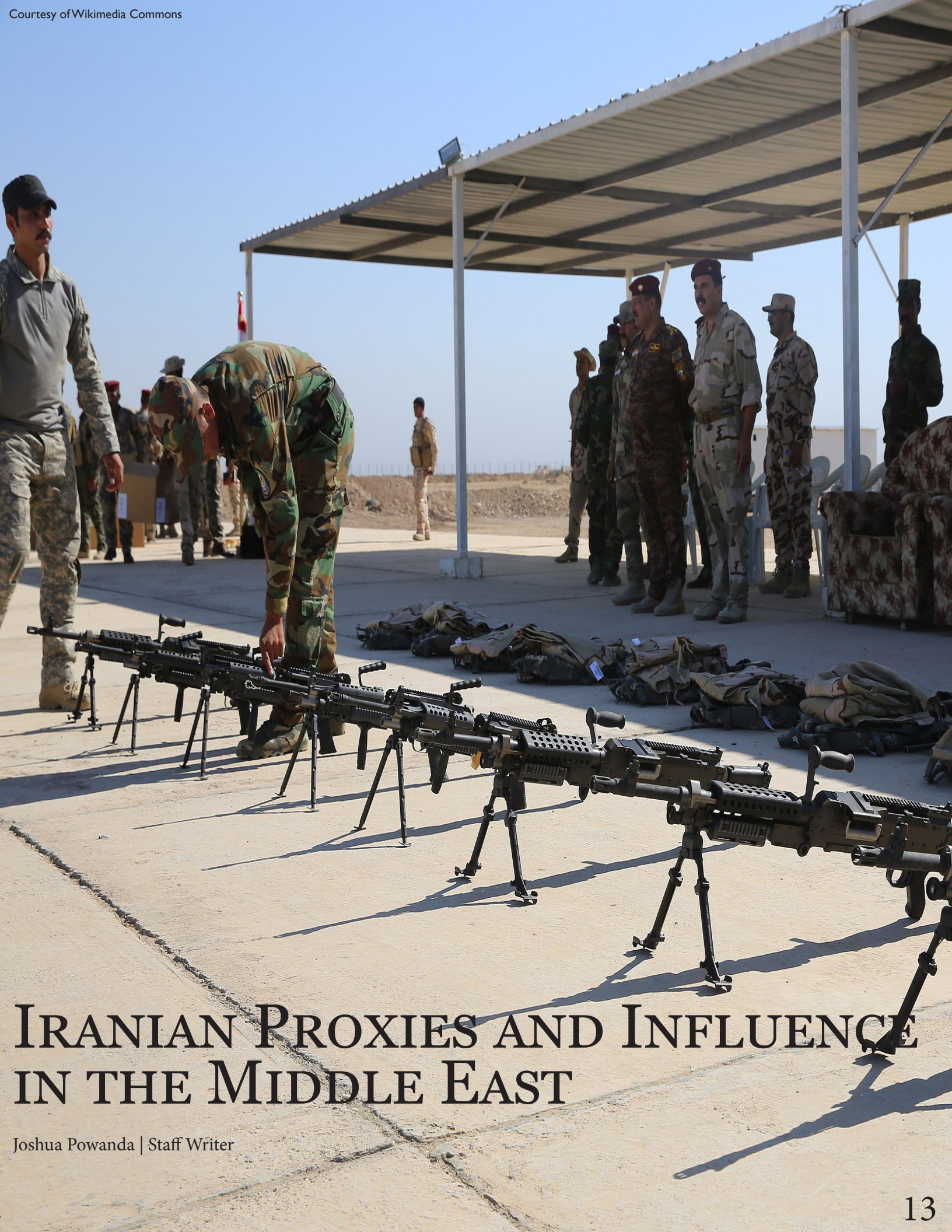
ideological significance. Such events are unsurprising given the rise in popularity of xenophobic opinions like those of Jörg Meuthen, the AfD's co-leader, who BBC News quoted as saying, "in some German cities, I struggle to find Germans on the streets."

According to Bavarian State Premier Markus Söder, the remnants of these Nazi rally grounds and monuments must be preserved to combat the startling rise of right-extremism. He told Deutsche Welle that the citizens of Nuremberg and many other Germans think these Nazi grounds, combined with their accompanying historical education center, serve as "authentic remembrance site[s] for future generations," warning of what he called the "cataclysmic war, the destruction of millions of people [that] took its starting point from the ideology [propagated]" by the Nazis and their modern equivalents.

The Nuremberg preservation effort and the House of Hohenzollern lawsuit have brought forward Germany's Nazi past and the daily struggle of how best to come to terms with that past once again. While Germans generally accept the concept of "Vergangenheitsbewältigung," most have failed to agree on how best to incorporate the lessons of their past into their lives, identities, and laws.

As if such a process was not challenging enough, the rise in popularity of xenophobic and Nazi-sympathizing far-right political parties like the AfD threatens to glorify the crimes of German history and to create a national identity based on hate. How Germany's past will be remembered, addressed, atoned for, and borne in modern times is a process that will likely continue for another 75 years and beyond. However, every passing day, month, and year will paint a reflection of the German public's thoughts, actions, and guilt as a result of their Nazi-stained past.

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IRANIAN PROXIES AND INFLUENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Joshua Powanda | Staff Writer

Since the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, the Iran has used its power and influence in the Middle East to attack, resist, and challenge its regional adversaries. Although its armed forces are powerful and well-equipped, Iran has created a system of proxy militias and organizations throughout the region that can carry out its many objectives.

Iran's regional goals include destabilizing countries where it can spread its influence and power while countering American, Israeli, and Saudi influence. In other words, Iran adopts an offensive defense strategy to ensure that conflict never touches its soil. According to New America, this strategy is known as "forward defense" or offensive defense. This doctrine asserts that it is more strategically viable for Iran to confront its adversaries on foreign territory and avoid conflict on Iranian soil. Furthermore, by deterring a direct conflict in Iran, the regime disguises its direct involvement behind the cover of proxies.

After the fall of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Tehran adopted a strict religious and ideological government and distanced itself from America and its allies Saudi Arabia and Israel, Iran's longstanding regional rivals. While Iran's quarrel with Saudi Arabia represents a centuries-long sectarian struggle for dominance of the region, it sees American and Israeli strategies as contradictory to its own. Despite previous military and economic cooperation, strict Iranian clerics began to view Israel as a barrier to the Shia Islamic Revolution that Tehran hoped to further throughout the Middle East. Furthermore, America's growing regional presence in the early 2000s alarmed Iran, as it sought more friendly governments in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and other nations. As

a result, Iran believes it can use its proxy forces to counter and eventually deter its adversaries in the hopes of increasing its regional dominance.

The New York Times explains that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force (IRGC-QF), the elite military and intelligence branch of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, oversees and manages Iran's proxy groups. Under the former leadership of IRGC-QF Major General Qassem Soleimani, many of Iran's proxies coordinated and worked with one another to further Iran's objectives. However, General Soleimani was killed in an airstrike in Baghdad, Iraq on January 3rd, 2020. His death was a significant blow to Iranian regional strategy and the uniformity of Iranian proxy groups. General Soleimani's influence and control over these groups were profound, as his presence was felt in every conflict and country in which Iran had puppet forces.

Along with General Soleimani, the airstrike also killed Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, an influential Iraqi politician and militia leader instrumental in carrying out Iran's missions in Iraq. Despite recent Iraqi protests against Iranian influence, Iran maintains a significant political and military foothold in Iraq. Politically, Iran has the backing and rhetorical support of many Iraqi politicians. Militarily, Iranian proxy militias are critical to the security of Iraq and provide a security blanket for many Iraqis in areas where the gov-

ernment cannot. An example of Iran's political and military influence can be seen with Hashd al-Shaabi, or the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). The PMF is an umbrella group once headed by al-Muhandis and comprised of Shiite militias – adherents of the Shia denomination of Islam – that came together after the rise of the Islamic State (IS). The group operates in Iraq and receives direct funding from the government in Baghdad.

The PMF also receives financial and military support from the Iranian government, as many Shiite militias comprising the PMF have close links to Tehran and the IRGC. Voice of America explains that one of these groups in the PMF is Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH), a prominent Iranian proxy and Shiite militia founded by al-Muhandis and considers Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei to be its spiritual leader. KH is a powerful militia in the PMF – its fighters were among those who attacked the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad in response to American airstrikes. As a result of their continued efforts in replacing American with Iranian influence in Iraq, the U.S. State Department designated the group a terrorist organization in 2009.

Another Iraq-based group that receives funding and support from Iran is the Badr Organization. According to the Counter Extremism Project, the Badr Organization is Iran's oldest proxy in Iraq and the most powerful group within the PMF, as it has

sought to bring the Islamic Revolution to Iraq. Like many Iraqi militias, the Badr Organization effectively took advantage of the power vacuum left by Saddam Hussein in 2003. Iran saw an opportunity to capitalize on the chaotic security atmosphere post-Hussein and did so with the Badr Organization, KH, and many other proxy militias. Iran not only successfully countered the new Ameri-



Hezbollah plays a key role in Iran's geopolitical security posture.
Courtesy of Flickr

Iran sees Syria as significant to its long-standing policy of resistance against Israel and serves as a pathway to Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea

can presence but also made it difficult for the United States to stabilize Iraq's government and armed forces.

Iran's approach to increasing its influence in Iraq is multi-faceted. Along with integrating friendly proxy militias into Iraq's security system, Iran supports political movements that are friendly to and supported by Tehran. Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iran has increased its support for Shiite Iraqi politicians and political parties. Most notably, Iran has long backed the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, which has a standing militia and active politicians. According to the Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, Iran understands the need to support such Iraqi politicians and proxies to avoid a hostile government in Baghdad and counter growing American influence in the country.

Iran's proxies in Iraq are critically important to its regional strategy. Not only does Iran want to have more influence in the country and avoid another Iran-Iraq war, but also gains from Iraq's strategic position. The Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point adds that Iran views Iraq as crucial to ensuring its security and strategic concerns by using the country as a gateway to Syria, Lebanon, and the Mediterranean Sea as well as a buffer between itself and adversaries like Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Iran's implementation of a forward defense in Iraq is evident from its opposition to its adversaries in the country. Along with the continued battle against the Islamic State (IS), Tehran hopes to keep any hostilities with the United States on Iraqi soil. While averting a war with the United States is seen as a strategic priority, any American encroachment onto Irani-

an territory would threaten the survival of the Iranian regime and also signal a loss of territorial integrity.

Tehran's proxy groups are also active in Syria. Iran's objectives inside Syria are to support the regime of President Bashar al-Assad and to maintain its Shiite proxies, thus giving it substantial influence over the country. Iran sees Syria as significant to its long-standing policy of resistance against Israel and serves as a pathway to Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea. Given the Syrian regimes' Shia background, Iran also sees Syria as a means to increase Shia influence in the region.

Iranian support for Assad represents a pattern of maintaining Shiite influence in the Middle East in the sectarian struggle with Sunnis, who follow a different denomination of Islam. Since Assad belongs to the Alawite sect, a branch of Shia Islam, Iran has a pretext to support the regime out of mutual defense.

BBC News reports that throughout the Syrian Civil War, Iran mobilized its proxy militias in Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to fight alongside pro-Assad forces and the Syrian army. Voice of America explains that since 2011, Iran has recruited and deployed Shiite Afghan fighters from the Fatemiyoun Brigade and Shiite Pakistani fighters from the Zeinabiyoun Brigade to fight with the Assad regime.

Many of these militias have been instrumental in recapturing Syrian cities such as Aleppo, Homs, Idlib, and the surrounding areas of Damascus. The New York Times explains that these militias were fighting the Syrian rebels and IS. Currently, Iranian-backed militias, not the Syrian army, control much of the recaptured territories. Iran's efforts to recruit and mobilize fighters from all over the Middle East underscores its lengthy efforts to secure a stronger foothold in Syria and maintain a presence closer to Israel's borders.

Along with its desire to maintain Shiite influence and support the Assad regime, Iran has also de-

ployed its forward defense strategy in Syria. While Iran may see Iraq as a stage for its opposition to America's presence, its influence in Syria is part of a large-scale effort to deter, counter, and attack Israel.

The most powerful and closest Iranian proxy assisting Tehran and Damascus in Syria is the Lebanese paramilitary group Hezbollah, Iran's earliest and most successful proxy according to Axios. Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has seen Hezbollah as a means to achieve its goals of countering Israel and the United States while furthering Iranian influence with plausible deniability. To avoid the public backlash and economic sanctions from the international community, Iran believes it can use

A stronger Iranian regional presence is threatening to the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia

its proxies as camouflage while still seeking out its objectives. Because Iran strategically uses offensive defense on foreign soil, it can cover its military and political tracks. Despite Tehran's use of Hezbollah as a disguise and public scapegoat, the terrorist group has consistently pledged loyalty to the Iranian Supreme Leader.

As a result of Iranian support for Hezbollah and its growing popularity throughout the 21st century, the group has integrated into Lebanon's government and security structure. The implications of Hezbollah's rise are profound given their close relationship with Tehran: the stronger Hezbollah becomes the stronger Iran's regional presence. A stronger Iranian regional presence is threatening to the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia.

Not only does Iran see the strategic advantages of influencing in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, but its support of the Houthi rebels in Yemen highlights

its rivalry with Saudi Arabia and many of the Gulf states. The long-standing Iranian-Saudi contention has sectarian roots and stems from the struggle to become the region's hegemon, as shown in Yemen's Civil War.

Yemen's conflict began as a struggle for power after the Arab Spring uprisings but quickly escalated into an international conflict BBC News reports. Both Yemeni and Saudi governments have accused Iran of supporting the Houthi rebels with funding and arms. Because of the shared Saudi-Yemeni border, Riyadh became increasingly concerned by a greater Iranian influence and presence on their perimeter.

According to Arab News, in 2015, the Saudi-led coalition intercepted and seized Iranian arms shipments en route to the Houthis. Salam Al-Khanbashi, the deputy prime minister of Yemen, claims that this "is concrete proof of Iran's involvement in Yemen." Despite Iran's lack of transparency about providing funding, its leaders have expressed support for the Houthis rebels. Whether Iran's involvement in the conflict is as profound as the coalition claims it to be, it seems that the rebels' conflict with one of Tehran's greatest enemies is reason enough for Iran to involve itself.

In contrast to other Iranian proxies throughout the region, support for militias in the Palestinian territories is noteworthy given the sectarian differences. While Iran sees itself as the leader of the Shia Muslim world and champions Shi'ite groups throughout the Middle East, it also funded and equipped Sunni Palestinians in their struggle against the "Zionists" in Israel.

Iran supports several Palestinian military groups such as Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), which oppose Israel. The Times of Israel reports that in addition to the reportedly 30 million dollars of annual financial support, Iran provides advanced military training for thousands of Hamas activists at Revolutionary Guard bases in Iran and Lebanon.

According to PBS, Iranian military

and financial support Hamas began in the 1990s after the start of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Because Iran believed the PLO's attempts to create lasting peace with Israel did not coincide with its resistance to Zionism, Tehran began to support the PLO's political rival, Hamas. In addition to this, Hamas violently seeks the destruction of the state of Israel, a policy that Iran also supports.

Despite a recent break in the relationship due to fractured ties between Hamas and Assad's regime, relations have been mended and Iran continues to provide such assistance.

The PIJ is another Palestinian militia that is financed, equipped, and trained by the Iranians. According to the Jewish Virtual Library, the group was formed in 1979 by radical Palestinian students in Egypt and was influenced by the Iranian Islamic Revolution. Since the 1980s, the PIJ has coordinated with the Quds Force while also maintaining close contact with the IRGC in Lebanon and Syria.

Tehran's support of Hamas and the PIJ represents its ability to overlook sectarian differences in opposition to a common enemy in Israel and highlights how Iran could influence future peace solutions between Palestinians and Israelis. Whether in Lebanon and Syria in the north or Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip in the west, it seems Iranian proxies and influence can extend close to Israel's borders while still ensuring the battle never touches Iranian territory.

Despite success in propping up proxies to further its objectives in the Middle East, Iran's regional strategy has faced some complications in recent months. In addition to the loss of General Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, COVID-19 has dramatically disrupted Tehran's ability to support and fund its proxy paramilitary groups. According to Reuters, the sanctions combined with the pandemic and a decline in oil prices have forced Iran, facing a large budget defi-

Iranian proxies and influence
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territory

cit, to limit its military spending, including on the Revolutionary Guards. Iran has long viewed its proxy forces as a means to counter Israeli, Saudi, and American influence in the region, which it may be unable to do if its economic downfalls are prolonged.

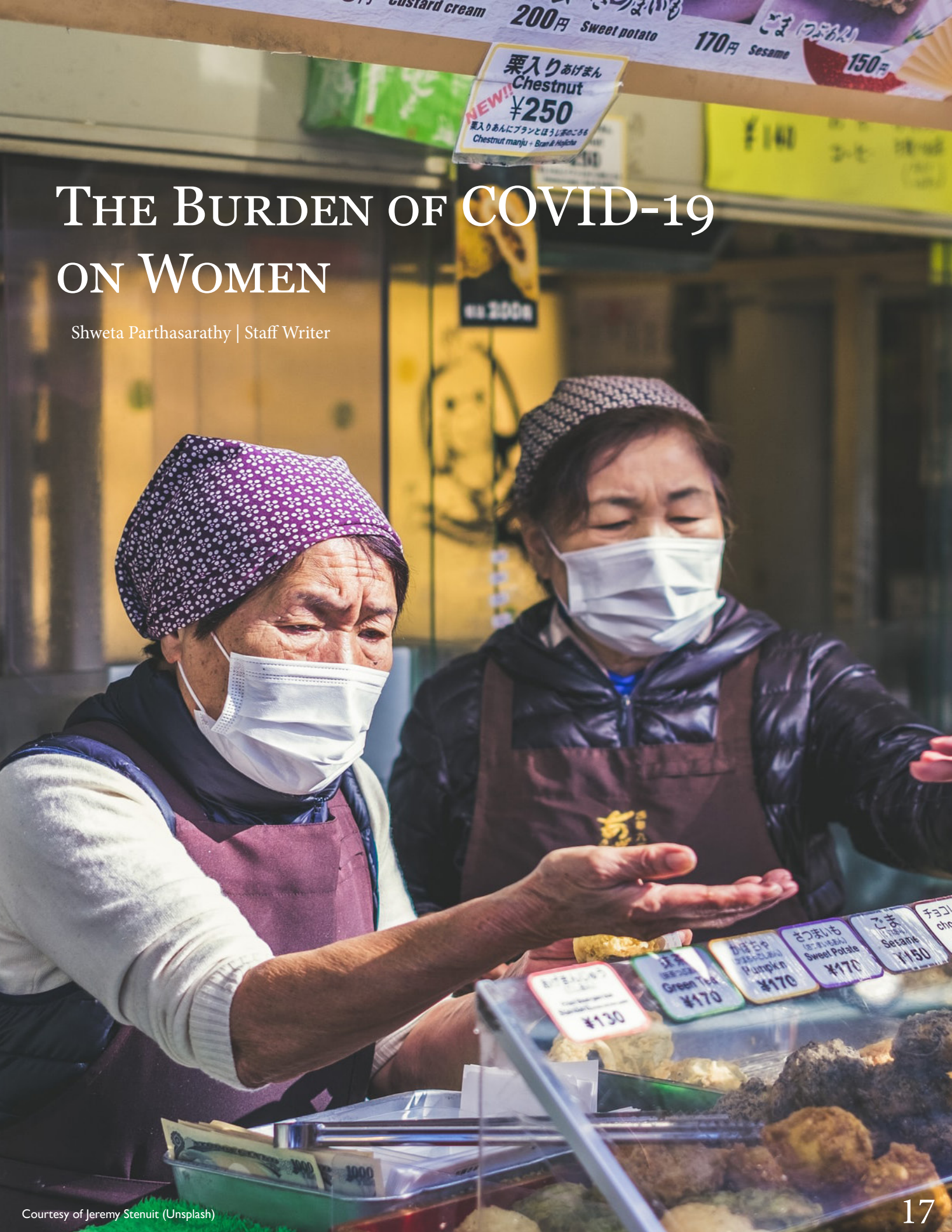
Since the Iranian Islamic Revolution, Tehran has pursued a unique regional policy of offensive defense through proxy paramilitary warfare where plausible deniability can be maintained if necessary. Under the leadership of the IRGC and the late General Qassem Soleimani, the country has historically been successful in recruiting and managing proxies and militias around the Middle East.

Iran's proxy forces have been instrumental in preserving the Islamic Revolution and furthering of Iranian and Shia influence. Even with the recent challenges to Iran's foreign policy objectives, its proxies will presumably continue to further its regional agenda and give Iran significant influence in many countries. As a result, the United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and their partners will continue to counter Iranian attempts to advance destabilizing actions and generate sectarian divisions.

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THE BURDEN OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN

Shweta Parthasarathy | Staff Writer



Before the coronavirus pandemic took the world by storm, society had begun treating women as equals and regarding women's rights as human rights. Leading up to 2020, male-dominated fields were becoming more equal, illiteracy rates among women and girls were dropping, and marriage rates for girls under 18 were decreasing dramatically. Slowly, young women were climbing out of the age-old well in which they were drowning. However, COVID-19 erupted, halting progress and, in some cases, threatening its complete reversal.

With the pandemic came quarantines, and with quarantines came more domestic responsibilities—mainly for women. A case brief authored by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (also known as UN Women) analyzed women in 38 countries and noted that women were more likely than men to have increased their time doing household chores, such as cooking, cleaning, decorating, and organizing repairs at home. Women also experienced a disproportionate increase in time spent in family care. Their tasks included teaching, playing, and providing emotional support for children, as well as providing the elderly with physical and medical care.

The rising number of women taking more responsibility at home largely stems from changes in unemployment and the job market during the pandemic. Although more men experienced a shift from employment to unemployment as active job seekers, in 2020, a larger number of women dropped out of the workforce altogether to better care for their families and homes. Even in the United States, a country largely considered to be progressive on women's rights, women lost 156,000 jobs in December 2020 while men gained 16,000, CNN reports.

Additionally, in a majority of cases where a family lost access to childcare due to the pandemic, it was the female parent who decided to forgo employ-

ment to stay home. Guidelines to contain the virus have not fully benefitted women and their families. The closing of daycares and schools has limited access to childcare services. Meanwhile, many restaurants and community businesses that supported already struggling families through discounted goods and services have shuttered, and family units that once supported each other remain far apart. Parents, especially mothers, have essentially lost the 'villages'

Even in the United States, a country largely considered to be progressive on women's rights, women lost 156,000 jobs in December 2020 while men gained 16,000

that helped them raise their children.

These challenges, however, are not limited to women in the U.S. or other first-world countries. Internationally, 80 percent of domestic workers, or those paid for working in others' households, are women; 72 percent of these workers have lost jobs due to the pandemic. These job losses caused some women like Durga Devi, a resident of Delhi, India, to suffer major setbacks. Despite her husband retaining his job as a security guard, Devi's family of five was forced to get by on less food while the quality of their children's education suffered, as they could not afford to buy a laptop.

Furthermore, the overall employment figures in Delhi, the capital city of India and a major employment hub in the country, follow a similar pattern as those seen in the U.S. According to IndiaSpend, a data-driven news agency, as of August 2020, the labor force participation rate (LFPR) for females is 5.5 percent. In the same period, men boasted a

rate of 57 percent. Unemployment, meanwhile, remains at 47 percent for women and 21 percent for men.

The massive gender gaps in LFPR and unemployment rates in Delhi are stark examples of the pandemic's negative impact on women's financial situations, which affects their ability to thrive independently. Agnes Leina, the founder and Executive Director of P'llaramatak Community Concerns, a resource center offering livelihood options for women in Kenya, explained this phenomenon in an interview with UN Women in 2019. "When you own things, you have power; and when you don't, you have no voice," explained Leina. "Economic bondage is demeaning, and by enabling women to make their own money, you give them back their dignity." Although Leina, herself an indigenous woman from northern Kenya, was interviewed before the pandemic, the implication of her words prevails.

For some women losing a job means forgoing a paycheck and financial independence. For others, however, it means risking their safety and lives. With the pandemic, women in abusive relationships found themselves trapped in inescapable, potentially life-threatening conditions. While both men and women can face domestic violence from their partners, women are more than twice as likely to be the victims, according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV). As quarantines required families and couples to remain home for days with minimal to no break from one another, women had no escape from their aggressors. In fact, domestic violence hotlines prepared for an increase in calls when quarantine began. However, there was a 50 percent decrease in calls, presumably because of women's difficulty safely connecting with these kinds of services, reported the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM).

Facing unemployment and greater financial dependency, women are

greater targets of domestic violence. In an abusive relationship, the NEJM explains, “financial entanglement with an abusive partner is too convoluted to serve without an alternative source of economic support.” The loss of financial independence can strike a blow to a woman’s self-esteem and self-assuredness, shrinking the chances of ending the abusive relationship.

The effects of the pandemic go far beyond working-age women in developed countries. Girls as young as ten years old are feeling the pandemic’s dangerous repercussions. In Samburu County, a small village in rural northern Kenya, girls are forced into marriages and genital mutilation procedures with even greater frequency than pre-pandemic times. The New York Times shared the story of Jacinta, a young ten-year-old who was subjected to genital mutilation and early marriage. “I didn’t know they would marry me off,” Jacinta said, until she was subjected to the genital mutilation, which is required for Samburu girls on the cusp of marriage.

Although attempts to curb this abuse in other parts of Africa have been somewhat effective, the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic strains have nearly destroyed the last 20 years of progress. Even before the pandemic, families struggling financially would sell their daughters into marriages in exchange for livestock, blankets, food, and cash. The number of young girls like Jacinta subjected to these horrors has only increased in the face of heightened financial struggles caused by widespread job loss and the upheaval of the global economy.

These stories are not unique to a single town, country, or continent. All across Asia, more young girls than ever are being forced out of school and into marriages as a direct result of the pandemic. Although this had been happening before the pandemic, schools often taught young girls family planning skills and provided them with a refuge, all of which the pandemic eroded. This was the case for May, a 15-year-old from the northern Hmong hill tribes in Thailand, who shared her story with Al Jazeera. Like countless others during the

pandemic, she was compelled to marry her 25-year-old construction worker boyfriend after getting pregnant. Her parents could not afford to keep her and the baby, so she moved six hours away to her husband’s family farm.

Similarly, Lia, an 18-year-old from the conservative West Sulawesi region in Indonesia, was forced to marry a man three decades older than her after being seen alone with him. Although Lia was able to escape that engagement, she again wound up in a marriage she did not want. This time, she had a child, due in part to the lack of family planning services that she would have received at school. Because her parents were unable to support her and her child, Lia went to live with her husband.

“I used to dream of becoming a flight attendant,” Lia recalled. “But she failed,” her new husband Randi interrupted, “and ended up in the kitchen.” Michael Brosowski, the founder of Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, explained to The Lancet that young girls like Lia and May are often married off “because families may have felt they could no longer afford to feed all the family, and it would be better to let their daughters go and move in with the husband’s family.”

This reasoning often applies in India as well. Rani, a 13-year-old, had successfully escaped the prospect of marriage by attending school. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, schools closed and Rani’s father, already battling tuberculosis, had to shut his business. The financial strain became so unbearable that he found Rani a man to marry within a month of schools closing. Rani was more than disappointed, saying, “They don’t understand that it is important [for girls] to go to school, start earning, and be independent.”

What is less reassuring is that even when girls reach out for help, they are often unable to access it. Even without the threat of a deadly virus, little can be done to change what is essentially a cultural norm. This issue of child marriage begins as soon as a girl is born. In countries like India, there exists a general sentiment is that girls cost money and are just an extra mouth to feed. Boys, mean-

“I used to dream of becoming a flight attendant,” Lia recalled. “But she failed,” her new husband Randi interrupted, “and ended up in the kitchen.”

while, can be educated, earn money, and extend the family lineage. Early marriage is often the simplest way for families to ease the financial burden that additional children add. While the governments of countries like India, Thailand, and Vietnam have laws standardizing marriage age for girls – typically at 18 – it is nearly impossible to enforce such a rule when many marriages are not legally licensed. For many, the cultural ceremonies and proceedings are enough to declare a marriage official, which had long made it harder for governments to enforce such a rule. Before the global pandemic, one of the biggest deterrents to child marriages was home visits by government officials and child protective agencies. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions, such inspections are now often delayed or never occur, NPR reports.

Although Lia, May, and Rani were forced into marriages as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic, had the pandemic never happened, it is likely that at least one of them would have faced the same outcome. Broadly speaking, COVID-19 continues to disproportionately affect women because they, as a whole, earn less, save less, hold more unstable jobs, have less control over their own finances, and live closer to the poverty line than men. All of these factors demonstrate that the economic impact of the pandemic is compounded on women. Understandably, the pandemic was not something society could have predicted, but the injustice it has exposed and exacerbated is something we certainly should have predicted. After all, when the baseline for women is so deeply riddled with inequality, is it any surprise that a virus made things worse?

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UGANDA'S GOVERNMENT CREATES NEW JUSTIFICATIONS FOR ELECTORAL CORRUPTION

Collin Duran | Staff Writer



Uganda has a muddled history when it comes to national elections. President Yoweri Museveni has led Uganda for nearly forty years and, on January 14, the president won a sixth in national elections, reports NPR. The election was marred by accusations of corruption and intimidation tactics used by the government. Domestic media outlets rushed to report on these abuses and cited the COVID-19 pandemic as a driver behind violations of the right to a free and fair election. The validity behind the narrative that the pandemic caused violations of civil liberties and impeding democratic institutions is insubstantial. The actions taken by Museveni's government during the most recent election reflect a pattern of abuse in the electoral process. While there is no doubt that COVID-19 played a role in enabling the government to impede the electoral process, a closer look reveals that the pandemic is merely a new pretext for old crimes.

Uganda's most recent election was littered with accusations of electoral abuse. Prominent opposition leader Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, better known as Bobi Wine, his supporters, journalists, and Ugandan voters were subjected to constant harassment by the government during the campaign period. While the scale of electoral violations is not unprecedented, government explanations for the abuse have shifted. Police subjected Wine to constant harassment throughout the election process, leading eventually to his arrest. The Ugandan government claimed that Wine's incarceration was a direct result of him breaking COVID-19 restrictions with the size of his rallies, states Human Rights Watch.

Bobi Wine's arrest led to a sweeping of protests across the country, some of which were met with brutal violence from state police resulting in 45 deaths and 600 arrests, The New York Times reports. In the days following Wine's arrest, the Ugandan electoral commission halted rallies in areas across the state, citing coro-

navirus concerns, though these areas had already been visited by President Museveni in previous months, reports Bloomberg. Additionally, The New York Times notes that there are credible allegations that President Museveni also hosted large rallies that exceeded the 200 person limit mandated by coronavirus guidelines.

These measures taken by the Ugandan government to suppress opposition during the most recent election

The actions taken by Museveni's government during the most recent election reflect a pattern of abuse in the electoral process

are not new and also appeared during the country's 2006, 2011, and 2016 elections. This pattern reveals a consistent history of attacking the electorate, opposition leaders, and journalists.

One notable incident in the recent 2021 election was the throttling of internet services in the days leading up to the election. According to NPR, the government shut down social media services such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. Additionally, military vehicles and soldiers were deployed into the capital city of Kampala, where Wine draws most of his support. These actions parallel the 2016 election. A report from the Global Observatory notes that on

the day of the 2016 election, the internet was shut off, and military personnel present in the capital. While neither the 2011 nor the 2006 elections featured an internet shutdown by the government, they did include the same voter intimidation tactics in Kampala, a historically weak region for President Museveni. A report from Reuters notes that there was an increase in armored vehicles, riot police, and military personnel in Kampala on the day of the 2011 election. A 2006 report from CNN shows that there was a similar situation during the election that year. Attacks on the electorate have become the new norm in Uganda. The electorate is not the only group the government is willing to go after, as the Museveni administration has launched slander campaigns against prominent opposition leaders.

The 2006 Ugandan election, similar to the subsequent elections in 2016 and 2021, featured smear campaigns against Museveni's main opposing candidate. In 2006, Museveni ran against a former confidant, Kizza Besigye. Besigye's campaign was hindered by various forms of government interference and criminal charges, including rape allegations, for which he had to appear in court, reports The Guardian. Max van den Berg, the EU's chief observer for national elections, noted that the charges brought against Besigye were, "trumped up in order to damage him politically." The Museveni government used the court system to slow the momen-



Despite accusations of "electoral corruption", President Museveni still garners a cult following. Courtesy of Yoweri K. Museveni (Flickr)

tum of the Besigye campaign during the 2006 election. However, the slander campaigns did not stop in 2006.

The 2016 election saw Museveni and Besigye run against each other for the fourth straight election. During the campaign period, Besigye was placed under house arrest for hosting illegal public rallies that violated the Ugandan Election Commission's mandate that all rallies be held indoors, reports by The Guardian. The government's crackdown on public rallies directly correlates with Museveni's desire to dampen growing populist support for opposition leaders, ensuring his 2016 election win. Besigye disputed the result, reports Al Jazeera, but was placed under house arrest on the grounds that his actions were treasonous.

The 2021 election featured the same harassment of the opposition. With Bobi Wine as Museveni's new challenger, the incumbent's campaign turned to COVID-19 as a pretext for immobilizing and slandering Wine, who was arrested twice for supposedly breaking pandemic guidelines. Like Besigye, Wine was placed under house arrest following the announcement of the election results under the pretense that a public appearance by the politician would incite riots, notes the Associated Press. The government has not limited itself to attacks on the electorate and opposition candidates. The Museveni administration has also been openly hostile towards the media.

The Ugandan government has muzzled the country's press in the previous four elections while offering different justifications each time. The government has not been shy in resorting to both physical and non-physical harassment in its attempts to curb media criticism. During the 2021 election, three journalists were hospitalized following a scuffle in the country's Masaka District, reports Voice of America. When members of the media were given an opportunity to enter into a dialogue regarding me-

dia harassment, the commissioner of the Uganda People's Defense Force, Brigadier General Henry Matsiko, quickly shot down any discussions of abuse. The commissioner went on to accuse members of the media of being one-sided in their reporting, calling them activists and saying, "once you're a journalist, prove to us, that you are exercising professionalism."

The Museveni administration has also used the COVID-19 pandemic as a justification for limiting foreign journalists from entering the country. A report from the Council to Protect Journalists highlights how the Ugandan government amped up security clearance requirements for members of foreign media organizations entering the country. All foreign journalists were required to re-apply for accreditation to cover any electoral events, a process described by the Council to Protect Journalists as "onerous" in nature. The new accreditation process also required journalists to submit personal information and a portfolio

The Ugandan government has muzzled the country's press in the previous four elections while offering different justifications each time

of their work. The new process made it clear that the Ugandan government could be selective in who is allowed to observe the election. Additionally, foreign media members were threatened with legal repercussions if they violated the new protocol and attended electoral events without accreditation.

Abuse towards the media did not begin in 2021, but the government's justifications for violating the freedom of the press has transformed. The 2006 elections featured numerous instances of journalists being harassed by local police and military personnel. A 2006 report from Hu-

man Rights Watch outlined how two separate members of the media were charged with promoting "sectarianism" for penning critical stories about the Museveni government. Additionally, when Besigye was on trial for rape and treason, the Ministry of Information forbade media outlets from covering the case, saying it could potentially create "prejudice" in the political leader's trial. In the days leading up to the 2011 election, two journalists were shot while reporting at opposition lead rallies, reports the Committee to Protect Journalists. In the months following the 2011 election, Museveni openly slammed both foreign and domestic media companies for their coverage of protests throughout the country, notes The Guardian. The 2016 elections presented the same hostile environment for journalists. Robert Ssem-pala of the Human Rights Network for Journalism stated to Voice of America that during the 2016 electoral cycle, there were over 80 incidents of, "violations and abuses of media rights and freedoms." This treatment of journalists shows that the Ugandan government is not afraid of using any justifications to bar members of the media from criticizing the regime.

The coronavirus pandemic has shaken the world in a multitude of ways, forcing countries around the world to make societal changes necessary to adapt to the new reality. The Ugandan government, on the other hand, has approached the pandemic from an opportunistic standpoint. During Uganda's 2021 national election, President Museveni and his administration used COVID-19 guidelines and regulations as an excuse to double down on old practices. As in previous elections, Ugandan citizen's right to a fair and free electoral process was violated with the government's usage of intimidation tactics and harassment measures.

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THE POWER OF PROTEST IN FRANCE

Mark Stachowski | Staff Writer

A wave of riots and protests across France in late 2020 saw thousands of citizens take to the streets decrying a proposed security bill that would prohibit the filming of police officers if done for “malicious purposes,” states POLITICO. A second provision of the proposed bill allows for the use of drones to film citizens’ public activities and for police officers’ body cameras to be live-streamed by authorities. This has caused much concern within France, with citizens and lawmakers alike calling the law an invasion of privacy and personal liberties. Protests and riots have allowed the issue to gain traction across France as more citizens hit the streets to voice their opinions. The New York Times reports that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, tens of thousands of people took to the streets in late November 2020. Over 46,000 gathered in Paris according to numbers given by the interior ministry, in addition to thousands more in other cities such as Lille, Rennes, and Strasbourg.

The protestors challenged a provision of a recent draft of the bill that criminalized the recording/filming of police officers if the goal is to “physically or mentally harm” the officers. Those who violate this provision could face prison time and fines, leading many to consider the wording of the law too vague and an impediment to personal liberties. Opponents also argue that the law would restrict the ability to document and publicize police brutality. While the bill is still pending review by the French Senate as of January 2021, France’s lower house of Parliament passed the bill in November 2020, leading to the initial protests and rioting, according to The Washington Post.

When news broke about the proposed global security bill, citizens quickly became enraged. Initial outrage on social media escalated to small-scale protests, which gained traction and grew.

The November protests in Paris were organized by a group called “Stop Loi Sécurité Globale,” which translates

to “Stop Global Security Law.” The group is made up of a broad coalition of journalists’ unions, human rights NGOs, and other groups, according to CNN. The protests were even attended by more than one hundred local elected officials from Paris and surrounding areas, exhibiting the movement’s popularity and its importance to the people. Protests over the security bill have trickled into 2021, continuing a long history of public protest in France.

France has an extensive history of demonstrations and riots, and the

Protests over the security bill have trickled into 2021, continuing a long history of public protest in France

global security bill protests are just the latest example. From economic issues to environmental problems, French citizens have taken to the streets to express their grievances. The recent “Yellow Vest” movement, a massive protest that began in 2018, captured global headlines as French protestors wearing yellow safety vests flooded the streets in mass numbers. According to NPR, in late 2018, Macron introduced a “green tax” taking effect on January 1, 2019. Before long, more than 136,000 protesters turned out in early December against the proposed tax, in addition to 280,000 in previous weeks.

The protests amassed a large global following as images of protestors donning the yellow construction vests flooded global headlines. The movement was one of the largest mass protests in recent history. The sheer number of people in the streets of Paris and across France showed the power of the people and how passionate they were about the issue. The protests started in rural French provinces and eventually spread to Paris, where demonstrators instigated violence and rioting.

The Yellow Vest protests were

started by those who were from more rural parts of France who had to drive long distances for work – they claimed that they could not afford a fuel tax and subsequent increase in fuel costs. The movement expanded, however, from a protest about a fuel tax to an outlet to denounce declining French standards of living. Those in the middle class whose incomes were too high for welfare but too low to fully make ends meet joined in solidarity. As the movement spread to urban cities such as Paris, protests soon grew violent and rioting ensued. NPR finds that looting, vandalism, and attacks on police, resulted in \$3.4 million in damages in Paris alone. Police held 380 people in custody one weekend during the riots. Four people died in the first three weeks of nationwide rioting.

Despite the scenes of disorder captured on camera, the protests were not always characterized by the rioting and violence that made headlines. The Guardian finds that hooded agitators dressed in all black took the demonstrations in Paris to another level, setting fire to vehicles, smashing windows, and throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at police. These actions led to police using anti-rioting tactics such as tear gas and water cannons. NBC News, covering a riot in December 2020, initially depicts peaceful protests featuring marches and banners calling for changes to the security law. This all changed when almost 500 “casseurs”, which translates to “hoodlums” or “rioters,” took over the protest. They smashed windows, set fire to cars, and created a scene of anarchy at a once peaceful demonstration. At least thirty arrests were made. Similar instances can be found in the recent protests against the global security bill.

The Yellow Vest protests made a return in September of 2020, with a mass protest in Paris leading the headlines. CNN reports that Paris police chief Didier Lallement restricted two of the four planned demonstrations, calling for no chaos or destruction during the protests. Soon enough, however,

police started to use tear gas to suppress the violence. Paris police stated that a penknife, a bow, and a hammer were among the weapons taken from protestors. More than 250 people were brought in for questioning.

After the first year of protests from the Yellow Vest Movement, political analysts found that the movement had little impact on creating change due to the strength of Macron's centrist party, La Republique en Marche (LREM), reports The Washington Post. Candidates who were Yellow Vest supporters did poorly in the May 2020 European parliamentary elections. Despite the lack of success in other European countries, great strides of recent change can be attributed to the Yellow Vest Movement as of late.

This change can be seen with the country's recent 2020 municipal election results. POLITICO reports that France's Green Party made huge strides in the past year, scoring wins in Lyon and Marseille, two of France's biggest economic and social hubs. The Socialist Party secured Paris with incumbent Mayor Anne Hidalgo winning reelection. The Green Party's huge wins in 2020 were the big headline, as the Green Party rarely maintained any sort of political control in the past due to a lack of popularity. With the strides that the party made in 2020, changes to environmental

policy should be more easily obtained. Should recent trends continue, it is not hard to imagine France moving more towards the Green Party and away from Macron's centrist party. Could the global security law protests have as much of an impact as the Yellow Vest movement? Recently, after the Yellow Vest protests, France saw a historical shift towards more left-wing-leaning politics when people became

They smashed windows, set fire to cars, and created a scene of anarchy at a once peaceful demonstration

tired of laws that were in place. With the widespread negative response to the global security bill, the entire bill could be scrapped because of the intensity of the protests. Global Citizen reports that in December of 2020, the French government agreed to rewrite the first provision of the global security bill: the restriction of filming police officers to be shared on social media. However, the government has not given any details regarding how or when they will change the wording. Christophe Castaner, the head of France's LREM party, stated that a rewrite will be adopted and submitted to the lower

house of Parliament. However, many who oppose the bill want it shelved for good. The national secretary of the French Communist Party Fabien Roussel says that a rewrite is a good first step, but they would like to withdraw the bill altogether. Despite these promises, French citizens have not stopped the protest against the security bill. Al-Jazeera reports that an early January 2021 protest saw over 34,000 people across the country take to the streets, according to police. However, organizers claim this number was closer to 200,000. This time, police arrested 75 people across the country, 24 of which were in Paris. 12 police officers and paramilitary officers were injured in clashes with rioters.

The next few weeks and months will be crucial in the rest of this developing story. The French Senate will vote on the bill, yet is still no word from the government regarding a rewording. The bill also could be thrown out completely, which would satisfy the protesters' demands. The recent demonstrations throughout France have been vital in bringing mainstream attention to the bill. Without the outcry of hundreds and thousands of French citizens, it would have gone into effect with no opposition, potentially stripping people of their rights. Demonstrations in France have a long history with varying levels of success. With the recent Yellow Vests Movement and the protests against the global security bill, however, we have seen French politics being strongly influenced by the people.

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A sign reads "My society will not be Orwellian" at a protest against the controversial Global Security bill. Courtesy of Jeanne Menjoulet (Flickr)



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