

# OVERTURE

Journal of International Affairs

Colby

*Volume 2, 2022*



# OVERTURE

**Journal of International Affairs**

## **Editors-in-Chief**

Keerthi Martyn '22 & Ravi Joshi-Wander '22

## **Editorial Board**

Conall Butchart '22

Inaya Jamil '24

Max Lessans '22

Anne Marie Doohar '24

Sydney Gallop '24

Mads McDonough '23

Aaron Mills '24

Blair Sullivan '22

Xianyang Zhang '24

## **Faculty Advisor**

Kimberly Flowers, Executive Director

Goldfarb Center for Public Affairs

## **Chief Designer**

Madeleine Hand '22

**Sponsored by the Goldfarb Center for Public Affairs**



# Contents

---

A Note from the Editors Keerthi Martyn '22 and Ravi Joshi-Wander '22	iii
Outlining the United State's Role in Digital Leadership Sundar Ramanujam Interview by Blair Sullivan '22	8
The Beginning of Motherhood Shalini Somar '22	11
Oral Cholera Vaccination in Yemen Anita Kirschenbaum '22	16
Insurgency Based Violence in Burkina Faso and the Wider Sahel Colin McCabe '22	25
Contestations of Migrations Mannon Frykholm '22	36
'Breaking Through': Information as a Central Driver of an Emerging Civil Society Jan Wenger '23	43
Obesity, Reforms, and Multinationals: Curing the Incurable Solomon Triester '23	47
Child Human Rights Violations Shalini Somar '22	54
Refugees, Rights, and Ukraine Nadia El-Shaarawi Interview by Conall Butchart '22	61



# A Note from the Editors

---

In *Overture's* second year of publication, we strive to once again highlight the excellent work of Colby students, both in and out of the classroom. In continuation with the goals set out by *Overture's* founders, Tom Cummins '21 and Josh Brause '23, *Overture* features exemplary commentary from the Colby community on a number of the most pressing issues affecting the global order.

This year's edition of *Overture* features seven student submissions spanning a range of topics and regions of the world, including the Jihadist insurgency in Burkina Faso, and the history of far-right politics in Greece, to name just two. Also included are two student-conducted interviews. CSIS scholar Sundar R. Ramanujam speaks to Blair Sullivan '22 on the role digital infrastructure can play in global development, and Colby Assistant Professor of Global Studies Nadia El-Shaarawi speaks to Connall Butchart '22 on the treatment of refugees from the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The editors extend our sincerest appreciation towards the Goldfarb Center for their support for our publication. In particular, we wish to acknowledge our faculty advisor, Kimberly Flowers, who has provided tireless guidance and assistance. We owe a debt of gratitude to our excellent editorial board, who has been instrumental in producing this year's *Overture*.

Thank you,

Keerthi Martyn '22 and Ravi Joshi-Wander '22

*Overture* Editors-In-Chief

April 2022

# Outlining the United States' Role in Digital Leadership

*An interview with Sundar Ramanujam*

## Interview by Blair Sullivan '22

---

**Sundar Ramanujam**, a research associate with the Project on Prosperity and Development at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), focuses on the role of the private sector in global development challenges. His research and analysis extend to a range of subjects, including democracy and capacity building in frontier markets, structural reforms in emerging markets, and the impact of the digital revolution on sustainable development. Mr. Ramanujam has helped lead numerous working groups and research projects that studied how the United States can preserve the international liberal order by leveraging its bilateral agencies, long-standing relationships with allies and partners, and the effective use of the multilateral institutions. Mr. Ramanujam has been credited with several publications on development finance, the digital revolution, economic governance, quality infrastructure, and sustained private sector development in low-income countries, among other subjects. Some of his work on infrastructure and development finance has meaningfully impacted the outcome of the 2019 G20 Summit. Mr. Ramanujam has a personal research interest in understanding the role of constitutions and high courts in shaping the rule of law and the political economy.

**Sullivan:** As we have seen, COVID-19 has rapidly escalated the global digital infrastructure landscape and forced the world to find new digital solutions. How can the United States and the international community harness new digital transformation to promote more inclusive global development?

**Ramanujam:** Great question. So one thing that we've seen as a result of this pandemic is the way that people find non-physical means to communicate, do commerce, politics, governance, and even security. We realized that the world yet again split into two halves:

the “haves” and “have nots.” Due to the haves' head start with digital infrastructure, they also made rapid economic gains during the pandemic, thus worsening the existing inequalities and inequities. The technical term for this phenomenon is the digital divide. In terms of what we can do to close this digital divide, there are several things to consider.

One is the necessity to find the monetary resources to help develop digital infrastructure. There is a concept called digital public infrastructure, what we consider as global goods. We need to get serious about making sure that not only do we put enough money into this digital public infrastructure, but we need to help figure out the “terms of use” for this technology. Can we use this digital public infrastructure to spy on countries? Or can we use it to suppress free speech and civil liberties? Those are hard realities that do exist, and we need to start simultaneously thinking about not only how to make the internet cheaper, but make it less threatening to vulnerable populations around the world.

The second thing to focus on is digital literacy skills. We still have pockets of the world—thinking about parts of Papua New Guinea, the Pacific Island countries, or even Asian and African countries—that are not fully familiar with how to use the internet. Investing in digital literacy skills is going to be key if we want them to be able to compete in digital economies.

The last part of it is providing technical assistance and understanding what the best practices are that we can learn. It is especially important to find the right way to spend money—ensuring that the project invested in is of high quality and standards, but also interoperable and compatible. Inclusion only comes when you ensure that the customer or end user is able to engage across the platform and doesn't feel constrained because someone made a bad or limiting design choice. Helping them make the right technical and policy de-

sign choice that ensures inclusion requires technical assistance. Those are the three big buckets.

**Sullivan:** That's great. I think focusing on these populations facing more digital marginalization is critical in adapting public policy.

A 2021 report you worked on, "The United States Has an Opportunity to Lead in Digital Development," speaks specifically about the development of this digital-first financial inclusion strategy that capitalizes on advancing digital payments and digital ID infrastructure. Can you talk a bit about what digital ID infrastructure is, and how the United States can engage, lead, and responsibly capitalize on the digital economy transformations to boost economic prosperity?

**Ramanujam:** Essentially, digital technology allows you to fill the gap of what conventional brick and mortar banks cannot do and accelerate financial inclusion efforts. Digital payment systems are one of the key components of an omnichannel strategy to bring about financial inclusion. The thing about digital payments however, is that efforts are moot if we haven't figured out an ID deficit system. There's about a billion or so people who lack any kind of ID, and those that do, have an ID system that is not digitally available or accessible.

This raises many issues, including how do we know a person is who they say they are? One of the core things that you cannot compromise on financial systems is financial integrity. How do you protect the system from being misused by people with malicious intent? So integrating digital ID systems is step number one to ensure the integrity, accessibility, and inclusivity of the financial system.

Next, you have to get people to digitalize. There are several models to be explored: we looked at Estonia's increased digitalization and India's ambitious and unique biometric identification system. Assessing these ambitious and successful projects, we can draw out some best practices.

One of these practices is to focus on first getting the basics right using a stacked approach rather than developing the whole ID system at once. It needs to be foundational—establish basic checks on ensuring that the ID number or document is unique and it belongs to

one individual.

You also need to make sure that it doesn't become restricted and that it can be used across several agencies. In some countries, like Canada, the United States, or even the United Kingdom, you have the social insurance number, social security number, or the National Health Insurance Number. While some countries are figuring out how to expand them and make them applicable to other areas, in other countries, you have to apply for a new ID to access other services that both public and private sectors have to offer. We need to make the ID system universally useful. We need to incentivize people to get an ID by tying them to a lot of services like getting a cell phone connection, a cooking gas connection, utility and water connection, applying for a job or even receiving pension payments.

So this is both the supply side—the government's role of getting the right design together—but also the demand side—thinking about how to get people to apply for ID systems.

**Sullivan:** Deviating a bit to consider today's context, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has highlighted the prominence of digital development in national and international security. Your CSIS report notes the heightened importance of digital identification systems during the COVID-19 crisis. How would you imagine these ID systems in play, particularly for the four million plus refugees outside of Ukraine right now?

**Ramanujam:** This is a critical question as these topics could not be more important and timely. You hit on the fact that there are over 4 million and counting refugees coming out of Ukraine because of the ongoing crisis. As one of the priority areas, we need a way to think about how people who are rushing to flee their homes can preserve the identification system or their ability to prove their identity in a new country.

This is an area that is being continually studied, but there are more concerns than answers in this context. The primary concern is over vulnerable populations and if host countries end up taking advantage of or exacerbating their vulnerabilities, either through surveillance, xenophobia, or ethnic tension. The primary question is, what if these refugees end up losing their civil liberties as they're trying to reclaim their right to live in peace? So the focus needs to remain on the

consideration and integration of human rights and civil liberties.

This goes back to the first point of making sure that public digital infrastructure is not used as an authoritarian tool of oppression. Ultimately, it is critical to simultaneously figure out the “rules of the game” in tandem with the physical infrastructure design to mitigate any space or time for nefarious actors to implant physical or metaphorical surveillance on the residents of the country.

**Sullivan:** Right, and speaking about the potential of these ID technologies to become authoritarian digital tools of oppression, I want to expand on the Chinese system and its role within this. How does the global need for advanced digital solutions create a conduit for irresponsible and unregulated policies? How can the United States adopt a position of leadership to responsibly guide this transformation and counter oppressive, manipulative digital policies?

**Ramanujam:** One, it is critical to ensure that the United States does not retreat in its leadership in multilateral institutions. There was a brief moment when we lost the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). ITU is key. They’ve been around since the 1800s and originally were responsible for setting up international telegraph standards and regulations. Today they set up the regulatory standards for how companies operate like Netflix and Hulu. Given their international scope and power, it’s important that we maintain the continual influence of democratic forces on standard setting and enforcement.

Two, the United States, other G7 countries, and even the European Union and some of its economic partners in the Indo-Pacific need to find areas of cooperation. There has been global contention over data regulation and privacy protection. The gold standard that we should try to emulate is the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) agreement. If you look at the digital trade chapter, they have a clear understanding of cross-border privacy rules, cooperation, and data flows. Those are important things for both state security apparatus but also for private sector firms that rely on data to develop new products, lower costs, and increase revenues.

These are issues that will be resolved through trade

agreements and bilateral economic chambers. We need to extend our cooperation with the European Union to cooperate with Japan, India, Singapore, and other countries with similar understandings of digital practices and use this coalition to counter Chinese policies on the global stage. While we can’t do much about regulation within China, we can utilize the multilateral system to mitigate the extension of China’s authoritarianism to other countries.

So it is a two pronged strategy: hold multilateral control and then use that control to set and enforce responsible and inclusive practices and standards.

# The Beginning of Motherhood

## *The prenatal and postpartum experience of Syrian refugee women and the significant effects on their infants*

**Shalini Somar '22**

---

Following the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in March 2011, millions of Syrians—including pregnant mothers—were forced to flee to neighboring countries such as Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon for safety, and resettle either within camps or cities. Living as a refugee while also expecting a child is unique and incredibly challenging—something thousands of Syrian women have been forced to endure for the sake of their child's and their own safety. There are key “risk factors” associated with living as a refugee that can increase the amount of distress a pregnant Syrian woman may experience throughout her pregnancy. These risk factors include changing family dynamics due to disruption, adapting to an unfamiliar environment and culture, constant stress due to fear of safety, lack of social support, poor nutrition and lack of vitamins, financial instability, homelessness, or limited access to a physician.<sup>1</sup> The prominent question here is, how does living as a displaced person facing these risk factors affect a Syrian woman's pregnancy? To dive even deeper, how does the added stress Syrian women endure while pregnant affect the well-being of their newborn baby, both in the short- and long-term? These are complex questions that must be understood through evaluating the experiences of prenatal and postpartum Syrian refugee women while in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and other regions as well. Overall, due to the numerous risk factors that Syrian refugee women face during their pregnancies, they suffer more frequently from health complications compared to non-refugee women, unfortunately causing their babies to endure significant health issues as well.

### **Structural Inadequacies of Refugee Antenatal Care: Case Studies**

#### ***Syrian Refugee Women in Lebanon***

The experience of Syrian women across Lebanon must first be evaluated in order to assess the impact of

displacement on natal health. Located to the west of Syria, Lebanon has taken in millions of Syrians since March 2011 who have fled their country to escape the violence that has plagued Syria for nearly a decade. From July 2013 to October 2013, researchers conducting a field study found that forced displacement makes pregnant refugee mothers and their infants more vulnerable since antenatal health care is often one of the first medical resources to destabilize and become fragmented when conflict occurs.<sup>2</sup> The lack of education and communication on antenatal care—particularly given the vast dispersion of displaced peoples across the country—has limited care for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Syrian refugees living in secure, long-term locations more frequently visit a primary health physician and can register pregnancies with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), while those living in camps or prone to relocation often cannot.<sup>3</sup>

Researchers found that regardless of pregnancy registration, pregnant Syrian refugee women structurally do not receive adequate antenatal care as a whole. When it comes to basic services such as blood pressure measurements, urine samples, and blood sample analyses, only 31.2% of the 420 Syrian women participating in the study had received all three of these tests and 18.5% did not receive any.<sup>4</sup> These essential tests can help physicians identify if a woman's pregnancy is high-risk within the first few months or identify other complications that must be cared for later on. The survey also demonstrates that of the women receiving antenatal care, 65.4% took iron tablets and 46.6% had a sufficient amount of vitamins, minerals, and folic acid; while of those without access, only 10.3% took iron tablets and only 14.5% had a diet with a sufficient amount of supplements.<sup>5</sup> Overall, the 2013 study clearly shows that pregnant Syrian refugees do not receive enough adequate care essential to maintain their baby's and their own health during the pregnancy.

### ***Syrian Refugee Women in Turkey***

Syrian refugees relocated in Turkish cities experienced similar medical issues as Syrian women who fled to Lebanon. A 2016-2017 study conducted at the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Health Sciences University Kocaeli Derince Training and Research Hospital compared the medical outcomes between pregnant local Turkish women and pregnant Syrian refugees living in the same city. While the Turkish Ministry of Health recommends at least four physician visits for pregnant women and refers higher-risk pregnant women to the necessary specialists, the researchers found that most Syrian women could not “meet” these guidelines due to the barriers and limiting factors related to their status as a refugee.<sup>6</sup> The key finding of this study is that rates of adolescent pregnancy, low birth weight, and pre-eclampsia are higher among Syrian refugees than the local Turkish women, thus echoing the findings of the study conducted in Lebanon.<sup>7</sup> The studies demonstrate how even in two different regions of the world, environmental and structural barriers—such as racial discrimination and a lack of transportation and hospital services—inhibit adequate antenatal care and increase medical complications for Syrian refugee women.

### ***Syrian Refugee Women in Jordan***

Beginning in September 2012 until February 2013, researchers evaluated the experience of 371 pregnant Syrian refugees in Jordan in the maternity unit at the Zaatari Refugee Camp. The camp’s maternity unit had to expand and adjust to the rising number of pregnancies per month due to a dramatic increase in the size of the camp. The average number of deliveries per month went from 5 to 112 during the six month research period.<sup>8</sup> The clinic in the refugee camp offered testing for hypertensive disorders, infections, and anemia, as well as ultrasounds to examine the fetus during pregnancy. The refugee camp also offered emergency cesarean deliveries, often elected given signs of “nonprogressive labor (43.8%), fetal distress (18.8%), failure of induction of labor (12.5%) and presentation other than the cephalic (12.5%).”<sup>9</sup> Following the birth, Syrian mothers were counseled on health and nutrition, safe sex, breast care, and family planning to decrease the chance of future complications for both the mother and newborn

infant.<sup>10</sup> While a unique situation, the relative success of natal care for Syrian refugees in Zaatari provides a valuable example of navigating and overcoming the obstacles of managing a delivery unit under war conditions. In particular, the researchers note the camp’s success of “establishing effective connections within and outside the refugee camp and facilitating transfers with local authorities.”<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, as instability and conflict fragment and dismantle essential antenatal care, the international community must work to “pick up the pieces” and ensure the safety and wellbeing of already vulnerable mothers and children.

Despite this example of success, many of the structural barriers in other countries still inhibit adequate care for Syrian refugee women.<sup>12</sup> Another study conducted in two governmental hospitals from January 1st, 2014 to December 31st, 2014, compares the natal care and experiences of Jordanian women and Syrian refugee women. The researchers collected records for all Syrian women and a random selection of Jordanian women’s records who visited either of the hospitals in 2014. While the number was exponentially growing, it is estimated at this time that there were close to 700,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan, with over 25% being females of reproductive age.<sup>13</sup> This study illustrates that statistically, Syrian women had a higher prevalence of cesarean deliveries and a higher rate of anemia, lower birth weights, and lower APGAR scores compared to the Jordanian women, similar to the studies in Lebanon and Turkey.<sup>14</sup> These medical struggles for Syrian women likely resulted from the stress from changing family dynamics, the challenge of adapting to a new culture and community, fearing for their safety, lack of support, and the increased prevalence of violence. Overall, pregnant Syrian refugee women—not only in Turkey and Lebanon, but also in Jordan—have more medical issues and complications with their pregnancy and birth than local women, suggesting a strong connection between living as a refugee and the various outcomes of the prenatal experience.

### ***The Impacts of Mental Health***

Another key issue that must be highlighted is the mental health of Syrian mothers due to their refugee status and fears over their pregnancy, as focused on in a study conducted on twelve Syrian refugee women recently resettled in Saskatoon, Canada in 2015 to 2016

after previously living in Jordan, Lebanon, or Turkey. These women were either currently pregnant or under one year postpartum. The study found that postpartum depression is nearly five times more prevalent among Syrian refugee women compared to Canadian-born women. At least 50% of the Syrian women had symptoms of depression or anxiety and 16% of the women had symptoms of PTSD.<sup>15</sup> Despite the medical and environmental improvements of giving birth and likely raising their children in a safer country, their experience of being pregnant and giving birth in Canada was extremely different than what it would have been like in Syria.

### ***Importance of Community Support***

In Syria, if not for the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, the women would have experienced a sense of happiness and strong support while pregnant and celebration when they gave birth to their child. Without the proper support system of mothers, sisters, cousins, and friends, the likelihood of developing depression while pregnant increases dramatically, which could affect the baby's health. Reem, a woman from the study, describes her pregnancy experience: "I used to have my mother and my sisters around me during labor, but I will be alone here. This is a big thing for me. I am displaced and all my family is away and this is something so big for me."<sup>16</sup> Iman, another woman from the study, also reflects on what it would be like in Syria: "Whenever I hear about a woman gives birth, she will be happy and will be relieved...the woman will be with her family and will be happy. She will have a baby. Things were very good in Syria before."<sup>17</sup> Based on the words of both Reem and Iman, pregnant Syrian refugee women, although grateful for adequate antenatal care, lack the social and emotional community support, thus increasing stress and chances of postpartum depression due to loneliness. Ultimately, more support groups need to be established for Syrian refugee women who have resettled, so they can help foster more friendships within their new community and feel more connected and happy as a whole.

### ***Many Mental Health Risk Factors***

Syrian women face increased risk of developing postpartum depression, given the many factors they en-

counter as refugees such as sexual and physical violence in refugee camps, disruption of family relationships, deaths of loved ones, and feelings of uncertainty in regards to their futures. Post resettlement, the pain, suffering, and abuse of traveling or living in a camp persists, and supplemented by the unfamiliarity of their new life, affects their well-being during their pregnancy.<sup>18</sup> Many Syrian women feel powerless after resettling in Canada given their lack of social support, living in an unfamiliar setting, a newfound dependency on their male partner (increasing risk of domestic violence), language barriers, and their continuing adaptation to their new country. These factors, while also feeling isolated and not being able to process past trauma, worsens the mental health of Syrian pregnant women.

Many Syrians place emphasis on privacy and confidentiality, especially when it comes to mental health, so Syrian women may be less likely to seek help for their suffering mental health over concerns their community will find out. The language barrier Syrian women face also exacerbates this restriction to support and care. Many women feel comfortable speaking with a health-care professional or therapist, but do not feel comfortable using a translator or interpreter, especially since so few people speak Arabic in Canada.<sup>19</sup> Overall, this study found that there should be an effort made to educate Syrian women and Syrian communities about depression and anxiety, especially when it comes to pregnancy in order to better support mothers. Although Syrian women may try to "smile through the pain," they need adequate mental health services in the new regions they have relocated to for the sake of their well-being and preventing postpartum depression.

### ***Residual Ramifications on the Infant***

While these studies make the detrimental impacts of living as a refugee experiencing pregnancy on a mother's prenatal and postnatal experience evident, the focus redirects to the medical implications of their mother's increased stress and lack of adequate antenatal care for the baby. Two key studies answer this prominent question. The first was performed from August 2013 to September 2016 at the University of Health Science Etlik Zubeyde Hanim Women's Health Teaching and Research Hospital located in Ankara, a Turkish city. This study examines the prevalence of hear-

ing impairments in newborn Syrian babies that were referred to a tertiary health institution or were born in a hospital within the Gaziantep province. This study found that when comparing Syrian infants and Turkish infants, Syrian newborns were more likely to suffer from congenital sensorineural hearing loss than Turkish infants.<sup>20</sup> Normally, in developed countries, newborns with hearing impairments are more easily identified and can be put into programs that will help with their speech and language skills. However, the infants of Syrian refugees are often not getting this screening, thus increasing the chances of significant hearing impairments for future generations of Syrians that can affect their quality of life.

The study also found the higher likelihood of a newborn developing hearing impairments in the first 24 hours of life, especially if they were born through a cesarean section.<sup>21</sup> Given the higher risk factors faced as refugees, Syrian women experience a much greater frequency of cesarean births than Turkish women. The findings conclude that although the Turkish government and UNHCR are doing their best to help aid Syrian women throughout their pregnancy and delivery, there needs to be more support provided by the international community in order to ensure the well-being of the mother and child and prevent long-term complications in the child's life such as a hearing impairment.

The second study that examined Syrian newborns was conducted at the Konya Research Hospital with 786 Syrian babies and 7230 Turkish babies from January 2016 to December 2017 (2 years). This study investigates the risk factors associated with the Newborn Hearing Screening and the results of Syrian refugee infants in the southwestern Turkish city Konya. The researchers found that in their initial hearing screening only 58.5% of the Syrian newborns passed the test bilaterally, while 78.6% of the Turkish infants passed bilaterally.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the researchers found a relationship between the likelihood of hearing loss and the presence of low birth weight or intensive care unit admittance. In both cases they found that infants born from Syrian refugee mothers were more likely to have a lower birth weight or be admitted into the intensive care unit after birth.<sup>23</sup> Essentially, the risk factors associated with forced migration such as changing family dynamics, adapting to a new environment, constant stress due to fear of safety, lack of support, poor nutrition, financial instability, homelessness, or inability to reach a doctor

can significantly affect the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of the expecting mother. Due to this issue, as well as the future negative consequences for the infant's health, it is even more important that Syrian mothers and their infants be looked after to ensure the well-being of both of them and steps be taken to reduce these risk factors associated with living as a refugee, so that future generation of Syrians are healthy.

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that although Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan hospitals and antenatal care centers are initiating efforts to help Syrian refugee women throughout their pregnancies, more must be done to ensure the well-being of both the mothers and their infants. The long term effects of the Syrian Civil War will be felt for generations—particularly the medical consequences seen at birth, when Syrian refugee women deliver their children with potential health issues that could impact their entire lives. The international community must do more to address this problem by looking at the specific risk factors Syrian women deal with due to their relocation and work on diminishing those in order to have a positive impact on Syrian pregnancies. More should also be done to help Syrian women feel less anxious, stressed, and depressed, so that they can feel more stable and happy in life in order to do their best at caring for their baby in the postpartum period. As they were forced to flee Syria and now deal with mental health issues that burden their lives, the international community should provide specific mental health resources to help pregnant Syrian women. Lastly, establishing better antenatal care and mental health services in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, and other countries where Syrian refugees live will help ensure good health within the next generation of Syrian people.

## Endnotes

- 1 Yücel, "Newborn Hearing," 4.
- 2 Benage, "An Assessment," 2.
- 3 Ibid, 4.
- 4 Ibid, 4.
- 5 Ibid, 5.
- 6 Turkay, "Comparison," 2.
- 7 Ibid, 9.
- 8 Bouchghoul, "Humanitarian," 2.
- 9 Ibid, 8.
- 10 Ibid, 9.
- 11 Ibid, 12.
- 12 Alnuaimi, "Pregnancy," 1.
- 13 Ibid, 4.
- 14 Ibid, 6.
- 15 Ahmed, "Maternal" 5.
- 16 Ibid, 7.
- 17 Ibid, 7.
- 18 Ibid, 8.
- 19 Ibid, 8.
- 20 Çıkırıkcı, "Comparison," 2.
- 21 Ibid, 4.
- 22 Yücel, "Newborn," 188.
- 23 Ibid, 189.

## Works Cited

- Ahmed, Asma, Angela Bowen, and Cindy Xin Feng. "Maternal Depression in Syrian Refugee Women Recently Moved to Canada: a Preliminary Study." *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth* 17, no. 1 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-017-1433-2>.
- Alnuaimi, K., M. Kassab, R. Ali, K. Mohammad, and K. Shattnawi. 2017. "Pregnancy Outcomes among Syrian Refugee and Jordanian Women: A Comparative Study." *International Nursing Review* 64 (4): 584–92. doi:10.1111/inr.12382.
- Benage, Matthew, P. Gregg Greenough, Patrick Vinck, Nada Omeira, and Phuong Pham. 2015. "An Assessment of Antenatal Care among Syrian Refugees in Lebanon." *Conflict & Health* 9 (1): 1–11. doi:10.1186/s13031-015-0035-8.
- Bouchghoul, Hanane, Emmanuel Hornez, Xavier Duval-Arnould, Henri-Jean Philippe, and Jacky Nizard. "Humanitarian Obstetric Care for Refugees of the Syrian War. The First 6 Months of Experience of Gynécologie Sans Frontières in Zaatari Refugee Camp (Jordan)." *Acta Obstetricia et Gynecologica Scandinavica* 94, no. 7 (2015): 755–59. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aogs.12638>.
- Çıkırıkcı, Sercan, Huseyin Deniz, and Secaattin Gülşen. 2020. "Comparison of Hearing Screening Results of Syrian Refugees and Turkish Newborns." *International Journal of Pediatric Otorhinolaryngology* 135 (August): N.PAG. doi:10.1016/j.ijporl.2020.110095.
- Turkay, Ünal, Ümit Aydın, Mehmet Salıcı, Ebru Çalışkan, Hasan Terzi, Bahar S. Astepe, and Onursal Varlıkl. 2020. "Comparison of Pregnant Turkish Women and Syrian Refugees: Does Living as a Refugee Have an Unfavorable Effect on Pregnancy Outcomes?" *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics* 149 (2): 160–65. doi:10.1002/ijgo.13117.
- Yücel, Abitter, Necat Alataş, Hilal Yücel, Mustafa Güllüev, Ekrem Özsöz, and Cüneyt Uğur. 2019. "Newborn Hearing Screening Results of Refugees Living in Our City and the Factors Affecting the Results." *International Journal of Pediatric Otorhinolaryngology* 123 (August): 187–90. doi:10.1016/j.ijporl.2019.05.019.

# Oral Cholera Vaccination in Yemen

## *The challenges of providing humanitarian aid in a conflict zone*

Anita Kirschenbaum '22

---

### **Introduction**

Humanitarian organizations are focused on implementing structures of aid that address the needs and concerns of communities that are lacking basic necessities or facing emergency health crises. When facing natural disasters, or events that are out of humans' control, aid organizations are able to focus primarily on the aid they are supplying; however, when faced with conflict, humanitarian law breaches, and complex political strife, every action humanitarian aid organizations take becomes highly politicized and can have detrimental effects on a community. In these situations, the question of whether the aid in question is "conflict sensitive" is brought up—the idea that humanitarian aid has the possibility of adversely affecting the work that peacebuilders do in conflict zones.<sup>1</sup> There can be a disconnect between longer-term conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and the more immediate, short-term humanitarian relief aid organizations implement.

The crisis in Yemen is an example that displays the difficulty of implementing aid in a conflict zone. At the time of writing, Yemen is experiencing a civil war and has been since the end of 2014, leading to many humanitarian crises, including extreme poverty levels, lack of basic human necessities, and the largest cholera epidemic on record. One of the most disputed questions surrounding humanitarian aid in Yemen is why the United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO) decided to abandon their campaign to vaccinate against cholera.

This paper seeks to address the question of why it is difficult to implement aid programs in conflict zones, using the case of Yemen as an ongoing example. Additionally, this paper seeks to answer why the oral cholera vaccine campaign specifically failed. Finally, this paper will explore what humanitarian aid organizations can learn from their efforts to provide aid to one of the most pressing humanitarian crises in the world, further

enabling them to implement more effective programs to combat cholera in conflict zones in the future.

### **The Conflict**

The civil war in Yemen is a complicated conflict with many different actors, agendas, and layers. It is a conflict over power, influence, and religious minorities, all stemming from disapproval of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. Hadi became president in 2012, following the Yemeni uprising during the series of pro-democracy protests of the 2011 Arab Spring.<sup>2</sup> Hadi's government had much international support, including the support of Saudi Arabia and many Sunni Muslims, who make up the majority of the Islamic community. He was perceived by many Yemenis, however, to be weak and inefficient, leading him to resign in September 2015 after the rebel Houthi group seized the presidential palace in an attempted coup.<sup>3</sup> Hadi quickly rescinded his resignation, and fighting has ensued ever since. The Houthis are currently in conflict with a wide range of local groups, all backed by different international actors including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran.<sup>4</sup>

The Houthis are based in North Yemen and are made up of the minority Zaidi Shias who feel marginalized.<sup>5</sup> They are a well-organized opposition group with many channels and alliances, including with Ali Abdullah Saleh—the former president of Yemen—and Iran, although they deny any ties to Tehran. Many Yemenis, particularly in the North and in the capital city of Sana'a, view the Houthis as the real rulers of Yemen. Their influence, however, is not nearly as strong in South Ye-

---

2 Sungtae Park, "Fact Sheet: Yemen," American Security Project (2015), 1.

3 Ibid, 1.

4 Peter Salisbury, interview by Jon B. Alterman, "Yemen's Civil War," Center for Strategic and International Studies (2021), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/yemens-civil-war>.

5 Park, "Fact Sheet: Yemen," 1.

---

1 Jon B. Alterman, "Aid and Conflict: Pitfalls in Yemen," Center for Strategic and International Studies (2018).

men.<sup>6</sup> The aim of the Houthis is not fully clear, nor is their connection to Iran; however, they claim they are fighting against a corrupt government that is working for the agendas of the United States and other regional actors.<sup>7</sup> They also claim to be seeking a more inclusive government.<sup>8</sup>

Other actors in the conflict include the southern movement, known as the al-Hirak coalition, who were formed in 2007 well before the Arab Spring. Al-Hirak is a loose coalition of groups who have a long history of resentment towards the Sana'a government in the north. The al-Hirak coalition views the Houthis as threats, as the group mostly consists of Sunni Muslims.<sup>9</sup> Iran is also an actor in the conflict, with an undefined relationship with the Houthis. The Iranian government is known to have given the Houthis funding and weapons. In contrast, the Saudi Arabian government backs the Hadi government against the Houthis. Since March of 2015, a coalition led by Saudi Arabia has carried out bombing raids and land warfare in Yemen to disrupt the Houthi government in Sana'a.<sup>10</sup> Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is also peripherally involved; AQAP is hostile to the Houthis and the Hadi government. The last notable peripheral actor is the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a radical Islamic militant group that occupies large amounts of territory in Iraq and Syria. ISIL has had a presence in Yemen since roughly January 2015.<sup>11</sup>

The conflict in Yemen has led to one of the world's worst humanitarian crises to date, but pre-existing vulnerabilities include failing water, sanitation, and hygiene systems (WaSH), lack of access to health services, and high levels of poverty, have put Yemen at the bottom of many Human Development Indices prior to the conflict. Yemen was ranked 153rd of 189 countries on the overall index, 128th in extreme poverty, 147th in life expectancy, and 172nd in educational attainment.<sup>12</sup> The conflict has exacerbated already vulnerable systems and infrastructure in Yemen, leading to further deaths

and economic crises.

Disease, hunger, and economic collapse have ravaged the country, which was already struggling with high levels of poverty prior to the civil war.<sup>13</sup> 2020 brought additional challenges, including an escalation of violence, torrential rains, a fuel crisis, desert locust infestations, and COVID-19.<sup>14</sup> Out of the total population of 30.5 million people, 20.7 million are deemed as "people in need" by the UN.<sup>15</sup> In 2020 the UN reported that the war caused an estimated number of 233,000 deaths, 131,000 (56.2%) of which stemmed from indirect causes, such as lack of food, overwhelmed health services, and failing infrastructure.<sup>16</sup> The combination of the conflict with the pre-existing vulnerable systems has led to a complete economic collapse and loss of revenues, and millions of peoples are living in extreme poverty. This has created serious detrimental impacts and harmful coping mechanisms, including debt, early and forced marriages, school dropout, and child labor. The groups most impacted have been women, children, the elderly population, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized communities.<sup>17</sup> The conflict has only escalated in 2021, with continued breaches of international humanitarian law on all sides of the conflicts, high numbers of civilian casualties, and displacement of roughly 4 million civilians to date, many of whom are highly reliant on humanitarian aid.<sup>18</sup>

The conflict in Yemen is extremely fluid and dynamic; the presence of several actors makes it constantly changing and incredibly challenging to resolve, especially with a growing distrust of outside organizations.<sup>19</sup> While there are constant conversations about peace in the region, there are no current resolutions to the conflict, and the actors involved are constantly shifting.<sup>20</sup>

6 Park, "Fact Sheet: Yemen," 1.

7 Salisbury, "Yemen's Civil War."

8 Park, "Fact Sheet: Yemen," 1.

9 Ibid, 1.

10 Ann Marie Kimball and Aisha Jumaan, "Yemen: The Challenge of Delivering Aid in an Active Conflict Zone," *Global Security: Health, Science and Policy* (2020), 65.

11 Park, "Fact Sheet: Yemen," 2.

12 Kimball and Jumaan, "Yemen: The Challenge of Delivering Aid in an Active Conflict Zone," 67.

13 "UN humanitarian office puts Yemen war dead at 233,000, mostly from 'indirect causes,'" *UN News* (2020), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1078972>.

14 "UN humanitarian office puts Yemen war dead at 233,000, mostly from 'indirect causes.'"

15 "Yemen," *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs* (2022), <https://gho.unocha.org/yemen>.

16 "UN humanitarian office puts Yemen war dead at 233,000, mostly from 'indirect causes.'"

17 "Yemen."

18 "Yemen."

19 Kimball and Jumaan, "Yemen: The Challenge of Delivering Aid in an Active Conflict Zone," 67.

20 Ibid, 65.

**Humanitarian Aid in Yemen**

The main regional actors who provide aid to Yemen are Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, each of

which are political actors that have pledged billions of dollars to the country.<sup>21</sup> However, both have also been accused of causing and prolonging Yemen's humanitarian crisis. The Saudi-led Coalition (SLC) created the Yemen Comprehensive Humanitarian Operations Plan, which pledged \$1.5 billion in new funding for the UN's 2018 Yemen response, \$30–\$40 million for port expansion, \$20–\$30 million to improve roads.<sup>22</sup> Additional Saudi-led funding includes the King Salman Human Aid and Relief Center, which donated 900,000 liters of fuel for hospitals throughout Yemen.<sup>23</sup> However, Saudi Arabia has been heavily criticized for using its assistance to further its own political agenda. The House of Saud has discouraged trade through the Houthi-controlled port of Hodeidah, which has historically supplied around 70% of Yemen's food and medicine. Additionally, the Saudis have encouraged the rerouting of trade through the Emirati-controlled port of Aden, which overburdens smaller ports due to their limited capacity and extorts funds towards the lengthy and complicated trade process.<sup>24</sup>

The United Arab Emirates claims to have donated \$4 billion towards Yemen in the last three years, and the Emirates Red Crescent has provided 35,000 tons of food and supplies to the Yemeni people since 2017. Additional funders include Kuwait and the United States, who have each pledged hundreds of millions in U.S. dollars of funds towards Yemen.<sup>25</sup>

There have been many obstacles that restrict the ability of humanitarian organizations to provide aid in Yemen. Some of these obstacles are endemic to Yemen, including poor infrastructure, uneven local capacity, and widespread corruption, all present before the conflict erupted.<sup>26</sup> Since the war erupted, regional actors have imposed blockades and restrictions of operations of major ports that have decreased Yemen's access to humanitarian services and goods, making delivering aid and materials to those in need incredibly challeng-

ing.<sup>27</sup> There is also a high level of local suspicion of foreign humanitarian groups, including the UN, making it even more difficult for aid organizations to build relationships with those suffering.<sup>28</sup>

Yemen has been a large receiver of humanitarian aid, and since 2018 there has been a total of \$5.17 billion dollars of funding directed towards the crisis. In 2018, 133 organizations were working in Yemen, which includes 10 UN organizations, 21 international NGOs, and 92 national NGOs.<sup>29</sup> Providing aid in Yemen—and generally in conflict zones—is additionally challenging due to how politicized actions become. It is impossible to separate humanitarian action and political goals. Humanitarian organizations ultimately need local partners to distribute resources, which means they must form alliances with local actors.<sup>30</sup> Donors to Yemen are forced to decide whether their donations are going to government-controlled areas or Houthi-controlled areas, ultimately supporting the political goals of one group.<sup>31</sup> Some of the largest contributing countries towards humanitarian funding are coalition members who provide the majority of arms to the conflict.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, Houthis have threatened violence and held communities hostage to discourage relief organizations from working in the government controlled areas. If aid organizations were to ignore these threats, their actions could end up indirectly hurting civilian populations and ultimately prolonging the conflict.<sup>33</sup>

Conflict also exists between local and international NGOs. When asked what the largest obstacles for providing aid in Yemen were, local organizations responded that they lacked funding for the delivery of aid and assistance. Additionally, both local and international organizations mentioned security issues and difficulty in reaching target areas because of the active conflict.<sup>34</sup> However, many local organizations critique the way international organizations create structures

27 Kimball and Jumaan, "Yemen: The Challenge of Delivering Aid in an Active Conflict Zone," 66-7.

28 Ibid, 65.

29 Ibid, 66.

30 Alterman, "Aid and Conflict: Pitfalls in Yemen," 1.

31 Alterman, "Aid and Conflict: Pitfalls in Yemen," 1.

32 Kimball and Jumaan, "Yemen: The Challenge of Delivering Aid in an Active Conflict Zone," 66-7.

33 Alterman, "Aid and Conflict: Pitfalls in Yemen," 2.

34 Hameed Alqatabry and Charity Butcher, "Humanitarian Aid in Yemen: Collaboration or Co-Optation?" *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* (2020), 252.

21 Alterman, "Aid and Conflict: Pitfalls in Yemen," 1.

22 Ibid, 2.

23 Ibid, 2.

24 Alterman, "Aid and Conflict: Pitfalls in Yemen," 3.

25 Ibid, 4.

26 Ibid, 3.

of aid on the ground and their effectiveness, arguing that international organizations ignore the resources local groups have to offer.<sup>35</sup> An anonymous local organization states: “International organizations do not involve local organizations in the implementation of any project together” and international organizations implement “projects directly without involving local organizations as implementers.”<sup>36</sup>

There have been few studies on the relationships that exist between various local NGOs, international NGOs, international organizations, and the government in Yemen for their work on the ground; however, it is known that while international organizations have more resources than local ones, local-level organizations have a deeper understanding of the wants and needs of the local population.<sup>37</sup> Local organizations argue that if international organizations were to partner with them, the collaboration would be more effective than implementing aid programs without the knowledge of local community members.

While many organizations and donors have been generous contributors to aid in Yemen, there is still a large funding gap between the needs of the Yemeni people and what is being provided. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), in 2020, the humanitarian crisis required \$3.2 billion dollars for aid and received 59% of funding requirements, and in 2021, it required \$3.9 billion dollars and received 57% of funding requirements.<sup>38</sup> The UNOCHA said in 2020 that it is “very difficult to bring aid into Yemen, citing an extremely restricted operating environment and a huge funding shortfall that has crippled the humanitarian response.”<sup>39</sup> The humanitarian crisis in Yemen is one of the largest crises to date, and even with hundreds of aid organizations working directly with the Yemeni people, there are not enough funds and resources to support all the people who are suffering. The funds that are available are difficult to use without further fueling the conflict, and aid programs are increasingly challenging to implement.

35 Ibid, 250.

36 Ibid, 252.

37 Alqatabry and Butcher, “Humanitarian Aid in Yemen: Collaboration or Co-Optation?” 250.

38 “Yemen.”

39 “UN humanitarian office puts Yemen war dead at 233,000, mostly from ‘indirect causes.’”

## ***The Cholera Epidemic in Yemen***

Cholera is an incredibly infectious and often fatal acute diarrheal infection, caused by the *Vibrio Cholerae* bacteria.<sup>40</sup> Cholera infects the small intestine and is transmitted through the fecal-oral route. It can take between 12 hours and 5 days for a person to show symptoms after ingesting contaminated food or water, but it can kill both children and adults within hours if a severe case is left untreated. Researchers estimate that every year there are roughly 1.3 to 4 million cases, and 21,000 to 143,000 deaths worldwide due to cholera.<sup>41</sup> Typical ways of spreading the bacteria is through the ingestion of infected food and water sources; therefore, cholera is most prevalent in areas with vulnerable WaSH infrastructure.<sup>42</sup> According to WHO, cholera is a global threat to public health, used as an indicator of inequity and “lack of social development,” and acts as a marker for the world’s most marginalized communities.<sup>43,44</sup> In areas where WaSH systems are damaged, waste materials can be released into groundwater, resulting in the contamination of vegetables and water sources.<sup>45</sup>

Cholera is an easily treatable disease, and the majority of people infected can be treated through a timely administration of an oral rehydration solution (ORS). It is imperative that communities have rapid access to ORS when experiencing an outbreak.<sup>46</sup> Prevention methods of cholera outbreaks typically include periodic testing of water sources, access to clean drinking water, and strong sanitation infrastructure. The main risk factors for cholera are poverty, overcrowding, poor hygiene, contaminated food, and lack of safe drinking water, all of which can be related to conflicts.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, chronic malnutrition can make an individual more susceptible to severe cases of cholera.

40 “Cholera,” World Health Organization (2021), <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/cholera>.

41 Ibid.

42 Fekri Dureab et al., “Yemen: Cholera outbreak and the ongoing armed conflict,” *The Journal of Infection in Developing Countries* (2018), 397.

43 Ibid.

44 Paul Spiegel et al., “Responding to epidemics in large-scale humanitarian crises: a case study of the cholera response in Yemen, 2016-2018,” *BMJ Global Health* (2019), 1.

45 Qin Xiang Ng, “Yemen’s Cholera Epidemic Is a One Health Issue,” *Journal Of Preventive Medicine & Public Health* (2020), 290.

46 “Cholera.”

47 Dureab, “Yemen: Cholera outbreak and the ongoing armed conflict,” 397

Yemen has experienced several outbreaks of cholera during the last 15 years, with the last outbreak—prior to the current outbreak—occurring in 2011. The current outbreak, however, is far more fatal and widespread than previous outbreaks and has occurred in two waves.<sup>48</sup> The first wave began on October 2, 2016 and led to a total of 25,872 suspected cases. The second wave, which Yemen is still experiencing at the time of writing, has been far more severe, starting on April 27, 2017. Between October 2016 and April 2021, the total number of reported cases is 2,538,677.<sup>49</sup>

The Yemen cholera epidemic is largely due to the ongoing civil war, making it completely human-made and entirely preventable. The Red Cross and the UN have pointed to Saudi-led naval and aerial blockades and bombing campaigns as the central causes behind the epidemic. These violent acts severely damage an already vulnerable WaSH and healthcare infrastructure. Furthermore, more than 2 million internally displaced individuals and refugees are forced to live in unsanitary conditions, making them even more susceptible to infection.<sup>50</sup> Additional complications are related to the overflowing and clogged sewage and drainage systems, as well as a massive fuel shortage which has led to a general disruption in sewage management and wastewater facilities.<sup>51 52</sup>

All of these factors are further complicated by the lack of basic amenities, chronic malnutrition, and unfavorable weather conditions. There have been many environmental changes throughout the cholera epidemic, including increased rainfall, flooding, and a strong El Niño that public health experts believe may have further contaminated water sources in Yemen and aided the spread of cholera-contaminated flying insects (chironomids) from the Horn of Africa to Yemen.<sup>53</sup>

The Yemen healthcare system is currently on the brink

---

48 Ibid, 398.

49 “Cholera Situation in Yemen,” World Health Organization (2021), <https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/WHOEMCSR434E-eng.pdf?ua=1>.

50 Spiegel et al., “Responding to epidemics in large-scale humanitarian crises: a case study of the cholera response in Yemen, 2016-2018,” 2.

51 Hesharn M. Al-Mekhlafi, “Perspective Piece: Yemen in a Time of Cholera: Current Situation and Challenges,” *The American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* (2018), 1558.

52 Firdausi Qadri et al., “Cholera in Yemen—An Old Roe Rearing Its Ugly Head,” *The New England Journal of Medicine* (2017), 2006.

53 Ng, “Yemen’s Cholera Epidemic Is a One Health Issue,” 290.

of collapse, with more than 55% of health facilities partially functioning or completely destroyed by the conflict. The ones that are functioning are overwhelmed with cholera patients, many of whom are lying in corridors with IV drips or outside of facilities, either in their cars or around the health facilities grounds, waiting for treatment. Many of these patients die before receiving any medical attention.<sup>54</sup> The lack of proper healthcare facilities means that those infected and left untreated are able to spread cholera easily to those around them.<sup>55</sup>

It is important to note that there is a correlation between the cholera outbreak in Yemen and the outbreaks that rage over the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, where there were over 63,000 cases recorded in 2016 alone. Many of these regions are receiving high numbers of Yemeni refugees, suggesting that the outbreak is swiftly spreading beyond the borders as the conflict continues to displace Yemenis. Humanitarian advocates argue that the UN and the World Health Organization should view the Yemen cholera outbreak as a global disaster, not just a national one, due to the highly infectious nature of the disease.<sup>56</sup>

### **Oral Cholera Vaccine Campaign**

There are currently three WHO pre-qualified oral cholera vaccines (OCV) available: Dukoral, Shanchol, and Euvichol-Plus. Each vaccine requires two doses for full protection. Dukoral is typically used for travelers and can be administered to individuals aged two years or older, while Shanchol and Euvichol-Plus can be given to anyone over the age of one. OCVs are administered with a buffer solution that requires 150 mL of clean water.<sup>57</sup> A 2018 meta-analysis of seven randomized trials and six observational studies deduced that the estimated mean efficacy of a standard, two-dose OCV is 58% with a protection that lasts for at least three years.<sup>58</sup>

---

54 Al-Mekhlafi, “Perspective Piece: Yemen in a Time of Cholera: Current Situation and Challenges,” 1558.

55 Ng, “Yemen’s Cholera Epidemic Is a One Health Issue,” 290.

56 Dureab, “Yemen: Cholera outbreak and the ongoing armed conflict,” 401.

57 “Cholera.”

58 Frederik Federspiel and Mohammad Ali, “The cholera outbreak in Yemen: lessons learned and way forward,” *BMC Public Health* (2018), 4.

The WHO released a position paper on cholera vaccines in 2017, stating their positionality and recommendations for the OCV campaign. The WHO states that preventing cholera should be prioritized in areas at the highest risks for epidemics or where cholera is endemic, specifically writing:

Given the current availability of killed whole-cell oral cholera vaccines (OCV) and data on their safety, efficacy, field effectiveness, feasibility, impact and acceptability in cholera-affected populations, these vaccines should be used in areas with endemic cholera, in humanitarian crises with high risk of cholera, and during cholera outbreaks. The vaccines should always be used in conjunction with other cholera prevention and control strategies.<sup>59</sup>

The WHO's recommendation for vaccinating communities is to reserve the stockpile for areas that are highly infected, with endemic cholera, or in areas which are suffering with humanitarian crises that allow for a high risk for cholera. However, cholera is prevented and spread is decreased through non-vaccine methods as well. The WHO recognizes this, recommending:

Vaccination should not disrupt the provision of other high priority health interventions to control or prevent cholera outbreaks. Appropriate case management, water-sanitation-and-hand-hygiene (WaSH) interventions, surveillance and community mobilization remain cornerstones of cholera control. Vaccination complements the other prevention and control measures and should be implemented in relevant settings as part of comprehensive cholera control strategies or while the other activities are being developed.<sup>60</sup>

By stating that vaccines should not disrupt other methods in preventing cholera. Vaccines are able to help decrease the spread of cholera, but there are other methods listed by the WHO that can prevent outbreaks and the spread of cholera more effectively in the long-term.

The WHO also writes a list of three criteria they use to determine whether an OCV campaign should be deployed in a community. The first criteria is whether there is a high risk of cholera among the population

in question and a risk of geographic spread to other regions in the vicinity. Second, they determine whether there is a programmatic capacity to vaccinate as many individuals as possible who are eligible to receive the vaccine—those over one or two year depending on the vaccine. Finally, the WHO will strictly not conduct an OCV campaign in a region where one has been conducted in the past three years in the same population, stating that a new campaign should not be carried out unless it is justified by continuous transmission from inadequate vaccine coverage during the previous campaign or if there has been a substantial change in the population.<sup>61</sup>

The OCV campaign in Yemen has been fleeting. In July 2017, three months into the second wave of the outbreak, a request was made for 3.4 million doses to be delivered to Yemen. The decision was made to release 1 million doses; however, several weeks later a meeting of local ministries, UN representatives, and aid agencies resulted in a retraction of the request.<sup>62</sup> Those who met were concerned that mass immunization would be infeasible due to the complex conflict and that the impact of vaccinations would be minimal due to the scale of the outbreak.<sup>63</sup> In August 2018, nearly 18 months into the second wave, 540,000 OCVs were delivered and administered by the WHO and UNICEF. A follow-up round was conducted in September 2018 where 387,000 of the previously vaccinated people received their follow-up dose.<sup>64</sup> Since 2018 the vaccine campaign has been scrapped in Yemen, and the shipped vaccines have been reallocated to other countries. The WHO and UN announced that they would rather focus their efforts on strengthening the WaSH system, instead of prioritizing OCVs.<sup>65</sup> Their reasoning is that it is too late for vaccines, announcing that focusing on clean water and sanitation, treatment of infected people, and working with communities to promote hygiene, sanitation, and cholera prevention would be more effective in the long run. Additional concerns surround whether providing vaccines—a form of aid—in some areas and not in others would fuel the conflict. This has led to the ethical

---

61 "Cholera vaccine: WHO position paper, August 2017–Recommendations," 3417.

62 Qadri et al., "Cholera in Yemen—An Old Roe Rearing Its Ugly Head," 2006.

63 Federspiel and Ali, "The cholera outbreak in Yemen: lessons learned and way forward," 4.

64 Ibid, 4.

65 Al-Mekhlafi, "Perspective Piece: Yemen in a Time of Cholera: Current Situation and Challenges," 1558.

---

59 "Cholera vaccine: WHO position paper, August 2017–Recommendations," World Health Organization (2017), 3417.

60 Ibid, 3417.

debate of who should be allocated vaccines and who should be used as determinants. Some health experts argue that it is best to give vaccines to those who are not living in the level of risk the Yemeni people are experiencing because vaccines would not be as effective. They argue that using vaccines on this population would be a waste. Others disagree, arguing that there is no harm done in vaccinating people who live in severely high-risk areas; vaccinating the Yemeni people would only save lives and mitigate spread.

Once the reality of the conflict in Yemen was accepted by international organizations, the question that remains regarding the largest cholera outbreak ever recorded is whether it could have been prevented or effectively managed had OCVs been deployed earlier. The answer suggests yes, but is complicated by the reality that there are logistical complications that inhibit humanitarian organizations' ability to create an orderly and comprehensive mass vaccination campaign.<sup>66</sup>

### ***Takeaways from Case of Yemen***

There are conflicting opinions about the feasibility of a mass immunization program in Yemen. Human Rights Watch has reported extremely chaotic conditions on the ground in Yemen early on, including 2 million internally displaced or trapped individuals, suggesting that OCV campaigns may not have been possible earlier on. These reports dissuaded many humanitarian organizations from implementing on-the-ground programs.<sup>67</sup> However, the magnitude of current humanitarian operations in Yemen suggests that mass immunizations may have been possible early on, which suggests that aid organizations are not equipped to prevent a cholera outbreak, specifically, during conflict.<sup>68</sup>

OCVs were not given until nearly 3.5 years into the conflict and 16 months into the outbreak, even though there was evidence in Yemen that suggested that the country would be susceptible to an outbreak both before and after the conflict erupted.<sup>69</sup> Despite the available tools to prevent the spread of cholera, there was a failure on the hands of organizations to act efficiently

and quickly.

Many global health researchers disagree about the possibility of OCVs in Yemen. Ng writes that many have attributed the catastrophic numbers of people infected to the delayed deployment of OCVs and surveillance of water quality on the ground, as the campaign was only initiated after almost a million cases had already occurred.<sup>70</sup> Federspiel and Ali agree, and they also write that there is a need for improved laboratory and surveillance capacity in countries in order to be able to declare outbreaks faster.<sup>71</sup> However, Qadri argues against this point, writing that it is incredibly difficult to implement these structures with governments who are engaging in internal conflict.<sup>72</sup> Ng echoes these sentiments, writing that it is difficult to achieve any organized and effective aid structures due to the political instability, making it imperative for the rival parties to negotiate a nationwide ceasefire before aid agencies will be able to properly address the humanitarian crises.<sup>73</sup>

Federspiel and Ali recommend that access to the International Coordinating Group (ICG) on Vaccine Provision's stockpile should be increased and the process should be simplified to allow for a more rapid deployment of vaccines. They also argue that more research should be conducted on the use of a single dose of an OCV, which has proven to have a short-term effectiveness of 69%.<sup>74</sup> Qadri and Federspiel and Ali write that a scale up of the ICG OCV stockpile is necessary.<sup>75</sup> In 2013, there were 2 million doses entering the ICG stockpile annually, which was scaled up to 25 million in 2018. Federspiel and Ali argue that this scale up should have happened earlier, given the demand for OCVs before 2018.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, continuous funding to the ICG stockpile is absolutely crucial.<sup>77</sup>

There is growing advocacy for the development of

66 Federspiel and Ali, "The cholera outbreak in Yemen: lessons learned and way forward," 4.

67 Ibid, 4.

68 Ibid, 4.

69 Ibid, 5.

70 Ng, "Yemen's Cholera Epidemic Is a One Health Issue," 290.

71 Federspiel and Ali, "The cholera outbreak in Yemen: lessons learned and way forward," 5.

72 Qadri et al., "Cholera in Yemen—An Old Roe Rearing Its Ugly Head," 2007.

73 Ng, "Yemen's Cholera Epidemic Is a One Health Issue," 291.

74 Federspiel and Ali, "The cholera outbreak in Yemen: lessons learned and way forward," 5.

75 Qadri et al., "Cholera in Yemen—An Old Roe Rearing Its Ugly Head," 2007.

76 Federspiel and Ali, "The cholera outbreak in Yemen: lessons learned and way forward," 5.

77 Ibid, 6.

predictive tools to guide the decision on whether a humanitarian emergency requires the deployment of OCVs as a preventative measure. Comparing the situation in Yemen to the 2010s cholera outbreak in Haiti, Yemen had a similar profile as being vulnerable to a cholera epidemic prior to the humanitarian crisis. Although it is difficult to predict a cholera outbreak, aid organizations need to start considering geographically high-risk cholera outbreak areas, not just areas where cholera is currently endemic.<sup>78,79</sup> Additionally, the WHO's current framework regarding the decisions on whether to deploy an OCV campaign is brief, leaving room for arbitrary decisions. In the case of Yemen, all high-risk criteria were fulfilled, making it unclear why the WHO decided to not move forward with its vaccination plans. The WHO needs to publish a more comprehensive framework for determining when to deploy an OCV campaign, as difficult as this could be.<sup>80</sup>

In the case of Yemen, OCVs were not deployed because the WHO and UN determined that it was too late for vaccines to be effective; however, 2017 may not have been too late for vaccines, as previous experiences with OCVs reactively has proven to be effective.<sup>81</sup> Considering millions of Yemenis have been infected and millions more have been exposed, 1 million doses would have been far too few to have a major impact on the spread. The WHO and UN should have allocated more doses to Yemen in order for an effective mass immunization.<sup>82</sup> What this argument does not consider, however, is the difficulty of providing aid in conflict zones. It is not clear that the WHO and UN would have actually been able to engage in a mass immunization program due to the potential of prolonging or fueling conflict by providing humanitarian aid in Houthi or government-controlled areas.

Most public health advocates argue that the OCV campaign should have been deployed earlier and that the WHO and UN should have identified Yemen as a region susceptible to a cholera epidemic, resulting in the organization of preventative systems. What health experts and humanitarian organizations are unable to answer

is how the WHO and UN are supposed to implement aid systems—including mass immunization programs—in a conflict zone. In Yemen, specifically, the reluctance of the Yemeni government to call the cholera outbreak by its name made it difficult for aid organizations to justify their intervention without knowledge of the realities on the ground.<sup>83</sup> Kimball writes about the importance of partnerships between international organizations and local NGOs, as local community members understand the complexities of the conflict on the ground and have access to information of which international actors are unaware.<sup>84</sup> Coppi agrees with this, writing that humanitarian organizations need to improve their coordination with groups at the local, national, and regional levels.<sup>85</sup> It would be more effective and efficient for the UN and WHO to work with local NGOs to provide immunization programs. Local community members are able to dictate where aid agencies should offer OCVs, and what regions they should avoid due to political strife.

To address the crisis in Yemen more broadly, Coppi writes that it is important for international organizations to work towards creating strong and unified initiatives to promote the respect of international humanitarian law by actors involved at all levels to protect noncombatants, as well as ease tensions among communities within and around Yemen. This means that the UN Security Council needs to play a more proactive role in de-escalation, and humanitarian actors need to strengthen their perception of neutrality in order to be trusted in the field.<sup>86</sup> In doing so, the work of aid organizations on the ground would have a greater opportunity to provide support without fueling conflict.

The final takeaway aid agencies must consider is the possibility of looking beyond immediate humanitarian needs. While providing relief for immediate concerns—hunger, disease, potable water—has significant impacts on communities, it is important for the international community to simultaneously invest in preventing further deterioration, which includes the support of healthcare facilities, addressing economic and finan-

78 Qadri et al., "Cholera in Yemen—An Old Roe Rearing Its Ugly Head," 2007.

79 Federspiel and Ali, "The cholera outbreak in Yemen: lessons learned and way forward," 5.

80 Ibid, 6.

81 Qadri et al., "Cholera in Yemen—An Old Roe Rearing Its Ugly Head," 2006-7.

82 Ibid, 2007.

83 Giulio Coppi, "The Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen: Beyond the Man-Made Disaster," International Peace Institute (2018), 27.

84 Kimball and Jumaan, "Yemen: The Challenge of Delivering Aid in an Active Conflict Zone," 66.

85 Coppi, "The Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen: Beyond the Man-Made Disaster," 1.

86 Ibid, 1.

cial impacts, and long-term peacebuilding efforts.<sup>87</sup> Specific to the cholera epidemic in Yemen, it is important for international organizations to look beyond this second wave of the outbreak and view Yemen as being high-risk for continued endemic cholera. Finally, the WHO and UN should not view the current cholera outbreak in Yemen as an epidemic with an end in sight, but instead as a long-term problem that could become a permanent risk, or endemic, to the region.<sup>88</sup>

### **Conclusion**

While it is clear that humanitarian organizations are faced with many challenges when attempting to provide aid in conflict zones, there are many changes they must adopt—as evidenced by the ongoing cholera epidemic in Yemen that aid organizations have failed to control. While aid in conflict zones will always be politicized, it is important for aid organizations to identify vulnerable structures early. The cholera epidemic in Yemen has proven that attempting to address health crises caused by conflicts that are already rampant is more difficult than working to prevent health crises before they are out of control.

The situation in Yemen also supports the argument that international organizations need to form partnerships with local NGOs before implementing aid programs or making decisions about what would be most useful for the population. This means maintaining as neutral a position as possible in order to maintain the trust of civilians and not further fuel the conflict. Local organizations need funding from international organizations, and international organizations need the insider intel that local members are privy to. These partnerships are crucial for providing aid in complex conflict zones, as long as the partnerships maintain as neutral a stance as possible. This argument, however, raises the question of whether relationships between local actors and international aid agencies can ever truly be apolitical. Further research should be conducted on how to implement aid structures in conflict zones where the positives outweigh the negatives—structures that provide long-term relief, even if there is potential for negative short-term effects.

---

<sup>87</sup> Coppi, “The Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen: Beyond the Man-Made Disaster,” 1.

<sup>88</sup> Qadri et al., “Cholera in Yemen—An Old Roe Rearing Its Ugly Head,” 2007.

# Insurgency Based Violence in Burkina Faso and the Wider Sahel

## Colin McCabe '22

---

### Introduction

This paper will explore the two ongoing insurgencies in Burkina Faso and the wider Sahel region involving Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wa Muslimin (JNIM), also known as the Group to Support Islam and Muslims, and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). The two insurgencies have maintained territorial control in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, and have used this control to gain money, recruit new members, and execute violent attacks on the local populations. The insurgencies have drawn international attention, but there has been little success in pushing them back and out of the regions so far.

The insurgencies have created a massive humanitarian issue in the three states as people are pushed out of their homes or flee from the insurgents. In Burkina Faso, 1.4 million people have been internally displaced and another 2.3 million have had basic services impacted by the conflict.<sup>1</sup> In Mali, while there are only 401,000 internally displaced people, over 90% of the population lives in an active conflict zone or fears that the conflict will spread to their region.<sup>2</sup> In Niger, the insecurity brought on by the conflict has limited the ability of many farmers in the west to have a livelihood as the insurgencies commonly extort cattle or agricultural products. Over 1,500 civilians died in 2021 alone from insurgent and ethnic militia attacks across the three countries, and the number of violent incidents has skyrocketed as the armed insurgency groups have swept across the nations. The crisis continues to grow each week with new attacks by each side, and there are currently around 2.1 million internally displaced people total, with just above 14 million in need of humanitarian assistance. Violent attacks against civilian populations are common as the insurgent organizations seek

to maintain control by weakening the perception of the state governments, exploiting ethnic tensions to drive recruitment, and instilling fear in the populations within their controlled territory. Insurgent attacks continue to be one of the main threats to the Sahel region and have risen in number and violence over the years.

In order to fully understand the two insurgencies, one must look into their background and creation. JNIM is a coalition group of different jihadist organizations that formed in March 2017 and has linked itself to al-Qaeda and is thus able to benefit from their more extensive resource and talent pool and international connections. The group is composed of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Mourabitoun, Ansar Dine, and Katiba Macina. The most significant factor in understanding JNIM is that all its member groups took advantage of the continued instability in Mali, beginning with the 2012 Tuareg rebellion. AQIM, in particular, was able to seize land in northern Mali directly after the revolution due to the inability of the government at the time to drive them out, but French forces would ultimately take back much of the occupied land in 2013. Al-Mourabitoun is actually a collection of splinter groups of AQIM that has faced its own issues and lost some members to ISGS. Ansar Dine also profited heavily from the 2012 coup in Mali, taking over land in the northern sector of the country and implementing Sharia law in and around Timbuktu until the French military intervened. Katiba Macina was formed in 2015 due to the ongoing instability in Mali and would spark the formation of ethnic-based militias in Mali, further contributing to the violence. JNIM as a whole has largely succeeded due to its ability to integrate into communities, particularly in Mali, due to the continued instability and concentration of wealth in the capital. However, it is due to the French military operation in the region that JNIM has now spread into other countries such as Burkina Faso and Niger. One must also note that JNIM briefly held peace talks with the Burkina Faso government in early 2020 before they ultimately broke down. ISGS is a recognized branch of the Islamic State's efforts to create a caliphate and is a member of the wider Islamic State

---

<sup>1</sup> "Burkina Faso," Global Humanitarian Overview (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, n.d.), <https://gho.unocha.org/burkina-faso>.

<sup>2</sup> "Mali," Global Humanitarian Overview (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, n.d.), <https://gho.unocha.org/mali>.

in West Africa Province (ISWAP) group. ISGS formed as a splinter of al-Mourabitoun in 2015 and has had a drastically violent impact on the region since. Rather than working from within the communities they control as JNIM often does, ISGS controls their populations almost exclusively through violence, fear, and extortion.

One newer element of the conflict is that while ISGS and JNIM used to cooperate, they now compete for territory and resources. The early cooperation between the two groups can mostly be attributed to the fact that leaders were close since ISGS was a splinter of al-Mourabitoun and had roots in the AQIM network. At least five instances of the two groups working together can be cited in which they often targeted larger military installations that would force the withdrawal of state troops from the tri-border region and allow the jihadis to have more territorial control. However, this cooperation would eventually dissolve and the two groups have been openly fighting one another since mid-July 2019, mainly in Burkina Faso's eastern provinces over territorial and ideological conflicts. As such the violence has escalated as the insurgent groups have an additional enemy to fight.

There are numerous factors that contribute to the ongoing violence and the ability for these two main insurgency groups to continue their efforts in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali. In this paper, I will first explore the contextual factors that contribute to the inability of Burkina Faso to properly respond to the insurgent groups. Second, I will examine some of the factors that drive the conflict and what specifically drives both JNIM and ISGS to continue their insurgencies. Third, I will look at the ways in which the insurgents have been able to continue their efforts by finding new sources of recruits, supplies, and money in order to maintain their strength. Fourth, I will look at windows of opportunity provided by the situation in Burkina Faso that have allowed the insurgencies to gain and control territory in the region. Finally, I will compare the situation in Burkina Faso to that of Mali and Niger and explain why counterterrorism efforts and elimination of the insurgencies in Burkina Faso cannot succeed unless the threat is eliminated in these two countries as well.

As you will see from these aspects that impact the ongoing violent insurgent conflict in Burkina Faso and the wider Sahelian region, it is a complicated issue. Despite the complexity, many of the causes of the conflict can be tied back to two central ideas. First, Burkina Faso,

Mali, and Niger are all fragile states with relatively weak economies that rely on a few products and they have poor governance structures. Continued political instability and weak rural governance in the countries is a driving force behind rural communalism and ethnic tensions that have sprouted into the ethnic violence that we see today. Similarly, the weak economies of each state cripple their ability to properly respond to any insurgency militarily and dampen their ability to win over local populations through basic infrastructure as the insurgencies have begun to do. Second, one must factor in the careful exploitation of opportunities by the insurgent groups that have exacerbated the violence and provided them with the financial means to continue the conflict. Groups such as AQIM have inserted themselves into the local population in the region over a number of years and won over the people through providing basic services and rudimentary justice. In return they get a silent population that won't help military intelligence efforts against the insurgencies. In addition, JNIM and ISGS have gone out of their way to utilize factors such as illicit gold mining and trafficking to their advantage to gain a source of funding for their operations. Overall, the insurgencies in the Sahel have many complicated factors such as ethnic militia-based violence and insurgency on insurgency violence, but when one looks at the larger picture, the violence occurs due to the inability of the state to properly respond to the matter at hand and the continued efforts of the insurgencies to win over and co-opt local populations.

### **Section One: Contextual Factors**

When one examines risk factors within Burkina Faso itself, there are two main pieces that stand out. Both are contributing factors that destabilize Burkina Faso and cause the country to be in a weaker state that can be exploited by insurgencies such as IGSG and JNIM. The first is the state of the economy in Burkina Faso. The weak economy has created a number of other factors that ultimately contribute to the fragility of the state and allow insurgent groups to utilize the economic situation of those around them to their advantage. The second factor is the failure to have strong rural governance in Burkina Faso. The lack of quality governance in the northern, rural provinces of Burkina Faso has created a sense of abandonment in the local populations, allowing the insurgencies to exploit these ten-

sions to their advantage.

## **Weak Economy**

Burkina Faso's economy is structurally weak due to its reliance on agriculture, which employs around 80% of the population of 20.9 million.<sup>3</sup> Due to the concentration of the labor force in a singular industry, the country is heavily vulnerable to changes in the price of cotton, the main cash crop. While the provinces that the insurgencies have taken over in Burkina Faso are mostly cattle focused, as the insurgencies take over more land in the country, additional revenue from agriculture is lost as farmers flee their land. As a result of the relatively weak economy, 40% of the population lives below the poverty line and just under a fifth of the population is food insecure. On top of these factors, there is a growing, educated youth population that is struggling to find jobs—in 2019, more than one million young graduates competed in the national civil service exam to fill about 5,000 job openings.<sup>4</sup> As 65% of the population is under 25 years old, the inability for them to find employment should be of major concern as they will turn towards alternative revenue sources should they remain unemployed.<sup>5</sup> Despite these grim stats, Burkina Faso's economy appears to be making a slight recovery—largely in part due to gold—and many expect that the economy will rebound in the coming years behind the metal. However, it is critical to understand that gold as a resource is also extremely valuable to the insurgent groups and that they have begun to target gold mines over the past few years—I'll delve more into that later. Both ISGS and JNIM exploit the poor condition of the economy for their own benefit by trying to recruit locals for whom it makes more sense to join up with an insurgent group for pay than continue their current job. As such, ISGS and JNIM are able to draw upon the populations in the territory they control for continued membership to fuel their fight for land and power.

## **Lack of Rural Governance**

In addition to having a weak economy, Burkina Faso also suffers from a lack of good governance structures

---

3 "Burkina Faso Overview," World Bank, October 26, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/burkinafaso/overview>.

4 Marcel Maglo and Fiona Grathwohl, "Regional Instability Drives Worsening in Burkina Faso," The Fund for Peace, May 10, 2020, <https://fundforpeace.org/2020/05/10/regional-instability-drives-worsening-in-burkina-faso/>.

5 "Burkina Faso," CIA World Factbook, (Central Intelligence Agency), <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/burkina-faso/>.

in rural regions. The roots of Ansarul Islam, a now defunct Islamist group, were founded in a social movement rather than a politically motivated insurgency. They capitalized on widespread discontent by the local population regarding the power of the marabout religious leaders and created a broader atmosphere of discontent with the government. In the Sahel region of Burkina Faso, there is a shared sentiment, especially among the young and socially disadvantaged, that "see[s] state representatives and security forces as foreigners trying to enrich themselves rather than state agents responsible for providing services".<sup>6</sup> As a result, the local populations in which these insurgencies exist are reluctant to cooperate with the government, thus helping the insurgencies stay hidden when necessary.

In addition to this idea of self-enrichment, many in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso feel as though the government has abandoned them due to a greater lack of infrastructure and inability to provide services. There are few, if any, paved roads, few hospitals and schools, and electricity and water are in low supply. One must also factor in recent droughts in a region whose main sources of economic activity are agricultural and livestock farming. As the government fails to respond to the needs of the people, they are seen as distrustful and incompetent and in some regions like Soum, it is common for locals to think the government is more inclined to look after itself and will use force to do so if it deems necessary.<sup>7</sup>

As a result of all of these factors, there is an inherent mistrust of the government in the region that the insurgencies have been able to capitalize on in order to benefit themselves. By providing some governance services—such as rudimentary social welfare, the settling of land disputes, and cattle protection—to populations they control, JNIM, and to some extent ISGS, have proven themselves to be more effective than the Burkina government to those living in the Sahel regions. The initial challenge to the existing social order posed by Ansarul Islam has continued and the Burkina government has largely failed to respond in any meaningful way and gain the trust of the people back. Until they are able to bridge the divide between the government

---

6 "The Social Roots of Jihadist Violence in Burkina Faso's North," International Crisis Group, November 3, 2017, <https://www.crisis-group.org/africa/west-africa/burkina-faso/254-social-roots-jihadist-violence-burkina-fasos-north>.

7 "Burkina Faso," CIA World Factbook.

and local populations in the Sahel region, the insurgencies will continue to flourish as locals will continue to not cooperate with the government forces.

## Section Two: Motives

Looking at the motives that fuel the conflict is critical as it helps build an understanding for why the two main insurgencies are occurring in the region and also begins to explain why some in Burkina Faso have either joined up with the insurgent groups or become complicit in the insurgents' activities. First, I will look at the identity grievances within Burkina Faso that have helped exacerbate the insurgent violence through the creation of ethnic violence, which I will later examine as a means by which ISGS and JNIM have continued the conflict. Then, I will touch on the desire for territory that the insurgent groups possess and how they are religiously motivated.

### *Identity Grievances*

One of the critical factors behind the identity grievances found in Burkina Faso is the underlying ethnic tensions, especially between the northern Sahel provinces and the capital. The two groups of focus are the somewhat Christian Mossi and Muslim Fulani, who respectively make up 52% and 8.4% of the population. The dominant Mossi is the ruling class that can be found in the center of the country whereas the Fulani people are mainly located in the Sahel provinces where they compose around 70-75% of the population. Many of these tensions lie on the back of the contextual factors mentioned previously—the Fulani feel as though the government is neglecting them and in large part blame the ruling Mossi for their issues. On top of these contextual factors, the Fulani people feel as though Muslims are underrepresented in government. While they make up approximately 60% of the population, they have low representation in the political elite and civil service—in January 2021, 18 of the 25 presidential cabinet ministers were from the Christian-leaning Mossi. While there have been efforts to reconcile the issues between the two groups, including the appointment of a minister for national reconciliation, tensions have only grown due to the feelings of lack of representation by the Fulani and a wider perception that the Fulani are at fault for the emergence of the insurgencies in Burkina Faso due to their location in the predominantly Fulani Sa-

hel regions of the country.<sup>8</sup> These tensions have boiled over into policing in the northern regions as government forces have targeted Fulanis for their presumed complicity with the insurgent groups, and by doing so created further grievances between the alienated ethnic group and the government. Due to these tensions, some members of the Fulani community are joining the insurgencies, as they see it as a way to protect their people, refusing to give information on ISGS or JNIM as they may see themselves as better off under their rule, or because they believe that the risks of joining have been lowered as government-trained forces are already targeting them as if they were complicit to the insurgencies' actions. As such, it is crucial for the government to recognize that the current ethnic tensions are a critical factor that helps drive some of the Fulani people towards helping or joining the insurgencies and they must take steps to mitigate the buildup of ethnic tensions in order to effectively combat the insurgent groups.

### *Territorial Control & Religious Desires*

Since both JNIM and ISGS are Islamist insurgencies, it shouldn't be a surprise that there is both a territorial and religious component that drives them. ISGS mirrors ISIS in that it is a militant Sunni group that follows a strict Salafi jihadist doctrine. They see themselves as possessing the potential to build their own caliphate after the general downfall of their parent group and as such they are continually pushing to gain more territory in which they can exert their control. They have done so mainly through the exploitation of local grievances, especially those of the Fulani people in the territory that they control. Much like ISIS, ISGS imposes a harsh version of Sharia law in which they deal out swift and harsh punishments for those that violate their laws such as amputation of limbs or execution.<sup>9</sup> Similarly to ISGS, JNIM also has religious and territorial drivers. Upon their creation, emir Iyad Ag Ghaly declared the group's intention was to "stand in front of the occupying Crusader enemy," reflecting similar anti-western

---

8 Henry Wilkins, "Burkina Faso's National Reconciliation No Easy Path," VOA (Burkina Faso's National Reconciliation No Easy Path, January 21, 2021), [https://www.voanews.com/a/africa\\_burkina-fasos-national-reconciliation-no-easy-path/6201032.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_burkina-fasos-national-reconciliation-no-easy-path/6201032.html).

9 Jared Thompson, "Examining Extremism: Islamic State in the Greater Sahara," *Examining Extremism: Islamic State in the Greater Sahara*, (Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 28, 2021), <https://www.csis.org/blogs/examining-extremism/examining-extremism-islamic-state-greater-sahara>.

Salafi doctrine that have been observed in other insurgency groups in the past.<sup>10</sup> The group actively seeks to replace state control with their conservative ideology and as such, seeks to control territory while it goes about its efforts to overthrow the states surrounding it. They control their populations and convince them to follow their doctrine through the threat of violence, but the group is not as brutal as ISGS. While neither the territorial or religious drivers of these two groups are any surprise, they must be mentioned as factors that push the insurgencies to continue their efforts in the region, and thus they are factors that contribute to the continued violence in the region.

## Section Three: Means

Looking at the ways in which both ISGS and JNIM utilize a variety of resources to continue their efforts is critical as it helps one examine what resources the insurgencies have utilized in order to continue the conflict. With the pair of insurgencies as they relate to the Sahel region there are two distinct factors that they have exploited in order to prolong their struggle: illicit economies and ethnic violence.

### *Illicit Economies*

There is little question that both ISGS and JNIM are attracted to illicit economies as a means of greed for wealth through which they can fund their operation. It is well established that the Sahel is a hotbed for trafficking, with numerous routes falling into territory controlled by the two insurgency groups. While it has been reported that groups like AQIM prefer not to traffic themselves due to the fact that “it represents peanuts for those organizations,” other groups certainly take advantage by trafficking mostly in drugs and people.<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that drug trafficking is strictly forbidden in the Quran, but groups still manage their way around it or simply ignore the directive and directly participate. If they participate, but aren’t the traffickers

themselves, they most often receive a tax from those trafficking for protection. Even if they aren’t actively participating in any form of trafficking, JNIM and ISGS take advantage of trafficking in the Sahel by utilizing the networks that traffickers have to bolster their own operations. To a larger extent, both ISGS and JNIM make more of their money from kidnappings than trafficking with JNIM receiving 204 alleged and convicted fighters alongside \$11.8 million for the release of four hostages last year.<sup>12</sup> When they receive this money, it often goes back into the illicit economy through the form of paying traffickers for weapons and ammunition. All in all, the insurgency groups have formed close ties with trafficking groups as a way to bring in additional income, utilize resources and networks of the traffickers, and keep themselves supplied with arms.

One major emerging illicit economy in Burkina Faso is illegitimate gold mining that the insurgent groups participate in and control. In addition, both ISGS and JNIM have executed attacks on gold mines and gold-carrying convoys themselves in order to gain the material. In order to understand the economics at stake here, one must understand how much money is involved—illicit gold mining operations across the country are estimated to support about three million people and foreign owned operations brought in \$300 million in government revenue for Burkina Faso in 2018.<sup>13</sup> When one factors in Mali and Niger, the informal gold trade is projected to be worth around \$2 billion.<sup>14</sup> In the Soum province of Burkina Faso, one has to pay their insurgent group that controls the gold site for access. In the eastern part of the country, ISGS and Ansar Dine levy the zakat for access to their mines. Insurgents attack the mines they don’t already control to raid gold storages across Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. As insurgent groups in the region have become more prominent, these attacks have increased in number and the government has been forced to pay more attention to the issue.

---

10 Jared Thompson, “Examining Extremism: Jama’at Nasr Al-Islam Wal Muslimin,” Examining Extremism: Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin, (Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 28, 2021), <https://www.csis.org/blogs/examining-extremism/examining-extremism-jamaat-nasr-al-islam-wal-muslimin>.

11 Djallil Lounnas, “The Links Between Jihadi Organizations and Illegal Trafficking in the Sahel,” Middle East North Africa Regional Architecture (MENARA, November 2018), [https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara\\_wp\\_25.pdf](https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara_wp_25.pdf).

---

12 Darren Davids, “Snatched in the Sahel: Militant Kidnappings in Mali,” S-RM Intelligence and Risk Consulting, November 19, 2020, <https://insights.s-rminform.com/militant-kidnappings-in-mali>.

13 Henry Wilkins, “Gold Mining in Burkina Faso Becomes Increasingly Dangerous,” VOA (Gold Mining in Burkina Faso Becomes Increasingly Dangerous), accessed December 16, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/a/gold-mining-in-burkina-faso-becomes-increasingly-dangerous/6306146.html>.

14 “How Jihadists Struck Gold in Africa’s Sahel,” Reuters (Thomson Reuters, November 22, 2019), <https://www.reuters.com/investigation/special-report/gold-africa-islamists/>.

However, when the government tries to retake gold mines, locals often side with the insurgency groups because of equipment and gold seizures as well as mine closures.<sup>15</sup> For some, artisanal gold mining is their only source of income and their desire to earn outweighs the dues they pay the insurgencies. The Burkina Faso government launched Operation Firestorm in May 2019 to regain control of the mining region in the east and had some success, but insurgent groups maintain control of a number of mines in the region. Overall, gold is a massive source of revenue for both of the insurgency groups, and it also possesses the potential to be a source of new recruits. Gold mining is a huge financial resource that allows the insurgents to have a relatively steady, semi-safe flow of income that is less risky than kidnappings and allows them to fund their operations. In addition, the trading of gold further connects insurgent groups to the traffickers as the gold is smuggled to other countries, such as Togo to avoid taxes. These factors ultimately entrench the insurgent groups in the communities around them as they have essentially integrated themselves into the informal gold mining economy and by doing so, formed connections with locals and traffickers, further bolstering their potential base of support in the country.

### **Ethnic Violence**

In addition to capitalizing on the ethnic tensions created between the Fulani and other groups in the region, both ISGS and JNIM have sought to twist the violence brought upon these groups to their advantage as well. The marginalization of the Fulani people across the region combined with their lack of economic opportunity marked them as a relatively easy target for the Islamist insurgency groups in the region to exploit, co-opt, and pit against those around them. The combination of the insurgencies locating themselves in these Fulani dominated regions, insurgency action to protect the Fulani, and retaliation by other ethnic groups has created a flow of ethnic violence that perfectly plays into the insurgents' hands as they have all but forced many Fulani to rely on them for protection.

ISGS has purposely targeted other ethnic groups across Burkina Faso in order to exacerbate the tensions between ethnic groups and foster violence that draws the

Fulani people towards their insurgency. ISGS is suspected of committing a massacre of 160 people earlier this year in Solhan in order to direct anger towards the Fulani people for their apparent complicity with the insurgencies. JNIM has taken an even larger role in fueling the ethnic conflict in Burkina Faso beginning earlier this year. Their forces have continually targeted government backed volunteer defense forces that have attacked the Fulani community. Due to hostile actions against the Fulani community, JNIM has attacked the town of Korumbi three times before taking over control completely, killed villagers in Kodyel in response to VPD mobilization against local Fulani, and committed other similar attacks that have targeted those that are going after the Fulani people or those that support groups going after the Fulani people.<sup>16</sup>

In response to the threat posed by the insurgent groups, numerous militias in Burkina Faso have formed and directly targeted the Fulani people in retribution. One of the more well-known groups was called Koglweogo, a Mossi militia, who, since 2019, has continually attacked and killed Fulani civilians in response to attacks by the jihadist insurgencies. The government largely allows these retaliatory actions to go unpunished and hasn't investigated a Koglweogo attack at Yirgou that killed dozens of Fulani.<sup>17</sup> The Koglweogo have been targeted by the insurgencies in return in efforts to show that the insurgencies are protecting the Fulani people and those in their territory. To add fuel to the fire, the Burkina Faso government passed a law allowing for the funding and training of vigilante groups to combat the jihadist groups. These groups, now collectively known as Koglweogo, have been accused of numerous civilian killings over the past year on suspicion of involvement with either JNIM or ISGS. It doesn't seem to bother the government too much though, with some Mossi party members even saying that if these voluntary forces commit atrocities, they are necessary in the fight against the insurgencies.<sup>18</sup>

---

16 "Sahel 2021: Communal Wars, Broken Ceasefires, and Shifting Frontlines," ReliefWeb, June 17, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/sahel-2021-communal-wars-broken-ceasefires-and-shifting-frontlines>.

17 Patricia Huon, "How Jihadists Are Fuelling Inter-Communal Conflict in Burkina Faso," The New Humanitarian, February 20, 2020, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/02/20/How-jihadists-fuelling-inter-communal-conflict-Burkina-Faso>.

18 Henry Wilkins, "Government-Backed Militias in Burkina Faso Accused of Abuses," VOA (Government-backed Militias in Burkina Faso Accused of Abuses, July 6, 2021), <https://www.voanews>.

---

15 "Getting a Grip on Central Sahel's Gold Rush," International Crisis Group, January 24, 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/282-reprendre-en-main-la-rupee-vers-lor-au-sahel-central>.

These atrocities further exacerbate the violence going on in the region. As long as attacks by the insurgent community are perceived as being committed by the Fulani, which to some extent is true at this point, other ethnic groups will respond in kind by targeting the Fulani community. In turn, these acts push the Fulani to join the insurgent groups so that they can protect their own communities. The situation in Burkina Faso is currently a cyclical one and there is seemingly little way to halt it as everyone sees it in their best interest to radicalize and commit violence against other ethnic groups that they perceive to be a threat. The insurgency groups have exploited this particular point of tension perfectly as it provides them with new recruits, makes the Fulani more likely to not cooperate with government backed forces, and allows them to claim they are protecting their constituents when they take aggressive action.

### Section Four: Opportunities

As it stands, Burkina Faso is an extremely weak state, ranking 36th on the state fragility index and displaying signs that it will continue to climb.<sup>19</sup> As such, it should be no surprise that the insurgent groups have been able to take advantage of this state fragility in order to find a greater foothold in the region. The first of the two major factors is weakness of the military and security complex of Burkina Faso that has developed as a window of vulnerability since the ousting of Compaoré in 2014. The second of these factors is the structural weakness of international institutions in the region, specifically the G-5 and its inability to maintain an effective force over time.

#### *Weakness of State Military*

Even after the ousting of Compaoré, the military apparatus of the state was still perceived to be a threat by the government and they subsequently reorganized it, effectively crippling much of the prior strength it possessed. After attempting a coup in 2015, the Presidential Security Regiment was disbanded, breaking apart the best trained and equipped force that the country

had.<sup>20</sup> While one would find few to argue against the force being disbanded due to its coup attempt and connection to the former presidency, the move diminished the military capabilities of the state and its ability to respond to threats. After the dissolution of this regiment, the new government continued to take steps that would serve to weaken the military and security structure of Burkina Faso due to their desire to shift away from institutions based in Compaoré's rule. As such, one intelligence branch that reported directly to the Chief of Staff is now split into three ineffective units that compete with each other. As a result, Burkina struggles to obtain information on the insurgencies, allowing them to operate and blend in with the local population with little struggle. In addition to the weakening of military institutions, there are a host of other structural issues such as lack of manpower, poor communication between different ranks, agency rivalry, poor training, and lack of both transport and attack vehicles. While the military was one of the strongest state institutions under Compaoré, his successors have turned it into a fragment of what it once was by continually diminishing its capacity to act and as such, nearly a third of the country has no military or police presence.

In addition to having structural weaknesses, the military also has discipline issues that have created moments of opportunity of which the insurgency groups take advantage. One of the larger points of concern lies in the fact that the military has essentially backed away from the front lines and given control to the volunteer defense forces and militias. In the first half of this year, the voluntary, mainly ethnic-based militias' death rate was four times that of the military.<sup>21</sup> Over the course of the year, the state military has come to increasingly rely on airstrikes due to this pullout from the northern regions of the country that appears to be driven by the military forces themselves—many soldiers refuse to serve in the regions close to the insurgencies out of fear for their own life. It is also worth noting that when the military has executed targeted ground operations, they often commit civilian massacres. The lack of government action when such events do occur display the inability of the military and state justice systems

---

[com/a/africa\\_government-backed-militias-burkina-faso-accused-abuses/6207880.html](https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/government-backed-militias-burkina-faso-accused-abuses/6207880.html)

<sup>19</sup> "Fragile States Index," Fragile States Index (The Fund for Peace, n.d.), <https://fragilestatesindex.org/>.

<sup>20</sup> "Tackling Burkina Faso's Insurgencies and Unrest," International Crisis Group, April 29, 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/tackling-burkina-fasos-insurgencies-and-unrest>.

<sup>21</sup> "Sahel 2021: Communal Wars, Broken Ceasefires, and Shifting Frontlines," Relief Web.

to prosecute such action and create further suspicion and dislike of the state in the rural areas where these atrocities are occurring. As mentioned in the ethnic violence section, these killings are disruptive events that push civilians closer to the insurgent movements and supply them with recruits. The weakness of the Burkina military—rooted in staid incapacity, lack of discipline, and the subsequent structural issues—has created an opportunistic scenario for the insurgencies. There is less risk for action when opposition forces are weak.

### ***Weakness of Institutions***

Not only is there weakness within the domestic security apparatus in Burkina, but there are also issues facing international institutions that have been involved in the Sahelian conflict. The G-5, the primary actor in the region, is a group composed of Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, and Mauritania and enjoys support from foreign powers, primarily France. The group has massive issues facing it. To name a few: four of its members are among the ten poorest countries in the world; it is trying to build a taskforce out of existing armies; and the countries often fight over priorities and accuse one another of not doing enough. The group has been largely ineffective over time, carrying out no missions in 2018 and relying heavily on France to prop up security in the region. Overtime, the group has seen some moderate success in the tri-border region of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso but hope for the group has dwindled, especially over the past few months. Earlier this year, France announced that it would end Operation Barkhane in the Sahel in 2022, dealing a blow to the G-5 with the removal of a reliable partner.<sup>22</sup> In addition, Chad announced that it would cut its forces in the G-5 in half, again weakening the broader security apparatus in the Sahel.<sup>23</sup> Despite these factors that have hurt the international institutional capacity to respond to events in the Sahel, there is also some signs of promise as Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo joined together for an anti-jihadist operation earlier this month

and the European Union has deployed a new task force called Takuba that will reportedly have responsibilities beyond the training and support of native militaries. All in all, international institutions in the region, especially the G-5, have been relatively weak and unable to respond to the growing threat that JNIM and ISGS pose. As such, the insurgencies have further freedom to act without fear of reprisal and can continue to be on the offensive rather than act defensively due to threats posed by international military coalitions.

### **Section Five: External Factors**

In a region that has faced as much instability as the Sahel, there are certainly external factors that have an impact on the insurgent violence in Burkina Faso. Some are smaller and others can be attributed towards other types of causes such as the prevalence of trafficking and illicit economies in the region. The largest external factors in the case of Burkina Faso are the respective stabilities of its fellow countries in which JNIM and ISGS exist. The two countries also face high levels of violence from the insurgent groups and they will not disappear from Burkina Faso unless they are pushed out of these two countries as well.

#### ***Niger***

The primary insurgent group of concern in Niger is ISGS due to their territorial location along the border between the country and Burkina Faso. On top of having to deal with ISGS, Niger is home to other armed groups including Boko Haram, so their already scarce resources are spread thin. As a result, Niger took steps similar to those we have seen in Burkina Faso over the past year or so and outsourced security to three different ethnic militias: the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad, the Tuareg Imghad, and the Allies Self-Defense Group—all three of which are Malian, not Nigerian.<sup>24</sup> The local communities feel as though the government has abandoned them and left them to the mercy of armed groups such as ISGS. Mirroring the violence in Burkina Faso, due to the rise of ethnic militias communities form to try and protect themselves, the conflict has adopted communal and ethnic undertones, resulting in increased levels of violence from both sides as the jihadist insurgencies target people of particular

<sup>22</sup> "France confirms end to Operation Barkhane in Sahel," The Economist Intelligence Unit June 14, 2021, <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=411122624&Country=Burkina%2B-Faso&topic=Politics&subtopic=Forecast&subsubtopic=International%2Brelations>.

<sup>23</sup> "Chad Plans to Withdraw Half Its Troops from G5 Sahel Force," Economic Intelligence Unit, August 26, 2021, <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1651353548&Country=Burkina%2B-Faso&topic=Politics&subtopic=Forecast&subsubtopic=Political%2Bstability>.

<sup>24</sup> "Sahel 2021: Communal Wars, Broken Ceasefires, and Shifting Frontlines," Relief Web.

ethnic groups in some of their attacks and militias respond in kind. The situation in Niger also mirrors that of Burkina Faso with the rapid buildup of ethnic militias for defense -as of June, 2021 there were Arab, Djerma, and Tuareg ethnic militias in sixteen different villages along the border region.

This western segment of Niger has become increasingly hostile and conflict prone due to the state's inability to do anything to resolve the issue. The state simply lacks the necessary resources to resolve the issue whether it be defending their people or replacing infrastructure that has been destroyed in attacks. Corruption runs rampant in the country with almost 40% of \$312 million spent on defense procurement from 2017 to 2019 lost due to inflated costs or the failure to deliver material.<sup>25</sup> In one case, three companies belonging to the same exact supplier competed for the same contract.<sup>26</sup> The military is drastically underequipped, and while the government is trying to root out corruption in order to solve the issue, it has been struggling to implement and enforce any anti-corruption legislation it passes. If the state has structural weakness in its military, it won't be able to solve any of the other issues it faces along the border with Burkina Faso and will have to continue to rely on ethnic-based militias for local defense.

The fragility of Niger has a direct impact on the ability of the Sahelian insurgencies to thrive as they will continue to exploit local ethnic tensions, extort populations, and gain and control territory in the country unless there is a structured effort to improve the capability of the Nigerien state to deal with the issues it currently faces. It is imperative that actors come up with solutions to these issues because even if issues are solved in Burkina Faso or Mali, both JNIM and ISGS could retreat towards Niger, recuperate, and then continue their insurgencies in other countries.

### **Mali**

As alluded to in the introduction, one could almost blame Mali for the insurgencies that Burkina Faso is

now facing. Building upon the background laid out prior, it is safe to say that violence and instability have been commonplace in Mali since the 2012 coup. Similar to Burkina Faso, the country is highly dependent on gold and agriculture exports and is thus highly susceptible to price fluctuations and poor growing seasons. Around 47% of the population sits under the extreme poverty line and around 90% of the country's poverty is concentrated in the south in and around the territories that JNIM and ISGS control.<sup>27</sup> The country's overall weak economy and lack of employment turns ordinary citizens into traffickers and smugglers. In turn, these people are exploited by the insurgent groups that commonly tax smuggling routes. As such, the economic situation in Mali openly benefits insurgent groups as they make profit off of trafficking and smuggling or find new recruits who are willing to join for the money.

Political and representational grievances are commonplace in the country over the past few years due to instability and corruption. The 2018 reelection of President Keita was accused of widespread fraud and created a movement that would result in a military coup in August 2020. While some were hopeful the military would clean up the act of the government, the junta took prominent posts in the cabinet as elections were planned and rewarded those in the military with lofty postings as well. The civilian heads of government disbanded the government to try and reform it with less military prominence only to undergo another coup. JNIM and ISGS benefit massively from the lack of clear governance; with everyone focused inward, people are less concerned about the insurgencies and it is unclear who is really fighting them on the ground. In central Mali, JNIM has taken advantage of the situation to pose as the mediator between the Fulani and the Dogon communities in order to undermine the influence of the ethnic Dogon-majority militia Dan Na Ambassagou. The political instability has also threatened Mali's defense capabilities as after the second coup, France temporarily suspended joint military operations in the country, depriving the state of crucial intelligence and air support needed to combat the insurgencies. While political factors certainly play a role in the fragility of Mali that allows for the existence, the country's weak military is a driving force behind their inability to successfully contest both ISGS and JNIM.

---

25 Flora Stevens, "If Niger Hopes to Secure Peace It Must Address Defence Corruption," Transparency International Defence & Security, August 28, 2020, <https://ti-defence.org/niger-military-defence-corruption-sahel-conflict/>.

26 Moussa Aksar, "Niger Lost \$120 Mln in Arms Deals over Three Years - Govt Audit," Reuters (Thomson Reuters, May 27, 2020), <https://www.reuters.com/article/niger-arms-audit/niger-lost-120-mln-in-arms-deals-over-three-years-govt-audit-idUKL8N2D92I-W?edition-redirect=uk>.

---

27 "Mali," World Bank, n.d., <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mali/overview>.

The security situation in Mali is rapidly deteriorating and reflects the situation in both Burkina Faso and Niger. Security forces and ethnic militias routinely commit human rights atrocities against civilians when on operations to counter insurgent activity in the country including executions, disappearances, and beatings. The UN peacekeeping force in the nation, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), tallied 43 executions by state forces in two months alone earlier this year.<sup>28</sup> MINUSMA is often celebrated by villagers and seen as positive, but they cannot cover enough territory to guarantee the security of an entire nation and their mandate is now focused on the upcoming elections. The state military itself is understaffed and undersupplied with only around 12,000 troops for a national population of 20.25 million. The situation has gotten so bad that the government has considered bringing in the infamous Russian Wagner mercenary group despite the fact that it would likely push key allies, such as France, out of the country entirely.<sup>29</sup> At the end of the day, Mali has an understaffed, weak military that doesn't have the respect of the people due to extrajudicial killings that it can't afford to fix due to the weak state of the nation's economy. It is heavily reliant on foreign partners and the UN mission for assistance in fighting the JNIM and ISGS insurgencies and will be unable to solve the issues it faces on its own.

Overall, Mali's fragility poses a large threat to the future of Burkina Faso. Insurgent groups have found a pretty comfortable home in Mali and it appears as if they won't be driven out for a while as the state doesn't have the resources at the moment to fully commit to dealing with the insurgent groups in a swift manner. Similar to Niger, Burkina Faso will have to work to solve the situation in Mali if it truly wishes to rid itself of the insurgency groups it currently faces.

## Conclusion

---

28 "Weak State Protection of Civilians Threatens Mali's Existence," United Nation Office of the High Commissioner (United Nations, August 6, 2021), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27364&LangID=E>.

29 "Why the War against Jihadists in Mali Is Going Badly," The Economist (The Economist Newspaper, November 18, 2021), <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/why-the-war-against-jihadists-in-mali-is-going-badly/21806350>.

The ISGS and JNIM insurgencies in Burkina Faso and the wider Sahel region have become increasingly complex in recent years due to the exploitation of ethnic tensions and violence by the insurgent groups and the emergence of competition and conflict between the former friendly insurgencies. The dynamics that have allowed the insurgencies to flourish are widespread and cover many aspects of state fragility and weakness not only in Burkina Faso, but in Niger and Mali as well. Each state has a relatively weak economy, aspects of political instability such as corruption or high turnover, and weak militaries that add to the violence. The insurgencies have continually capitalized on the inability of states to respond to them by committing further attacks, gaining territory, and extorting locals. For some it has become easier to live under the jihadist insurgencies because even if they are violent, they may offer some form of social order and governance provisions that the state government can no longer provide. Throughout this paper, I have covered numerous reasons for why the Sahelian insurgencies and the violence that they bring flourish. Each of these topics traces back to one of two starting points—the exploitation of disorder by the insurgent groups and state fragility caused by weak economies and poor governance. One could contest this theory and claim that the insurgencies that now plague Niger and Burkina Faso are entirely the fault of the situation in Mali post-2012 in which jihadist groups obtained territory. They could say that the insurgencies snowballed past the capabilities Burkina Faso and Niger could handle before they were even in the countries and as such you can't fault them for the issues they face today. While this line of thought has some merit, I believe it ignores the ways in which the insurgencies have benefited from these two countries such as through the gold mines in Burkina Faso. Simply put, the insurgencies ultimately thrive because they are in weak states that don't have the proper resources to effectively combat them.

It is unclear what direction the conflict in the Sahel will take over the next few months. Mali is supposed to have elections in early 2022, but no one is currently sure what to expect as current leaders have taken power through two separate coups in 9 months. As such, it is hard to tell what the direction the country will take regarding the issue as it is dependent on if there is a government transition. While Malian security forces and the militias that they have trained have been somewhat effective, the country has heavily relied on

France to help aid it against the jihadist insurgencies though what that support will look like is also in question with the end of Operation Barkhane. Burkina Faso will be the country to which observers should be paying the most attention as it is currently rebuilding its government amid protests in early December calling for a stronger response to the insurgent groups. Again, it is unclear exactly what shape any new action will take, but one can expect there to be some form of surge against the insurgents within the coming months. While some may be hopeful about the potential effectiveness of a renewed push against JNIM and ISGS from Burkina Faso, I believe it is highly unlikely that the problem will be solved due to the widespread territorial control that the insurgent groups possess across all of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. In addition, unless another nation steps in to fully replace France, it is unlikely that the region will see help from a strong international partner. The United States under the Biden administration has largely followed the playbook of the Trump administration and given the region lesser priority over domestic issues and other foreign policy focuses such as China, Russia, and Iran and should not be thought of as a potentially reliable partner. There appears to be little hope for the region marred by the pair of Salafi driven insurgencies. Barring a miracle, one should expect the dynamics that have allowed them to come to fruition to continue and the levels of violence in the region to increase.

# Contestations of Migrations

*A history of Greece's far-right and the rise of The Golden Dawn*

Mannon Frykholm '22

---

## Introduction

The object of this paper is to situate Greece's militant, neo-Nazi, far-right group, the Golden Dawn, in a longer history of far-right politics in Greece, and to trace the nationalist, fascist, and racist elements of the Golden Dawn to better understand how the movement of immigrants and refugees into Greece is contested by the paramilitarized and violent tendencies of far-right ideologies. Situating both the opportunistic growth of the Golden Dawn as a political party and its anti-immigrant discourses in a longer history of far-right politics in Greece offers insight into how far-right ideologies spread, infiltrate, and influence public discourse on migration. The growth of negative public opinion of migration initiated by the Golden Dawn has resulted in the often-violent restriction and management of people's right to freedom of movement.<sup>1</sup>

The far-right is often used as an umbrella term to encompass the social groups, movements, and parties whose core ideologies consist of nationalist-shaped ideological doctrines.<sup>2</sup> Among scholars engaging in literature on migration and the far-right, there exist many different distinctions beneath this umbrella term that are used to distinguish specific ideologies, methods, and groups within the far-right. Take, for example, the distinctions between the terms "extreme right" and "radical right": right-wing extremism implies the pursuit of eliminating all forms of democracy, while right-wing radicalization implies "root and branch" reform of political systems without the explicit pursuit of eliminating forms of democracy.<sup>3</sup> This is just one example of distinction within far-right scholarship, as there exist many within literature on the far-right. This paper will

use the term "far-right" to include a broader combination of far-right ideologies primarily consisting of nationalist, fascist, and racist discourses.

To situate the far-right in Greece and its impact on migration, there are three main questions this paper considers: How has the rise of the Golden Dawn contributed to a longer history of far-right politics in Greece? How has the rise of the Golden Dawn been shaped by as well as shape the interwoven ideologies of nationalism, fascism, and racism? How do far-right politics, such as that of the Golden Dawn's political party, influence migration and incite violence targeted towards people on the move, particularly in Greece?

These questions consider how the growing prominence of migration along the Balkan route and through Greece has facilitated opportunities for the Golden Dawn to actualize and spread nationalist, fascist, and racist ideologies.<sup>4</sup> This paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing and developing literatures focusing on the far-right and on migration through the Balkan route. Through investigating these questions, I attempt to reveal the intersections in which politics of migration along Greek borders are met and moderated by the ongoing nationalist, fascist, and racist elements that make up the Golden Dawn. The Golden Dawn has militantly embodied nationalist, fascist, and racist ideologies since and before its initiation and thus pursues violence through its "on the ground" paramilitarization efforts (paramilitarization in this context can be understood as the unsanctioned use of military-style force),<sup>5</sup> racializing and othering of migrants, and promoting the illegalization of migration. These manifestations of the Golden Dawn ultimately combine to create hostile Greek nation-state terrain for migrants to cross.

---

1 Stierl, M. 2017. 8 Excessive Migration, Excessive Governance: Border Entanglements in Greek EU-ropes. In N. De Genova (Ed.), *The Borders of "Europe"* (pp. 210-232). New York, USA: Duke University Press.

2 Vasilopoulou, Sofia; Halikiopoulou, Daphne. 2015. *The Golden Dawn's 'Nationalist Solution': Explaining the Rise of the Far Right in Greece*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 5.

3 Golder, Matt. 2016. "Far Right Parties in Europe." *Annual Review of Political Science* 19(1): 477-497.

---

4 Mullen, Bill; Vials, Christopher. 2020. "Introduction" to *The U.S. Antifascist Reader*. Verso: London.

5 Tsoutsoumpis, Spyridon. 2018. "The Far Right in Greece. Paramilitarism, Organized Crime and the Rise of 'Golden Dawn,'" *Südosteuropa. Journal of Politics and Society*, De Gruyter, vol. 66(4), 510.

### ***Situating the Golden Dawn in Greek's Recent Far-Right History***

Throughout history, Greece has often been a site for violent, polarized, and extremist politics. A deep divide between leftist and rightist beliefs has shaped the volatile nature of Greek politics. In tracing a brief political history of Greece from World War II to the present, one fact becomes strikingly clear: over the years, Greece has been a birthplace for many different far-right manifestations which have incited various forms of violence and sites for contestation. A brief history of the far-right in Greece, post-World War II, follows.

The Greek Civil War, a war between the Democratic Army of Greece and the Greek Government Army, took place in 1944 through 1949, ultimately underscoring what would become the harsh reality of an extremely polarized political landscape ever since. During the Civil War, Greek communists (the Democratic Army of Greece) failed to gain control of the state as they faced the right-wing's anticommunist efforts (the Greek Government Army) that were funded by the United States' and the United Kingdom's aid (ultimately allowing Greek membership in NATO).<sup>6</sup> Greece became largely economically dependent on U.S. aid during the 1950s, which greatly influenced the spread of anti-communism within Greek centrist political views. The outcome of the Greek Civil War, in which the Greek Government Army overpowered the Democratic Army of Greece, resulted in the decline of leftist power, though communist ideologies persisted.

The far-right in Greece began to develop after World War II through the formation of several different paramilitary groups; "over forty paramilitary organizations were formed between 1959 and 1963,"<sup>7</sup> most working to silence communist beliefs in Greece. Such paramilitary-style organizations operated clandestinely at local levels,<sup>8</sup> and their work centered on spreading ultra-conservative views, such as the belief that the entire state apparatus of Greece "was unable or unwilling to pro-

vide" for its Greek citizens.<sup>9</sup> The localized organizations recruited primarily young men in Greek provinces to join and spread anticommunist and anti-leftist rhetoric. Paramilitary organizations quickly spread at this grassroots level. Far-right groups attracted large followings among working and lower middle-class men,<sup>10</sup> pursuing the fascist ideologies that promised a rebirth of the Greek nation at any cost.

The 1960s brought in an era of dictatorship to Greece. The Greek junta, a far-right military operation guided by dictator Georgios Papadopoulos from 1967 to 1974, proved to be "the heyday of the extreme right"<sup>11</sup> in Greece. Under this regime, the youth presence in paramilitary organizations marked a new generation of neo-fascists in Greece. Ultimately the dictatorship fell apart in 1974, and taking its place in power was a stable two-party democratic system that alternated power between socialist and conservative parties.<sup>12</sup> Despite this sense of political stability, however, the far-right continued to mobilize in the face of democratization by way of its ongoing grassroots, paramilitary style organizing, which resulted in internal terrorist acts and civilian attacks—"over 100 bombs and arson attacks took place in Athens between 1977 and 1979."<sup>13</sup>

In the 1980s, a man by the name Nikolaos Michaloliakos established the Golden Dawn, a neo-fascist group that would eventually become a political party. Formed by previous members of a neo-fascist organization originally called the Party of August 4th,<sup>14</sup> the Golden Dawn has defined itself by its guiding principal, "with faith in the ideology of nationalism" and by its symbol, a co-opted figure resembling a Nazi swastika.<sup>15</sup>

Vasilopoulou notes, "The Golden Dawn arose in Greece at a time of severe economic crisis resulting in recession, high rates of government deficit as a percentage of GDP, high levels of unemployment, and stern austerity measures."<sup>16</sup> Moreover, when met with an influx of immigrants due to collapsing socialist regimes in

6 Ibid.

7 Tsoutsoumpis 2018, 510.

8 Beede, Benjamin. 2018. "Semi-Military and Paramilitary Organizations" in *Military History*. Oxford University Press: New York.

9 Tsoutsoumpis 2018, 511.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid, 513.

12 Mazower, Mark. 2002. *The Balkans: A Short History*. Modern Library: New York, 137.

13 Tsoutsoumpis 2018, 514.

14 Vasilopoulou, et al 2015, 4.

15 Ellinas, Antonis A. 2013. *The Rise of Golden Dawn: The New Face of the Far Right in Greece*, *South European Society and Politics*, 18:4, 543-565. \_

16 Vasilopoulou, et al 2015, 8.

Eastern Europe and the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s,<sup>17</sup> anti-immigrant rhetoric spread once again throughout a new generation of youth. As the Greek government “did nothing to integrate [immigrants]”<sup>18</sup> into their country, the far-right was fueled to take their violence to the streets by way of paramilitarization to face these “foreign” newcomers, acting outside of the law when they deemed it necessary. Organized crime by the Golden Dawn included human trafficking, forgery of legal documents, gang recruitment, and preventing the collectivizing efforts of immigrants. These efforts all contributed to the spread of anti-immigrant sentiments among Greek citizens outside of the far-right organizations.<sup>19</sup> In the context of Greece’s 1990s economic volatility, the influx of immigrants followed by the anti-immigrant public discourses, combined to create the perfect conditions for the rise and strengthening of the Golden Dawn.

While far-right ideologies and paramilitarization continued to persist by way of grassroots organizing for the next two decades, the local town elections of 2010 and the national parliamentary election of 2012 proved to be the most alarming and significant display of far-right beliefs since Greece’s dictatorship. In 2010, the Golden Dawn successfully managed to elect a town councilor in Athens, which was the first of Golden Dawn’s political representation in the state apparatus. Support for the Golden Dawn’s presence as a political party only spread by the time the national parliamentary elections of 2012 rolled around.<sup>20</sup> Greece faced yet another debt crisis and economic recession during these years, a factor that compounded with the Golden Dawn’s sudden rise of political power to give the far-right its greatest presence in Greece since the age of its dictatorship. In this context, the Golden Dawn political party received the votes of nearly 1 out of every 14 Greek voters, ultimately securing 7% of the vote in 2012 and sending 18 of its members to parliament.<sup>21</sup> The Greek’s left has since been forced to face their deepest fears: the possibility and reality of far-right, neo-fascists taking hold of political power by way of electoral

representation.

Most recently, after a five-year long criminal court case against the Golden Dawn’s political party that began in 2015, the party was finally found to be guilty of its status as a criminal organization in 2020, despite denying their presence as a neo-Nazi movement and the weaponization of its members. The party was guilty on the counts of “attacking members of a trade union, the attempted murder of a group of Egyptian fishermen, and, most famously, the murder of anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas.”<sup>22</sup> While one guilty verdict does not simply eliminate far-right ideologies, this guilty verdict was celebrated and understood as an important step towards justice and eradicating the far-right’s presence and power within the Greek nation.

Throughout this history of the far-right in Greece, several themes emerge: first, the generational recreation and embodiment of far-right ideologies through the continued targeting, recruitment, and grooming of new generations of youth, particularly young men from working- and lower-class provincial families;<sup>23</sup> second, the provocation of localized and illegal violence run by these far-right groups, regardless of the governing political system in power; third, the turbulent economic status of the Greek state including austerity measures and occasional dependence on European Union/American/Western aid; and lastly, though this list should certainly not be considered exhaustive, the nationalist fueled anti-immigrant rhetoric mediated through organized violence and gang attacks throughout Greece.

This brief history of Greece’s far-right highlights the roots of the Golden Dawn’s presence in Greece. Since the Golden Dawn’s establishment in the 1980s, its members have acted violently through local organized crime.<sup>24</sup> Greek history reveals the fact that far-right ideologies continue to overcome the test of time in a globalized world. Of course, the future remains to be unwritten, but in the face of a so-called “refugee crisis,” a term used to describe the refugees trapped in Greece awaiting asylum into Europe, and with “the Golden Dawn one of the most successful far right-wing parties in the Greek post-dictatorship era,”<sup>25</sup> it remains an ongoing project to disseminate the politics and impli-

17 Mazower 2002, 134.

18 Tsoutsoumpis 2018, 517.

19 Ibid, 522.

20 Sakellariou, A. 2013. “Golden Dawn and Its Appeal to Greek Youth.” Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: Athens, 6.

21 Dinas E, Georgiadou V, Konstantinidis I, Rori L. 2016. From dusk to dawn: Local party organization and party success of right-wing extremism. *Party Politics*;22(1): 80-92.

22 Lavelle, Moira. 2020. “Greece’s Nazi Golden Dawn has Finally Been Ruled a Criminal Organization.” *Jacobin Magazine*.

23 Tsoutsoumpis, 2018, 511.

24 Vasilopoulou, et al 2015, 4.

25 Ibid 4-5.

cations of the far-right's effect on Greek society and in particular, the experiences among immigrants and refugees that face far-right hostility and racism. As such, the following section will assess how far-right ideologies are shaped by on-the-ground physical manifestations of nationalism, fascism, and racism, and how the Golden Dawn has contributed to the spread of these ideologies.

### **The Golden Dawn: A Far-Right Project of Nationalism, Fascism, and Racism**

In their campaign for the 2012 election, Golden Dawn members “slapped and hurled water at female rival politicians live on TV, threatened to throw immigrants and their children out of hospitals and creches, [were] accused of violent assaults on foreign workers in Athens, and [were] arrested for attacking anarchists.”<sup>26</sup> These examples of violence indicate how the Golden Dawn has been shaped by and contributes to a vast discourse of far-right ideologies around the globe that are actualized through violence.<sup>27</sup> I argue that the ideologies of nationalism, fascism, and racism are interwoven discursively; they share tangential language and definitions which can make them abstractly difficult to define, separate, and differentiate; essentially, these ideologies make each other up. As such, within literature of far-right ideologies and fascism in Greece, the Golden Dawn is defined by scholars in a wide variety of ways: as a political party, as a group of neo-Nazis, as a far-right paramilitarist group, as an ideological movement, and as a grassroots proliferation of fascist ideas. I accept these distinctions and nuances in defining the Golden Dawn in a comprehensive sense, in that the Golden Dawn is representative of various far-right ideologies, described here specifically as nationalism, fascism, and racism, and consisting of the violent activities that have unfolded since the Greek Civil War. In assessing the Golden Dawn as a far-right project, it is useful to understand the ways that nationalism, fascism, and racism specifically are interconnected concepts that operate together and fuel each other especially when physically manifested in violent manners. This section will describe the Golden Dawn's production of violence and hostility as a result of nationalist, fascist, and racist ideologies.

<sup>26</sup> Sakellariou, 2013, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Vasilopoulou et al, 2015, 5.

Nationalist discourse is promoted by many far-right groups beyond the Golden Dawn in Greece. Nationalism is widely accepted as a core ideological feature for far-right groups.<sup>28</sup> Eric Wolf writes that “Concepts like ‘nation’...name bits and threaten to turn names into things.”<sup>29</sup> Nationalist discourse is the reification of nations and the language that is used to create the identity of a nation. The means through which the rhetoric of nation-making spreads is central to the making of nationalist identity itself. But what language, exactly, suggests this nation-making and nationalism in the context of the Golden Dawn? What kind of nation-making does the Golden Dawn hope for?

To answer these questions, I argue that the language used to determine the Golden Dawn's image of Greece is comprised of fascist discourse. Thus, to help identify nationalism within the Golden Dawn, a definition of fascism is necessary. I define fascism in this context as the culmination of racist, colonial, sexist, and xenophobic ideas that imply processes of othering in order to benefit the needs, agendas, and nation-making claims of its pursuers. I also understand fascism as an inherently racialized ideology due to its desire to perpetuate racist, colonial, sexist, and xenophobic rhetoric as attempts to reify and actualize nation-state projects.<sup>30</sup> In this way, Greek nationalism is greatly shaped by the ideologies of both fascism and racism.

Greece's Golden Dawn is a primary example of how nationalism, fascism, and racism are ideologies that intersect through language and violence. Language of nation-making prompts the characterization of a place's authenticity, such as promoting images of Greece's classical past history as a defining feature for Greek authenticity in order to create a framework that is then used to describe a region that contains a group or groups of people that adhere to the area's images of authenticity.<sup>31</sup> The Golden Dawn specifically creates the language for nation-building by its use of common far-right tropes and myths such as xenophobia, hyper-masculinity, the rebirth of a nation, a call to recreate

<sup>28</sup> Mullen, 2020, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Wolf, Eric. 2010. *Europe and the People Without History*. University of California Press: Berkeley. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Robinson, Cedric. 2020. “Fascism and the Response of Black Radical Theorists” in Mullen, Vials' *The U.S. Antifascist Reader*. Verso: London

<sup>31</sup> Traverso, Enzo. 2019. *The New Faces of Fascism: Populism and the Far Right*. Verso: London. 40.

the glorified past, militarism, and organized crime in an ongoing quest of the nation's racial, cultural, and ethnic Greek purity.<sup>32</sup> These tropes and myths promote racialization through advocating and enacting the politics of differentiation. For example, students of the Golden Dawn are pictured on their website as such:

[they are] giving the neo-Nazi salute during their history lessons [emphasizing] ancient glory and the military victories of ancient Greeks, in particular the militaristic and oligarchic ancient Sparta or the Revolution of 1821, which resulted in liberation from Ottoman rule and the formation of an independent Greek state in 1830.<sup>33</sup>

The curriculum the Golden Dawn provides for its students encourages directly “intimidating and attacking political opponents, teachers, and classmates of non-Greek origin, and recruiting fellow students”<sup>34</sup> on this basis. The Golden Dawn promotes the characterization of Greece in the glorified light of its past. This characterization of the nation is central to its discourse of recreating a “greater, more powerful” Greek nation. This nation-making inherently relies on processes of othering, in which differences, such as race or place of origin, are mapped onto both bodies and land to distinguish one group or groups of people from another, ultimately creating borders between these different identities.

### ***Migration meets the Far-Right in Greece***

The question then remains, how do far-right politics influence migration and shape borders, particularly in Greece? In the context of its open xenophobia, the Golden Dawn and its promotion of far-right ideologies guided by nationalism, fascism, and racism are bound to encounter immigrants and refugees. The hostile terrain immigrants and refugees face while exercising their right to freedom of movement has been contested over the years by the paramilitary groups that specifically target their movement patterns. Racialized and xenophobic discourses spread through Greece stereotype immigrants and refugees as dangerous and impure threats to the Greek nation; these discourses seek to categorize migration as an illegal and invasive act, ultimately threatening the safety of the Greek nation. It

should go without saying that refugees and immigrants exercise their right to freedom of movement for a variety of necessary, compelling, and innately humanist reasons—to reconnect with family, to leave war-torn or violent areas, to seek safety from natural disasters, to pursue alternate opportunities than the place they originate might offer, among many other reasons. But time and time again, the far-right contests this movement by disregarding the reasons people on the move practice mobility, by dehumanizing the experiences of immigrants and refugees, and by becoming overly concerned with controlling population movements, ultimately labeling people on the move as foreigners, criminals, and subversives.<sup>35</sup>

The paramilitarization of the Golden Dawn and their grassroots-level efforts of organized crime and incitement of violence has often been targeted specifically at immigrants and refugees as well as towards activists and far-left organizers in Greece that advocate for the rights of people on the move. The Golden Dawn defines immigrants and refugees as people that have “no culture” and as “barbarians.”<sup>36</sup> One Golden Dawn member noted, “... it is impossible to have even a proper discussion with [immigrants] because they will take a knife and attack you; that is why Greeks should take up the knife first.”<sup>37</sup> Paramilitarization of the Golden Dawn is the physical manifestation of far-right ideologies; it is guided by the nationalist desire to purge that which is considered “other” to the idealized Greek national identity, founded by the racial differentiation of people and actualized through localized militant pursuits of crime. Paramilitarization is central to the spread of fascism and the reproduction of stereotypes.

Moreover, processes of racialization and othering marginalizes the experiences of immigrants and refugees. The Golden Dawn justifies their hostility towards immigrants and refugees by claiming that people on the move are responsible for a rise in criminality in Greece. No scholarship proves that immigrants or refugees are responsible for these claims of increased criminality; ironically, the neo-Nazi paramilitarization of the Golden Dawn has in fact proved itself to be the provoker of violence in Greece (and ultimately the reason why the Golden Dawn was put on trial in court). An anthropologist visiting villages in southeastern Peloponnese

<sup>32</sup> Mullens 2020, 14.

<sup>33</sup> Sakellariou, 2013, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Traverso 2019, 61.

<sup>36</sup> Sakellariou, 2013, 11.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

noted that “racist and xenophobic attitudes were both common and socially acceptable. In many villages immigrants lived under conditions practically amounting to apartheid.”<sup>38</sup> Additionally, a respondent for the Golden Dawn openly described themselves as racist:

“I have been forced over recent years to become a racist. [Immigrants] have forced me to become a racist because it can’t be right that I’m afraid to move around in the country where I was born and in the neighborhoods where I grew up.”<sup>39</sup>

In the context of anti-/fascist scholarship, these racializing and othering practices promoted by the Golden Dawn can be understood as a contribution to the ongoing violent, racist, and authoritarian practices of Occidental capitalism<sup>40</sup> and its perpetuation of white supremacy, nationalist driven violence, and xenophobia that encourage the hardening of economic and racial nationalisms that a fascist state thrives on.

Contributing to the demonization and stereotyping of people on the move, the Golden Dawn has militantly promoted the idea that freedom of movement across borders is and should be illegal. A guiding principle in their 2012 electoral campaign influenced voters, many of whom were young men, by promoting the idea that there should be no such thing as legal immigration. Members of the Golden Dawn’s political party who ran for its electoral campaign “declared that immigration [could] never be legal” so much so that the party’s manifesto promised that if elected, it would actively expel all immigrants from Greece.<sup>41</sup> Golden Dawn politician Nikolaos Michaloliakos, a leader and organizer of the party, exclaimed during his campaign: “Close the borders! Make the army and the navy seal our borders and not let people enter illegally. When it gets dark, the Greeks live in fear... Golden Dawn will fight this fear.”<sup>42</sup> This language of the Golden Dawn incites fear and perpetuates tropes of fascism, such as the idea that organized crime should be used in the quest of “security.”<sup>43</sup> Influenced by far-right principles, refugees and immigrants face a violent and marginalizing force before they even set sail across the Mediterranean Sea and step foot across the borders of Greece.

38 Tsoutsoumpis, 2018, 511

39 Sakellariou, 2013, 11.

40 Mullens 2020, 15.

41 Vasilopoulou, et al 2015, 3.

42 Lavelle, 2020.

43 Mullens 2020, 15.

## Conclusion

I end this paper by posing a crucial and ongoing question: how does the far-right in Greece situate among the ongoing solidification efforts of Western nations’ borders and the European border regime? This paper does not answer this question, but rather, problematizes the context of localized violence and promotion of far-right ideologies that then contribute to larger projects of far-right ideologies that transcend borders and individualized nation-state projects. Through the anti-immigrant and racist ideals propagated by the Golden Dawn, individuals can come to understand Greece as complicit as a nation-state project to the European border regime. Its “hardening of economic and racial nationalisms wedded to apartheid-style xenophobias,” ultimately contribute to the enforced projects of “border walls” that work to uphold the “Fortress Europe.”

<sup>44</sup>

Situating the Golden Dawn as a contributor to longer histories of far-right ideologies, its violence and racist rhetoric should not come as a surprise to scholars. Problematizing and noting the far-right’s presence in Greece are necessary steps to begin resisting its violent, racist, and xenophobic tendencies. Far-right ideologies transcend bordering systems themselves, infiltrating different areas, political groups, and belief systems, ultimately manifesting in various regions to work most productively against a diversifying and globalized world. As Enzo Traverso writes, “The far right has different faces in different countries and cannot be fought in Greece in the same way as in Germany, France, or Italy.”<sup>45</sup> As such, the question remains, how can nationalist, fascist, and racist ideologies be contested in Greece on a daily basis to resist the long legacy of far-right influence in Greece? The politics of border control are shaped by far-right ideologies; to deconstruct the violence of bordering systems and their effect on human lives, it is necessary to deconstruct far-right beliefs and to identify the origins of far-right ideologies.

44 Mullens 2020, 14.

45 Traverso 2019, 22

## Works Cited

- Beede, Benjamin. 2018. "Semi-Military and Paramilitary Organizations" in *Military History*. Oxford University Press: New York.
- Bez nec, Barbara & Speer, Marc & Stojic Mitrovic, Marta. 2016. *Governing the Balkan Route: Macedonia, Serbia and the European Border Regime*. 10.13140/RG.2.2.29918.23363.
- Bistis, George; September 2013. *Golden Dawn or Democratic Sunset: The Rise of the Far Right in Greece*. *Mediterranean Quarterly* 1; 24 (3): 35–55. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/10474552-2339453>
- Bray, Mark. 2017. "Trump and Everyday Anti-fascism beyond Punching Nazis." *Roar Magazine*.
- Dinas E, Georgiadou V, Konstantinidis I, Rori L. 2016. From dusk to dawn: Local party organization and party success of right-wing extremism. *Party Politics*; 22(1):80-92. doi:10.1177/1354068813511381
- Ellinas, Antonis A. 2013. The Rise of Golden Dawn: The New Face of the Far Right in Greece, *South European Society and Politics*, 18:4, 543–565, DOI: 10.1080/13608746.2013.782838
- Ellinas, Antonis A. 2015. Neo-Nazism in an Established Democracy: The Persistence of Golden Dawn in Greece, *South European Society and Politics*, 20:1, 1–20, DOI: 10.1080/13608746.2014.981379
- Golder, Matt. 2016. "Far Right Parties in Europe." *Annual Review of Political Science* 19:1.: 477-497.
- Halikiopoulou, Daphne; Vasilopoulou, Sofia. 2015. *The Golden Dawn's Nationalist Solution: Explaining the Rise of the Far Right in Greece*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Hameršak, M., Hess, S., Speer M., Stojić Mitrović, M. 2020. The Forging of the Balkan Route: Contextualizing the Border Regime in the EU Periphery. *Movements Journal* Vol. 5. <https://movements-journal.org/issues/08.balkanroute/01.hamersak,hess,stoje-mitrovic,speer--the-forging-of-the-balkan-route.html>
- Ilker Ataç, Kim Rygiel & Maurice Stierl. 2016. Introduction: The Contentious Politics of Refugee and Migrant Protest and Solidarity Movements: Remaking Citizenship from the Margins, *Citizenship Studies*, 20:5, 527-544, DOI: 10.1080/13621025.2016.1182681
- Lavelle, Moira. 2020. "Greece's Nazi Golden Dawn has Finally Been Ruled a Criminal Organization." *Jacobin Magazine*.
- Mazower, Mark. 2002. *The Balkans: A Short History*. Modern Library: New York.
- Mazower, Mark. 1993. *Inside Hitler's Greece. The Experience of Occupation, 1941-44*. New Haven/London: Yale Nota Bene/Yale University Press, 1993.
- Mezzadra, Sandro. 2020. Abolitionist vistas of the human. *Border struggles, migration and freedom of movement*, *Citizenship Studies*, 24:4, 424–440, DOI: 10.1080/13621025.2020.1755156
- Mullen, Bill; Vials, Christopher. 2020. *The U.S. Antifascist Reader*. Verso: London.
- Robinson, Cedric. 2020. "Fascism and the Response of Black Radical Theorists" in Mullen, Vials' *The U.S. Antifascist Reader*. Verso: London.
- Stierl, M. (2017). 8 Excessive Migration, Excessive Governance: Border Entanglements in Greek EU-rope. In N. De Genova (Ed.), *The Borders of "Europe"* (pp. 210-232). New York, USA: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822372660-010>
- Sakellariou, Alexandros. 2013. "Golden Dawn and Its Appeal to Greek Youth." *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*: Athens.
- Traverso, Enzo. 2019. Interview with Nicolas Allen and Martín Cortés, "Fascisms Old and New." *Jacobin Magazine*.
- Traverso, Enzo. 2019. *The New Faces of Fascism: Populism and the Far Right*. Verso: London.
- Tsoutsoumpis, Spyridon, 2018. "The Far Right in Greece. Paramilitarism, Organized Crime and the Rise of 'Golden Dawn,'" *Südosteuropa. Journal of Politics and Society*, De Gruyter, vol. 66(4), pages 503-531
- Vasilopoulou, Sofia and Daphne Halikiopoulou. 2015. *The Golden Dawn's 'Nationalist Solution': Explaining the Rise of the Far Right in Greece*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. doi: 10.1057/9781137535917.0005.
- Wolf, Eric. 2010. *Europe and the People Without History*. University of California Press: Berkeley.

# Breaking Through

## *Information as a central driver of an emerging civil society*

Jan Wenger '23

---

### Executive Summary

The core of this briefing is that information-sharing networks can be created against the backdrop of the emergence of microeconomic networks. These networks shall be supported and developed in a low-threshold manner. With the increase of external pressure, the possibility of an emerging civil society with a growing degree of organization arises. Thus, this policy brief recommends that EU governments encourage information flow into North Korea while mitigating political controversies and individual risks. Three key elements will be explored: 1) diplomacy of engagement, 2) NGO support, and 3) stakeholder protection.

### Introduction

The 2014 Report of the Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) drew international attention to the human rights abuses and crimes against humanity happening in the DPRK. NGOs and activists presented the evidence and served as a significant catalyst for spreading the knowledge of DPRK human rights issues throughout the international community (Hosaniak, 2018). Despite evidence provided through satellite imagery and escapee testimonies, little has changed in North Korea during the intervening seven years and North Koreans continue to be abused under the current regime. Thus, it is crucial to shed further light on abuses and initiate immediate action through concrete policies in order to end this human suffering.

The oppression of independent information and use of state propaganda are key components of the DPRK's control of society. Thus, without the outside world's help in battling this propaganda, North Koreans will likely not have the chance to learn the truth. Research illustrates that most North Koreans no longer live in information isolation and demand foreign media. However, the consumption of foreign media is criminalized. Evidence shows that the government punishes this

consumption of foreign and party-independent media with beatings, imprisonment, and even death. This policy brief evaluates the current efforts and emerging possibilities of sending information into the DPRK, proposing the most effective ways European governments could contribute in "breaking through" and creating a counterweight to the propaganda, strengthening civil society, and improving North Korea's human rights record.

### Situation brief

#### *DPRK's resilience to change explained*

Through state propaganda, surveillance, monitoring, and punishment, the DPRK succeeds in oppressing its citizens' access to independent information. Further, historically, North Koreans only experienced autocratic regimes. 500 years of feudal Joseon dynasty were followed by Stalinist Communism and the Japanese Imperial Occupation (NKNEWS, 2018). Thus, the North Koreans do not have historical memory or significant comparisons to foreign countries that could spark a civil society or even a revolution as the world witnessed in communist post-WWII Europe.

#### *Disruptors to the DPRK's Information Monopoly*

The first major disruption to the state's monopoly on information was the famine from 1994–98. Eunsun Kim (2015, p. 22), a North Korean escapee, wrote that in 1994 "I truly did believe the sky was crying from despair at the death of Kim Il-sung." However, the famine changed North Koreans' perception of reality. Many citizens were afraid of dying from hunger and migrated to China and South Korea. Those who returned reported experiences disruptive to the state's narrative, and weak but irreversible bonds of trust started to form among the people (Baek, 2018, p. 263). North Koreans who did not return engaged in activism in neighboring countries, garnering international attention and media coverage. The power of free information flow was demonstrat-

ed, triggering international and regional reactions that pressured the DPRK. Internationally, the United States signed the 2004 North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004, and the COI emphasized the importance of human rights promotion in the DPRK in 2014 (King, 2021, p. 202; Hosaniak, 2018). Regionally, NGOs formed around the DPRK and began gathering data and building networks to connect with citizens in the DPRK. Unfortunately, the Republic of Korea (ROK), in its Sunshine Policy (1998–2008) and beyond, has often sacrificed human rights for national security. Thus, NGOs in the ROK often struggle to find funding and access to infrastructure (Enos, 2016). The DPRK's behavior included external and internal trends. Externally, the state denied committing human rights abuses and provoked security incidents (Smith, 2019 and King, 2021, p. 232). Internally, the DPRK aggressively cracked down on its citizens with punishments and new methods such as radio jamming to suppress free information (RSF Index, 2010).

The second major disruption of COVID-19 has not entirely played out yet. The pandemic gave the government a reason to shut down the country and tighten border control. However, the shutdown also led to a humanitarian crisis and hunger in the DPRK. Thus, doors also opened because the pandemic context forced the DPRK to develop a higher risk tolerance, and the regime accepted help from China but is in a quandary to take help from Western nations (RFA, 2021).

### ***Information Tools and Networks***

Individuals and organizations tried different approaches to bring information into the DPRK. Popular means are radio and TV broadcasting, USB drives, books, DVDs, and cell phones (King, 2021). The Chinese border allows for smugglers to bring in these sources. The demilitarized zone (DMZ) between the DPRK and ROK is difficult to cross (Kim, 2015), and flying balloons to send USB drives over the DMZ has proven politically controversial and less than successful (King, 2021, p. 232). With a rising demand for foreign media, a sustainable and diversified information network arose in the DPRK. Human rights activists succeeded in bringing information into North Korea by working together with profit-driven smuggler networks and demand-driven clients who are both willing to risk their lives to learn about the outside world (Baek, 2018, p. 257). Further, there are new organizations in Silicon Valley and other tech-hubs who develop new technologies that could increase in-

formation exchange (Enos, 2016).

## **Foreign Information Consumption and North Korean society**

### ***From Basic Needs to Political Awareness***

Learnings from post-communist societies like Cuba, East Germany, and Poland demonstrate that communities of trust (COT) and aligned interests are key elements to promote and strengthen an emerging civil society as a counterweight to an autocratic state. The starting point for these developments was often the lack of goods for daily use (Althaus, 2016 and Frank & Fuentes, 2021). Access to these goods offers a low-risk/high-reward scheme for initial networking (Baek, 2018, p. 265). Maslow's Pyramid of Needs is a widely accepted model that describes the development from basic to psychological and self-fulfillment needs. This brief introduces a derivation of Maslow's individual-centric approach to demonstrate how COTs emerge and how outside factors can accelerate progress through information exchange.

Defector interviews suggest North Korean society is currently in level three: "exchange of political information" (Baek, 2018, p. 264)—the NGO North Korean Human Rights's data suggests that 60–70% of North Koreans interacted with foreign media. While there has been no collective action or structural organizations, the micro-changes in North Korea illustrate that a continuous flow of independent information is crucial for society. The UN (Laying the human rights foundations for peace, 2020, p. 27) writes that "marketplaces had become important hubs, not only for trade but also for exchanging information." The rising demand for foreign media and the risk-taking propensity show that the people's loyalty to the state is declining. Small-scale rotational lending schemes among friends and neighbors are the closest phenomena to organized political resistance in the DPRK. Behavioral changes such as adapting South Korean slang and fashion prove that foreign media broadly influences the younger Jangmadan generation (Baek, 2018, p. 266). Thus, society is becoming politically more aware, and social trust is growing. Since the DPRK also features political whistle-blowers and government crackdowns, society finds itself in a constant battle against the state and its loyal citizens (Baek, 2018, p. 267). Therefore, North Koreans have not yet formed organized political resistance on

a larger scale. In effect, North Korean society can only succeed and claim its rights if cells emerge. Independent information flow plays a crucial role in this battle against the state and must be maintained. Thus, external actors can support the North Koreans by structurally providing information and must be ready to support and protect the emerging cells and dissidents. With the increasing maturity of North Korean society, more institutionalized support from outside will be possible and required.

## Debate

Should efforts to send information from outside into North Korea be encouraged and supported?

This question centers around the four variables of security, effectiveness, and harm and benefit for the individuals. The overarching goal remains to improve the human rights situation in the DPRK. However, governments generally prioritize national security concerns over addressing North Korean human rights violations.

For example, when Kim Jong-un verbally attacked the border crossing of balloons and threatened violence and the termination of foreign relations towards the South, the ROK passed legislation that forbade balloons in 2020. Furthermore, balloons were also criticized for being ineffective, wind-dependent, and symbolically problematic (King, 2021, p. 232).

However, the situation brief demonstrated the importance of information flow, and not all information channels to North Korea are as provocative and ineffective as balloons. Historically, radio broadcasting proved to be effective in helping countries transition out of autocratic socialism (King, 2021, p. 204). Together with American organizations, South Korean NGOs are broadcasting stories of defectors and other outside information in the DPRK. However, the ROK's security concerns limit these efforts as well and often do not allow NGOs to access radio broadcast waves. Since radio is effective and less political, the bill to fund NGO broadcasting might successfully pass the National Assembly (Enos, 2016).

Under the cloak of business issues, around 600,000 North Koreans own Chinese cell phones and can call their business partners and families in China (Enos, 2016). Finally, hardware sources such as DVDs and USBs

are smuggled across the Chinese border. Although NGOs are involved in this process, private individuals conduct the actual smuggling (Baek, 2018, p. 258). Both cell phones and private smuggling allow for relatively unproblematic in- and outflow of information and can help NGOs gather data.

Overall, there is consensus that North Koreans must be exposed to foreign media to have a chance in the battle for their human rights and that they prefer entertainment to analytical content (Smith, 2021). The debate, thus, suggests that the information flow must be maintained using the safest (for individuals), most effective, and least political tools.

## Policy Position

Therefore, I suggest that the EU governments encourage illicit information channels and underground networks by applying the four variables effectively. Human rights and security are directly correlated and mutually benefit each other. The overarching goal is to help North Koreans rise in the adjusted Maslow pyramid, create political cells, and get one step closer to establishing a civil society.

The current COVID-19 crisis leaves the DPRK vulnerable and creates a chance for European organizations to establish information channels through the diplomacy of good deeds. Through the channels of development, funding, and humanitarian help, the European Union should be able to open a backdoor for information flow without violating any fundamental principles. On December 3, 2021, the United Nations announced to exclude the DPRK from its humanitarian aid plans (Yonhap, 2021). Independent of the international community and the United States, European governments can establish trust in the DPRK to help its society. Furthermore, internal and external political pressure need to act together to support the flow of information and change. Lowering the ban for daily goods might be the approach to support informal local markets as information carriers.

## Policy Recommendations

In light of the debate above, I recommend that the EU governments take the following three actions:

1. The EU governments shall engage with the DPRK individually and create access. Politics of engagement

might be challenging to implement. Nevertheless, information channels tied to developmental and humanitarian projects could be most effective in reaching, educating, and building trust with North Korean society. Further, although COVID-19 gave the DPRK another reason for isolation, the pandemic also allows for a chance to build new relations. The DPRK will feel less threatened if Europeans approach them independently and individually.

2. The EU governments can also improve the North Korean human rights situation by politically and financially supporting NGOs and other organizations who are trying to bring information into North Korea. The European Union should encourage the ROK to provide these organizations with infrastructure (like AM waves). While this policy comes with certain risks, it is also the most realistic and researched approach. EU governments can mitigate the situation by supporting the most effective and least political methods. North Koreans are willing to take the risk to get foreign information; the EU governments should, thus, take the risk of providing it.

3. Lastly, the European Union can support civil society, information access, and human rights by promoting North Korean umbrella stories and protecting public role models and dissidents. If leaders like Ai Weiwei for North Korea ever arise, it is mission-critical for the international community to keep these voices unharmed.

### **Conclusion**

The human rights abuses committed by the DPRK continue unabated. Communist regime change history shows that only the combination of internal and external pressures can give North Koreans a chance to claim their rights. Thereby, the free flow of information and foreign media play a crucial role. Escapee testimonies confirmed that foreign information was what they needed to act. However, for change on a larger scale, the trust among North Koreans must increase, and political cells must emerge. Research also shows that independent information plays a vital role in keeping the trust alive and allows for cultural connection. Thus, EU governments must support and encourage free information flow.

# Obesity, Reforms, and Multinationals: Cur- ing the Incurable

*A look into the role of multinational food corporations in affecting health outcomes in Mexico and Chile*

Solomon Treister '23

---

## **Introduction: From scarcity to abundance**

Food scarcity was once the driving force of death and suffering in a region facing constantly changing environmental conditions. Today, it is the abundance of food that has pushed Latin Americans to the top of the list of countries suffering from preventable disease. Where people were once starving, they are now eating themselves to death. But the abundance of food no longer reflects diverse crops of fresh fruits and vegetables. Latin Americans are some of the greatest consumers of sweetened soft drinks and processed foods that can easily be found at corner markets. Shelves are filled with calorie dense fried chips, candy loaded with ingredients consumers cannot identify nor pronounce, and drinks containing processed sugars and chemical preservatives. These junk foods are high in calories but poor in nutrients and many consumers are not actively choosing to eat these goods. The choices consumers make reflect the ways their neuropsychology has been altered by the food accessible to them. Consumers are left at the will of markets, leaving them addicted to, and unable to escape, their habits.

The victims of poor health are often also victims of poverty, income instability, and poor nutrition. These intersecting factors often behave in a vicious cycle: poor nutrition is directly tied to economic potential and overall economic performance. Vital to understanding the health crisis is recognizing that individuals are living out the results of decisions multinational corporations have made. In a market driven economy where low prices dominate, companies able to offer their products at a cheaper price are successful. As the world has become more globalized, food is increasingly produced on a global scale. Large-scale production means a locally produced assortment of vegetables can no longer compete with cheap instant noodles. But individuals aren't really saving money—they are paying with their health.

This paper explores nutritional and food crises through the cases of Mexico and Chile, two of the highest consumers of junk food per capita. And what is junk food? The WHO outlines highly processed foods as consumables “high in free sugar, total fat, saturated fat and sodium, and low in protein, dietary fiber, minerals and vitamins, compared with unprocessed or minimally processed foods, dishes and meals.”<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Ablard, a historian of Latin America, points out that the current health crisis seen in Latin America can be traced back to the beginning of food delocalization in the region. Chávez documented the alarming increase in consumption of carbohydrates, paired with a decreased consumption of vital nutrients—Mexicans were taking after their North American neighbors.

Worsening diets in Mexico also reflect a changing economic structure. Previously, subsistence farmers had to transition to more export-based food production in an increasingly free market. After selling their products in foreign markets, farmers had more cash to spend and increasingly became consumers of imported goods. This example sheds light on the ways in which poor health outcomes must be interpreted through a multi-dimensional lens. Victims of poor health and socioeconomic status are subject to markets, corporate interests, and politics. Individuals lose not only ownership over their health, but also agency in their communities, which is diminished by lacking resources to overcome health obstacles.

Mexico was not the only country impacted by the global economy. In Chile, structural changes in the agricultural sector led to government responses to combat poor nutrition. Since the 1940s, the Chilean government has experimented with nutritional assistance programs that help bring more nutritious food to Chil-

---

<sup>1</sup>Pan American Health Organization. Ultra-processed food and drink products in Latin America: Sales, sources, nutrient profiles, and policy implications. Washington, D.C.: PAHO; 2019.

eans suffering from malnutrition. But these programs have been hard to track and historically faced bureaucratic obstacles.<sup>2</sup> In a highly stratified society, families once living in subsistence conditions are now suffering the consequences of highly processed diets. While the consumption of processed foods and sweetened beverages cannot be isolated as the sole contributors to high rates of obesity, studies into dietary preferences indicate the large role these choices play.<sup>3</sup>

### ***The Nutritional Epidemic of the 21st century***

So why does obesity matter? Obese individuals typically face comorbidities including heart conditions, hypertension, diabetes type B, cancer, or sleep apnea. These conditions are also linked to depression and an overall lower quality of life. Individuals dealing with obesity often also face obstacles in the workforce negatively affecting labor market outcomes.<sup>4</sup> Conditions of obesity also cause more sedentary lifestyles, thus facilitating a cycle of generational obesity. Reflective of international trends, both Chileans and Mexicans increasingly find themselves brought up in obesogenic environments that normalize unhealthy weights, promote excessive food consumption, and discourage physical activity. For children living in urban areas, it may also be unsafe to play outside due to high crime rates.

Chile is not far behind Mexico in facing epidemic levels of obesity. Studies have indicated that some of the hardest hit are Indigenous populations, mainly the Mapuche. These historically marginalized communities face the double challenge of losing their traditional, sustainable lifestyles while being subject to new health challenges. High rates of obesity have also been tied to poor maternal education. In Chile, the reported rates of obesity were 10 percent higher for adults with less than 8 years of schooling.<sup>5</sup> The findings coming out of both

countries point to the need to view obesity as the result of compounding factors. Addressing the issue will likely require a multifaceted approach.

So why is it that Latin Americans consume so much processed food? A large portion of the populations in Mexico and Chile purchase their food day by day. In rural areas, workers in the informal economy spend much of their money purchasing food at their local corner market. At these stores, the cheapest items are chips, candy, and soft drinks. In some areas, soft drinks like Coca-Cola are the same price or cheaper than water. Even in supermarkets with an abundance of options, the overwhelming majority of the store is filled with highly processed foods lacking nutritive diversity. According to a study by the PAHO/WHO, sales of ultra-processed foods and drinks have grown by 8.3% across Latin America between 2009 and 2014.

Despite the effect of processed food on obesity and other preventable diseases, a 2019 report by the WHO outlines the lack of regulation around marketing of the products. Ricardo Rapallo, the chief policy officer for the FAO stated that “Industry is the most important player, as it can manage the different elements that constitute current food systems.”<sup>6</sup> Producers are the ones in control of what ingredients go into foods, and which foods are available to the public. Companies can have an impact on health outcomes through how they advertise their products as well. The huge impact of producers raises the question as to who is responsible for regulating these companies. In many ways, the Mexican and Chilean governments have begun responding with similar regulations as seen in the early stages of tobacco regulation. As it became clear that tobacco consumption was tied to cancer and lung disease, governments began mandating clear warnings on tobacco and taxing products, driving up costs for consumers. Highly processed foods have many parallels to the tobacco industry. Foods are loaded with ingredients with little transparency for the average consumer. Up until recently, there had been little to no regulations on packaging sizes, nor any warnings about potential health effects. It is important to recognize that these consumables are also price elastic. Mexicans can only drink Coke with every meal if the sugary treat is affordable.

2 Giorgio Solimano and Peter Hakim. “Nutrition and National Development: The case of Chile.” *International Journal of Health Services*, vol. 9, no. 3, Sage Publications, Inc., 1979, pp. 495–510, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45132091>.

3 Juan C Caro. et al. “Designing a Tax to Discourage Unhealthy Food and Beverage Purchases: The Case of Chile.” *Food Policy*, vol. 71, 2017, pp. 86–100, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2017.08.001>. FOOTNOTE FORM IS FIRSTNAME LAST,

4 Bernardo Turnbull et al. “Childhood obesity in Mexico: A critical analysis of the environmental factors, behaviours and discourses contributing to the epidemic.” *Health psychology open* vol. 6,1 2055102919849406. 15 May. 2019, doi:[10.1177/2055102919849406](https://doi.org/10.1177/2055102919849406)

5 Juliana Kain et al. “Demographic, Social and Health-Related Variables that Predict Normal-Weight Preschool Children Having Overweight or Obesity When Entering Primary Education in Chile.” *Nutrients* vol. 11,6 1277. 5 June 2019, doi:[10.3390/nu11061277](https://doi.org/10.3390/nu11061277)

6 CNS Media. “UN Links Rise in Ultra-Processed Foods in Latin America and Caribbean to Worsening Health.” [.Nutritioninsight.com/](https://www.nutritioninsight.com/), CNS Media, 14 Nov. 2019,

## Steps Forward in Regulation

Both the Chilean and Mexican governments have begun implementing labeling laws and taxes to help curb sugar consumption. In 2014, Mexico implemented a peso-per-liter tax on sugary drinks. The WHO found that beverage taxes can be effective tools in shifting consumption habits—but these taxes must be paired with subsidized fruits and vegetables. While the tax initially showed success, in the years that followed, soft drink sales have continued to rise, demonstrating how Mexicans are still committed to their consumption habits. Wilebaldo Ramírez, a shoe shiner interviewed by the *Wall Street Journal* in Mexico City said “If water was cheaper than soda, maybe I’d switch. But in the meantime I want flavor.”<sup>7</sup> This is a trend across the globe, when faced with a premium price for water, individuals would rather have the sweetened beverage. This issue also points to an underlying problem of lack of access to safe and free drinking water. When processed beverages are cheaper than water, consumers are being exploited. Companies continue to offer their products at cheap prices, trapping their consumers in a cycle of poor diet.

Mexico has also taken after Chile in implementing front of label warnings on products containing levels of saturated fat, sugar, carbohydrates, and sodium above a set threshold. Chile began mandating warning labels on the front of “excess designated” packaged foods in June of 2016. The mandate was rolled out in three phases to coordinate with food producers. The campaign has experienced success in helping consumers cut back on their intake of processed snacks and beverages. A study conducted by the Nutrition Department at the University of North Carolina found that the implementation of the warning labels was correlated with a reduction in the consumption.<sup>8</sup> The study looked at changes in purchases for different ages and socioeconomic demographics before and after the rollout of the initial phase of labeling mandates. The labeling changes were implemented along with tighter regulations on marketing of sugary products to children as well as regulations on products that are allowed for

children in Chilean schools. Consumer trends are important early indicators of the efficacy of government regulation. But in the years to come, looking at product formulation changes will also be a necessary step in creating healthier markets.

Some governments have decided warnings are not enough. In the Mexican state of Oaxaca, officials banned the sale of junk food to minors under the age of 18 altogether. Tabasco has followed Oaxaca, banning the sale of junk food to minors, putting unhealthy processed foods in the same category as alcohol and cigarettes.<sup>9</sup> These policies have been criticized as too radical because of its consequences for both food producers and shop owners who depend on the sales of processed foods. The Mexican National Association of Small Merchants (Anpec) reacted to the new regulation that “prohibiting the sale of these products is a measure that will close many of the small businesses in Oaxaca, causing job losses, more business closings and despair in the families that make a living from their sale,” according to *Mexico News Daily*. Of course the efficacy of these laws also depends on how well they are enforced.

These measures are a step in the right direction in creating more transparency for consumers, but when highly processed foods are the only option, warnings can only change behavior so much. In poor areas, fresh and whole foods aren’t just expensive, but rare. Issues of access are compounded for residents now facing environmental challenges of drought, leaving them unable to grow fruits and vegetables. In Santos Reyes Yucuná, a town in Oaxaca where nearly the entire population lives below the poverty line, there is not a single store selling fresh fruits and vegetables.<sup>10</sup> This example highlights a larger trend in Mexico and across Latin America of poor areas having little to no access to fresh produce. Lack of access is a central issue in creating solutions for healing sick populations. Consuming whole foods is central in both preventing and living with diseases like Type I and Type II diabetes. Creating new channels for the distribution of affordable whole food products is a necessary aspect of shifting consumer habits.

---

7 Amy Guthrie and Mike Esterl. “Soda Sales in Mexico Rise despite Tax.” *The Wall Street Journal*, Dow Jones & Company, 3 May 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/soda-sales-in-mexico-rise-despite-tax-1462267808>

8 Taillie, Lindsey Smith, et al. “Changes in Food Purchases after the Chilean Policies on Food Labelling, Marketing, and Sales in Schools: A before and after Study.” *The Lancet Planetary Health*, vol. 5, no. 8, 2021, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2542-5196\(21\)00172-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2542-5196(21)00172-8).

---

9 “Article: Mexico States Poised to Adopt More Laws Banning Sales of Junk Food and Soda to Minors.” IHS Markit, 11 June 2021, <https://ihsmarkit.com/research-analysis/mexico-states-poised-to-adopt-more-laws-banning-sales.html>.

10 “In Mexico’s Poorest Town, Junk Food Easier to Buy than Fresh Vegetables.” *Mexico News Daily*, 13 Aug. 2020, <https://mexiconewsdaily.com/news/in-mexicos-poorest-town-junk-food-easier-to-buy-than-fresh-fruit-vegetables/>.

One effective channel where governments were able to improve nutritional outcomes is in schools. Academic institutions have been able to curb consumption habits by regulating dining hall menus and banning vending machines. In both Chile and in Oaxaca in Mexico, strict regulations target students' diets by eliminating sugary drinks and fried foods from cafeterias. These regulations should be understood as a major step forward. For many students the meals offered at school are a vital source of nutrients for the day. Focusing on encouraging healthy consumption and physical activity at school can help address the information deficit at home.

### ***The Role of Multinational Corporations***

These measures are crucial in helping shift consumer demand, but accountability also falls on the producers. Multinational corporations have long enjoyed freedoms in marketing their products wherever and to whomever they choose. The Coca-Cola company is a prime example of the kind of reach large food producers can have into individual lives on a global scale. Coca-Cola has evolved from a “medicinal beverage” to become the most quintessential American brand around the world. In Mexico, Coca-Cola maintains 70% of the market share for the production and sale of soft drinks.<sup>11</sup> These numbers speak to how influential Coca-Cola is beyond supermarket shelves. The company utilizes political strategies to prevent sales from being subject to policy reform. Coca-Cola has followed the tobacco industry in its strategies: supporting independently sponsored research campaigns, lobbying activities, and attempting to reframe the conversation around diet. Coca-Cola has responded to epidemic levels of obesity by framing the issue around individual responsibility: the individual needs to exercise more or the individual needs to practice better moderation. These statements are not wrong, but they neglect accountability for cultural patterns that stem from broad market availability of unhealthy, addictive products.

The impact of Coca-Cola can be seen throughout Mexico's history. Vicente Fox, who served as president from 2000–2006, received campaign donations from

the Coca-Cola company. Prior to his presidency, Fox rose from a route supervisor to an executive, making Coca-Cola the top beverage in Mexico and across Latin America. Coca-Cola continued to influence policy into Fox's term—especially regarding health policy. In 2006 when statistics indicated Mexico was on route to become the most obese major country, Juan Riviera, the director of the Center for Nutrition and Health at Mexico's National Institute of public health, pointed to soda as the culprit. But after formulating a health campaign to educate the public on drink consumption, the campaign was aborted under pressure from influential soda producers.<sup>12</sup> Nearly every government panel formed to fight obesity includes Coca-Cola and other influential food producers. The primary reason the soda tax was able to overcome corporate interest was because the tax came from Mexico's finance ministry, and was framed as a revenue generator. But Coca-Cola has continued pushing back, claiming the answer to the obesity crisis is not demonizing brands.

The taxes in Mexico and Chile both saw immediate success. Data show limited growth in the sales of sweetened beverages. A plateau in the sales of sweetened beverages is paired with increased sales of water, suggesting that demand for sweetened beverages may not be keeping pace with growing populations. But more recent data suggests that sales have crept up again. The policies are effective but must increase in severity to promote continued change.

In 2013, before the Mexican congress debated the soda tax, the Mexican Diabetes Association hosted a talk in Monterey discussing the importance of exercise in combating diabetes. The event was funded by Coca-Cola. The company also sponsors another organization by the name “Exercise in Medicine.” These efforts follow the trope of processed-food producers claiming that diet issues are a result of a calorie surplus. Again, these claims serve to shift responsibility onto the consumer. Coca-Cola has also been successful in blocking advertisement campaigns that reveal how much sugar is in sodas and sweetened beverages. Corporations have managed to impede research campaigns at universities and think tanks through funding. Coca-Cola continues to negatively influence non-communicable disease prevention programs from a governmental to

<sup>11</sup> Eduardo J Gómez, Coca-Cola's political and policy influence in Mexico: understanding the role of institutions, interests and divided society, *Health Policy and Planning*, Volume 34, Issue 7, September 2019, Pages 520–528, <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czz063>

<sup>12</sup> Tina Rosenberg, “How One of the Most Obese Countries on Earth Took on the Soda Giants.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 3 Nov. 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/nov/03/obese-soda-sugar-tax-mexico>.

civic level.

Some of the hardest hit populations are poor citizens who already suffer from a lack of access to potable water.<sup>13</sup> In San Cristobal, a town in Chiapas, potable water is becoming more and more scarce. Residents report only having running water a couple times a week. San Cristobal is also home to a Coca-Cola FEMSA production facility that relies on groundwater to manufacture its beverages. While Coca-Cola pays remarkably little for access to water, residents are stuck paying for potable water delivery. The money that Coca-Cola is paying is collected federally and local infrastructure remains inadequate. This example points to inadequacies on the part of corporate responsibility and weak government policy.

A New York Times investigation outlines just how influential Coca-Cola is in the region. Where the Indigenous Tzotzil population carries out religious ceremonies, bottles of Coke are used as a type of sacred beverage. Some community members reject Coca-Cola's sacred use adding that high levels of obesity, diabetes, and other comorbidities arrived with the soft drinks and other processed foods. But other residents speak to the beverage's medicinal properties, citing over 40 years of use. This case points to the ways consumption habits are deeply entrenched in society. Changing Mexico's diet is a complex, and at times sensitive undertaking.

Another layer in understanding the impact of high rates of obesity in Mexico and Chile is the cost burden on both micro and macroeconomic levels. Consumers do not solely pay with deteriorating physical conditions, but expensive hospital bills and medications. An OECD health policy study "*The Heavy Burden of Obesity*" highlights the economic impacts of obesity related conditions for OECD countries.<sup>14</sup> In Mexico, obesity is predicted to account for a 5% reduction in GDP between 2020 and 2050, and Chile is not far behind with an estimated loss of over 3%. The effects obesity can have on economic performance are multifaceted.

Obesity can have substantial impacts on economic performance in different ways. On a micro level, high rates of obesity are linked to poorer educational out-

comes. Obesity and related non communicable diseases are connected to poor nutrition, sleep, and low rates of physical activity. These factors are associated with cognitive hurdles for students. Physical conditions are also linked to emotional and mental health problems. Obese children have lower self esteem and lower levels of life satisfaction. The OECD study also found that a higher BMI is associated with poorer academic performance. This draws a connection between the consequences individuals face and the impact those consequences have on human capital in an economy. A key to reversing this epidemic is regulating sugary drinks.

## **Moving Forward**

The data is clear that Mexico and Chile are in crisis. Both countries are leaders globally in food labeling policy, as well as aggressive reforms aimed at childhood consumption habits. But changing consumption patterns through policy and pressure on large corporations has enjoyed marginal success in decreasing obesity rates. A more comprehensive solution will involve creating more sustainable and affordable routes for whole food products to reach consumers. In the report *Incentivizing Food System Transformation* by the World Economic Forum, researchers indicate the network of institutions involved in transforming the way countries can shift diets. Chile and Mexico exemplify both the capacity for change and the ongoing battle to break through corporate influence.

Facilitating change requires cooperation across different governmental organizations down to community level engagement. Creating sustainable pathways also overlaps with many of the environmental initiatives needed to combat climate change. These solutions can be understood as ecosystems of change that encompass both health and environmental concerns.

The need to address obesity and the other comorbidities caused by the modern diet and unequal food distribution systems is multifaceted: change requires understanding the issue as social, economic, and political. Focusing efforts around addressing youth populations will be key in changing the trajectory for both Chile and Mexico. Reversing obesogenic culture is a generational task that can take decades to implement. Governments should be more concerned with big picture changes rather than looking at indicators from a short time frame. Governments should act on the suc-

---

<sup>13</sup> Oscar Lopez and Andrew Jacobs. "In Town with Little Water, Coca-Cola Is Everywhere. so Is Diabetes." The New York Times, The New York Times, 14 July 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/14/world/americas/mexico-coca-cola-diabetes.html>.

<sup>14</sup> OECD (2019), *The Heavy Burden of Obesity: The Economics of Prevention*, OECD Health Policy Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/67450d67-en>

cess of taxing processed foods and pair the taxes with subsidized access to fresh produce. Increasing demand for healthy products necessitates that those products be affordable. Governments can also look to incentivize local farming practices that connect communities to healthy food sources.

Fostering better distribution of whole foods can make nutritious, healthy diets more accessible. But the constraining factor of multinational influence can make change slow and challenging. Large corporations possess strong distribution networks, inexpensive products with long shelf lives, strong consumer demand, and legitimate stakeholder power. And uprooting corporate interest will be difficult. Private companies are focused on sales, and consumers are limited in budget and access. Private investors can have an important impact on facilitating change in corporate policy. Coca-Cola has increasingly become a “total beverage company,” producing everything from soda, juice, and energy drinks, to water, and alcoholic beverages. In a 2020 company report, the company assured the public that it is committed to reducing the sugar content in beverages and promoting lower and calorie free alternatives.<sup>15</sup> In fact, Coca-Cola has reduced the amount of added sugar in Coke. But the company still depends on sales and a strong consumer base. While changes in formulas and health campaigns represent positive contributions towards change, they can be understood as a response to harsh government policy and public health crises. Continued change is dependent on continued pressure, whether it be from private investors or government agencies.

The solution will be complex. Changing consumption patterns is not solely about decisions but shifting the culture around food and beverages. Educating the public on connections between consumption habits, health outcomes, and economic potential can help cement a clearer understanding of how consumption choices intersect with economic outcomes. Health cannot be neglected as a fundamental contributor to both increasing individual potential and economic productivity at large.

<sup>15</sup> Coca Cola FEMSA. Integrated Report 2020. Coca Cola FEMSA, 2020, <https://coca-colafemsa.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/KOF-Investor-Presentation-March.pdf>.

## Works Cited

- CNS Media. “UN Links Rise in Ultra-Processed Foods in Latin America and Caribbean to Worsening Health.” *Nutritioninsight.com*, CNS Media., 14 Nov. 2019, <https://www.nutritioninsight.com/news/un-spotlights-rise-in-ultra-processed-foods-in-latin-america-and-caribbean-to-worsening-health.html>.
- Coca Cola FEMSA. Integrated Report 2020. Coca Cola FEMSA, 2020, <https://coca-colafemsa.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/KOF-Investor-Presentation-March.pdf>.
- Eduardo J Gómez, Coca-Cola’s political and policy influence in Mexico: understanding the role of institutions, interests and divided society, *Health Policy and Planning*, Volume 34, Issue 7, September 2019, Pages 520–528, <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czz063>
- Ferdinand, Tyler, et al. “To Tackle Food Insecurity, Invest in Digital Climate Services for Agriculture .” *World Resources Institute*, 29 July 2021, [https://www.wri.org/insights/tackle-food-insecurity-invest-digital-climate-services-agriculture?utm\\_campaign=wridigest&utm\\_source=wridigest-2021-8-3&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=readmoreSocialPrint](https://www.wri.org/insights/tackle-food-insecurity-invest-digital-climate-services-agriculture?utm_campaign=wridigest&utm_source=wridigest-2021-8-3&utm_medium=email&utm_content=readmoreSocialPrint).
- Gonzalez Martin, Diana. “Sugar and Modernity in Latin America.” *Sugar and Modernity in Latin America*, <https://lacua.au.dk/projects/sugarandmodernity-latinamerica/>.
- Guthrie, Amy, and Mike Esterl. “Soda Sales in Mexico Rise despite Tax.” *The Wall Street Journal*, Dow Jones & Company, 3 May 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/soda-sales-in-mexico-rise-despite-tax-1462267808>.
- Hymson, Laura A. *The Company That Taught the World to Sing: Coca-Cola, Globalization, and the Cultural Politics of Branding in the Twentieth Century* . [https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/86471/lhymson\\_1.pdf](https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/86471/lhymson_1.pdf).

“In Mexico’s Poorest Town, Junk Food Easier to Buy than Fresh Vegetables.” *Mexico News Daily*, 13 Aug. 2020,

## Obesity, Reforms, and Multinationals: Curing the Incurable •

<https://mexiconewsdaily.com/news/in-mexicos-poorest-town-junk-food-easier-to-buy-than-fresh-fruit-vegetables/>.

Lopez, Oscar, and Andrew Jacobs. "In Town with Little Water, Coca-Cola Is Everywhere. so Is Diabetes." *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 14 July 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/14/world/americas/mexico-coca-cola-diabetes.html>.

Mitchell, Cristina. "Paho/WHO: Ultra-Processed Foods Gain Ground among Latin American and Caribbean Families." *Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization*, Pan American Health Organization, 23 Oct. 2019, [https://www3.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=15530%3Aultra-processed-foods-gain-ground-among-latin-american-and-caribbean-families&Itemid=1926&lang=en](https://www3.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15530%3Aultra-processed-foods-gain-ground-among-latin-american-and-caribbean-families&Itemid=1926&lang=en).

OECD (2019), *The Heavy Burden of Obesity: The Economics of Prevention*, OECD Health Policy Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/67450d67-en>

Oliveros-Rosen, Elijah. "Economic Outlook Latin America Q4 2021: Settling into the New Post-Pandemic Normal of Slow Growth." *Economic Outlook Latin America Q4 2021: Settling Into The New Post-Pandemic Normal Of Slow Growth | S&P Global Ratings*, 27 Sept. 2021, <https://www.spglobal.com/ratings/en/research/articles/210927-economic-outlook-latin-america-q4-2021-settling-into-the-new-post-pandemic-normal-of-slow-growth-12122907>.

Rosenberg, Tina. "How One of the Most Obese Countries on Earth Took on the Soda Giants." *The Guardian*, *Guardian News and Media*, 3 Nov. 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/nov/03/obese-soda-sugar-tax-mexico>.

"Sales of Sweetened Drinks & Water Pre and Post-Tax Mexico 2015." *Statista*, *PLOS*, 26 Sept. 2016, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/726752/sugar-sweetened-drinks-and-water-sales-before-and-after-tax-in-mexico/>.

Sandin, Linnea. "Covid-19 Exposes Latin America's Inequality." *Covid-19 Exposes Latin America's Inequality | Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 6 Apr. 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/covid-19-exposes-latin-americas-inequality>.

Taillie, Lindsey Smith, et al. "Changes in Food Purchases after the Chilean Policies on Food Labelling, Marketing, and Sales in Schools: A before and after Study." *The Lancet Planetary Health*, vol. 5, no. 8, 2021, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2542-5196\(21\)00172-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2542-5196(21)00172-8).

Taylor, Sean. "Mexico States Poised to Adopt More Laws Banning Sales of Junk Food and Soda to Minors." *IHS Markit*, 11 June 2021, <https://ihsmarkit.com/research-analysis/mexico-states-poised-to-adopt-more-laws-banning-sales.html>.

Webber, Jude. "Mexico's Healthy Eating Drive Could Hurt Trade." | *Financial Times*, *Financial Times*, 24 June 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/0f11dc8c-8c23-45d1-9333-b858ec2cef3f>.

World Economic Forum. *Food Systems Initiative Incentivizing Food Systems ... World Economic Forum*, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/reports/incentivizing-food-systems-transformation>.

Broom, Douglas. "This Is How Chile Is Trying to Turn around Its Obesity Problem." *World Economic Forum*, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/chile-obesity-regulations-food-labelling-advertising/>.

# Child Human Rights Violations

*An in depth understanding of the global community's approach to sex trafficking and forced marriage*

Shalini Somar '22

---

Human trafficking, specifically child trafficking, is a major human rights violation that has garnered the attention of many organizations from various sectors. The various types of trafficking children may be subjected to include: forced marriage, begging, labor, domestic servitude, slavery, prostitution, pornography, theft/drug smuggling, removal of organs, and selling infants/children for adoption.<sup>1</sup> This paper aims to examine the discourse surrounding child trafficking within the instances of sex trafficking and forced child marriage. These two specific branches of child trafficking are closely related and may overlap at times, which is why it is important to examine the discourse on these issues together. However, it is important to acknowledge many of the challenges with the discourse within child trafficking. The most pressing issue is how difficult it can be to understand this type of human rights violation in depth because of the young age of many victims. Sex trafficking and forced marriage has a hidden nature to it, and much of the research is based on interviews from victims that come forward. Furthermore, this is then fueled by the ineffective or problematic ways aid organizations may go about attempting to address or help fight child sex trafficking or forced marriage, leading to negative consequences for victims and survivors. Overall, the discourse and global initiatives addressing child sex trafficking and forced child marriage is flawed, negatively impacting children, so the international community should take more cohesive and preventative steps to fight this issue.

First, before diving deeper into this topic it is essential to take a closer look at the definition of child sex trafficking and forced child marriage to understand the challenges this brings about. The UNICEF website constitutes children as victims of trafficking when they are “recruited, transported, transferred, or harbored or re-

ceived for the purpose of exploitation.”<sup>2</sup> This definition is important because it provides a framework for aid organizations and governments to understand what trafficking may look like. However, it is problematic because it is also vague. A key issue with trafficking is that there are numerous definitions created by organizations, so it can lead to gaps where victims can be negatively impacted. For example, the Department of Justice of the United States defines child sex trafficking as the “recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a minor for the purpose of a commercial sex act.”<sup>3</sup> In this instance the definition of child sex trafficking includes the words “patronizing” which eludes to the manner in which a trafficker may coerce or exploit a victim. This is significant because it shows how the numerous definitions of trafficking have slight differences, but can have big impacts on the ways in which the international community fights this issue. Next, it is important to also understand the legal definition of a “child.” The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child declares that a child “means every human being below the age of eighteen years.” This is important because it sets an international standard for who constitutes a child. However, this is concerning when it comes to child trafficking because not every child may have a documented birth certificate. This can then make it easier for someone to exploit a child into marriage or sexual acts if there is a discrepancy with someone’s age.

Furthermore, after evaluating key definitions, it is also important to explore the most prominent risk factors for trafficking. For youth, the most common risk factors

---

<sup>2</sup> “Child Trafficking.” UNICEF USA. Accessed December 31, 2021.

<https://www.unicefusa.org/mission/protect/trafficking>.

<sup>3</sup> “Child Sex Trafficking.” The United States Department of Justice. United States Government, May 28, 2020. <https://www.justice.gov/criminal-ceos/child-sex-trafficking>.

<sup>4</sup> “Convention on the Rights of the Child.” OHCHR. UNICEF. Accessed December 31, 2021. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Child Trafficking and Action to Eliminate It.” United Nations. United Nations. Accessed December 31, 2021. <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/childtrafficking.pdf>.

for child sex marriage are past sexual violence, pregnancy, illiteracy, and marriage.<sup>5</sup> Other key risk factors include children being part of a gang, LGBTQ+ individuals, history of juvenile justice, behavioral or mental health problems, living in high poverty areas, living in countries with political or police corruption, and the glorification of pimp culture.<sup>6</sup> Marriage is a risk factor of child sex trafficking because if a child is forcibly married off at a young age they can become dependent on their older spouse who can then take advantage of them sexually for profit. Furthermore, in some areas of the world, poverty is a risk factor because “on the one hand, sex work is condemned and feared, yet is accepted as a means for young rural women to access what is valued.”<sup>7</sup> Overall, this sheds light on the various ways children can be coerced into the sex trafficking ring because of their circumstances in life. This is important because aid organizations must understand what led a child to forced marriage or sex trafficking in order to then remedy their situation and prevent further cases. Finally, once children are forced into sex trafficking, finding them and getting them out of this system can be quite challenging, so preventive efforts can be the most effective in decreasing this issue.

Next, the topic of child brides is profound in the international community because of the issue of consent. It is an international standard that a child cannot properly agree to marriage because of their age. The argument is that a child is too young to understand what marriage is and because of this cannot fully consent to marrying someone else. However, countries have found loopholes by creating laws that allow women to be married under the age of 18, perpetuating the issue of children being sold for marriage. The United Nation’s

Children Fund states that there are currently more than “700 million of the women alive today around the world who were married before they reached 18 years of age.”<sup>8</sup> For example, in Moroccan society prior to Moudawana policy, laws towards women were based around conservative Islamic law and traditions, which allowed child marriage. Moudawana or Family Law was then introduced in 2004 and raised the minimum age of marriage to 18. However, child and forced marriage still occurs because Moudawana allows judges the opportunity to authorize marriage below the age of 18. This loophole leads females as young as 15 to be forced or coerced into marriage.<sup>9</sup> Forced child marriage is concerning because then children endure “physical, psychological, economic, and sexual violence, and restrictions on their movement.”<sup>10</sup> As a result, many girls who marry men who are much older than them are likely to enter an unhealthy power dynamic where they can easily be controlled and abused, especially in sexual manners. Finally, forced child marriage perpetuates the death rate of children because of pregnancy-related deaths. Pregnancy-related deaths are one of the leading causes of deaths for mothers under the age of 18. This is due to mothers not being fully developed yet, so girls that give birth under the age of 15 are five times more likely to die during labor than someone in their 20s.<sup>11</sup> Overall, once a child is forced into marriage it is much harder for them to break away because they are under the control of someone who can easily abuse them, which is a major detriment to their mental and physical well-being.

This then relates to child sex trafficking because many victims of sex trafficking are previously married. Essentially, child brides can be forced by their husbands to sleep with others for profit by their husband or still be forced to repeatedly sleep with their husband under the guise of “marriage” which is why this human rights violation is often hidden. In a study conducted on the

---

5 Boyce, Sabrina C., Kimberly C. Brouwer, Daniel Triplett, Argentina E. Servin, Carlos Magis-Rodriguez, and Jay G. Silverman. “Childhood Experiences of Sexual Violence, Pregnancy, and Marriage Associated with Child Sex Trafficking among Female Sex Workers in Two US–Mexico Border Cities.” *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 8 (2018): 1049–54. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2018.304455>

6 Greenbaum, Jordan. “Child Sex Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation: Health Care Needs of Victims.” *Pediatric Clinical Practice Guidelines & Policies*, 2017, 1393–93. [https://doi.org/10.1542/9781610020862-part05-child\\_sex](https://doi.org/10.1542/9781610020862-part05-child_sex).

7 Molland, Sverre. “‘I Am Helping Them’: ‘Traffickers’, ‘Anti-Traffickers’ and Economies of Bad Faith.” *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 22, no. 2 (2011): 236–54. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1757-6547.2011.00135.x>. (240).

---

8 Aptel, Cécile. “Child Slaves and Child Brides.” *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 14, no. 2 (2016): 305–25. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jicj/mqv078>. (317)

9 Ibid. (318).

10 Sabbe, Alexia, Halima Oulami, Wahiba Zekraoui, Halima Hikmat, Marleen Temmerman, and Els Leye. “Determinants of Child and Forced Marriage in Morocco: Stakeholder Perspectives on Health, Policies and Human Rights.” *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 13, no. 1 (2013): 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-698x-13-43>. (5)

11 Ibid

U.S.-Mexican border in regards to child sex trafficking, a common area for trafficking, researchers found that 78.0% of the sex trafficking victims had been forcibly married under the age of 16 and 89.8% of the sex trafficking victims became pregnant under the age of 16.<sup>12</sup> This is important because it illuminates how sexual slavery and forced marriage are interconnected. A key point is that those that have experienced forced sex trafficking at a young age are stigmatized and discriminated upon. Interestingly, forced marriage can increase a child's chances of experiencing sex trafficking, while sex trafficking can also majorly decrease someone's chances of getting married later in life because they are deemed "unmarriageable" due to their past. This connection is important for aid organizations to address because they can fight back against these issues from multiple angles and hopefully prevent potential cases.

Furthermore, child sex trafficking is an issue that must be understood in relation to risk factors depending on the region. For example, in Thailand the risk factor of poverty is a way in which girls are coerced into prostitution. Essentially, many young women will first be told that they are going to sell food/items, but eventually are coerced into sex work to make extra money. There is a sort of family dynamic created within shops, where girls are coerced into believing the shop owners are "helping" them when in reality their bosses are taking advantage of their financial needs and using their bodies.<sup>13</sup> This is important because it relates to how aid organizations, governments, and the media have a tendency to assign a victim narrative onto them. Essentially, perceiving all young women working in sex trafficking as without agency is harmful because it focuses on defining these girls by their sex work instead of what led them into these circumstances. Another example relates to issues of migration, specifically at the U.S.-Mexican border. This region is a hotspot for trafficking and the sexual exploitation of minors. Transnational trafficking occurs when victims are moved across

international borders.<sup>14</sup> Risk factors that play a key role here are past sexual exploitation and living in countries with political or police corruption. Researchers found that of the females that experienced child sex trafficking in Mexico, 89.8% became pregnant under the age of 16, 78.0% had been forcibly married under the age of 16, 97% experienced past sexual violence under the age of 16, and the girls experienced this all at an average age of 14, even as young as 10–12 years old.<sup>15</sup> This is concerning because once a child has been recruited or coerced into sex trafficking they will likely suffer physical, psychological, and sexual abuse from traffickers who are trying to maintain control over them.<sup>16</sup> Finally, many youth will then suffer from extreme mental health issues including PTSD, depression, suicidality, anxiety, aggression, and more.<sup>17</sup> Overall, sex trafficking is an issue that must be contextualized with an understanding of the risk factors that are creating or perpetuating children being trafficked.

This then relates to the approach that aid organizations use when addressing the issue of trafficking: the victim and master narratives. The victim narrative is when aid organizations, governments, and the media have a tendency to assume survivors have no agency and assign a narrative on to them.<sup>18</sup> This negatively impacts children who are especially seen as helpless because it can detract from effectively solving the issue. This directly relates to sex trafficking in Thailand where girls under the age of 18 willfully work in the sex industry because of poverty. Essentially, "both 'traffickers' and

---

14 Greenbaum, Jordan. "Child Sex Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation: Health Care Needs of Victims." *Pediatric Clinical Practice Guidelines & Policies*, 2017, 1393–93. [https://doi.org/10.1542/9781610020862-part05-child\\_sex](https://doi.org/10.1542/9781610020862-part05-child_sex).

15 Boyce, Sabrina C., Kimberly C. Brouwer, Daniel Triplett, Argentina E. Servin, Carlos Magis-Rodriguez, and Jay G. Silverman. "Childhood Experiences of Sexual Violence, Pregnancy, and Marriage Associated with Child Sex Trafficking among Female Sex Workers in Two US–Mexico Border Cities." *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 8 (2018): 1049–54. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2018.304455>

16 Greenbaum, Jordan. "Child Sex Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation: Health Care Needs of Victims." *Pediatric Clinical Practice Guidelines & Policies*, 2017, 1393–93. [https://doi.org/10.1542/9781610020862-part05-child\\_sex](https://doi.org/10.1542/9781610020862-part05-child_sex).

17 Ibid.

18 Molland, Sverre. "'I Am Helping Them': 'Traffickers', 'Anti-Traffickers' and Economies of Bad Faith." *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 22, no. 2 (2011): 236–54. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1757-6547.2011.00135.x>.

---

12 Boyce, Sabrina C., Kimberly C. Brouwer, Daniel Triplett, Argentina E. Servin, Carlos Magis-Rodriguez, and Jay G. Silverman. "Childhood Experiences of Sexual Violence, Pregnancy, and Marriage Associated with Child Sex Trafficking among Female Sex Workers in Two US–Mexico Border Cities." *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 8 (2018): 1049–54. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2018.304455>

13 Molland, Sverre. "'I Am Helping Them': 'Traffickers', 'Anti-Traffickers' and Economies of Bad Faith." *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 22, no. 2 (2011): 236–54. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1757-6547.2011.00135.x>.

‘anti-traffickers’ engage in an economy of bad faith.<sup>19</sup> This alludes to the ironically common thread between aid organizations and traffickers where they take away part of their agency. Often aid organizations will have accounts of sex trafficking victims they have “saved” on their websites. These accounts tend to only be 1–2 sentences long and are fashioned to draw on readers’ emotions and fuel the idea that although the girls were easily manipulated, they were also easily saved by the non-profit organization.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, this coincides with the master narrative where aid organizations place themselves as “heroes” in sex trafficking survivors stories. Essentially, the master narrative “is selective in how it represents the history of the problem and that it does not ‘take up’ important detail about the context that fosters sexual exploitation...contains the stuff of legend as it occupies critical spaces of policy, activism, and development.”<sup>21</sup> It is important for aid organizations to be conscious of how they frame their initiatives or risk playing into these narratives.

These narratives can be seen on many aid organizations’ websites, but also we see some organizations taking active steps to move away from this. First, on Destiny Rescue’s website, a nonprofit dedicated to rescuing children who have been trafficked, they detail the rescue of a young woman named Jayla. Jayla was coerced into prostitution after getting a job serving drinks, but was rescued by Destiny Rescue representatives. It states on their website that “one night, she sat with some men that she expected to be like every other dirty customer she had sat with so many times before. But, it wasn’t long before she noticed these men were different. Instead of trying to abuse her, our rescue agents were there to offer her a way out, which she embraced with both hands and a big smile.”<sup>22</sup> First, the major red flag with this story is that it is not written by Jayla herself, but clearly a representative of Destiny Rescue. This story is only a few paragraphs long and majorly simplifies the “rescuing” process. By doing this it aligns Destiny Rescue as a type of savior and writes off Jayla as a helpless girl. Furthermore, the Polaris

Project uses a different approach to detail the stories of the people they have rescued from sex trafficking, no matter how young they are. In regards to the Polaris Project website, the specific section designated to survivor stories is written by the actual survivors. This is key because it allows survivors to have a voice within their own stories, which is incredibly important for understanding how sex trafficking functions to take advantage of people under the age of 18. A notable story is by Jose Alfaro who details being sex trafficked at the age of 15 after forming a relationship with a 36-year old man he met online. Alfaro is given as much space as he wanted to write his story and sheds light on the various ways he felt let down by the system in place that are supposed to protect children, and indicates how LGBTQ+ youth can be vulnerable to trafficking because of the ways in which traffickers exploit their pain and loneliness. He ends his essay by stating “the most important part to saving victims is realizing how many different ways we could have done something before as anything as horrific as to what happened to me happens to someone else.”<sup>23</sup> Finally, the ways in which aid organizations approach victims and conduct research can have a profound impact on the resources given to survivors, which is why it is essential to move away from the victim and master narratives. Especially, when it comes to children who may be particularly vulnerable to having their stories manipulated because of their young age and often lack of awareness.

Next, the legal world can also play a fundamental role in how the greater international community perceives child trafficking. It is important that this issue gets the recognition it deserves in a courtroom to better put this human rights violation on governments radars. However, in many legal settings victims of sex trafficking are often scrutinized in the criminal system instead of directed towards resources or given the help they need. In many cases victims are misidentified as prostitutes in the criminal system instead of being seen as victims of child abuse and exploitation.<sup>24</sup> For example, in the case of Tiffany Simpson, who was sentenced to

19 Ibid. (237)

20 Snajdr, Edward. “Beneath the Master Narrative: Human Trafficking, Myths of Sexual Slavery and Ethnographic Realities.” *Dialectical Anthropology* 37, no. 2 (2013): 229–56. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-013-9292-3>.

21 Ibid. (229)

22 “Six-Year-Old Girl Rescued at the Nepal Border” *Destiny Rescue*, November 18, 2021. <https://www.destinyrescue.org/blog/six-year-old-girl-rescued-at-the-nepal-border/>.

23 “Survivor Story: James Evans.” *Polaris*, August 18, 2021. <https://polarisproject.org/survivor-story-james-evans/>.

24 Greenbaum, Jordan. “Child Sex Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation: Health Care Needs of Victims.” *Pediatric Clinical Practice Guidelines & Policies*, 2017, 1393–93. [https://doi.org/10.1542/9781610020862-part05-child\\_sex](https://doi.org/10.1542/9781610020862-part05-child_sex).

serve 20 years in prison at the age of 17, despite clear evidence that she was a victim of sex trafficking. Simpson grew up in Georgia and was trafficked beginning at the age of 15 after forming a trauma bond with her trafficker who took advantage of Simpson's emotional needs, since Simpson's parents were not meaningfully in her life at the time. Simpson's story demonstrates how judges easily branding victims of sex trafficking as prostitutes can have harmful effects because during her hearing the judge asked Simpson "how long she had been 'shacking up' with her then 34-year-old trafficker."<sup>25</sup> Simpson was sentenced for her role in the recruitment of another 13-year-old girl, but the judge failed to recognize how the trauma bond played a key role in Simpson's actions. Often, traffickers will use the trauma bond to coerce their past victims to recruit new victims. The judge failed to do right by Simpson who never received the help she deserved for the trauma she endured. Finally, the criminal justice system needs to take more steps towards better understanding child sex trafficking, especially when it comes to emotional manipulation. A key step would be to ensure police officers who often interact and find victims of sex trafficking receive in-depth education on how to spot signs of trafficking and give resources as soon as possible.

Furthermore, child trafficking in relation to forced marriage also has numerous issues with lack of recognition. The precedent set during the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals was that enslavement was considered a crime against humanity. Forced child marriage falls under this type of crime because many young girls will be forced to have sexual contact with their husbands, taking on extra labor within domestic duties, and have to raise any and all children a girl has during this marriage.<sup>26</sup> When it comes to prosecuting these crimes "forced marriage is not entirely with the category of sexual slavery as it includes a variety of other sexual and non-sexual crimes, many of which may independently qualify as slavery."<sup>27</sup> This is important to recognize because the hidden nature of this type of trafficking in addition to the fact that forced mar-

riage constitutes multiple categories illuminates why it is harder for prosecutors to successfully convict those guilty of forced child marriage. For example, the first case of forced child marriage was tried in Sierra Leone by the Special Court for Sierra Leone in the early 2000s. During the war in Sierra Leone, many women and girls were forced to complete domestic duties daily, in addition to having sexual contact with their "husbands." The Special Court for Sierra Leone Statute did not include forced marriage as a crime against humanity, so the prosecutor charged it as another "inhuman act." However, originally the Trial Chamber rejected this claim and concluded that forced marriage "did not exist independently of enslavement, sexual slavery, rape, imprisonment, and forced labour."<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the Special Court for Sierra Leone also failed to consider sexual violence committed against children as their own category.<sup>29</sup> This is incredibly disappointing due to the fact that children are a particularly vulnerable group and deserve this type of recognition. Especially, when keeping in mind that sexual slavery in all forms can significantly negatively impact a child's psychological and physical well-being for years to come or the rest of their life. Overall, when it comes to the crime of forced child marriage, an important step the international community must take is ensuring that when courts are given the chance to convict those guilty of this crime they are held accountable. Failing to recognize forced marriage within the trafficking world can have far reaching negative effects because it sets the precedent that children forced into marriage and sexual slavery will not get the justice they deserve.

Next, another important sector that can play a key role in how the international community addresses forced child marriage and child sex trafficking is the medical world. Medical centers and medical professionals can help with identifying cases of trafficking and sexual abuse, especially when a girl has become pregnant. Their role is important because normally child victims of trafficking do not self-identify because of the abusive relationship they have developed with their traffickers and their lack of awareness due to their young age. This is supported by the fact that most victims of trafficking are recruited when they are between 12–16 years old.<sup>30</sup> It is viable for medical professionals to re-

25 Powell, Andrea. "She Was a Victim of Child Sex Trafficking - and Sent to Prison. Now She Has a Chance at Freedom." <https://www.thelily.com>. The Lily, October 27, 2021. <https://www.thelily.com/she-was-a-victim-of-child-sex-trafficking-and-sent-to-prison-now-she-has-a-chance-at-freedom/>.

26 Aptel, Cécile. "Child Slaves and Child Brides." *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 14, no. 2 (2016): 305–25. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jicj/mqv078>. (316.)

27 Ibid.(321)

28 Ibid. (320)

29 Ibid. (312)

30 "Child Sex Trafficking." The United States Department of Justice. United States Government, May 28, 2020. <https://www.justice.gov/>

ceive in depth training on the signs, support, and care of trafficking in young victims. Studies have shown that when healthcare professionals receive emergency training on sexual exploitation and trafficking, the number of reported cases by these professionals increased significantly.<sup>31</sup>

An example of a nonprofit aiming to educate medical professionals on trafficking is Physicians Against the Trafficking of Humans, which is taking the lead in teaching doctors how to best identify and address cases of trafficking in hospitals and urgent care centers. When medical providers are suspicious that a child patient of theirs may be involved with the trafficking world, they must be very conscious of the questions they ask and ensure the child that they are in control of the situation. This is an important first step to building trust with a young victim and giving them back control in their life that has been taken away. In addition this can work well with a mental health assessment because of the psychological toll this type of human rights violations takes on a person, especially a child.

Finally, the government and non-profit sector within the international community's fight against sex trafficking and forced marriage is another vital sector. Non-profits are vital here because they can help with amplify the needs of victims and survivors, spread awareness, and pressure governments to address issues of trafficking within their borders or other countries. One of the goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals calls for "an end to trafficking and violence against children as well as to all forms of violence and exploitation regarding women and girls."<sup>32</sup> This is a positive step for the international community because it prioritizes the issue and unifies the world in the fight against trafficking. Another important global initiative is "Girls not Brides" which aims to end child marriage through productive partnerships with over 1,500 organizations across over 100 countries.<sup>33</sup> This initiative is especially important in the time of COVID-19 where

many issues that women and girls face have been exacerbated and resources have been reduced due to lockdown restrictions and economic woes leading to an increase in risk factors for forced marriage and sex trafficking. Finally, addressing the systems that allow the enslavement of children should be at the forefront of governments and nonprofits fighting against child trafficking. This demands the international community form "effective partnerships and enhanced coordination across the UN and the multilateral system, mainstreaming the issue into international policy, developing frameworks and indicators, and intensifying cooperation regarding the fight against this practice."<sup>34</sup> Overall, the public sector has taken important steps to fight sex trafficking and child marriage by unifying the initiative. However, nonprofits still need to be careful to properly communicate the needs of victims and amplify their voices in an authentic manner. Governments also need to do a better job of holding other countries accountable that allow trafficking to exist in high demand within their borders to effectively diminish trafficking networks.

In conclusion, the international community needs to take a more comprehensive and preventative approach to sex trafficking and child marriage in addition to effectively amplifying the voices of victims. A great first step would be to establish a more inclusive and distinct definition of sex trafficking and forced child marriage to ensure there is a clear understanding of what both are. In addition, listening to the stories of survivors directly is the best way to understand how they are coerced and recruited into trafficking to better understand the risk factors and how to best address these risk factors. Furthermore, moving away from the victim and master narrative will also allow organizations to gain a more in-depth understanding of the situations different victims may be in when they are trafficked. Finally, the continual identification of risk factors through research, especially from the medical world, will add to the hope of minimizing risk factors, so less children are vulnerable to this type of human rights violation. Overall, the discourse on sex trafficking and forced marriage is quite messy and has clear gaps in it, so by taking steps to address the gaps in research will better help the international community's approach to fighting child trafficking.

---

criminal-ceos/child-sex-trafficking .(567)

31 Hadjipanayis, Adamos, Francis P. Crowley, Tom Stiris, David Neubauer, and Pierre-André Michaud. "Child Trafficking in Europe: What Is the Paediatrician's Role?" *European Journal of Pediatrics* 177, no. 9 (2018): 1419–23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00431-018-3190-2>. (1421)

32 Ibid. (1422)

33 "About Us." *Girls Not Brides*. Accessed January 2, 2022.

---

34 Aptel, Cécile. "Child Slaves and Child Brides." *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 14, no. 2 (2016): 305–25. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jicj/mqv078>. (324).

Works Cited

- “About Us.” Girls Not Brides. Accessed January 2, 2022. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-us/>.
- Aptel, Cécile. “Child Slaves and Child Brides.” *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 14, no. 2 (2016): 305–25. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jicj/mqv078>.
- Bick, Debra, Louise M. Howard, Sian Oram, and Cathy Zimmerman. “Maternity Care for Trafficked Women: Survivor Experiences and Clinicians’ Perspectives in the United Kingdom’s National Health Service.” *PLOS ONE* 12, no. 11 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0187856>.
- Boyce, Sabrina C., Kimberly C. Brouwer, Daniel Triplett, Argentina E. Servin, Carlos Magis-Rodriguez, and Jay G. Silverman. “Childhood Experiences of Sexual Violence, Pregnancy, and Marriage Associated with Child Sex Trafficking among Female Sex Workers in Two US–Mexico Border Cities.” *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 8 (2018): 1049–54. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2018.304455>
- “Child Sex Trafficking.” The United States Department of Justice. United States Government, May 28, 2020. <https://www.justice.gov/criminal-ceoschild-sex-trafficking> .
- “Child Trafficking.” UNICEF USA. Accessed December 31, 2021. <https://www.unicefusa.org/mission/protect/trafficking>.
- “Child Trafficking and Action to Eliminate It.” United Nations. United Nations. Accessed December 31, 2021. <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/childtrafficking.pdf>.
- “Convention on the Rights of the Child.” OHCHR. UNICEF. Accessed December 31, 2021. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.
- Greenbaum, Jordan. “Child Sex Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation: Health Care Needs of Victims.” *Pediatric Clinical Practice* Guidelines & Policies, 2017, 1393–93. [https://doi.org/10.1542/9781610020862-part05-child\\_sex](https://doi.org/10.1542/9781610020862-part05-child_sex).
- Hadjipanayis, Adamos, Francis P. Crawley, Tom Stiris, David Neubauer, and Pierre-André Michaud. “Child Trafficking in Europe: What Is the Paediatrician’s Role?” *European Journal of Pediatrics* 177, no. 9 (2018): 1419–23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00431-018-3190-2>.
- Molland, Sverre. “‘I Am Helping Them’: ‘Traffickers’, ‘Anti-Traffickers’ and Economies of Bad Faith.” *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 22, no. 2 (2011): 236–54. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1757-6547.2011.00135.x>.
- Powell, Andrea. “She Was a Victim of Child Sex Trafficking - and Sent to Prison. Now She Has a Chance at Freedom.” <https://www.thelily.com>. The Lily, October 27, 2021. <https://www.thelily.com/she-was-a-victim-of-child-sex-trafficking-and-sent-to-prison-now-she-has-a-chance-at-freedom/>.
- Sabbe, Alexia, Halima Oulami, Wahiba Zekraoui, Halima Hikmat, Marleen Temmerman, and Els Leye. “Determinants of Child and Forced Marriage in Morocco: Stakeholder Perspectives on Health, Policies and Human Rights.” *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 13, no. 1 (2013): 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-698x-13-43>.
- “Six-Year-Old Girl Rescued at the Nepal Border.” *Destiny Rescue*, November 18, 2021. <https://www.destinyrescue.org/blog/six-year-old-girl-rescued-at-the-nepal-border/>.
- Snajdr, Edward. “Beneath the Master Narrative: Human Trafficking, Myths of Sexual Slavery and Ethnographic Realities.” *Dialectical Anthropology* 37, no. 2 (2013): 229–56. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-013-9292-3>.
- “Survivor Story: James Evans.” *Polaris*, August 18, 2021. <https://polarisproject.org/survivor-story-james-evans/>.

# Refugees, Rights, and Ukraine

*An interview with Professor Nadia El-Shaarawi*

## Conall Butchart '22

---

*Professor Nadia El-Shaarawi is an Assistant Professor of Global Studies at Colby College. Her research focuses on refugees and refugee health, and she teaches classes on refugees, global health, and humanitarianism. Nadia is currently working on a book addressing issues of imperial unknowing and the production of ignorance during the Iraq War and its impact on Iraqi refugees. She is interviewed by Conall Butchart '22 in a discussion centered on both refugees in the context of the Ukraine war and refugee treatment more widely.*

**Conall Butchart:** If you had to explain international refugee law in three sentences to someone who had never heard of it before, what are the very essential elements?

**Nadia El-Shaarawi:** The general kind of architecture of international refugee law is governed by the 1951 refugee convention, and its 1967 protocol that's the most important document under international law. There's all kinds of other agreements and treaties, and, of course, national laws that govern how refugees are defined in particular circumstances, but a lot of them draw on and relate to the 1951 convention. And the 1951 convention defines a refugee as a person who has crossed a border, so they have left their country of habitual residence, because of a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of five grounds—in U.S. law, we call those “nexus” grounds. And those are race, religion, nationality, political opinion, either actual or imputed, and membership in a particular social group. And that last one is kind of fuzzy sounding; that's probably the hardest [to define], [and] every single one of these categories has been adjudicated through huge amounts of case law.

So they're all really contested categories, and also categories that have been agreed on in various kinds of legal ways. But membership in a particular social group is the one that I think is the hardest to understand as a regular sort of person. And what that's been understood to mean is that it's some kind of immutable characteristic of something about you, that you cannot change and that you shouldn't, or you shouldn't be asked to change. That's been interpreted in the law as persecu-

tion on the basis of occupation and persecution on the basis of gender and sexual identity. Sometimes people are persecuted because of the family they belong to or particular social groups that have been interpreted in that way.

The next part of it is that they are unwilling or unable to return safely. So that's the definition that was agreed upon in the aftermath of the massive refugee crisis in Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War, when there were millions of displaced people. And countries came together trying to figure out, “Well, what do we do?” There's been scholarship recently pointing out—and I raise this because I think one of the kind of key themes that is really important right now is this double standard that we see between European refugees and refugees from other places. There's a ton of literature coming out right now talking about the colonial origins of the Refugee Convention, and how we think of the Refugee Convention as being so fundamental to understanding displacement and how it comes out of this European moment, but during the moment at which it was defined, and the moment at which it was signed into law, there was, of course, displacement happening all over the world and other in other places. Displacement then wasn't just a European problem, even though we imagined it as being a European problem.

So, the 1951 convention, when it gets signed in the aftermath of World War Two, it's restricted only to refugees in Europe, and only to refugees displaced prior to 1951. So then, in 1967, there's a protocol that gets signed, which is basically an amendment to the 1951 convention that expands it to the rest of the world and also removes the temporal limitation. So it can be refugees who are displaced at any time. And the convention lays out a whole number of rights that state signatories are supposed to give to refugees by virtue of signing this convention. The most foundational one is something called non-refoulement, which is basically this idea that the most important right that refugees have is the right to not be sent back to the place that they fled from; the right not to be returned to persecution.

So what we see now is that we have this international framework that's not perfect, but does offer some

protections to refugees. But we see that states all over the world, including in Europe, are violating those agreements that they themselves have signed. Just kind of constantly, at this moment, there's been this real global erosion of asylum, and what's happening with displaced Ukrainians right now is actually pretty heartwarming. It's horrific, what they're going through, but there has been this real groundswell of support for them from just, you know, regular people as well as from states that is certainly not the norm that we see for refugees from other places at this moment.

**Butchart:** What do you see as the defining differences between this Ukrainian case and the, like you said, the general of erosion of state responsibility toward refugees? Why does this moment in particular seem to be very different than other recent moments?

**El-Shaarawi:** That's a really good question. I think there are a couple of ways that we see the response being different—I would say in terms of the displacement itself, what's happening to the Ukrainians, which is absolutely devastating, is in and of itself not that different—we see people fleeing to neighboring countries hoping they're going to be able to return, and we are in this very initial first three weeks of the invasion phase, where I think that is often how displacement looks. There are a lot of questions about what's going to happen as this continues. But this, the displacement itself, really doesn't look that different.

What is so different is the response to it. And I'd say that the response both in terms of state responses, and in terms of mutual aid, grassroots solidarity responses, and media discourse has been really different. There's been a ton of critiques of the ways in which mainstream media has talked about this crisis—there's a really good statement by the Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists Association where they cataloged a number of different instances of this [double-standard] and put out a statement condemning it—these examples on CNN and Al Jazeera and all kinds of really mainstream media outlets talking about how “it's so shocking to see this in Europe. It's so shocking.” The Ukrainians they look just like us, you know, they are quote-unquote, these middle-class civilized people with their suitcases in their cars. This kind of language has been really devastating, I think, to people who are not, white Europeans who have had to flee.

It implies right that there's this idea of certain people and certain places where we as a world are comfortable

with seeing war and comfortable with people being displaced, and who get understood as being properly migrants or refugees, right? And other places where we think that shouldn't happen which emanates from all kinds of civilizational-colonial ideas. What's happening to the Ukrainians right now is absolutely devastating, right? It necessitates this response. It deserves this response. But I think we do need to ask the question, why doesn't every person who's displaced get this same kind of support? Some of the countries that people are fleeing to — Hungary and Poland, particularly come to mind — these are countries that as recently as last year, Poland was talking about massing troops on the border to try and keep refugees out and was militarizing their border. And they still are: we've seen lots of stories, there's a really good New York Times piece about the differential experiences of a white Ukrainian family and refugee from Sudan, both trying to cross into Poland. And the ways in which the Sudanese man was really violently stopped by Polish border guards and the Ukrainian family was welcomed in and a family took them in and let them stay as long as they wanted.

And so you see, the double standard isn't only discourse, it's very much in terms of how people are actually being treated. Same thing for Hungary, which has become infamous recently for Viktor Orbán's incredibly tough anti-migration policies, policies that really echo the ones that we saw President Trump implement in the United States. He's used awful, awful language about refugees and migrants calling them invaders, calling them invading armies, but also militarizing the border, building walls and fences, [and] installing military. And [Orbán] went so far as to say we need to stop migration entirely and using really, violent Islamophobic rhetoric, like this idea of Muslim hordes invading Hungary, a very white, Christian ethno-nationalist kind of discourse. And Hungary's borders are open to Ukrainians, right? Ukrainians can fly for free on a Hungarian airline, and he's using this language now of “we can manage it, we can do it.” But he's making these very clear distinctions. He's saying the Ukrainians are refugees, but all of these other people who have tried to either transit through or seek asylum in Hungary. They're migrants, and we can tell the difference between refugees and migrants. I think it's heavily racialized. And we've seen that in the experiences of African students and Indian students fleeing Ukraine, Roma people trying to flee Ukraine and having trouble because they haven't had documents. But, you know, it's not entirely only racialized. I do think there's something, particularly in terms of the way in which we think about it and talk about

it here in the United States, that is also geopolitical and has to do with our imaginations of Europe and our understandings of Russia. Russia has been this geopolitical enemy of the United States, which I think plays into it as well. But it's also truly horrific, right? What's happening to the Ukrainians right now and what Russia is doing. So, I think, you know, there's also an element of "this response is appropriate." It's just the question of why it hasn't happened for other people and why it doesn't happen for other people.

**Butchart:** Okay, next question. Obviously, being a refugee is not so simple as just "I was here, now I'm there and I have a new life." There's tons of different implications about health, job opportunities, education, opportunities, language and cultural barriers which, at least as far as I'm aware, have not been very prominent in the news about the experience itself. And I was wondering if you could trace out the broad common themes about the ways that being a refugee affects a person, if that makes sense?

**El-Shaarawi:** You know, it really depends. It really depends. There are certainly some common experiences of loss and uncertainty and insecurity that refugees experience. But beyond that, the way the experience actually plays out for people, and what it means for people, I think, really depends on the structures in place, the policies in place, the ways in which they are either welcomed or not. And then also, of course, what they fled from. We tend to think that these are people who have been through war or been through violence of some kind, persecution of some kind that they experienced. Certainly, if you think of just the mental health side of it, they experienced something traumatic, and then they fled, and then they're safe. And we don't tend to think about what happens to them afterwards. But one of the things that there's literature about, that I have also seen in my own work, is that a lot of how displacement affects people's lives, happens in the place of exile.

So, if people can work, if people can send their kids to school, if people have support learning languages, if they have access to safe, stable housing, if they are integrated within local populations, if they have access to health care and mental health care. All of those things can make a real difference. These experiences are always going to be painful. I think displacement is, you know, it's inherently a painful experience. But there are ways to make it more painful and ways to make it

less painful. And it feels like a lot of states have, in recent history, found ways to make it more painful. And it seems like in the case of the Ukrainians right now local people are trying to make it less painful in ways that are really kind of lovely.

But of course, one of the one of the things that's really been important in my own work is, and this I learned from refugees, when I was working with Iraqi refugees, and I had started out interested in their health, and asked them about health. And what they said to me over and over again when asked about their health was what they were most worried about their uncertain future. And I think that is something that is also often common to refugees. And when you see people being given temporary protected status (TPS), like, for instance, the U.S. government just offered TPS to Ukrainians here in the United States, which gives you the status and the ability to work for 18 months, and then you can renew it, or like the temporary protection that they just got in the European Union for Ukrainians, which is three years, which, again, is amazing. But when you think about what it's like to live with that uncertainty, I think that is something that is quite common to the refugee experience, and is really, really difficult for people—how do you kind of plan for your life? How do you really nurture life when you feel like that status is going to be taken away from you potentially at any time?

**Butchart:** Is there anything else that you feel is relevant to refugees in general, and Ukraine specifically, that if you were to explain the context to somebody, you would include this detail?

**El-Shaarawi:** The thing that I have been thinking about the most is, I already said, but thinking about the double standards that we talked about, but also using them to perhaps build something better, like recognizing that war is a catastrophe for everyone. We can talk about Syrians, but if you think about Yemen, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, there are all these other situations where people are displaced in massive numbers that are not getting that kind of attention. So is there a way to take that space of welcome that we see around the Ukrainian situation and expand it to others as well?

The other thing I would say in terms of the Ukrainian situation specifically, thinking about the more long-term consequences for people and ways to support them more in the long-term. I think that's really important. And then the last thing I'd say would be I've

## OVERTURE • Vol. 2, 2022

been thinking a lot about people who aren't and who are able to move. We talked about the Roma people who maybe don't have documents but also, as I've been reading about, like what's happening in Mariupol, thinking about people who are unable to leave, whether it's because the electricity has been cut to the city, and they can't get out of their high-rise apartment building because they're elderly or disabled and the elevators don't work, or because the city's been put under siege and they can't physically get out of the city. So, thinking about who's able to move and who can't is also an important topic.





---

Goldfarb Center for Public  
Affairs at Colby