

KANSAS UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

VOLUME 1
2025



Kansas Undergraduate Journal of International Studies

The *Kansas Undergraduate Journal of International Studies (KUJIS)* is a multi-disciplinary journal for undergraduate research. The journal is a home for research on international or global topics from any appropriate discipline; e.g., International Studies, Political Science, Cultural Studies, Anthropology, Economics, Sociology, or Gender Studies.

Dr. Brian W. Lagotte
Founding Editor

Student Editors

Shea Marney
Kennedy Mulvaney
Andrew Fewins
Hannah Loub
Eilish Frissell

Isabel López
Marina Bontrager
Grace Yearout
Bhavya Gupta

Contact Details

1445 Jayhawk Blvd.
215 Bailey Hall
Lawrence, KS 66045

Email: KUJIS.KU@gmail.com

Website: <https://journals.ku.edu/kujis>

Published by the University of Kansas Libraries



Kansas Undergraduate Journal of International Studies, 2025, 1(1).

<https://journals.ku.edu/kujis>

© 2025 the Authors

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License.

Kansas Undergraduate Journal of International Studies

2025 – Volume 1

Introduction

Brian W. Lagotte

**Rhetoric vs. Reality:
Political Motivations Behind High Speed 2 (HS2) Decision-making**
Cate Manning

**NGOs reports vs. Reality:
Indigenous Peruvians' real-life challenges**
Fabiana Paola Salas Valdivia

**Mirror, Mirror, on the Big Screen:
North Americanization in Colombia through Film**
Ainsley Powell

**Silence on Xinjiang:
Freedom of Expression on Chinese Social Media**
Keira Dobbs

**From Ostpolitik to Putinpolitik:
The AfD's Affinity for Russia**
Rachell Orce

**Meilė Yra Visiems:
The Evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania**
Levi Brabec

Kansas Undergraduate Journal of International Studies

Introduction

Dr. Brian W. Lagotte
Founding Editor

Welcome, readers, to the inaugural volume of the *Kansas Undergraduate Journal of International Studies* (KUJIS). In an attempt to highlight the amazing work of undergraduate researchers tackling global and international issues from a breadth of perspectives, this journal aspires to be a multi-disciplinary home for research on topics from any appropriate tradition; e.g., International Studies, Political Science, Cultural Studies, Anthropology, Economics, Sociology, or Gender Studies.

The impetus for the journal is a particular trend I have witnessed in undergraduate publishing over the years, both in our own Global and International Studies program here at the University of Kansas (KU) and undergraduate study in general, which is the timing of article submission could not come at a worse time in the scholars' studies. Often, I have seen the most sophisticated research articles come to fruition for students completing formal undergraduate theses, normally but not always, as a part of a capstone experience in their programs. This structure means students have been toiling away for one or perhaps two semester on a rigorous, challenging, frustrating, and rewarding project they finish just in time for graduation. Then, in the summer, after getting their diploma, and attending graduation parties, and thinking about next steps, undergraduate researchers need to spend a little time finalizing their manuscripts to fit publication requirements for submission.

I think you could guess that the motivation to do more work on the senior thesis during the sunny and free days of the postgraduate summer is at its nadir.

Thus, even though I see one or two students each year have the endurance to complete those final steps and publish in terrific undergraduate journals around the country, I have continually witnessed many high quality theses remain only excellent course artifacts when they could be so much more. Since my Global and International Studies students' final capstone articles follow the traditional research article format, designing a journal that closely fits those parameters was straightforward and hopefully will provide them the final push of motivational convenience to see the highest quality final projects make their way into print and out into the world.



Kansas Undergraduate Journal of International Studies, 2025, 1(1).

<https://journals.ku.edu/kujis>

© 2025 the Authors

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License.

The goals for KUJIS are two-fold, then, one near-term and one in the long-term. In the immediate future, I hope the journal is a showcase of the amazing work the students in KU's Global and International Studies program complete during their senior years. The venue can host more fantastic pieces that might otherwise have been left aside during that crucial period after completing the degree and moving on to their next adventure. Eventually, having undergraduate researchers submit articles from a variety of programs at KU, and from universities in Kansas outside of this institution, and even from schools around the country outside Kansas is one future goal of the journal. I realize that sounds a bit lofty in the introduction of the very first volume, but an editor can dream after all.

The first step of those plans, therefore, is to introduce said amazing authors of this initial volume of the journal. Before providing some notes on the individual articles, a little context on how these projects developed overall may help to evaluate the pieces. I advise the undergraduate scholars in the program while they conduct projects in two semesters, starting from scratch in August and having the manuscript done by May. Often they report the process is the first attempt to complete the entire authentic research cycle wherein they had to: find conversations about their topic in the relevant literature, create their own question contributing to those discussions, formulate a feasible research design by finding their own data to answer that question, and then write a formal proposal laying out their plans. That process is the first semester. Then, they execute the data collection and analysis, contemplate disciplinary implications from their results, and produce the actual manuscript in the spring. I am always impressed by the quantity and quality of work the first-time researchers can produce on such an accelerated timeline.

The first article by **Cate Manning**, "**Rhetoric vs. Reality: Political Motivations Behind High Speed 2 (HS2) Decision-making**," is an example of a researcher investigating how politicians talk about major infrastructure projects occurring within their tenures. When a significant High Speed train project found itself on the chopping block, **Manning** examined if the leaders involved were railing against the project, excuse the pun, due to empirical realities or political expediency. Following that paper, **Fabiana Paola Salas Valdivia** also looks at the differing perspectives of a central problem in "**NGOs reports vs. Reality: Indigenous Peruvians' real-life challenges**." The question here is how accurately NGOs are identify the challenges Indigenous Peruvians are dealing with on a day-to-day basis. The author raveled to Peru over winter break to do in-person interviews revealing opinions on education, identity, and environmentalism that show how complicated these issues are.

A second article in Latin America follows, with **Ainsley Powell** examining images, dialogue, and plot lines in Colombian films to uncover any potential processes of North Americanization in the movies. After explaining

how the theoretical perspective has developed in the field, **“Mirror, Mirror, on the Big Screen: North Americanization in Colombia through Film”** applies those metrics to ten films within the last decade. The article by **Keira Dobbs** is fourth, tackling issues that continues to draw attention to researchers focused on politics in the media: state censorship, self-censorship, and the freedom to express one’s opinion. In **“Silence on Xinjiang: Freedom of Expression on Chinese Social Media,”** Dobbs tackles social media use and how threats of “fake news” are wielded to control controversial narratives.

Finally, two articles on European politics close the volume. In **“From Ostpolitik to Putinpolitik: the AfD’s Affinity for Russia,”** Rachell Orce initially was interested in patterns of German politicians being influenced by the Russian State. Once a clear geographical pattern immediately appeared, Orce took a deeper dive to see how the discourse of popular politicians on the right express their ideological proximity to Russia. To borrow an old cliché, last but absolutely not least is **Levi Brabec’s** work in **“Meilė Yra Visiems: The Evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania.”** Using reports from community organizers, joined with semiotic analysis of social media images from over a decade, Brabec arrives at an interestingly contradictory conclusion of where LGBTQ+ issues have gained greater tolerance (and where they have not). The six articles in this first volume ought to highlight the breadth of topics welcomed in the journal as well as the variety of disciplinary perspectives and research techniques.

To close this introduction, I would like to thank two groups of people for providing so much assistance to this project. First, in the University of Kansas libraries, **Marianne Reed** and **Eric Bader** have patiently taught me about open source journaling, wisely advised on many components you can see in the journal and on the website, and completed a tremendous amount of heavy lifting in the final formatting and production of the volumes. Although people often use the phrase “it would not have happened without them” in these kinds of situations, it has likely never been more accurate. And, of course, a tremendous thank you to my volunteer student editors: **Shea Marney, Isabel López, Kennedy Mulvaney, Marina Bontrager, Andrew Fewins, Grace Yearout, Hannah Loub, Bhavya Gupta, and Eilish Frissell.** On top of all the actual work these seniors have with courses, organizations, part-time jobs, and the like, they graciously signed on to experience all the wonderment of a minutia-driven, time-consuming experience of manuscript copy editing without the pesky distraction of actual financial remuneration—all while helping me figure out how to do this stuff for the very first time. They deserve more plaudits than I could ever fit in a single letter of recommendation.

So readers, I leave you to peruse the articles that now follow, and I believe that you will enjoy them as much as I have enjoyed working with the authors. I also hope that you are inspired to contemplate submitting your own work to the journal someday (or motivating your students to do so).

Rhetoric vs. Reality: Political Motivations Behind High Speed 2 (HS2) Decision-making

Cate Manning
University of Kansas

This project asks whether British prime ministers Boris Johnson's and Rishi Sunak's decisions to cancel part of High Speed 2 (HS2) – a rail line intended to connect major cities in the United Kingdom – stem from political motivations or practical infrastructure concerns. Previous researchers have examined the importance of access to high-speed rail (HSR) networks outside of major metropolitan areas and the effects of this on regional economies. Using public choice theory as a theoretical lens, this project examines the political factors influencing the cancellation – or funding – of the major rail project. The research uses a mixed qualitative and quantitative method to assess the political rhetoric and realities surrounding HS2's development. Specifically, the project employs a comparative analysis of government policy papers, reports, and press statements from the respective prime ministers and public opinion polling, election results, and transportation data. This project argues short-term political decisions played a greater role in the rail project's cancellation than potential infrastructure concerns or post-pandemic travel patterns. For instance, the cancellations reflect Johnson's commitment to maintaining political cohesion and party support and Sunak's priority of improving his public image ahead of an election. Citing the UK's history of regional economic disparities exacerbated by Conservative policies, the research aims to contribute to a better understanding of how party politics shape the development of large-scale infrastructure projects.

Key Words: United Kingdom Railway, Politics and Infrastructure



The double decker's upper level gives a clear view into a poorly lit construction site in Central London. Beyond blue fence panels labeled "HS2," railway tracks lead into Euston Station, and the bus snakes through the adjacent traffic lane lined with cones. The acronym gives no immediate indication of the fenced-off area's purpose, but a quick Google search does: "High Speed 2...connecting the UK's north and south...largest infrastructure project in Europe...terminating at Euston...under construction." The next morning at the neighboring King's Cross Station, delays and cancellations flash across schedule boards, mostly affecting northbound trains controlled by private companies; *maybe HS2 will fix that*, I thought. Fourteen months later, the acronym pops up again. In a former train station turned conference hall in Manchester, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announces his decision to halt the northern section of the major rail project, *The New York Times* reports. With the Conservative Party's 2023 conference slogan, "Long-term decisions for a brighter future," projected above him, Sunak argued commuters' post-pandemic travel habits did not justify HS2's escalating costs; the public money must go elsewhere. As I read about pauses to government funding and contractor plans in disarray, I wondered if the rail line would ever make it to Euston, let alone the North.

The High Speed 2 (HS2) rail project's evolution reflects the United Kingdom's need to reinforce its decades-old rail network, promote economic growth, and address regional imbalance. Beyond its technical function as the rail network's new and improved backbone, historical factors such as socio-economic conditions and political dynamics influenced the development of HS2. Though the UK's "North-South divide" traces back to the 19th century, since the 1980s, Conservative Party policies designed to achieve national economic revival have instead increased regional disparity (Martin, 1988). By 1997, under Conservative leadership, the privatization of the nation's rail industry after decades of state ownership led to more expensive train tickets since users rather than taxpayers pay the major share of the fares (Dobruszkes et al., 2022). Following the Conservative Party's pledge to revitalize, or "level up," the North in 2019, the gap in transport funding has grown; in the 2021-2022 fiscal year, the government spent £905 per head on transport in London and the South East compared to £442 per head in the North East (Mayes et al., 2023). The historical context of the UK's rail industry and social differences frames the government's decisions to scale back northern sections of the HS2 project. Since 2010, shifting Conservative policies and successive prime ministers have delayed the project's development and created uncertainty regarding its future.

As a high-speed route connecting major cities in the North and Midlands regions with London, HS2 was proposed in 2010 to address issues of rail capacity and efficiency while stimulating economic growth outside the prosperous capital and southern region. The project aimed to "shrink" the country and propel the UK into a new era of modern transportation – similar

to high-speed rail (HSR) in France or Japan – acting as a vital initiative in the UK’s neglected infrastructure landscape. After the UK’s successful partnership with France to build High Speed 1 – better known as the Channel Tunnel – the then-Labour government laid out plans for new HSR lines throughout England and potentially Scotland (“High-speed rail plans announced,” 2010). The proposed Y-shaped rail line intended to have two major parts: Phase 1 running from London to Birmingham, and Phase 2 travelling northeast and northwest, toward Leeds and Manchester, and interchanging in Birmingham (Department for Transport, 2010). Because accessibility to London determines the socio-economic circumstances of many UK cities, HSR lines can spur economic growth in cities along the route through additional services and reductions in train times (Chen & Hall, 2011). The 2023 cancellation of Phase 2a – the northeastern leg – raised questions about the government’s commitment to regional unity. While initial HS2 plans were seen as a step in bridging the gap between the South and the North and Midlands, the decision highlighted tension between short-term economic considerations and the nation’s goal of creating a more balanced economy.

As the proposal gained momentum over the years, HS2 became emblematic of the government’s challenges in balancing national growth, regional priorities, and politics. Support from Conservative Party members dwindled due to controversies surrounding the megaproject’s rising costs, potential environmental damage, and poor management, consequently leading to the suspension and cancellation of Phase 2. In 2020, the former chairman of the HS2 company, Douglas Oakervee, and then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson gave the project the go-ahead and confirmed the original rationale was still valid; in his independent review, however, Oakervee speculated “London could derive more benefits from HS2 than places outside of London” (Oakervee, 2020, p. 95). Less than two years later, Johnson’s long-delayed Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) for the North and Midlands halted construction on the northeastern section going toward Leeds (Department for Transport et al, 2021). As a cabinet member, Rishi Sunak championed the project and wanted to reinstate the route canceled by the IRP, but in October 2023, as prime minister, he scrapped the northwestern (Birmingham-Manchester) route, citing pandemic-related costs and dwindling rail capacity; instead, he announced Network North, a plan to redistribute the funds to other transport projects in the region (“Conservative leadership race,” 2022; Parker, 2023). Both Johnson’s and Sunak’s alternative plans for HS2 shifted focus away from the North, therefore undermining the project’s original purpose. To understand the motivations behind the prime ministers’ decisions, this research explores the changing politics and government reports shaping the rail project’s future.

The research project examines whether Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak are making infrastructure or political decisions when scaling back and canceling Phase 2 of HS2. Both the former and the current prime minister failed

to consider the project's benefits for the North, showing a clash between short-term politics and long-term national or regional growth. Therefore, the research will compare government rhetoric surrounding HS2 to the reality of the rail line. Specifically, the project looks at rhetoric in Johnson's Integrated Rail Plan (2021) and Sunak's Network North Plan (2023) to uncover justifications surrounding HS2's development. Using evidence from these reports, the research will examine variables such as rail capacity and project funding to understand the leaders' arguments; the project utilizes existing rail usage reports from the Office for National Statistics and the Office of Road and Rail Data Portal. Furthermore, the project references how public choice theory may explain if politicians used HS2 decision-making as an electoral strategy. The timeline of unkept "levelling-up" promises, planning, and funding uncertainties shows a lack of ambition from the UK government to execute large infrastructure projects quickly and cost effectively. Accordingly, the research will show the importance of considering wider economic, social, and environmental impacts in governments' decisions surrounding transportation projects.

Overall, this paper argues Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak made political decisions, rather than infrastructure decisions, when canceling the second phase of HS2. The project details the politicians' approach and stances regarding the rail project prior to becoming prime ministers, before discussing external political factors – such as election results and public polling – that may have influenced decision-making during their times in office. First, the literature review summarizes research on the regional impacts of high-speed rail and its development. The mixed methods research design collects government reports and external data, using thematic coding strategies to answer whether the politicians were primarily making political or infrastructure decisions when cancelling the second phase of HS2. The analysis shows how each prime minister cherry-picked external data to make an argument against sections of the project, not accounting for political reasonings such as forthcoming elections. The analysis argues that, in the context of elections, short-term political decisions played a greater role in the cancellation of the second phase of HS2 than potential infrastructure concerns or post-pandemic travel patterns. Finally, the discussion section explores how public choice theory framework best explains the prime ministers' decisions and suggests potential policy implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

High Speed Infrastructure

A growing body of literature is concerned with the importance of access to high-speed rail (HSR) networks outside of major metropolitan areas. Previous studies have found a correlation between HSR and regional economic growth. Specifically, scholars reported rail connections to and from major

cities or provinces – the most important markets – have indirect positive impacts on small- and medium-sized cities. Bonnafous' analysis of France (1987) concluded the purpose of HSR is to provide direct and profitable services between two cities, and for these services to be profitable, one must be a major capital (p. 130). Adopting a similar position, Chen and Hall (2011) aimed to fill a gap in the literature by examining regional economic impacts of HSR in the UK. The case study argues against economists' predictions that rail networks benefit metropolitan areas, e.g., London, at the expense of smaller cities or rural areas (Chen & Hall, 2011). The existing research considers economic impacts when evaluating transportation policy decisions and examines the broader infrastructural implications beyond major metropolitan areas. In the case of HS2 in the UK, new research can provide insight into how political and economic factors shape policymaking surrounding the project.

Other scholars have debated the regional economic benefits of HSR projects outside of concentrated metropolitan areas. Several studies suggest HSR does not contribute to regional economic growth; therefore, such projects are not economically viable investments. Contrary to previously mentioned studies, evidence suggests regional economic effects are likely concentrated around stations or major metropolitan areas, leading to short-term benefits in peripheral regions (Vickerman, 1997). In the cases of Germany and Portugal, economic restructurings resulted in HSR projects' rising costs, public opposition, and completion delays; furthermore, the authors point to political – not economic – motivations as the drivers in the projects' implementation (Szobi et al., 2023, p. 30). Regional connections to HSR may drain surrounding economic activities, therefore negatively impacting smaller cities (Albalade et al., 2012, p. 347). However, a relatively small body of literature mentions how historical development or political decision-making can shape HSR ambitions. A new comparative study across different regions and countries can help identify best practices and potential areas for improvement in leveraging HSR for regional economic development. Therefore, this research project aims to find whether economic or political decisions hold greater influence on HSR policymaking in the UK.

While several lines of evidence suggest HSR infrastructure alone is not likely to be transformative for the economy, literature acknowledges such projects can have a more significant impact when coupled with other policy efforts. Authors consider the impacts of alternative transportation methods, such as highways. According to Sánchez-Mateos & Givoni (2012), "it is likely that a new HSR line will result in accessibility reduction and inferior position for the rail in the competition with other modes and mainly road transport" (p. 112). Furthermore, road projects employing local labor may be more beneficial to "poor" regions compared to large-scale rail projects (Vickerman, 1997, p. 36). By examining the influence of broader policy goals and considerations of alternative transportation, this research project aims to contribute

to the ongoing debate on the strategies for enhancing regional development and rail accessibility. Investigating the political and infrastructure considerations behind canceling the rail project can explain competition between different transportation modes and inform future policy decisions.

A recent qualitative study described how HSR networks around the world are socially exclusive. Accordingly, the authors noted the potential of HSR projects to exacerbate existing social imbalances. Dobruszkes et al.'s study (2022) describes the social inequalities associated with HSR use and calls for a more comprehensive understanding of the social and political dimension of HSR services. For example, travel methods associated with HSR are linked to economic factors like higher income, as well as other categories of exclusion, e.g., geographical or time-based. The authors raise the issue of taxpayer-funded transportation projects not benefiting the masses, suggesting the exclusion in the UK is primarily due to economic factors (Dobruszkes et al., 2022, p. 101). This research project aims to address overlooked political questions of HSR projects by analyzing government rhetoric and political decision-making.

Public Choice Theory

The use of public choice theory allows researchers to apply economic methods to politics to explain how and why political decision-making occurs. As the theory assumes personal goals primarily motivate policy outcomes, scholars agree small interest groups have more influence over political decision-making than the majority group. For example, since politicians are interested in maximizing power and profits, candidates seeking reelection prioritize securing votes from "median voters" and special interest groups (Butler, 2012, p. 16). Furthermore, small groups – such as private businesses or lobbyists – influence the government decision-making process "at the expense of large numbers of taxpayers or consumers" (Orchard & Stretton, 1997, p. 412). Therefore, research shows the interests of a small group can lead to government failures or inefficiencies detrimental to the public (Butler, 2012). Applying public choice theory to national infrastructure decision-making can uncover the motivations of politicians and interest groups, such as local constituencies or environmentalists. The theory provides a framework for research exploring how self-interests can impact the implementation of infrastructure projects.

By investigating the political and infrastructure considerations behind canceling HS2, the research project aligns with the broader debate on transportation policy and regional economic development. Like previously mentioned research, the project examines the broader social and economic impacts of HSR beyond major metropolitan areas, as well as the influence of alternative transportation methods. The proposed project aims to contribute to the existing literature by focusing on the wider economic, social, and political considerations impacting the major HSR project in the UK. Specifically,

I investigate whether Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak made infrastructure or political decisions when scaling back and canceling Phase 2 of HS2. To bridge a gap in the literature, the focus on government rhetoric and policymaking addresses overlooked political questions regarding HSR projects. This project explores the political impacts on HSR development by analyzing the potential shift in rhetoric across governments. While previous studies have examined the economic impacts of HSR networks and national projects, this research focuses on political influence in transportation policymaking.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To assess Rishi Sunak's and Boris Johnson's rhetoric surrounding HS2, the project's primary data sources are Johnson's Integrated Rail Plan for the North and Midlands (IRP) and Sunak's Network North plan. The project also references Douglas Oakervee's (2019) review of the rail line to determine trends in the decision-making and government rhetoric surrounding the rail line. The IRP serves as a primary source for understanding Johnson's stance on HS2 and the government's first approach at scaling back a northern section of the rail project; the report followed Oakervee's independent review of the project's potential costs and benefits. Similarly, Sunak's Network North outlines the government's plans and decisions regarding HS2 in the North. The official government plans, independent reviews, and historical policy implementations will show the rationale behind canceling Phase 2 of HS2. As the research project aims to uncover patterns in the decision-making and government rhetoric surrounding HS2, these data sources were primarily used in evaluating Johnson's and Sunak's political and infrastructure decisions regarding the rail project.

To trace changes in the prime ministers' rhetoric and arguments over time, i.e., before and after taking office, the research utilized newspaper articles and government press releases spanning from 2019 to 2023 about the HS2 Phase 2a and Phase 2b cancellations. Specifically, gathered press releases and British news coverage using the Lexis Nexis newspaper database and the website of the Prime Minister's Office (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/prime-ministers-office-10-downing-street>). The prime minister's website is a direct source of political stances and the official narrative surrounding the HS2 cancellations via press releases and speeches. The data from Lexis Nexis' newspaper database also traces the project's evolution and changes in political rhetoric over time. Additionally, the news sources capture the public discourse and reaction to the cancellations, which potentially influence policymaking. Put together, press data from the prime minister's website and the Lexis Nexis' newspaper database trace the rail project's evolution, as well as the changing political rhetoric and public discourse surrounding the decisions made regarding HS2. Therefore, the data provides further context into whether political considerations or infrastruc-

ture concerns drove Johnson's and Sunak's decisions to cancel the second phase of HS2.

The project uses both government surveys and independent polling data to track changes in public opinion and rail usage over time. Specifically, I utilized datasets from two independent research firms and two non-ministerial government departments, the Office of Road & Rail (ORR) and Office for National Statistics (ONS). The independent research firms YouGov (<https://yougov.co.uk>) and Redfield & Wilton Strategies (<https://redfieldandwiltonstrategies.com>) contributed public opinion poll data from 2019 to 2023 tracking Britons' beliefs about HS2's planning, implementation, and cancellations. These datasets also include demographic information relevant to the research, such as political affiliation and region of residence. Furthermore, to supplement the independent research, the ORR (<https://www.orr.gov.uk>) and ONS (<https://www.ons.gov.uk>) statistics contribute quantitative data representing passengers' rail usage and travel habits by region. The ORR and ONS maintain a large archive of rail and transport data, as well as census data documenting citizens' methods of traveling to work (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/>). The quantitative polling data provides a wider view of external factors influencing the cancellation of the northern legs of HS2. The research project uses public opinion data to gain insight into political decision-making outside of the government policy papers and prime ministers' rhetoric.

The project gathered information pertaining to the Phase 2 route of HS2 using a mixed methods approach. To fully cover the arguments of scaling back the rail project, I collected data from news and government sources (qualitative) and research firm and government agency data (quantitative). On Lexis Nexis, to ensure newspaper data reflected the politicians' times in office, I set the date range to correspond with each prime minister's term, i.e., "2019-2022" or "2022-present" and used the search terms "[prime minister's surname]," "HS2," and "Phase 2." On the prime minister's government website, to collect the prime ministers' speeches and press releases regarding Phase 2 of HS2, I looked for documents sorted under the website's "Transport" topic (and "rail" and "transport planning" sub-topics), marked as "news and communications," and authored by "Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street (Number 10)." From Redfield & Wilton's research page and YouGov's homepage, I collected appropriate results after searching "HS2" and, on YouGov specifically, filtering for "surveys results." Then, using the ORR's Statistics and Data Portal, I collected annual "regional rail usage" datasets from 2019 to 2023 for the "East Midlands," "West Midlands," "North West," and "Yorkshire and the Humber" regions (<https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/usage/>). Finally, from the ONS' 2021 census reports, I collected regional transportation statistics using the "method used travel to work" variable, filtering for the term "train." The collection approach integrated qualitative arguments and quantitative data to help answer the

“why” behind policymaking. This method is useful in identifying the influence of public opinion on government decision-making and infrastructure considerations.

To understand the motivations behind the prime ministers’ decisions, the project analyzed the government reports, public opinion, and changing rhetoric shaping the rail project’s future. Through quantitative and qualitative analysis, I sought any correlations or divergences between rail usage and political rhetoric. Accordingly, the research project considers wider economic, social, and environmental impacts in governments’ decisions surrounding transportation projects. First, I thematically coded the politicians’ decisions and statements for recurring arguments such as “economic growth,” “environmental impacts,” “capacity,” “infrastructure,” and “costs.” Next, the data from the ORR, ONS, and two independent research firms either support or contest the prime ministers’ given rationale, explaining whether political or infrastructure arguments are the norm. The two-part method compared both data types to determine the extent to which politicians’ statements and positions support the existing rail data. To identify and categorize the key themes in the politicians’ statements, the qualitative analysis involved thematically coding government reports and news releases for recurring arguments related to the decision. Comparing quantitative data with the qualitative findings provided a clear picture of whether the politicians’ statements align with the actual trends and opinions related to the rail project.

ANALYSIS

The lack of clarity surrounding HS2’s objectives made the project vulnerable to shifts in political priorities and susceptible to short-term decision-making. Since 2009, successive governments altered HS2’s purpose from enhancing travel times to improving rail line capacity and, most recently, as a means of “levelling up” the country. The Labour government explored the proposal in detail in a 2010 paper, concluding HS2 “offer[ed] a balance of [economic] benefits unmatched by any other option and should be at the heart of the long-term development of inter-city travel in Britain” (Department for Transport, 2010, p. 151). The David Cameron-led coalition government passed a parliamentary bill in October 2013 to start the project under the same rationale (“HS2: Cameron hails,” 2013). However, the same month, Cameron’s government published a strategic case for the project, stating the main objectives for HS2 were to improve rail capacity and connectivity with shorter, more reliable journey times; in May 2013, the National Audit Office had called these objectives unclear (Department for Transport, 2013, p. 18; Morse, 2013, p. 9). Boris Johnson’s and Rishi Sunak’s decisions to cancel the second phase of HS2 reflects a pattern of indecision or short-term thinking plaguing the project since its inception. Instead of committing to

a long-term strategy, immediate political considerations swayed successive governments' planning of HS2.

Boris Johnson's position

Johnson's evolving stance on the project, from expressing concerns as mayor of London to announcing its continuation and partial halting as prime minister, suggest political pressures shaped HS2's development. Moreover, Johnson's going against expert opinion shows the prime minister folding to Conservative Party criticisms. As mayor, Johnson expressed concerns about the route's infrastructure encroaching on the capital city and, in 2018, urged the government to prioritize other northern transport projects ("London Mayor Boris Johnson," 2011; Shipman, 2018). In February 2020, Johnson – now prime minister – announced the project would go ahead, calling it "a controversial and difficult decision;" the decision followed an independent review by Douglas Oakervee, former chairman of HS2 Ltd., who concluded the government should complete the project in full ("HS2 go-ahead controversial," 2020; Oakervee, 2020, p. 12). However, in November 2021, despite the recommendation, Johnson scaled back the project – cutting the north-eastern (Birmingham-Leeds) route, or Phase 2b – in the Integrated Rail Plan (IRP), potentially in response to ongoing pressure from Tory colleagues and constituents (Department for Transport, 2021; Mason, 2020; see Figure 1). Johnson's choice to scale back the project aligns with the UK government's trend of prioritizing political gain over broader infrastructure needs. In short, the decision appears to be less about the project's merits and more about Johnson's commitment to maintaining political cohesion and support within the Conservative Party.

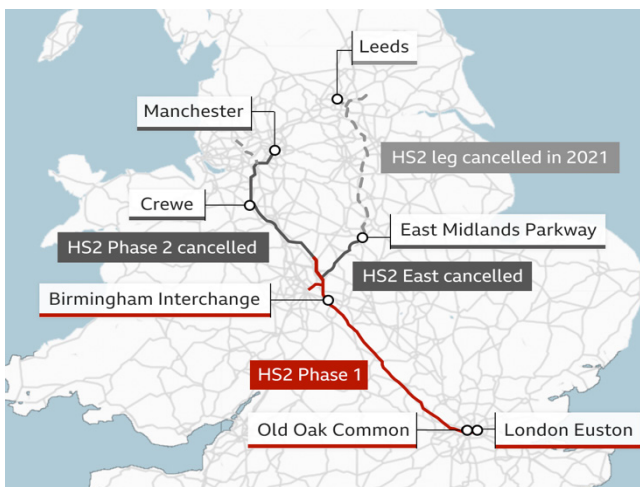


Figure 1: HS2 Route (2023). Source: [hs2.org.uk](https://www.hs2.org.uk) via BBC News (2023)

Johnson presented the project as a key policy priority before the Phase 2b cancellation, evident in press releases from the Prime Minister's Office. Moreover, Johnson's rhetoric indicates his preference for novel and inadequate infrastructure projects. In July 2019, Johnson committed to regional growth and "level[ing] out opportunities" through a new Manchester-Leeds rail route separate from HS2, "one of his top domestic priorities" ("PM pledges new Manchester-Leeds Rail Route," 2019). Despite proposing vastly expensive infrastructure projects in the past, Johnson also prioritized "improvements that can happen in the short term, not just big engineering schemes that will take years" (Walker, 2021; "PM pledges new Manchester-Leeds Rail Route," 2019). Furthermore, on February 11, 2020, after confirming HS2 would go ahead alongside improvements in local transport, Johnson stated his stance was "not and never [would] be an 'either/or' between big projects and local services" ("PM confirms HS2 will go ahead," 2020). If Johnson believed pushing the project would solidify a legacy as "man of the people," then scaling back HS2 showed the prime minister placed greater value on his image within the Conservative Party. Even though Conservatives later pushed Johnson out of office, the IRP was an attempt at appeasing all voters and avoiding further party disarray.

Rishi Sunak's position

Rishi Sunak's changing opinions on HS2 also indicate deliberate efforts to shape his public image ahead of the 2024 General Election. Additionally, Sunak used the project as a talking point in the first 2022 Conservative leadership election. While campaigning in Leeds in July 2022, Sunak defended the project and remained skeptical of Johnson's proposed alternatives, expressing interest in reinstating the canceled northern branch ("Conservative leadership race," 2022). Specifically, the former member of Johnson's cabinet "want[ed] to see HS2 trains brought up to Leeds and..., as chancellor, funded the projects to look at how best to do that" ("Conservative leadership race," 2022). However, in October 2023, as prime minister, Sunak scrapped the northwestern (Birmingham-Manchester) route, citing rising costs and dwindling rail capacity due to the pandemic, and instead announced the Network North transport plan, disregarding Johnson's IRP ("PM redirects HS2 funding," 2023). Like Johnson, Sunak's positions on HS2 appear to be less about infrastructure planning and more about aligning key policies with electoral prospects. Both the 2022 campaign position and 2023 cancellation reflect Sunak's need to break away from Johnson following the former prime minister's scandals.

<p>“HS2 is the ultimate example of the old consensus. The result is a project whose costs have more than doubled, which has been repeatedly delayed and it is not scheduled to reach here in Manchester for almost two decades and for which the economic case has massively weakened with the changes to business travel post Covid. <i>I say, to those who backed the project in the first place, the facts have changed</i> [emphasis added]. And the right thing to do when the facts change is to have the courage to change direction. And so, I am ending this long running saga. I am cancelling the rest of the HS2 project” (Sunak, 2023).</p>
<p>“We’ve taken the decision many should have done: but didn’t. We’ve ended the HS2 drama and in its place will embark upon a full-scale national reinvestment in the infrastructure people actually use and want and the skilled workforce who’ll build it. And no more hiding: no more pretending in the face of overwhelming evidence” (Sunak, 2023).</p>

Table 1: 2023 Conservative Party Conference Speech Mentions HS2. Source: Sunak, R. (2023)

Sunak suddenly reversed on HS2 shortly before a party leadership conference to position himself as a decisive leader. Moreover, the decision shows indifference toward Conservatives’ “Levelling Up” agenda. In the weeks before the 2023 Conservative Party conference, Sunak declined to commit to building HS2 to Manchester amid cancellation speculations but called the project “one of the many things [Conservatives] are doing to level up across our country” (“UK PM Sunak declines to commit,” 2023). Moreover, *The Guardian* reported the prime minister was “said by those close to the HS2 project to have long disliked it and to be more opposed to building the northern section than [Chancellor Jeremy] Hunt,” then Britain’s top financial official (Helm & Savage, 2023). Accordingly, Sunak refuted previous support for the project in the conference’s keynote speech (see Table 1). The prime minister’s reluctance to commit to the project shows other policies take precedent, especially with an election looming. By framing HS2 as a departure from the “old consensus,” Sunak broke from past Conservative governments (and the party’s current flagship policy), potentially to appease certain constituencies or to bolster election prospects.

Regional considerations

Canceling the second phase of HS2 and investing in alternative regional transport is a shared strategy by the prime ministers to address cost concerns and prioritize more feasible infrastructure projects. In keeping with the Conservative’s “Levelling Up” agenda, Johnson and Sunak’s decisions prioritize redirecting funds to better connect cities in England’s North rather than with London. Initially, the Oakervee Review speculated “London could derive more benefits from HS2 than places outside of London,” and following the review, Johnson set out a £96 billion investment to benefit the Midlands and the North, the “largest and most ambitious” government investment in the railways (Oakervee, 2020, p. 95; Department for Transport, 2021, p. 10).

Following Sunak’s decision, press releases detailed how new plans would “[benefit] more people in more places, more quickly” (Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street et al., 2023; see Table 2). According to Sunak, HS2’s economic case points to almost half the project’s benefits going to London and the South East, rather than the North and Midlands; instead “every pound” saved from not proceeding with Phase 2 of HS2 would instead be “quickly” reinvested in “hundreds” of transport projects across the country (Department for Transport, 2023, p. 5, 15). However, speculation about HS2’s benefits for London compared to other regions raises questions about the equitable distribution of resources, and despite Sunak’s promised “rapid” reinvestment in numerous projects, the timeline and costs of the alternative investments remain unclear. Moreover, this point assumes the politicians are only making regional or infrastructure considerations when weighing the pros and cons of HS2, which is highly unlikely.

“Rather than delivering HS2 Phase 2 new line between Birmingham and Manchester, the Prime Minister is taking action to deliver greater frequency and quality of transport infrastructure across the whole country” (“PM redirects HS2 funding,” 2023).
“Spiralling HS2 costs redirected to build Network North and fund raft of transport projects across the country, delivering the strong, reliable connections people depend on every day” (“PM redirects HS2 funding,” 2023).
“As a result of the decision to scrap the extension of HS2, every region will now receive investment in the modes of transport that matter to you most” (“Find out about every new transport project in your region,” 2023).
“A fully funded £2.5 billion West Yorkshire mass-transit system, giving the region better connections to Bradford and Wakefield. Leeds will no longer be the biggest European city without a mass-transit system, with up to seven lines potentially created as part of a transformed network, eventually linking Leeds to Bradford, Halifax, Huddersfield, and Wakefield – all in operation before HS2 would have reached the region” (“Find out about every new transport project in your region,” 2023).

Table 2: Regional considerations noted in Sunak’s press releases

The former prime minister considered the project’s impacts on constituencies with strong voter turnout in the 2019 General Election, while the current prime minister considers voting intentions ahead of the upcoming General Election. Johnson’s and Sunak’s decisions align with the preferences – or concerns – of the Conservative electorate, perhaps to maintain or strengthen the party’s support base. The politicians prioritized HS2 construction in the Midlands because the constituencies’ voters strongly impact Conservative victories: much of the line runs through rural areas, or “safe” seats for the Conservative Party (see Figure 2). Additionally, the East & West Midlands constituencies strongly supported electing Johnson in 2019; therefore, Johnson’s decision acknowledges the constituencies’ voters who at the time opposed HS2 (Figure 2; “HS2 fails to inspire,” 2019). Sunak’s decision may be an attempt to appeal to a wider variety of voters following the May

2023 local elections, where Conservatives lost councilors in almost every region of England, including the South East, East, and East Midlands, and the West Midlands and North West regions (“Local elections 2023,” 2023). Johnson’s decision prioritized HS2 construction and local transport investments in areas crucial for Conservative victories and where support for the party was strong, while neglecting then pro-Labour areas, i.e., Leeds. However, Sunak’s cancellation may serve to appeal to current voter preferences across the country.

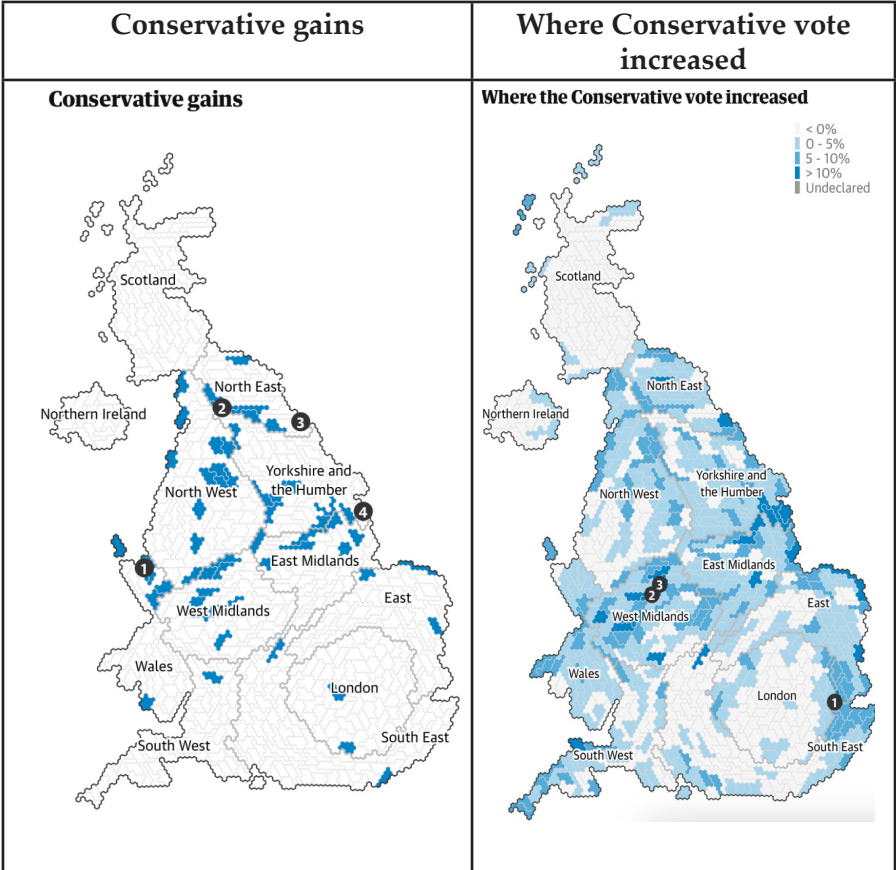


Figure 2: UK General Election 2019 results. Source: Holder, J., Voce, A., & Caelainn, B. (2019)

Alternatives to HS2

Sunak contends large investments in rail infrastructure are futile since cars are the most popular mode of transportation in the UK. The Network North report presents the argument for investing in road infrastructure to reflect recorded travel habits. According to a 2019 transport report, 76% of

UK households had access to at least one car (Department for Transport, 2019, p. 20). In 2021, outside of London, all regions in England saw around 70% or more people travelling to work by car (Department for Transport, 2022). However, Sunak’s justification is not reflective of popularity as much as insufficient alternatives in regions outside London. The broader approach to transport risks widening the gap in adequate access to transportation options, particularly among non-car owners. The government’s inability to simultaneously address local transport, road infrastructure, and national rail projects reflects a lack of political will.

Sunak’s decision aligns with his government’s pro-car stance and commitment to watering down net-zero policies. While Network North promised the North and the Midlands more public transport schemes, Sunak’s priorities heavily focus on road projects. Prior to the Phase 2 cancellation, Sunak listed the needs of drivers as a transport policy priority, slamming “anti-car measures” at the expense of public transportation users and net-zero policies (Walker, 2023). In the report, Sunak confirms his support for car usage multiple times, specifically through the goal of improving motorways neighboring HS2’s original route (see Table 1; Department for Transport, 2023, p. 25). By December 2023, following Sunak’s promise to reinvest HS2’s funding in “hundreds of transport projects across the country” including a “record investment of £8.3 billion to fix the blight of potholes,” the Department for Transport confirmed the money fixed potholes in London (Department for Transport, 2023, p. 5, 26; Brown, 2023). In pitting public transport users against drivers, the move fails to recognize citizens often use cars because public transport is unreliable or nonexistent. Furthermore, Sunak’s vague outline of improved road networks further reflects a lack of clear planning, the same issue testing HS2.

“Our plan breaks with the failed consensus of the past, which saw too much investment go to Westminster’s transport priorities. Instead, we’re going to invest in the transport that really matters to people – the roads, buses, and railways they use every day” (p. 4)
“Buses are the most popular form of public transport, yet we spend three times as much on trains. Outside London, many rely on cars, yet our local roads are congested and poorly maintained” (p. 4)
“We must also focus on the transport routes that matter most to people: the modes that people use, and what they want to see improved. Most total passenger journeys are by road, with 88% of passenger miles by car, van or taxi, and four in five households outside of London having access to a car. The majority of public transport journeys are by bus, with investments in the bus network delivering significant returns. And the vast majority of journeys are local, with nearly three-quarters running less than 5 miles” (p. 10)
“The £6.5 billion we are investing in HS2 this year is 23% more than what we are investing in the entire road network” (p. 11).
“And to improve everyday local journeys for people, such as more buses and better roads, we will tackle the scourge of potholes across the country and support hundreds of bus routes in the North and Midlands” (p. 24).

"Strategic road projects, such as the M6 Junction 15 between Manchester and Birmingham and providing funding to dual the A1 between Morpeth and Ellingham" (p. 25).
"Ensuring the delivery of 70 road schemes across the country – including 21 in the North, 10 in the Midlands, and 39 in the rest of the country" (p. 25)

Table 3: Sunak’s pro-car stance in Network North. Source: Department for Transport (2023)

Financial considerations

Supporters of Johnson’s and Sunak’s cancellations argue cost overruns made HS2’s original plans financially unviable. Therefore, distributing funds to a greater number of smaller projects is a more worthwhile endeavor. The government initially estimated HS2 would cost £37.5 billion (in 2011 prices) but the expected cost increased dramatically; due to inflation increases and the project’s growing scope, the 2015 budget of £55.7 billion for the whole of HS2 increased to £100 billion (Norris & Tetlow, 2023). Because of inaccurate estimates and continual delays, Johnson stated costs could be better spent elsewhere for the same amount or less, e.g., £96.4 billion total (Department for Transport, 2021, p. 31). Similarly, Sunak argued the cost-benefit case no longer held because HS2 would return “possibly as little as 80 pence for every £1 invested by the taxpayer” (Department for Transport, 2023, p. 15). However, HS2 now costs over twice as much for half the track. Furthermore, the government is not “saving” any taxpayer money with the cancellation by reallocating funds elsewhere. Any proposed alternative schemes may undermine the reliability of the Conservative government, given the uncertain status of the projects’ completion.

Johnson’s and Sunak’s decisions ignore the timeline of project mismanagement and lack of government oversight contributing to HS2’s cost overruns. Specifically, the prime ministers’ infrastructure and cost arguments primarily rely on pandemic-related issues such as inflation, rather than a weak post-Brexit economy. The initial 2010 policy paper assessing the HS2 plan concluded that the then-estimated £30 billion total cost “reflected its finding that construction costs for major projects in the UK are higher than for comparable projects elsewhere in Europe” (Department for Transport, 2010, p. 9). For instance, building infrastructure in the UK costs far more than in most other places, with major rail projects estimating £262 million per mile; the completed first phase of HS2 may cost £396 million for each mile of track (Burn-Murdoch, 2023). Furthermore, in July 2023, the Infrastructure and Projects Authority published an annual report stating the Birmingham-London route of HS2 “appears to be unachievable,” while Crewe-Manchester “appears feasible,” but “significant issues already exist” (Slow, 2023). In disregarding known planning and cost issues affecting HS2, the government’s lack of political will drove the cancellations. The ministers’ short-term strategies also fail to consider that the value of a completed first phase is significantly less without the completion of the second.

Post-pandemic travel patterns

The pandemic’s impact on travel patterns influenced both prime ministers’ decisions to cancel legs of HS2. Johnson’s approach, however, highlights a more genuine intent to prioritize infrastructure development than Sunak’s decision, which aligns with his government’s road priorities. Johnson expected travel patterns to rebound following the pandemic, and evidence from the National Infrastructure Commission justified investing in new rail services like the prime minister’s proposed alternatives for HS2 (Department for Transport, 2021, p. 38). Yet, Sunak used the pandemic to justify the cancellation, saying it “significantly changed the travel patterns [HS2] was originally designed to serve” and “while road travel has recovered to pre-pandemic levels, train journeys are still down by 20 per cent” (Department for Transport, 2023, p. 5, 16). Attributing railway challenges solely to the pandemic should not justify halting a major infrastructure project. Johnson citing the National Infrastructure Commission’s finding makes his decision regarding HS2 look more reasonable. Likewise, Sunak’s argument about dwindling rail numbers – true or not – upholds a pro-car approach to transportation planning.

Despite Sunak’s shortsighted claims about changing commuter patterns, rail travel is growing in the UK. The substantial increase in total passenger journeys indicates a demand for rail upgrades like HS2. Data from the Office of Road and Rail illustrates total passenger journeys are rebounding post-pandemic (see Figure 3). Although business and commuter traffic decreased following the pandemic, leisure travel increased, and passenger numbers are higher than pre-pandemic (“Rail commuting up 8%,” 2023).

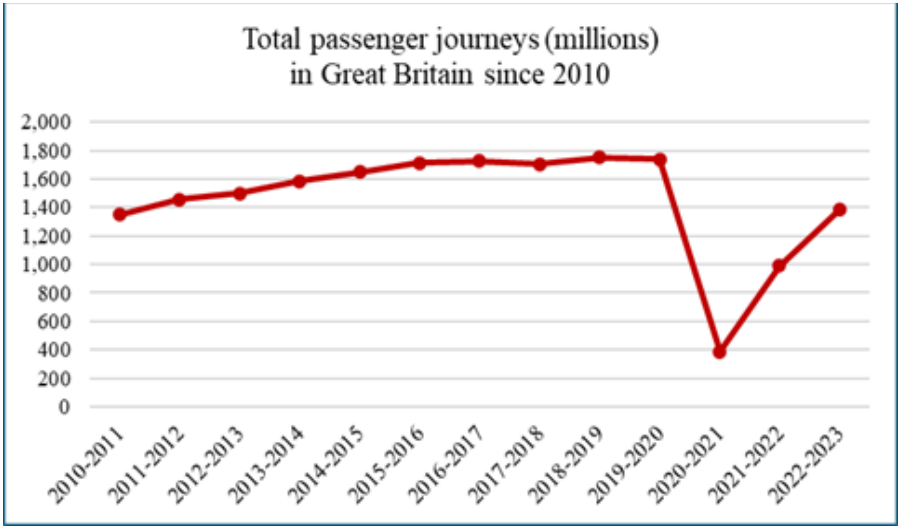


Figure 3. Source: Office of Road and Rail Data Portal

Therefore, to justify the cancellation, Sunak overlooked current data showing a growing demand for rail services. The prime minister's decision prioritizes broader political agendas over addressing the evolving needs of transportation infrastructure.

Public opinion

Despite divided public opinion, during Boris Johnson's term, a higher proportion of Conservative voters supported HS2 compared to Labour and Liberal Democrat voters. However, polls later indicated increased opposition from the whole electorate, regardless of party affiliation. YouGov data from 2019 shows a split among voters: 39% supported HS2 plans and 38% opposed, and more Conservatives supported the plan than Labour Party members; in 2020, a larger portion of Labour and Liberal Democrat voters than Conservative voters supported HS2's cancellation (YouGov, 2019; Redfield & Wilton Strategies, 2020). Polarized public opinion persisted into 2021; polling in July 2021 showed a plurality (43%) of Britons opposing HS2, compared to 29% supporting HS2 and 25% neither supporting nor opposing the rail line (Redfield & Wilton Strategies, 2021b). Moreover, a significant majority of Britons (56%) aware of HS2 expressed skepticism about its value for money, believing the project would not offer a good return on investment (Redfield & Wilton Strategies, 2021a). The widespread skepticism about HS2's value for money among the British public transcends partisan views. Therefore, a genuine assessment of the project's feasibility and cost-effectiveness possibly motivated Johnson's decision to cancel part of HS2, rather than political expediency.

Sunak's decision did not reflect the project's support among the public, although a substantial portion of the electorate agreed with the cancellation. The decision aimed at addressing more pressing issues and resonating with a broader swath of the electorate. Through appealing to public sentiment, Sunak sought to solidify support across party lines. Voters generally supported building the full rail line prior to Sunak's decision (see Appendix Tables 2 & 3). However, a plurality of Britons supported the final decision to scrap the Birmingham-Manchester section of HS2; among the group, a majority of 2019 Conservative voters supported the decision, while a plurality of 2019 Labour and Northern voters opposed (Redfield & Wilton Strategies, 2023; see Appendix Table 5). While the public agreed the government should reallocate money elsewhere, only 25% thought Sunak would invest savings in alternative projects (see Appendix Table 4; Topham et al., 2023). The prime minister's decision to cancel HS2 is not merely about the project but also about positioning the government favorably ahead of an election. Sunak appears responsive to the concerns of his party, while potentially attracting support from disillusioned voters who prioritize the government's fiscal responsibility over ambitious infrastructure plans.

DISCUSSION

Public Choice Theory

Public choice theorists focus on an individual or interest group's attempt to achieve private goals by influencing public sector choices. For this reason, public choice theory may explain how Sunak's and Johnson's political opportunities (e.g., election prospects in the UK's plurality voting system) influenced the prime ministers' decisions to cancel the second phase of HS2. For instance, the analysis finds Johnson cut the first phase of HS2 in response to backlash from Conservative colleagues. With the interest of gaining more party support, Sunak's decision to cancel the second phase influenced his image as a more progressive or decisive Conservative leader than his predecessors. Furthermore, another finding suggests Sunak's promises of vague and drawn-out "levelling up" alternatives to the rail project are a tactic to keep constituencies voting for the Conservative party well into the future. Public choice theory supports the analysis' argument that political incentives influenced HS2 policymaking more than infrastructure or financial considerations. Relating to the theory's assumption personal goals primarily motivate policy outcomes, each prime minister's decision regarding HS2 considers the longevity – or legacy – of his time in office.

Johnson and Sunak made cancellations to the second phase of HS2 surrounding general elections, suggesting the decisions strategically responded to the preferences of specific constituents. Likewise, public choice theory states special interest groups have more influence over political decision-making than the majority group. Furthermore, since politicians are interested in maximizing power and profits, candidates seeking reelection prioritize securing votes from "median voters." In terms of special interest groups, the analysis found Sunak's decision may appeal to voters who are skeptical of large infrastructure projects or concerned about the rail project's escalating costs and unclear benefits. Likewise, Johnson – facing pressure from Conservative politicians and party members in the Midlands – canceled the project to possibly recognize concerns from the region's swing voters who influenced his election. Furthermore, in citing changes to travel patterns post pandemic, Sunak's decision aligns with his government's pro-car stance and commitment to watering down net-zero policies. Public choice theory assumes politicians need to remain popular to stay in power and therefore support legislation promoting the general interests of a specific party and voters. This framework supports the analysis' hypothesis that, when cancelling the second phase of HS2, Johnson and Sunak strongly considered the rail project's impact on the Conservative party's goal of avoiding election defeat.

Policy Suggestions

The UK government should consider finishing the full HS2 network in addition to completing smaller transportation projects across the country. Reinstating the rail project's second phase could offer a practical solution to the transportation challenges it was originally meant to serve, such as old infrastructure or overcrowded trains. Additionally, following through on the alternative plans outline in the Integrated Rail Plan and Network North would strengthen regional development in the North and Midlands. Past literature from Vickerman (1997) and Sánchez-Mateos & Givoni (2012) acknowledges HSR projects can have more significant impacts when coupled with other policy efforts, such as highways or bus systems; HSR infrastructure alone is not likely to be transformative for the economy. Furthermore, the findings show supporters of Johnson's and Sunak's cancellations argue HS2 is financially unviable and investing in more local infrastructure projects is more worthwhile. However, the analysis finds Sunak's Network North report – which names dozens of road projects as HS2 alternatives – uses car popularity, i.e., reliability, to justify the cancellation. Integrating smaller transportation projects with the HS2 network could improve passenger accessibility, reduce rail congestion, create more job opportunities, and promote social equity in underserved regions of the UK. Unless the government commits to both HS2 and local transportation projects – and integrates the wider infrastructure system – regional inequalities will only widen. That said, HS2 alone will not solve the North-South divide: British policymakers should also consider implementing long-term regional equality plans that do not just serve as electoral strategies.

In the future, British policymakers' proposed transport investments should be grounded in clear objectives and an overall transport strategy. A thought-out strategy – potentially determined by an independent body – ought to align with broad, long-term national objectives rather than short-term policies tied to a specific government. The analysis finds HS2's changing objectives over the years resulted in short-term decision-making from successive governments and, most recently, reflecting the current Conservative government's key policy, "Levelling Up." Furthermore, the lack of clarity surrounding the goals and benefits of HS2 led to controversies and polarized public opinion. And without clear objectives or decent cost-benefit analysis, the project's development lagged, and costs dramatically increased at taxpayers' expense. A broader vision for the future of transportation in the UK may help avoid short-term/ad-hoc decisions and ensure projects reflect the country's priorities even as facts change. If policymakers implement a clear transport strategy sooner rather than later, future governments can prioritize investments with the greatest positive impact on society, the economy, and the environment. Additionally, taxpayer money could be spent more wisely and efficiently if decision-makers evaluate a project's potential benefits against the costs and risks more accurately.

CONCLUSION

This paper argues Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak made political decisions when canceling the second phase of HS2, primarily considering the impacts of the project in the context of elections and keeping the Conservative Party in power. Specifically, Johnson and Sunak undermined the project's continuously shaky objectives to make the cancellations appear to be the most logical. Branded to "level up" the UK, the decisions cast doubts about the country's potential to ever finish ambitious infrastructure projects due to political debates. The prime ministers considered their legacies, their party's power, and their "promised" policies in the decision-making process over infrastructure concerns. Johnson's decision cast him as a "man of the people"-type leader who appeals to all parties, and similarly, Sunak branded himself as a decisive leader who pledged to end a long-drawn-out and controversial project. The alternatives to HS2 act as more "political pledges" than anything, considering localized projects' completion rests on Conservative governments staying in power past Sunak's initial term. This project acts as a case study for why Western countries often fail at major infrastructure projects. For the UK in particular, the paper shows the government's propensity to draw the country down time over time, thereby placing it behind its peers; canceling HS2 can be seen as another major blow to the country's economy following Brexit. Furthermore, the project details how political failures play a role in the appraisals or cancellations of very large infrastructure investments.

REFERENCES

- Albalade, D., Bel, G., & Tomer, A. (2012). High-Speed Rail: Lessons for Policy Makers from Experiences Abroad [with Commentary]. *Public Administration Review*, 72(3), 336–350. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2016.01.009>
- Bonnafeous, A. (1987). The regional impact of the TGV. *Transportation* (1986-1998), 14(2), 127-137. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00837589>
- Brown, M. (2023, December 20). Disbelief at plan to fix London potholes as part of Network North project. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk>
- Burn-Murdoch, J. (2023, August 25). The Nimby tax on Britain and America. *The Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com>
- Butler, E. (2012). Public Choice – A Primer. *The Institute of Economic Affairs*. <https://iea.org.uk/publications/research/public-choice-a-primer>
- Chen, C. L., & Hall, P. (2011). The impacts of high-speed trains on British economic geography: A study of the UK's InterCity 125/225 and its effects. *Journal of Transport Geography*, 19(4), 689-704. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2010.08.010>
- Conservative leadership race: Truss and Sunak pledge rail improvements in North. (2022, July 28). *ITV News*. <https://www.itv.com>

- CPC23 Address from Rishi Sunak. (2023, October 4). *The Conservative Party*. <https://www.conservatives.com/news>
- Department for Transport. (2010, March 11). *High Speed Rail* [policy paper]. <https://www.gov.uk>
- Department for Transport. (2013). *Strategic Case for HS2* [policy paper]. <https://www.gov.uk>
- Department for Transport. (2019, December 17). *Transport Statistics Great Britain: 2019* [report]. <https://www.gov.uk>
- Department for Transport, High Speed Two (HS2) Limited, Johnson, B., & Shapps, G. (2021, November 18). *Integrated Rail Plan: biggest ever public investment in Britain's rail network will deliver faster, more frequent and more reliable journeys across North and Midlands* [news story]. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/integrated-rail-plan-biggest-ever-public-investment-in-britains-rail-network-will-deliver-faster-more-frequent-and-more-reliable-journeys-across-no>
- Department for Transport. (2021, November 18). *Integrated Rail Plan for the North and Midlands* [policy paper]. <https://www.gov.uk>
- Department for Transport. (2022, December 15). *National statistics Transport Statistics Great Britain: 2022 Domestic Travel* [press release]. <https://www.gov.uk>
- Department for Transport. (2023, October 4). *Network North: Transforming British Transport* [policy paper]. <https://www.gov.uk>
- Dobruszkes, F., Chen, C. L., Moyanoc, A., Pagliara, F., & Endemann, P. (2022). Is high-speed rail socially exclusive? An evidence-based world-wide analysis. *Travel Behaviour and Society*, 26(1), 96–107. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tbs.2021.09.009>
- Helm, T., & Savage, M. (2023, September 23). Rishi Sunak pushes to axe northern HS2 rail line ahead of Tory conference. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk>
- High-speed rail plans announced by government. (2010, March 11). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com>
- Holder, J., Voce, A., & Caelainn, B. (2019, December 13). How did Boris Johnson achieve his landslide victory? A visual guide. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk>
- HS2: Cameron hails 'vital programme' as MPs approve funding. (2013, October 31). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com>
- HS2 fails to inspire across the Midlands. (2019, August 1). *ITV News*. <https://www.itv.com>
- HS2 go-ahead controversial and difficult, admits Boris Johnson. (2020, February 11). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com>
- HS2: what is the route and why is the Manchester link scrapped? *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com>
- Local elections 2023: In maps and charts. (2023, May 9). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com>

- London Mayor Boris Johnson attacks HS2 high-speed rail. (2011, July 3). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com>
- Martin, R. (1988). The Political Economy of Britain's North-South Divide. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 13(4), 389–418. <https://doi.org/10.2307/622738>
- Mason, R. (2020, February 11). Tory opposition to HS2 fades as Boris Johnson backs project. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk>
- Mayes, J., Tartar, A., & Pogkas, D. (2023, January 24). UK's Poorer Regions Fall Further Behind in Blow to Sunak's 'Levelling Up' Pledge. *Bloomberg UK*. <https://www.bloomberg.com>
- Morse, A. (2013, May 8). *High Speed 2: A review of early programme preparation* (Parliamentary Paper No. 134). The National Audit Office. <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Full-Report.pdf>
- Norris, E., & Tetlow, G. (2023, October 5). HS2 is a fiasco of change and churn. *Institute for Government*. <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/>
- Oakervee, D. (2020, February 11). Oakervee Review of HS2. *Department for Transport*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/oakervee-review-of-hs2>
- Office of Road and Rail Data Portal. (n.d.). *Passenger rail usage* [data tables]. <https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/usage/regional-rail-usage/>
- Orchard, L., & Stretton, H. (1997). Public choice. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 21(3), 409–430. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.cje.a013678>
- Parker, G. (2023, October 4). Rishi Sunak axes northern leg of HS2 in flurry of 'radical' decisions. *The Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com>
- Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, & Johnson, B. (2019, July 27). *PM pledges new Manchester-Leeds Rail Route to unleash regional growth* [press release]. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-pledges-new-manchester-leeds-rail-route-to-unleash-regional-growth>
- Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, Department for Transport, & Johnson, B. (2020, February 11). *PM confirms HS2 will go ahead alongside revolution in local transport* [press release]. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-confirms-hs2-will-go-ahead-alongside-revolution-in-local-transport>
- Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, Department for Transport, & Sunak, R. (2023, October 4). *PM redirects HS2 funding to revolutionise transport across the North and Midlands* [press release]. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-redirects-hs2-funding-to-revolutionise-transport-across-the-north-and-midlands>
- Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, and Sunak, R. (2023, October 5). *Find out about every new transport project in your region* [news story]. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/find-out-about-every-new-transport-project-in-your-region>
- Rail commuting up 8% as strikes impact reduces. (2023, June 8). *Great British Railways Transition Team*. <https://media.gbrtt.co.uk/news>

- Redfield & Wilton Strategies. (n.d.) *Research* [webpage]. <https://redfieldandwiltonstrategies.com>
- Redfield & Wilton Strategies research team. (2020, February 14). *Early Decisions: HS2 and Huawei* [dataset]. <https://redfieldandwiltonstrategies.com/early-decisions-hs2-and-huawei/>
- Redfield & Wilton Strategies research team. (2021a, May 23). *Plurality of Britons Aware of HS2 Think HS2 Will, On the Whole, Be a Bad Thing for the Environment* [dataset]. <https://redfieldandwiltonstrategies.com/plurality-of-britons-aware-of-hs2-think-hs2-will-on-the-whole-be-a-bad-thing-for-the-environment/>
- Redfield & Wilton Strategies research team. (2021b, July 9). *Plurality of Britons Aware of HS2 Oppose its Development* [dataset]. <https://redfieldandwiltonstrategies.com/plurality-of-britons-aware-of-hs2-oppose-its-development/>
- Redfield & Wilton Strategies research team. (2023, October 19). *Scrapping Northern Leg of HS2* [quantitative graphs]. <https://twitter.com/Redfield-Wilton/status/1716817605397557703/photo/1>
- Sánchez-Mateos, H. S., & Givoni, M. (2012). The Accessibility Impact of a New High-Speed Rail Line in the UK – A Preliminary Analysis of Winners and Losers. *Journal of Transport Geography*, 25, 105-114. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2011.09.004>
- Shipman, T. (2018, September 30). Boris Johnson: Theresa May misled me over Brexit, and mustn't copy Jeremy Corbyn. *The Times*. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/>
- Slow, O. (2023, July 30). HS2: Rail link rated 'unachievable' by infrastructure watchdog. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com>
- Szobi, P., Nigrin, T., & Oravec, J. (2023). Political Will and Economic Necessity? The Construction of High-Speed Rail Networks in Portugal and East Germany. *Review of Economic Perspectives*, 23(1), 19-34. <https://doi.org/10.2478/revecp-2022-0017>
- UK PM Sunak declines to commit to northern leg of HS2 rail project. (2023, September 28). *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/>
- Topham, G., Savage, M., & Ungood-Thomas, J. (2023, October 7). HS2 services to Manchester may run slower than normal trains. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk>
- Vickerman, R. (1997). High-speed rail in Europe: Experience and issues for future development. *The Annals of Regional Science*, 31(1), 21-38. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s001680050037>
- Walker, P. (2021, November 26). Boris Johnson's plan for Irish Sea bridge rejected over £335bn cost. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk>
- Walker, P. (2023, September 29). Sunak 'backs drivers' with curbs on 20mph limits and bus lanes. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk>
- YouGov. (n.d.) *Homepage* [webpage]. <https://yougov.co.uk/>

- YouGov. (2019, November 13). *Do you support or oppose plans to build a new High Speed rail line linking London, Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester?* [survey results]. <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/travel/survey-results/daily/2019/11/13/33270/1>
- YouGov. (2023, October 6). *Westminster Voting Intention and Ad Hoc | YouGov / The Times Results 4th - 5th October 2023* [survey results]. https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/TheTimes_VI_AdHoc_231005_W.pdf
- YouGov. (2023, September 28). *Westminster Voting Intention and Ad Hoc | YouGov / The Times Results 26th - 27th September 2023* [survey results]. https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/TheTimes_VI_HS2_230927_W_yzXCaLz.pdf

APPENDIX

Do you support or oppose building the HS2 rail link between London, Birmingham and Manchester?

	Total	Vote in 2019 Gen Election			Region in England			
		Con	Lab	Lib Dem	North	Mid-lands	London	South
Total sup- port	47%	52%	58%	54%	49%	47%	54%	44%
Total oppose	33%	35%	35%	37%	34%	39%	23%	33%
Don't know	21%	13%	16%	9%	17%	15%	23%	23%

Source: YouGov. (2023, September 28). YouGov / The Times Results 26th - 27th September 2023

Do you support or oppose cancelling the portion of HS2 between Birmingham and Manchester, so high-speed trains only ran between London and Birmingham?

	Total	Vote in 2019 Gen Election			Region in England			
		Con	Lab	Lib Dem	North	Midlands	London	South
Total sup- port	23%	28%	20%	16%	20%	29%	19%	24%
Total op- pose	52%	50%	61%	69%	62%	50%	55%	48%
Don't know	25%	23%	19%	15%	19%	21%	26%	28%

Source: YouGov. (2023, September 28). YouGov / The Times Results 26th - 27th September 2023

Do you think building HS2 is good or bad value for money?

	Total	Vote in 2019 Gen Election			Region in England			
		Con	Lab	Lib Dem	North	Midlands	London	South
Good value £	15%	10%	18%	14%	18%	12%	24%	12%
Bad value £	58%	67%	60%	58%	56%	69%	48%	59%
Don't know	27%	24%	22%	27%	27%	19%	28%	29%

Source: YouGov. (2023, September 28). YouGov / The Times Results 26th - 27th September 2023.

Rishi Sunak has also cancelled the part of the HS2 rail link between Birmingham and Manchester... Do you think this was the right or wrong decision?

	Total	Vote in 2019 Gen Election			Region in England			
		Con	Lab	Lib Dem	North	Midlands	London	South
Right decision	37%	55%	22%	32%	29%	44%	33%	42%
Wrong decision	40%	27%	57%	49%	51%	38%	40%	33%
Don't know	23%	18%	21%	19%	20%	18%	27%	25%

Source: YouGov. (2023, October 6). YouGov / The Times Results 4th - 5th October 2023.

NGOs reports vs. Reality: Indigenous Peruvians' real-life challenges

Fabiana Paola Salas Valdivia
University of Kansas

This research explores if NGOs accurately document the socioeconomic and environmental issues Indigenous Peruvians face. The study draws on previous literature on environmental challenges and focuses on socioeconomic challenges affecting Indigenous people. Additionally, the research contributes to previous studies as some researchers argue there is a disconnect between development organizations and target communities and propose the outsiders' theory claiming that development organizations lack the cultural awareness to understand the needs of target communities. The study uses thematic coding to find the seven main issues documented in NGO reports. These seven topics served as the basis for formulating open-ended questions to conduct 45-minute interviews with ten Quechua speakers to then analyze the transcripts through two rounds of thematic coding. Socioeconomic issues are the most pressing issue for Indigenous Peruvians, as these people lack access to basic services. Consequently, Indigenous people leave their communities looking for better jobs and educational opportunities in cities. Furthermore, socioeconomic issues make Indigenous people more vulnerable to environmental challenges as Indigenous migrants are usually poor, and climate change disproportionately affects people facing poverty. The project will help to close the gap between NGO reports and real-life challenges to allow researchers to explore policies on how to address the connection between socioeconomic challenges and environmental issues instead of following external agendas.

Key words: Indigenous Peru, Indigenous Issues, NGO reporting



Kansas Undergraduate Journal of International Studies, 2025, 1(1).

<https://journals.ku.edu/kujis>

© 2025 the Authors

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License.

Peruvian centralization does not allow institutions to address Indigenous people's challenges, such as a lack of education and healthcare access. Peruvian institutions offering services such as healthcare and higher education are highly centralized in the capital, neglecting other regions, including areas with a higher density of Indigenous people. For instance, according to Espino (2023), "only 36% of Peruvians have higher education and, of that 36%, only 13.9% come from rural areas" (p. 1). Furthermore, according to Diego Venegas, the former Minister of Health:

The inefficiency of the health care system is a consequence of centralization, as Peruvians heavily depend on hospital centers in Lima while other patients from the rest of the country struggle to receive medical attention. More specifically, according to Venegas, "only five of the 25 departments of Peru have radiotherapy, reflecting the huge gap between the capital and the rest of the regions of Peru. ("La pandemia y el centralismo," 2021)

Understanding the centralized system in Peru helps to comprehend why the research question focuses on assessing if NGOs accurately address the issues Indigenous people face, as NGOs do not document factors such as centralization as mechanisms contributing to inequalities Indigenous people face. Consequently, the research question will allow for gathering primary data NGO reports lack.

NGOs and the Peruvian government classify poverty, lack of education, a poor healthcare system, and lack of political rights as the main challenges Indigenous people face. More specifically, the prevalence of poverty and poor education among Indigenous people contribute to social exclusion. The United Nations Economic and Social Council report identifies poverty as an issue disproportionately affecting Indigenous people as "Indigenous peoples are in the worst economic situation compared to other Latin American citizens as many Indigenous individuals live on less than \$1 per day ("Underdevelopment, Poverty of Latin America," 2011). Furthermore, according to the Peruvian Ministry of Diversity and Social Inclusion, poverty leads to Indigenous people's lack of access to higher education, causes occupational segregation, and reduces the opportunities of Indigenous Peruvians for political participation; consequently, all these factors exacerbate discrimination and social exclusion (Valdivia, 2007, p. 644). Knowing the economic inequalities and discrimination Indigenous people face helps to understand why the research question focuses on finding discrepancies and similarities between NGO reports and the individual experiences of Indigenous people, as this comparison will reveal if the focus of NGOs on socioeconomic inequalities aligns with the issues Indigenous individuals believe are more important to solve. More specifically, this study analyzes the testimonials of the interviewees to find common patterns of Peruvian social dynamics influencing socioeconomic challenges that may not be covered in NGO reports.

NGOs highly emphasize environmental challenges as a key issue Indig-

enous Peruvians face. NGOs and the researchers working for these organizations are concerned about the negative impact of territorial displacement, extractive industries, and climate change on Indigenous lands and attempt to include Indigenous people in the development of environmental programs to address environmental issues. Deruyttere (1997) highlights the problem of the pollution of Indigenous territories as the result of mining, logging, poaching, and commercial farming and calls for the preservation and restoration of these environments. Similarly, the website of UNESCO Peru highlights the importance of giving Indigenous people visibility and promotes capitalizing on these people's knowledge of the environment to design and implement environmental programs to address issues such as climate change ("UNESCO Peru," 2023). Being aware of NGOs' emphasis on solving environmental challenges provides context to explore whether NGOs impose environmental agendas on Indigenous populations. The research question investigates the possibility that contrary to NGO reports, Indigenous people in Peru prioritize solving socioeconomic disparities over addressing environmental challenges.

This research assesses if NGOs accurately document the factors influencing Indigenous issues in Peru. The research investigates similarities and differences between NGO reports and the real-life issues Indigenous individuals face. The primary data for this project are ten interviews of 45 minutes with 10 Indigenous individuals based on questions about territorial rights, extractive resources, climate change, poverty, education, healthcare access, and discrimination. The interviews include the topics discussed in NGO reports. This research theorizes NGOs are imposing environmental agendas on Indigenous populations in Peru when, in reality, Indigenous Peruvians perceive socioeconomic challenges as more important issues.

Existing research on Indigenous challenges focuses on outsiders' perspectives; in contrast, this project focuses on understanding insiders' perspectives on the Indigenous challenge by gathering primary data. Prioritizing insiders' perspectives over outsiders such as non-governmental organizations can help to devise initiatives considering Peruvian social dynamics to solve the issues Indigenous people perceive as most important.

Indigenous interviewees' experiences align with NGOs' reports on socioeconomic issues, yet the interviews challenge NGO reports documenting environmental challenges as an issue for Indigenous Peruvians. The testimonials align with NGO reports addressing lack of access to healthcare, access to education, discrimination, and poverty. However, the interviews challenge NGO reports documenting climate change, territory displacement, and extractive resources industries as issues for Indigenous Peruvians. The following literature review addresses the debate among scholars studying socioeconomic issues affecting Indigenous people and the scholars studying the protection of environmental rights in Indigenous lands. Additionally, this section discusses the gap between NGOs and target communities,

highlighting the “outsider theory,” which suggests NGOs lack the cultural awareness to understand the needs of target communities. The research design outlines the use of an interview protocol covering seven NGO-reported issues for conducting ten interviews, along with two rounds of thematic coding to analyze the transcripts. The analysis section includes quotes from the interviewees aligning with the information from NGO reports about socioeconomic issues, and it also includes quotes challenging NGOs documenting environmental challenges as the most pressing issue. The discussion section supports scholars investigating socioeconomic challenges faced by Indigenous communities over scholars focused on environmental conservation. It also supports the scholars’ argument about NGOs imposing an environmental agenda, as there is a lack of alignment between the NGO reports and the interviewees’ testimonials. Lastly, this paper advocates for government investment in small hospitals and tutoring programs to address socioeconomic issues and policies fostering economic growth through sustainable practices in extractive industries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Socioeconomic vs. Environmental Issues

Previous research has focused on understanding the dynamics behind socioeconomic inequalities with an emphasis on ethnic minorities in Latin America. Ethnicity is one factor correlated with inequalities, as Indigenous people in various countries of Latin America face discrimination that limits access to government services and job opportunities. Thorp et al. (2006) used the CRISE survey of perceptions of identity to show that:

Socioeconomic inequalities have in part an ethnic dimension. The researchers asked participants if someone’s ethnic or racial origins affected the chances of employment. According to research, in Bolivia and Peru, nearly two-thirds of respondents felt that ethnicity impacted job opportunities while in Guatemala half of respondents felt being Indigenous affects job opportunities in the public sector. (p. 458)

This research project can help understand how inequalities such as limited education opportunities, lack of health access, and discrimination impact the individual experiences of Indigenous Quechua speakers in Peru. Additionally, this project’s insights on discrimination will help to understand ethnicity as a factor limiting opportunities for Peruvians.

While a group of researchers focuses on indigenous socioeconomic inequalities, other scholars discuss the development of transnational movements to promote environmental conservation. Scholars propose a more inclusive framework including indigenous insights for environmental conservation. Hibbard et al. (2008) attribute the emergence of a transnational movement in the 80s and 90s focused on place-based projects aiming to

integrate the interests of the economy and Indigenous needs to preserve the environment as a response to scholars' critiques about excluding Indigenous people's views. Similarly, Lertzman & Vredenburg (2005) focused on a case study using interviews, press releases, and panel reports to highlight the benefits of negotiations that included the insights of native people. In this case study, The Scientific Panel for Sustainable Forest Practices – an organization studying the preservation of the environment – used the Nuu-Chah-Nul's environmental knowledge to find agreements about land planning in native territories in Canada (Lertzman & Vredenburg, 2005). This research will analyze if Indigenous individuals prioritize environmental conservation over socioeconomic inequalities or vice versa. Additionally, the personal experiences of the interviewees will provide information on socioeconomic and environmental issues to understand why they prioritize some issues over others.

Some scholars led credence on NGOs imposing environmental agendas to control the region by questioning the actions of Latin American governments with extractive resources. These NGOs impose agendas with the excuse of caring for Indigenous rights and the environment. For instance, Lorena Suarez (2014) supports the idea of ex-presidents of Latin America opposing the imposition of environmental agendas. Furthermore, the author analyzed the discourses against the imposition of NGO environmental agendas of the former presidents of Bolivia, Uruguay, Ecuador, and Cuba. In the 2012 discourse of Pepe Mujica, the former president of Uruguay, the former leader argued that "if international donors are so concerned about protecting the environment, then why these organizations do not encourage powerful countries to stop importing resources from developing countries polluting the most?" (Suarez, 2014, p. 82). The analysis of the interview testimonials will allow finding patterns about how environmental and socioeconomic issues affect Indigenous Peruvians to complement the information of the NGO reports.

Development Agents vs. Target Communities

Research has examined the disconnect between the priorities and strategies of NGOs and the actual needs and preferences of Indigenous communities. This misalignment in goals and priorities results in development projects' ineffective outcomes. De-Sardan (2008) analyzed different anthropological case studies in Africa as evidence of development organizations commonly deploying "experts" to engage with villagers and conduct rapid field studies aimed at identifying community demands. However, these fieldwork projects often serve as a means for development organizations to justify implementing the same projects across multiple developing countries without adequately addressing the unique needs of each community (De-Sardan, 2008). Similarly, after conducting a fieldwork project in Guatemala with the Ch'orti's, Metz (2006) argues that the lack of consideration for

family planning in development projects is one example of the disconnect between local needs and broader politics, as Indigenous people in Guatemala have the highest birth rate in Latin America, but there is no project willing to address the issue and instead, development projects “impossibly try to keep up with population growth rather than giving Ch’orti’s the means to prevent it” (p. 248). This project extends previous research on the disconnect between NGOs and Indigenous communities by analyzing NGO reports and complementing these reports’ information with primary data. However, instead of analyzing the disconnect between development projects targeted toward Indigenous people, this research aims to find the potential disconnect between NGO reports and the issues Indigenous Peruvians face.

Scholars in the social sciences developed the outsider theory to describe the challenge external organizations usually face when attempting to address social issues in communities where these organizations have limited knowledge or lack direct experience. Outsiders may end up not comprehending the dynamics of a specific culture due to cultural barriers and the insiders’ lack of trust in people outside their communities; consequently, scholars suggest engaging in collaborative research with insiders to avoid biases. Giwa (2015) analyzes case studies to highlight the challenges researchers from the Global South face to understand communities they do not belong to due to cultural barriers and highlights the importance of collaborating with insiders, as these people can grasp aspects of culture outsiders lack access to. Similarly, Mullings (1999), analyzes his own experiences on how cultural perceptions influenced his fieldwork project when conducting interviews with managers and workers in Jamaica and suggests external organizations and researchers be in a constant reflexive and critical process to recognize how positionality affects the understanding of the insiders’ dynamics. This research project contributes to the body of the outsider theory by examining the possibility of NGOs acting as outsiders lacking the cultural awareness to understand the challenges of Indigenous Peruvians. Additionally, in case this study finds discrepancies between the NGO reports and the interviews on Indigenous challenges, it could emphasize the need for collaboration between NGOs and Indigenous people to adequately address Indigenous issues.

This project will address the current scholarly debate about NGOs imposing agendas on developing countries. Additionally, it will draw on existing research about indigenous socioeconomic and environmental challenges Indigenous people face in Latin American countries by analyzing the individual life experiences of Indigenous people in Peru. The project contributes to recent research by analyzing if the agendas of NGOs align with the real-life experiences of ten Indigenous Quechua speakers in Peru by providing an in-depth evaluation of overlaps and discrepancies. This analysis will allow an understanding of the factors contributing to the challenges Indigenous people face in having access to healthcare, access to education, discrimination, resource extraction, territorial displacement, economic inequalities,

and climate change. The recognition of the most salient issues Indigenous people face helps to respond to these people's needs by developing an Indigenous political agenda. The publication of this project can serve to promote research to suggest policy changes and create awareness about the Indigenous issue among scholars.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This project used primary data drawn from in-person interviews I conducted in Peru with ten Quechua speakers. The questions of the interviews pertained to issues regarding access to healthcare, access to education, discrimination, resource extraction, poverty, territorial displacement, and climate change Indigenous Peruvians face according to two NGO reports. This study analyzed the report of the Minority Rights Group International (MRG) from the database of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and one report of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). I chose the MRG report from the database of the UNHCR and the ECLAC report because both are the main development organizations worldwide as they develop projects and conduct research to advance global development agendas, promote human rights, and address challenges affecting vulnerable populations. The interviews provided information about the personal experiences of Indigenous Peruvians on the seven main socioeconomic and environmental challenges addressed in the NGO reports. As this data focused on individual experiences, the interviews provided examples of the specific ways these challenges affect Indigenous individuals' opportunities and rights. The interviews helped close the gaps in the NGO reports' conclusions to better understand how the seven main challenges mentioned above affect Indigenous people.

After identifying the seven main challenges discussed in the NGO reports on socioeconomic and environmental issues, I designed an interview protocol to supplement the existing information of the two NGO reports. I designed interview questions by including two to six questions per topic and follow-up questions to explore individuals' insights (see Table 1). These types of questions encouraged participants to elaborate on personal experiences on how socioeconomic and environmental issues affect their daily lives. Individual narratives contributed to finding commonalities of opinions and factors influencing socioeconomic and environmental challenges to shed light on systemic issues Indigenous Peruvians face. Additionally, interviews with ten people provided information about the six main issues explored to understand the unique experiences of Peruvian Indigenous challenges not necessarily covered in existing research.

Questions per topic
Territorial rights: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · How was life in the place that you were born? · Why did you decide to move to Arequipa? · If you had the opportunity to go back to live the rest of your life in your place of birth, would you do it? Why?
Extractive resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · What are the main activities people do for living in your place of birth? · Have the occupations people used to have changed over time? If so, why? · What are the main resources you can find in your original region? How do people take advantage of these resources? · Is there mining or tree felling in your place of birth? If so, what are your opinions about these activities?
Climate change: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Have you noticed a change in how people back in your hometown raise their crops or livestock? · What are your opinions on heavy rains and their effect on crops and living back in your hometown? · Do you believe climate change equally affects your place of birth and Arequipa? Why do you have this opinion?
Poverty: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · In what industry do you work? · How do you feel about the work that you do? · In what part of the city do you live? · Why did you decide to live there? · How often do you go to buy groceries, and where do you buy them? Why do you prefer to go shopping in that place?
Education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Was your primary school close to your house back in your hometown? · How was your experience in high school? · Back in high school, what was your ideal occupation? · Did you have the opportunity to follow a profession in the field that you wanted to? Why or why not?
Healthcare: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · How frequently did you go to the doctor when you resided in your place of birth? · Was the hospital close to your house back in your hometown?
Discrimination: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Do you believe that in our country, white people have more opportunities than others? · Have you ever witnessed someone being mistreated based on their appearance? · Have you ever felt discriminated against?

Table 1: List of questions used in the interviews

I collected the participants for this study through personal connections and a snowball technique, ensuring a diverse pool of Indigenous individuals from the Andean region of Peru who migrated to the city of Arequipa. I chose people from Cusco, Puno, and the Andean region of Arequipa, as most Indigenous people in Peru speak Quechua and the majority of Quechua speakers residing in Peru live in the same areas as the ten interviewees I gathered (see Table 2). After finding the participants, obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and ensuring participants' informed consent, I conducted 45-minute interviews in Spanish with participants from a diverse mix of educational levels and occupations, including 5 women and 5 men. I conducted the interviews in a casual setting at a coffee shop, and I recorded the participants without including videos to protect the privacy of the interviewees. During the interviews, individuals discussed socioeconomic challenges such as lack of access to education, health, and poverty as factors influencing the decision to leave Indigenous communities. Primary interview data provided narratives defying the assumption of NGO reports about all Latin American Indigenous people facing the same issues. Specifically, this data helped to get the opinions of Indigenous Peruvians about Indigenous challenges to complement the information from the NGO reports.

Origin of the interviewee	Date of the interview	Place of residency
Interviewee from Santa Lucia, Puno.	December 19 th , 2023	Moved permanently to Arequipa.
Interviewee from Juli, Puno.	December 20 th , 2023	Moved permanently to Arequipa.
Interviewee Castilla, Arequipa.	December 22 nd , 2023	Moved permanently to Arequipa.
Interviewee Ilave, Puno.	December 27 th , 2023	Comes to Arequipa every three months and then goes back to Ilave.
Interviewee 1 Chumbivilcas, Cusco.	December 28 th , 2023	Moved permanently to Arequipa
Interviewee 1 Achoma, Arequipa.	December 29 th , 2023	Initially moved to Arequipa, moved to Brazil, went to Lima, and now resides in Arequipa.
Interviewee 2 Achoma, Arequipa	December 29 th , 2023	Moved permanently to Arequipa.
Interviewee from Huancane, Puno.	January 4 th , 2024	Moved permanently to Arequipa.
Interviewee from Ninantaya, Puno.	January 5 th , 2024	Moved permanently to Arequipa.
Interviewee from Espinar, Cusco.	January 6 th , 2024	Moved permanently to Arequipa.

Table 2: Interviewees information

I used content analysis and two rounds of thematic coding to analyze the data. The first round analyzed the transcripts by identifying the seven main topics discussed in the NGO reports, and the second round analyzed document files to look for common opinions and experiences of the participants when facing these issues. The first round used the seven codes to examine the transcripts and used targeted transcription to translate to English information defying or aligning with NGO reports. After this process, I created seven documents for each theme. These document files went through a second round of thematic coding to find patterns about the opinions and challenges individuals face by using nineteen thematic codes (see Table 3). Two rounds of thematic coding guaranteed gathering the most recurrent themes from the NGO reports and the interviews. Lastly, thematic coding facilitated the organization of information according to the seven topics to compare and contrast the NGO reports with individuals' experiences.

Territorial rights: <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Voluntary migration· Job opportunities influencing migration· Educational opportunities influencing migration
Extractive resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Communities affected by mining· Positive opinions on mining· Negative opinions on mining
Climate change: <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Climate change effects on food production· Climate change effects on Indigenous communities' vs urban areas· Ethnicity of the migrants affected by climate change
Poverty: <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Residing in low-income areas· Lack of ownership of property· Occupations of migrants
Education: <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Pursue of higher education· Proximity of schools· Quality of education

Healthcare: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Medical personnel · Proximity to hospitals
Discrimination: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Personal experiences with discrimination · Individuals avoiding talking about discrimination

Table 3: Codes used for the second round of thematic coding

ANALYSIS

Access to Services

According to NGOs, lack of access to education and healthcare are two issues affecting Indigenous people in Latin America. Institutions located far away from Indigenous communities, low quality of services, and lack of economic resources are factors influencing the lack of access to healthcare and education. According to Del Popolo & Jaspers-Faijer (2014), gaps in the implementation of healthcare rights among Indigenous people are influenced by material poverty, low levels of formal education, and people living in remote areas. Furthermore, “the main reasons for the lower rate of participation of youth in post-secondary education are early incorporation into work and the poor quality of primary and secondary education” (Del Popolo & Jaspers-Faijer, 2014, p. 92). However, due to the NGOs’ failure to consider the influence of national contexts on social dynamics, these reports may not accurately capture the social factors influencing the challenges Indigenous Peruvians face when accessing education and healthcare. NGOs may oversimplify how the lack of access to healthcare and education affects Indigenous Peruvians because these reports lack firsthand testimonials to understand the unique experiences of the interviewees.

Medical centers located far away from Indigenous communities and the absence of doctors in hospitals are challenges affecting Indigenous communities in Peru. On average, Indigenous Peruvians have to commute for at least one hour to go to a medical post, and these medical centers do not have doctors; instead, these centers only have nursing technicians. According to the interviewees, going to the hospital required several hours of walking, traveling on mules, or public transportation (see Table 4). Moreover, all the interviewees reported having health posts understaffed without specialized health services, such as cardiologists. For instance, according to the interviewee from Chumbivilcas, Cusco: “There was not a healthcare center near my house and the closest healthcare facility did not have doctors or nurses, there was only one nursing technician” (personal communication, December 28th, 2023). The overlap between NGO reports and the testimonies of

the interviewees validates the accuracy of the lack of access to healthcare as an issue affecting Indigenous Peruvians. Complementing the information in NGO reports with primary data helps to avoid the danger of assuming homogeneity in the difficulties of accessing healthcare among Indigenous peoples in different Latin American countries and helps to recognize how geographical isolation and lack of personnel negatively impact specifically Indigenous Peruvians.

Interviewee 1 from Achoma, Arequipa “The hospital in Achoma is about a forty- minute walk away. We did not go to the doctor regularly because the hospital was far away. Nowthat I live in Arequipa, I regularly visit the doctor for my baby.”
Interviewee from Juli, Puno “There was no health center in my town. To go to the medical center, we had to ride a mule or ahorse for almost an entire day.”
Interviewee from Huancane, Puno “I had to walk an hour and a half to get to the hospital as there is not even access for vehicles.”
Interviewee from Chumbivilcas Cusco “When I lived in Chumbivilcas I had to take transportation and travel three hours to go to thehospital because the hospital was far away.”

Table 4: Proximity to healthcare centers

Not all interviewees reported a lack of access to healthcare negatively affecting them. Some interviewees reported always being healthy and not being affected by hospitals located far away, as these interviewees did not need to go to the doctor due to good health. Additionally, some testimonials reflected healthcare services, such as vaccinations, accessible to Indigenous individuals through healthcare campaigns. For instance, the interviewee from Castilla, Arequipa said: “As part of healthcare campaigns, nurses went to people’s homes once a month to promote the health of the elderly and children by having vaccination campaigns” (personal communication, December 22nd, 2023). Moreover, the interviewee from Ilave, Puno said: “While growing up, my family focused on eating nutritious food such as quinoa and kiwicha, so my family and I never got sick to the point of needing to go to a doctor because we have always been healthy” (personal communication, December 27th, 2023). These discrepancies suggest that while healthcare access remains a concern for many Indigenous communities, there are variations in experiences undermining the idea of deficient healthcare as an issue for all Indigenous people. However, few interviewees reporting being healthy and

having access to healthcare services due to healthcare campaigns does not sufficiently counter the prevailing narrative of healthcare facilities being far away from Indigenous communities and lacking personnel.

Indigenous Peruvians face challenges accessing education due to economic difficulties and schools being far away from Indigenous communities. Indigenous Peruvians have to walk or use public transportation for at least one hour to go to school. Moreover, Indigenous Peruvians cannot pursue higher education because they need to start working at a young age due to poverty. For instance, the interviewee from Chumbivilcas, Cusco said: “In Chumbivilcas, I had to take public transportation and travel for three hours to go to primary school” (personal communication, December 28th, 2023). Similarly, the interviewee from Huancane, Puno said: “To go to school we had to walk about an hour or an hour and a half” (personal communication, December 30th, 2023). Moreover, the interviewees reported not pursuing higher education due to a lack of economic resources (see Table 5). The overlap between the interviewee’s testimonials and NGO reports is an indicator of NGOs accurately documenting the lack of access to education as an issue affecting Indigenous Peruvians. This information underscores the importance of addressing socioeconomic disparities, as these issues are the primary cause of Indigenous Peruvians’ challenges, including lack of access to education.

<p>Interviewee from Ilave, Puno</p> <p>“I have only studied until high school because then I needed to start working as I did not have money. I decided to move to Arequipa and worked on different jobs before becoming a gardener for a private residential area. My aspiration as a child was to become a civil engineer, but I did not have the time to study and work at the same time.”</p>
<p>Interviewee from Chumbivilcas, Cusco</p> <p>“From a young age, I started working selling clothes because I needed the money, so I could not go to university.”</p>
<p>Interviewee from Huancane, Puno</p> <p>“I wanted to become a teacher, and I planned to take the exam to get admitted to the ‘Universidad Nacional de San Agustín’ which is a national university that offers free tuition to students. I knew that the admission process was very competitive and since I was working because I needed the money, I did not have enough time to study for the exam, so I did not get admitted. After that, I decided to continue working and gave up on going to college.”</p>

Table 5: Financial limitations on higher education pursuit

On the other hand, variations in educational opportunities among some Indigenous individuals challenge the idea of economic limitations and dis-

tance to schools as barriers limiting education opportunities. Contrary to most interviewees, some Indigenous people had enough money to pursue higher education and others reported schools not being far from Indigenous communities. While nine of the interviewees only completed primary and secondary education, one interviewee completed higher education studies in Brazil and became a nurse. Furthermore, the experiences of two participants challenge the idea of schools being far from Indigenous communities (see Table 6). While these outliers may provide valuable insights into exceptions about educational opportunities, these exceptions do not adequately depict the barriers such as the scarce economic resources and the lack of proximity of schools faced by most interviewees. Moreover, relying solely on the experiences of a small subset of interviewees risks overlooking the broader patterns of educational inequality and socioeconomic marginalization prevalent among Indigenous populations in Peru, as reflected in the testimonials of most participants.

<p>Interviewee from Castilla, Arequipa</p> <p>“I left Castilla when I was 10 years old, so I only went to primary school in my hometown. The school I attended was small and was close to my house because the town where I lived was very small.”</p>
<p>Interviewee 2 from Achoma, Arequipa</p> <p>“The school was close, about a 10-minute walk away. My experience at school was good, the teachers always went to classes, and there were different teachers for each course.”</p>

Table 6: Educational experiences among Indigenous people

Indigenous Migration

According to NGO reports, Indigenous people migrate to cities due to territorial displacement. Territorial displacement forces people to leave Indigenous territories because the construction of infrastructures such as power plants causes disruption in the environment. According to Del Popolo & Jaspers-Faijer (2014), Indigenous people’s decision to relocate hinges on considerations relating to gaps in the implementation of territorial rights, as some cities in Latin America have been founded directly in Indigenous territories. Similarly, according to Grant (2019), private company projects, such as the construction of the hydroelectric plant known as “Barro Blanco” in Panama, caused flooding and consequently led to the territorial displacement of the Indigenous community of the Ngäbe-Buglé. NGOs addressing territorial displacement as the main issue causing Indigenous people to migrate demonstrates the emphasis development organizations place on environmental concerns, as these organizations tend to ignore other socioeconomic factors such as access to services and job opportunities causing people

to migrate, and instead choose to emphasize the environmental factors such as territorial displacement. Furthermore, by attributing environmental issues as the root cause of other social problems such as migration, NGOs mistakenly imply that solving environmental challenges would immediately solve social issues such as migration.

The testimonials of the interviewees show Indigenous people do not migrate to cities due to territorial displacement. At least within the context of this sample, the interviewees migrated to urban areas because Indigenous communities usually lack job and educational opportunities offered in cities. For instance, none of the ten interviewees reported migrating to Arequipa due to territorial displacement. Specifically, the Interviewee from Juli, Puno said:

I decided to move to Arequipa to progress financially and look for better job opportunities, and I would return to Juli just to visit my family, but I would prefer to stay to live in Arequipa to be able to make more money. (personal communication, December 20th, 2023)

Like the interviewee from Puno, the rest of the participants also reported voluntary migrating to Arequipa, motivated by better educational opportunities and due to more access to services (see Table 7). The interviewees' reporting of deciding to leave Indigenous communities due to socioeconomic issues challenges the information from NGOs territorial displacement. This discrepancy allows considering the hypothesis of NGOs imposing environmental agendas instead of focusing on solving socioeconomic issues motivating Indigenous migration.

<p>Interviewee from Huancane, Puno</p> <p>"I decided to move to Arequipa because I thought I would have better educational opportunities. For now, I would not return to Puno because I have gotten used to the fact that I can go to places such as shopping centers, and the hospital, and I can send my kids to school. None of these facilities are close to my house back in Puno."</p>
<p>Interviewee from Castilla, Arequipa</p> <p>"I came to Arequipa because Castilla is a small town. I decided to move to Arequipa because the educational opportunities are better here than in my town."</p>
<p>Interviewee from Espinar, Cusco</p> <p>"In addition to better job opportunities, I moved to Arequipa because in Espinar we struggled with limited access to healthcare services and lack of schools. The lack of adequate facilities nearby made daily life challenging."</p>

Table 7: Factors motivating Indigenous Peruvians to migrate to Arequipa

Rapid Urbanization, Discrimination, and Poverty

According to NGO reports, Indigenous people in Latin America contribute to rapid urbanization by migrating to urban areas. As a consequence

of migration and rapid urbanization, Indigenous individuals experience discrimination and poverty in urban areas. According to Del Popolo & Jaspers-Faijer (2014):

The percentage of Indigenous peoples in urban settings is significant: according to the 2010 census round, about 50% of the Indigenous population lives in urban areas...Furthermore, Indigenous migrants encounter difficulties in maintaining and exercising Indigenous identity and culture and in accessing services and employment opportunities in cities owing to structural discrimination. After migration, Indigenous women are more likely to work in domestic service occupations, in maquila industries, or informal own-account activities with extremely precarious working conditions such as miserable wages, a total lack of social security, and health coverage. (pp. 56-60)

While NGO reports offer general insights into how Indigenous people contribute to rapid urbanization and face discrimination and poverty after migration, these reports lack the opinions and personal experiences of Indigenous individuals in Peru with these issues. Consequently, these reports may overlook variations in different countries' social dynamics that contribute to these issues.

The interviewees' experiences support the idea of Indigenous migration to urban areas as a common pattern in Latin America, contributing to the issue of rapid urbanization. Indigenous migrants reside in the peripheral areas of the city, as these areas offer the most affordable housing in Arequipa. According to the interviewees, Indigenous Peruvians occupy peripheral areas of the city because of a lack of economic resources (see Table 8). Participants reported living in low-income peripheral areas of Arequipa: two participants reported living in "El Cono Norte," one participant reported living in "Apipa," one participant reported living in "Pachacutec," and one participant reported living in "Chapi." This project's interviews complement the NGO reports by highlighting how economic inequalities affect Indigenous Peruvians after migrating to Arequipa. Indigenous Peruvians living in low-income areas support the assertion that socioeconomic inequalities are the most pressing issue for Indigenous Peruvians.

Interviewee from Santa Lucia, Puno:

"I live in 'El Cono Norte' because I do not have enough money to pay for a house in another area of Arequipa. Since I work selling clothes in the street, I can only afford to live in that area of the city, as it is the cheapest place to live in Arequipa."

Interviewee from Ninantaya, Puno:

"I live in 'Chapi' and it takes me a long time to get to my job as I work as a gardener for several houses in a residential condominium in Challapampa which is one of the wealthiest areas of the city. Although I work for people who earn a lot of money, the money I make is not enough to live in an area that is closer to the city. So, every morning I have to wake up around 4 am to then take the bus to arrive at my place of work."

Table 8: Interviewees living in peripheral areas due to lack of economic resources

While the majority of the interviewees migrated to Arequipa and built houses in low-income areas, contributing to rapid urbanization, some interviewees lack the ownership of property or do not live permanently in Arequipa. Some participants do not own a house due to constant traveling or due to having to work alternative hours as part of the requirements of being a live-in maid. For instance, two out of the ten interviewees reported not owning a house in the city of Arequipa. Additionally, one participant reported renting a house in Arequipa as the interviewee works in the informal sector and constantly goes back to Ilave, Puno to bring money to his family, and the interviewee from Chumbivilcas, Cusco reported staying at the house of her employer as part of the requirements of being a maid (see Table 9). Despite not owning a house, these people still reside in the city, and consequently, contribute to rapid urbanization by increasing social fragmentation. Additionally, these people working in the informal sector without having access to social security underscores the economic challenges faced by Indigenous Peruvians.

Interviewee from Chumbivilcas, Cusco

"Since I work as a maid, I live in the same house as the people I work for. My boss wanted me to live in her house because in that way I can take care of the house 24/7."

Interviewee from Ilave, Puno

"I come to Arequipa every two months to work as a 'carretillero' - a Peruvian term for people carrying heavy products in markets - so I can bring money for my family. While I am in Arequipa, I rent a room in 'El Cono Norte' - as this is the only area in the city I can afford."

Table 9: Interviewees' reasons for not owning a house in Arequipa

Some of the interviewees reported feeling discriminated against, as people used derogatory terms or made negative comments about their Indigenous features. Non-Indigenous people made fun of indigenous accents and features, implying these characteristics make Indigenous individuals inferior to white Latin Americans. According to the interviewees, people in cities like Arequipa made negative comments against them based on their Indig-

enous features (see Table 10). Additionally, both interviewees from Achoma and Chumbivilcas exhibited non-verbal cues indicative of discomfort while recounting personal experiences about discrimination, such as avoiding eye contact and tense body language. Complementing information from NGO reports with firsthand experiences shows discrimination towards Indigenous Peruvians, reinforcing marginalization by promoting stereotypes and eroding individuals' sense of belonging within society through the use of derogatory comments. Understanding the interconnectedness between marginalization and discrimination shows unfair treatment deepening social inequalities by limiting the opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in social activities, and consequently, supports the assertion of social disparities as one of the most pressing issues for Indigenous Peruvians.

<p>Interviewee from Chumbivilcas, Cusco</p> <p>"I have felt discriminated against because I work as a nanny, and the kid that I took care of made fun of my accent and called me a 'chola' - a derogatory term used to refer to Indigenous people especially by the White privileged Peruvians. She used this term because she said that she was not going to obey a 'chola' implying that because since she was White, she was superior to me."</p>
<p>Interviewee 1 from Achoma, Arequipa</p> <p>"When I went to study in Brazil, one of my classmates asked me if all Peruvians looked and acted the same, as she implied that my Indigenous features made me ugly and uncultured."</p>

Table 10: Interviewees' personal experiences with discrimination

While the interviewees reported discrimination as an issue in Peru, most of the participants avoided responding to questions on how discrimination affected them at a personal level. Probably due to interviewees' discomfort regarding this topic, most of the interviewees did not report experiencing discrimination firsthand. When asked about experiences of discrimination, seven interviewees shifted in their seats, crossed their arms, and avoided making direct eye contact. Although all the interviewees agreed that discrimination is an issue for Peruvians, seven interviewees avoided responding to questions about how discrimination affected them personally. Only the interviewee from Santa Lucia, Puno reported not feeling discriminated against at all: "I know that a lot of people say discrimination is a big issue in Peru, but I have not felt discriminated against because I have always been self-confident, and I am proud of my ethnicity" (personal communication, December 19th, 2023). The reluctance of most interviewees to discuss personal experiences of discrimination does not diminish the validity of NGOs documenting discrimination as an issue for Indigenous people; rather, the attitude of the participants suggests discrimination may be taboo in Peruvian

society. The lack of open dialogue about discrimination may indicate that participants did not want to share information with a non-Indigenous outsider for fear of being misinterpreted. The lack of communication between Indigenous Peruvians and non-Indigenous outsiders supports the idea of NGOs lacking cultural awareness to document the social dynamics influencing discrimination in Peru.

Environmental Issues

According to NGOs, climate change disproportionately affects Indigenous people in Latin America. Climate changes coupled with resource extraction industries threaten the ecological sustainability of Indigenous communities, causing food insecurity. According to the Del Popolo & Jaspers-Faijer (2014), “climate change is a threat primarily affecting Indigenous people because these people usually live in fragile ecosystems sensitive to changes in the physical environment” (p. 52). Furthermore, environmental degradation, pollution of Indigenous traditional ecosystems, and a decline in Indigenous traditional food sources threaten food and nutrition security for Indigenous individuals (Del Popolo & Jaspers-Faijer, 2014). Additionally, according to Grant (2019), some Indigenous leaders, such as Ricardo Ushigua, address the necessity of rejecting capitalist production and consumption of extractive industries to safeguard Indigenous traditions and ensure the Earth’s sustainability for future generations. While the ECLAC and the MRG reports provide a generic understanding of the negative impacts of climate change and resource extraction on Indigenous communities in Latin America, these reports lack the opinions Indigenous Peruvians have regarding these issues. The personal experiences of Indigenous Peruvians with environmental problems may challenge the NGO environmental narrative that claims all Indigenous peoples in Latin America have negative opinions and experiences with environmental challenges.

Some participants reported climate change having positive effects on food production, while others believe climate change is not affecting Indigenous communities at all. For instance, Interviewee 1 from Achoma, Arequipa believes climate change is positively affecting crops and the raising of cattle in Indigenous communities, as freezing temperatures no longer put food production in danger (personal communication, December 29th, 2023). Furthermore, one interviewee reported climate change not happening at all, while another interviewee reported that climate change has no impact on food production, emphasizing that the only factor affecting crops is the use of insecticides (see Table 11). The divergence between NGO reports documenting food insecurity due to climate change and the interviewees’ not considering these issues affecting food production challenges the accuracy of the NGO reports. This discrepancy suggests NGOs make generalizations about all Latin American Indigenous communities facing food insecurity due to

climate change without considering Indigenous people’s divergent experiences varying according to the environmental context of different countries, such as the case of Peru.

<p>Interviewee 2 from Achoma, Arequipa</p> <p>“The climate has not changed; it is still the same. The only thing that has changed is that now people use insecticides and before that was not used. We only used natural fertilizers with what animals like sheep and rabbits defecated with. Now people started to use specific fertilizers and insecticides to optimize food production.”</p>
<p>Interviewee from Ilave, Puno</p> <p>“I have not noticed that climate change affects our crops because food production has remained the same since I left.”</p>

Table 11: Interviewees’ opinions on climate change’s impact on food production

Some Indigenous Peruvians believe climate change equally affects Indigenous communities and urban settings, such as Arequipa. The interviewees referred to “huaycos”—a term from the Andes used to describe the flash floods and mudslides brought on by intense rains in mountains, particularly during El Niño — as an example of climate change affecting both urban and Indigenous communities. For instance, interviewees believe climate change and phenomena such as “huaycos” affect more people in the city of Arequipa, as people in Indigenous communities respect the riverbeds, while migrants in Arequipa build houses in unsafe places (see Table 12). Additionally, Interviewee 2 from Achoma said: “In my town, the ‘huaycos’ do not affect us as much because we have traditional knowledge that has helped us to build our houses to be resistant to heavy rains” (personal communication, December 29th, 2023). This discovery supports the argument about NGOs not considering the perspectives of Indigenous communities regarding climate change and erroneously reporting this issue as a challenge most Indigenous Latin Americans want to address.

<p>Interviewee from Juli, Puno</p> <p>“I think that the changes in the climate not only affect the people of my town but also the people of Arequipa because there have always been landslides here too, but the situation is worse in Arequipa since more people from other provinces have moved here. Usually these people build houses near the torrent and when there are huaycos the water is carried to the houses.”</p>

Interviewee from Chumbivilcas, Cusco

"I believe that heavy rains and huaycos affect the people of Arequipa more than the people of my town because the people who come to Arequipa build their houses in places where they should not build as the river is close to people's houses. On the other hand, in my town, people know where the water passes and they do not build in those places."

Table 12: Opinions on "huaycos" impact

Migrants affected by "huaycos" due to building houses in areas close to the river in Arequipa are Indigenous. The ethnicity of the migrants in Arequipa challenges the interviewees' perspectives on climate change affecting more Peruvians in urban settings than Indigenous communities. After a follow-up question about the ethnicity of the migrants the interviewees referred to, the participants believed migrants coming to Arequipa come from Andean regions, which are areas with a higher density of Indigenous Peruvians. For instance, the interviewee of Chumbivilcas, Cusco said, "I believe most people that come to Arequipa come from Cusco and Puno, and after migrating they build their houses in peripheral areas of Arequipa" (personal communication, December 28th, 2023). While this information supports the narrative of NGOs about climate change affecting Indigenous people the most, Indigenous people are affected by climate change only after migrating to Arequipa looking for better socioeconomic opportunities. This interconnection between environmental and socioeconomic issues reinforces the argument about socioeconomic issues being the root of other challenges, such as climate change, affecting Indigenous Peruvians.

Although some interviewees mentioned that mining is not common in Indigenous communities, these interviewees still had positive opinions on mining because it brings economic growth. These interviewees supported mining because it offers job opportunities and economic growth through the development of infrastructure such as roads. For instance, six out of the ten interviewees reported not having mining industries in their native communities, and the six supported the industry. In addition, out of the four participants reporting mining happening in their Indigenous communities, two interviewees had positive opinions about mining. Eight of the ten participants had positive attitudes toward mining because the industry offers job opportunities to locals and pays fees to the Peruvian government to develop infrastructure projects such as schools and roads (see Table 13). The discrepancy between NGOs arguing Indigenous people oppose mining industries, and the testimonials from the interviewees supporting mining due to economic growth, challenges the accuracy of the NGO reports. NGOs advocating for the elimination of extractive resources industries without fully considering the perspectives of Indigenous communities benefiting from this industry shows a disconnect between NGOs' agendas and the real-life

experiences of Indigenous Peruvians. Additionally, some individuals supporting mining due to economic development show that Indigenous Peruvians care about Indigenous communities having more access to services to alleviate socioeconomic disparities, even if achieving this progress causes environmental damage.

<p>Interviewee from Huancane, Puno</p> <p>“In Huancane there is no mining. People are mostly dedicated to livestock and agriculture. My opinion about mining is that it generates many jobs without having a higher education. Mining does not only benefit people without a degree, as professionals can also benefit from mining companies because they can become supervisors in the mine and earn a lot of money.”</p>
<p>Interviewee from Ninantaya, Puno</p> <p>“Peru is a mining country. If we get rid of mining, there will not be progress in Peru because what contributes the most to Peru is mining, and without that money, projects that benefit the communities could not be carried out.”</p>
<p>Interviewee from Chumbivilcas, Cusco</p> <p>“Where I live there is mining and the mine helps the population by giving them work and companies also give money to governments to build schools, tracks, etc. So I think mining is good.”</p>

Table 13: Interviewees’ positive opinions on mining

A couple of interviewees had negative views about mining due to the bad management of the mining fee and environmental damages caused by mining. Some interviewees had negative views on mining because, despite mining industries paying a fee, bad project management such as corruption in Indigenous communities does not allow Indigenous people to use the money to develop infrastructure projects. Additionally, some people oppose mining because mining pollutes Indigenous communities, and this pollution affects food production. According to the interviewee from Castilla, Arequipa: “Food production is not the same because the miners have ruined everything. Before mining the peaches were big, and now they do not even grow” (personal communication, December 22nd, 2023). Furthermore, two out of the four interviewees that reported having mining in their communities believed the industry is not good for Indigenous communities because it does not give job opportunities to locals, and they think local governors do not use the mining fees effectively due to corruption or bad project management (see Table 14). The interviewees’ negative views about mining show NGOs not being completely wrong in arguing Indigenous people in Latin America oppose extractive resources industries. However, not all interviewees were against mining and only a few people opposed mining industries due to the negative consequences of this industry in the environment. This lack of

consensus among participants indicates NGOs may impose an environmental agenda without considering the views of some Indigenous individuals supporting mining due to economic growth.

Interviewee from Castilla, Arequipa

"There is mining in Castilla, although mining companies give money to councils to use on projects that benefit the community, the councils steal that money."

Interviewee Santa Lucia, Puno

"In my town there was mining, but the mine did not help the people at all because they did not offer jobs to locals and even though the mine gave a mining fee, the government ended up returning the money due to lack of projects. But, I think that if that money was used effectively many people would benefit, so mining itself is not the problem, but the issue is poor project management by local authorities."

Table 14: Interviewees' negative opinions on mining.

DISCUSSION

Environmental vs. Socioeconomic Issues

This study found only a few participants reporting environmental issues affecting Indigenous communities in Peru; therefore, this discovery challenges scholars studying the transnational movement of environmental rights. These group of scholars make generalizations about all Indigenous people prioritizing environmental challenges and ignore that Indigenous people from different countries may face unique environmental issues. Although scholars such as Hibbard et al. (2008) do research to promote collaboration with Indigenous communities to design environmental protection initiatives, these researchers focus on studying multiple countries and consequently generalize the Indigenous experience with environmental challenges. Avoiding generalizations is necessary, as only some interviewees believed climate change is negatively impacting food production and only a couple of interviewees believed mining causes pollution, negatively affecting Indigenous communities. Although this study did not find all participants having negative opinions and experiences with environmental challenges, some participants believed environmental challenges affect Indigenous Peruvians; however, these interviewees only represent a minority. The diverse views of the interviewees support the need for conducting research based on case studies rather than studies comprising multiple countries to see why participants' responses about environmental issues vary.

Interviewees reporting socioeconomic issues affecting them more than environmental issues challenges the literature on transnational environmental movements because this literature emphasizes the protection of Indigenous territories as the most pressing issue for Indigenous people, and this

project instead supports scholars conducting more research on socioeconomic challenges. Research focusing on discrimination and lack of access to services such as healthcare responds to the needs of Indigenous Peruvians, as these topics align more with the issues Indigenous Peruvians report. For instance, the participants placed a higher priority on socioeconomic development over environmental conservation, as most interviewees supported mining industries due to job opportunities for locals and funding for development projects such as schools and roads. Additionally, the interviewees expressed concerns about socioeconomic inequalities due to a lack of access to basic services like healthcare and education. In alignment with the interviewees reporting concerns with socioeconomic issues, the analysis of Thorp et al. (2006) found that Indigenous people in Bolivia, Guatemala, and Peru disproportionately face socioeconomic disadvantages, such as lack of job opportunities, compared to non-Indigenous people due to discrimination. Socioeconomic issues affecting Indigenous Peruvians the most supports previous research on socioeconomic issues having an ethnic dimension in Latin American countries. This discovery supports the group of scholars focusing on studying socioeconomic issues affecting Indigenous people over the researchers studying the impact of environmental challenges on Indigenous populations.

According to the interviewees, socioeconomic difficulties are the root issue causing environmental challenges as a collateral effect, therefore this finding supports the scholars' idea about NGOs imposing environmental agendas, as these organizations do not consider the insights of Indigenous people prioritizing solving socioeconomic issues as a strategy to mitigate environmental challenges. As a result, the NGOs' agendas do not align with the needs of Indigenous Peruvians. According to Suarez (2014), development organizations impose environmental agendas in Latin American countries despite the opposition of Latin American presidents. Similarly, the testimonials of Indigenous Peruvians support the assertion of NGOs imposing environmental agendas because contrary to NGO reports arguing Indigenous people migrate due to territorial displacement, the interviewees reported moving to Arequipa due to better educational and job opportunities. Additionally, despite NGOs claiming that climate change disproportionately affects Indigenous people, the interviewees mentioned climate change phenomena such as "huaycos" do not affect people living in Indigenous communities and only impact Indigenous migrants motivated to leave Indigenous communities looking for better socioeconomic opportunities in cities. NGOs prioritizing environmental challenges and the testimonial of interviewees prioritizing socioeconomic issues support scholars asserting development organizations impose an environmental agenda on developing countries. Consequently, this study supports more research about the attitudes of Latin American government officials and the perception of target communities on development organizations imposing agendas in Latin America.

Policy Implications

Development policies need to address the interconnectedness of environmental and socioeconomic issues by investing in building small hospitals to subsidize healthcare and by investing in traveling tutors to promote education, as lack of access to basic services reinforces poverty, and climate change disproportionately affects the poor. Policies avoiding addressing this relationship can lead to Indigenous people continuing to be exposed to climate change's negative effects, such as floods, because solving environmental issues will not be a priority, as Indigenous people will focus on addressing their immediate needs such as access to healthcare. According to Mann (2024), poor communities are more likely to suffer the negative consequences of climate change, as these people usually live in regions prone to droughts and floods. In alignment with this literature arguing that poor people are more vulnerable to climate change, the interviewees reported "huaycos" affecting Indigenous migrants residing in peripheral areas of Arequipa near riverbeds. According to them, this vulnerability arises from Indigenous migrants limited economic resources, preventing them from building houses in safer locations. Governments investing in tutoring programs and building small clinics may help Indigenous people because currently, Indigenous Peruvians struggle to access basic services like healthcare and education, and consequently, environmental concerns are not a top priority. Governments investing in tutoring programs and small hospitals to subsidize healthcare will allow individuals to have the social and economic stability to not need to migrate and be exposed to environmental challenges as a result of migration.

Latin American governments and extractive industries should develop long-term, sustainable ways such as recycling water used in mining to preserve the environment while also raising incomes. Developing initiatives should not only prioritize short-term income growth through industrial development but should also address the long-term impacts of environmental depletion by promoting economic progress while simultaneously ensuring environmental protection. According to Hariram et al. (2023), the "take-make-waste" economic model helped build modern society, but this model contributes to overconsumption and ecological damage. Consequently, a shift towards more sustainable economic models is necessary to address environmental crises and tackle growing inequality (Hariram et al., 2023). In alignment with this policy suggestion, some international mining companies are starting to develop sustainable mining techniques by using the water from the drains to purify wastewater through a wastewater treatment system to then recycle this water to use it for processing the minerals (Cerro Verde, 2024). This literature promoting sustainable solutions for mining responds to the needs of the interviewees, as these people reported being concerned about mining polluting Indigenous communities. Sustainable solutions such as recycling water may prevent Indigenous people in Latin America from

paying higher prices for products due to the depletion of natural resources. Therefore, policies promoting sustainable resource projects will prevent Indigenous people from facing more economic challenges, as these people already face poverty.

CONCLUSION

In contrast to NGOs prioritizing environmental challenges, this project found socioeconomic challenges to be the most pressing issue for Indigenous Peruvians. The interviewees prioritize socioeconomic development through the construction of hospitals and schools over projects protecting the environment. According to the interviewees, Indigenous people have difficulties accessing healthcare and education facilities due to the geographic isolation of Indigenous communities. However, some interviewees had positive opinions about mining because despite the industry causes pollution, mining companies pay a fee to promote the economic development of Indigenous communities by building roads, schools, and hospitals and by giving job opportunities to locals. Therefore, this project shows the importance of development organizations working with target communities to avoid making assumptions about the priorities Indigenous people have regarding environmental and socioeconomic issues. Collaborative work between development organizations and Indigenous communities would help better understand the socioeconomic challenges Indigenous individuals from specific communities face. This approach will help design development projects to address socioeconomic challenges as a priority.

REFERENCES

- Cerro Verde. (n.d). *El río Chili vuelve a tener vida* [website]. <https://www.cerroverde.pe/desarrollo-sostenible/mineria-cobre-molibdeno-arequipa-minera-circulo-virtuoso-del-agua-climate-change-and-health-socially-vulnerable-people>
- Del Popolo, F., & Jaspers-Faijer, D. (2014). *Guaranteeing Indigenous people's rights in Latin America: Progress in the past decade and remaining challenges. Summary*. United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. <https://repositorio.cepal.org/items/0a398827-304d-4f74-8008-28f394bf8f58>
- Deruyttere, A. (1997). *Indigenous peoples and sustainable development: The role of the Inter-American Development Bank*. (Working Paper No. IND96-101). Inter-American Development Bank. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18235/0006794>
- De-Sardan, J. P. O. (2008). *Anthropology and development: Understanding contemporary social change*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

- Espino, A. (2023). *¿Es más difícil para los jóvenes de áreas rurales ingresar a una institución de educación superior?: El sistema educativo básico regular rural como política discriminatoria*. Facultad Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. <https://facultad.pucp.edu.pe>
- Giwa, A. (2015). Insider/outsider issues for development researchers from the Global South. *Geography Compass*, 9(6), 316-326. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12219>
- Grant, P. (2019). Minority and Indigenous trends 2019: Focus on climate justice. *Minority Rights Group International*. <https://minorityrights.org/app/uploads/2023/12/mrg-key-trends-report-2019-final-1.pdf>
- Hariram, N. P., Mekha, K. B., Suganthan, V., & Sudhakar, K. (2023). Sustain-alism: An integrated socio-economic-environmental model to address sustainable development and sustainability. *Sustainability*, 15(13), 10682. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151310682>
- Hibbard, M., Lane, M. B., & Rasmussen, K. (2008). The split personality of planning: Indigenous peoples and planning for land and resource management. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 23(2), 136-151. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0885412208322922>
- La pandemia y el centralismo frenan tratamientos a enfermos de cáncer en Perú. (2021, May 14). *France 24*. <https://www.france24.com/es/minuto-a-minuto/20210514-la-pandemia-y-el-centralismo-frenan-tratamientos-a-enfermos-de-c%C3%A1ncer-en-per%C3%BA>
- Lertzman, D. A., & Vredenburg, H. (2005). Indigenous peoples, resource extraction and sustainable development: An ethical approach. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 56, 239-254. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-004-3528-8>
- Mann, M. E. (2024, April 4). *Global Warming*. <https://www.britannica.com/science/globalwarming/Socioeconomic-consequences-of-global-warming>
- Metz, B. E. (2006). *Ch'orti'-Maya survival in eastern Guatemala: indigeneity in transition*. UNM Press.
- Mullings, B. (1999). Insider or outsider, both or neither: Some dilemmas of interviewing in a cross-cultural setting. *Geoforum*, 30(4), 337-350. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-7185\(99\)00025-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-7185(99)00025-1)
- Suárez, L. (2014). Latinoamérica y el desafío de un discurso ambiental propio. *Sociales en Debate UBA Journal*, (7). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62174/sed.3308>
- Thorp, R., Caumartin, C., & Molina, G. (2006). Inequality, ethnicity, political mobilization and political violence in Latin America: The cases of Bolivia, Guatemala and Peru. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 25(4), 453-480. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27733878>
- UNESCO Peru accompanied the voice of Indigenous women in RedLAC 2023 (Cusco - Peru). (2023, November 3). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-peru-accompanied-voice-Indigenous-women-redlac-2023-cusco-peru>

- United Nations. (2011, May 20). *Underdevelopment, poverty of Latin America's Indigenous peoples stem from historic wrongs; strategic means for correction needs 'urgent revision', forum told*. [Press release]. <https://press.un.org/en/2011/hr5058.doc.htm>
- Valdivia, N. (2007). Exclusión, identidad étnica y políticas de inclusión social en el Perú: El caso de la población indígena y la población afrodescendiente. *GRADE*, 603-655. <https://centroderecursos.cultura.pe/sites/default/files/rb/pdf/EXCLUSIoN-IDENTIDAD-eTNICA-Y-POLiTICAS-de-inclusion-social-en-el-Peru.pdf>

Mirror, Mirror, on the Big Screen: North Americanization in Colombia through Film

Ainsley Powell
University of Kansas

This article examines Colombian cultural productions to test the theory of North Americanization through film. The theory of North Americanization stems from the study of how different aspects of international interactions shape national identity and cultural shifts, specifically between North and Latin America. Previous literature investigated different Colombian films and how they do or do not portray Colombian cultural values or norms. The data in this project consists of 10 Colombian films, one from each of the last ten years, all with Colombian directors or production teams. When watching the films, I paid attention to dialogue, behavior, and cinematic decisions reminiscent of North Americanization as defined by previous scholars in the field. The present and missing aspects of North American influence indicate how Colombian filmmakers, and by extension the Colombian population, interact with North American norms and values and identify with them. This article affirms the presence of North Americanization in Colombia and adds to the research on cultural productions as a medium of understanding a population.

Key Words: Colombian Film, North Americanization, Cultural Imperialism



Kansas Undergraduate Journal of International Studies, 2025, 1(1).

<https://journals.ku.edu/kujis>

© 2025 the Authors

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License.

For decades, through Hollywood, the United States has dominated the global film industry, producing many of the world's most popular films. The top 50 grossing films are all produced or co-produced in the United States or with the cooperation of US-American studios. The role of Hollywood in film cannot be overstated and also acts as a symbol for the outreach of US pop culture on a global scale. This influence is particularly evident in the realm of Colombian cinema, where the pervasive impact of North American culture echoes through the frames of local films. Within this cultural exchange, how do Colombian filmmakers navigate the power dynamics at play and portray the nuances of this imperialistic influence on screen?

First, we must investigate the history between the two regions to understand power dynamics. Through the Monroe Doctrine, the United States asserted a presence in Latin America and simultaneously deterred other countries from interfering, stating any outreach to the Americas from other countries would be viewed as a hostile act. While the US insists the presence in Latin America is to assist with economic development and provide military protection, most actions are in the direct interest of the US rather than Latin America. Recently, questions have risen regarding the Monroe Doctrine; Gilderhus (2006) explains how the doctrine provides the US alone with the ability to cooperate with and intervene in Latin America. Since the articulation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, the US government has influenced elections, facilitated military dictatorships, and financed military coups, all supporting the recent argument of the US using the Doctrine to promote personal interests rather than the interests of the Latin American countries (H.R. Con. Res. 943, 2024). The new resolution seeks to end "unilateral coercive economic measures," and over a dozen Republican officials signed on against the resolution to show support for the Monroe Doctrine as tensions with eastern powers increase (H.R. Con. Res. 943, 2024). Due to the Monroe Doctrine, the dominance of North America in Latin America led to cultural hegemony between the two continents. The Monroe Doctrine ideology provides the foundation for the theory of North Americanization, as the policies impacted cultural interactions between North and Latin America.

While the primary effects of the Monroe Doctrine involved trade policies and political interventions, a side effect was the cultural interaction between the Americas. Between the US presence in Latin America and migrants between the two regions, the interactions between cultures began to influence norms. Dennis (2006) explains how migrants, both to and from Colombia, exemplified a form of globalization as they brought about new styles of music and other North American aesthetics. Furthermore, migrants to the US brought back US communication technology, cassettes, and magazines introducing music and other aspects of pop culture, like styles and aesthetics associated with US hip-hop, to Colombia. As the cultures interacted more and more, new art styles with influences from both the US and Colombia emerged, and the normalization of both countries' styles and products al-

tered the popular culture in Colombia (Dennis, 2006). This example shows the framing of the US as the “origin” of the styles and Colombia as the “recipient.” The imposition of US norms, art styles, and products in Colombia through international experiences of migrants and outreach of corporations highlights a power dynamic between the two regions in which the US is the dominant influence.

The reflection of pop culture changes in Colombian film provides further insight into the depth of US presence in the country, as well as the micro-level developments in culture in Colombia as a result of the US’ lasting impression. More recently, studying the arts is an increasingly popular method of understanding the impacts certain actions have on one’s identity. The historical and contextual relevance of different art forms is often bypassed in studying a culture and how different developments impact a country, despite the “accuracy most arts have in depicting the true feelings of a population” (Bakewell & Bright, 2022). The expression of specifically Latin American identities in US films became a topic of discussion as films like *Coco* and *Encanto* rose to popularity, and critics questioned the obligation of the films to accurately reflect the respective identities and cultures (“Disney’s Animated Film,” 2021). Putting aside US intervention, many native Colombian films seek to portray traditional aspects of the culture the producers and directors deem important and relevant (“As Usual, this,” 2023). This research addresses native films, as opposed to films portraying Colombian populations made elsewhere, and the ideas and feelings expressed in these films. Looking past North American representations of Latin American populations and cultures, this project seeks to understand the point of view of the Colombian population rather than that of the US.

This research investigated how the Colombian films reflect the changing identity in Colombia due to the North American influence in Latin American countries. The presence of the US specifically in Latin America created a cultural shift many scholars trace back to the role of the United States during times of change and development – be it social, political, or economic – in Colombia and other Latin American countries. Moreover, the content of one film from each of the last ten years, produced in Colombia or by Colombian production companies, comprises the data—and all have Colombian directors. The content of the films will show whether or not the North Americanization in Colombia is deep enough to be reflected in modern art forms, as well as which aspects of North American presence the Colombian population showcases. The intervention of the US in Latin American politics and economies prompted a shift drastic enough to appear in the artistic expressions, namely films, produced in such countries. The role of films and cinema as reflection of identity makes it a worthwhile medium to study the depth of US’ intervention and prevalence in Colombian politics and culture.

The findings in this study assert Colombian films do showcase North Americanization in regard to some themes, but the theory does have limits

in its application. Colombian productions are likely to portray one or more themes of North Americanization, however, not all aspects of North Americanization appear in the sample. Furthermore, common themes in the films are more related to social rather than political issues. The literature review section will utilize existing discussion to define the theory of North Americanization as well as explain previous studies on some of the films in this analysis. Throughout the research design section, I explain how the films were chosen and the use of thematic coding during the analysis. The findings and analysis include how themes of North Americanization did and did not apply to the films. The discussion ties the findings of this project to the existing literature around the films and whether viewing the productions through the lens of North Americanization was useful or not.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Productions Studies

Literature discussing the artistic expression of social issues often illuminates the similarities between contemporary works and the audience to whom the works appeal. Latin American researchers study how films and other mediums reflect social events and political developments occurring during the time of release. For example, some researchers analyze the content of films and literature through a qualitative frame to show the relevance of a work during different time periods or to provide a simplified explanation of cultural changes throughout historical events (Lanzendoerfer, 2013; Acevedo-Munoz, 2004, p. 40). Additionally, researchers may quantify the appearance of social or cultural taboos in films, such as tobacco use, then evaluate the impact the portrayals have on the audience habits, such as increased use of tobacco (Barrientos-Gutierrez, 2015, p. 2). Scholars and researchers prove films and other art forms are outlets people utilize to reflect social and political developments in Latin America. Therefore, this research studies the connection between native Colombian films and the effects of North Americanization on Colombian culture these films portray, adding more specific research to the scholarship surrounding artistic mediums and political changes due to North Americanization.

Some research investigates specific Colombian films and their relevance to Colombian identity or culture. The analysis of specific films tends to focus more on directors' choices regarding certain scenes included or excluded from films, as well as the social impact the director desires. One study of *Monos* (2019) analyzes the attention paid to sexuality and gender norms in the film and the relevance of this choice in a film about Colombian citizens' disconnect to certain conflicts (Betancourt, 2019; Landes, 2019). Castrión (2019) does a study on the cinematic choices in *El Abrazo de la Serpiente* (2015) in an attempt to determine whether the director effectively subverted the Western lens often applied to Latin American films. The author studies

the use of Amazonian myths, language, and practices in the film to test the hypothesis (Castrillón, 2019; Guerra, 2015). Both *Monos* and *El Abrazo de la Serpiente* are a part of this analysis, and the analysis will affirm or disagree with the arguments made in the former studies. This project will be able to elaborate more on the North American lens these films may have and act as a broader study of similar themes.

Themes Defining North Americanization

The discussion around North American influence, hereby referred to as North Americanization as a theoretical framework, contains arguments regarding neoliberalism in Latin America. Many authors address the role of North America in the introduction of neoliberal ideas, as the ideology is not compatible with traditional culture in many Latin American countries. Buchenau (2022) studies the rise of consumerism and “mass culture” in Latin America after the perceived North Americanization. The author analyzes the history of a department store in Mexico and how the store used US practices as a “model” throughout economic hardships and political developments (Buchenau, 2022). König and Rinke (2022) discuss the effects of market-based and consumer economies through a study of Latin American cultural values and norms; the researchers use the influence of the US on Latin American businesses to explain how consumerism forms the foundation for North Americanization in Latin America. This project seeks to address how relevant the economy is in the films, and whether cultural productions touch on economic aspects of Colombian culture. The analysis of Colombian films also contributes to this discussion by determining if the films showcase consumerism and neoliberalism as the authors discuss or if more traditional economies are common.

Some scholars analyze the role of North Americanization separate from neoliberal ideologies and choose to apply the theory to a more social lens. Researchers have attempted to investigate the North Americanization of gender relations and norms. Stoner (2017) examines how Cuban mass media reflects and influences national identity with respect to Cuba’s geographical position as a “nexus point” between the Americas by showing how the cultures may have collided. This author specifically examines how the arts in Cuba portray women to show the evolution of Cuban identity over time; the analysis showed how portrayals of “the independent woman” alter Cuban identities and approaches to traditional gender norms (Stoner, 2017). Rinke (2022) also addressed how North Americanization influences gender relations through media; his analysis focuses on how the introduction of publicized media containing scandalous women stemmed from the US military involvement in Chile. The author uses different magazine productions from the US and Chile in an attempt to show how the “spillover” from North American media influenced more mass publication of nudity in Chilean media; the author frames this research as “voyeuristic media” to explain how

obsessed Chilean consumers became with sexualized productions (Rinke, 2022). My project utilizes a similar strategy to determine if the sexualization of women in media carries over into Colombian film. Additionally, my research will confirm or deny if film, like other art forms, shows women with agency, independent of their relationships with male characters. How Colombian films portray gender relations and norms will help determine whether these themes are present in other countries' media as well and could affirm or disagree with the previous claims.

Another author approaches North Americanization in Latin America through a more ideological point of view. Their research focuses on working through the frame of the US as a model for modernity. Quiroz (2022) argues that efforts towards modernization in Latin America would include not only economic, social, and cultural modernity, but also religious modernity. After defining religious modernity as a split from the monopoly of the Catholic church in Latin America, the author studies how beliefs south of the Rio Grande alter after interactions with the North American Christian as opposed to the Latin American Catholic. The author uses the interactions to explain how the "US model of the intellectual Christian over the spiritual Catholic" caused a slow evolution to religious modernity; the conclusion declares evolution ends with a return to native cultures and revival of tradition as an indicator of modernity (Quiroz, 2022, p. 111). My research attempts to understand how Colombian films portray Protestant, Catholic, and indigenous religions, and whether cinematic productions are indeed indicative of religious diversification or not. The project will utilize alternative techniques, i.e. film analysis, to test whether the theory of religious diversification as an aspect of North Americanization upholds across platforms, or is only observable in studies with human subjects.

In the same collection, multiple authors note the role of US omnipresence in Latin America, regardless of the focus of the research. Throughout the collection, the most common denominator for North Americanization is US omnipresence, but depending on the author's argument, omnipresence has a different role. One author focuses on the omnipresence through markets and products by examining the impact of the dominance of North American productions in Mexico (Buchenau, 2022). Another author explains US omnipresence as a result of North American desires in regard to "the belief in its own evolutionary cultural superiority, economic supremacy, and the search for geopolitical security" (König & Rinke, 2022). I study the role of the US in the films in both of these regards to ascertain whether the US is present in Colombian cultural productions as predominantly as it is in previous research. Depending on the prevalence of US American norms, products, and characters, this analysis will serve as a cultural study evaluating the validity of claims of US omnipresence in Colombia.

Existing literature researches artistic mediums to analyze and understand national identities, cultural values and norms, and the possible effect

of arts on the audience; this research seeks to utilize the content of contemporary Colombian films to accomplish similar goals. Furthermore, this research aligns with the current literature discussing globalization by studying the influence of North America in cultural productions. The project builds on the literature by evaluating the presence of North American influence in Colombia and assessing whether modern films portray previous scholars' ideas of North Americanization. Analyzing the influence of North America in Colombian cinema and, by extension, Colombian culture provides further understanding of the dynamics of cultural imperialism and hegemony. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates how dominant cultures exert influence over marginalized ones, shaping narratives, values, and identities.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The data in this project consisted of ten movies, one from each of the last ten years. Because the project studies the reflection of North Americanization in Colombian films, any additional types of data would confuse the results. All of the films were either Colombian-produced or co-produced; if a film was co-produced, the director or production crew had to be Colombian to include the film in the analysis. The project uses the dialogue and images of the films to form the data. The dataset is tailored to investigate the phenomenon of North Americanization within the realm of Colombian cinema. Films are a form of cultural expression and allow the project to directly engage with a primary source to identify cross-cultural influences.

Using *The Numbers* (<https://www.the-numbers.com/Colombia/movies>) and the International Movie Database (IMDb) (<https://www.imdb.com>), I found the top-grossing movie from each of the last ten years. Both sites were necessary in case the top-grossing movie was unavailable to stream in the US. Based on *The Numbers* reports, if the two top-grossing films were unavailable, I used IMDb to determine the highest-rated film in Colombia; the research is most effective when applied to popular films. Throughout the project, these films are referred to in shorthand for brevity (see Table 1). Finally, I watched, translated, and transcribed sections of the films portraying social or political themes. The use of the top-grossing or top-rated film each year ensures the project addresses either well-liked or often-watched Colombian produced films. Additionally, the method ensures the movies are chosen on merit alone, and not to support an affirmative or negative argument regarding the North Americanization in Colombian film.

The first time I watched each film, I marked timestamps to go back and transcribe particular sections based on the portrayal of the predetermined social or political issues. This lens was broad enough to ensure I transcribed applicable excerpts of the movie but narrow enough to avoid transcribing the entire movie. Throughout the dialogue, I paid attention to the characters' attitudes and actions in these scenes and marked time stamps. The social

Film	Shorthand
Manos Sucias (Wladyka, 2014)	Sucias
El Abrazo de la Serpiente (Guerra, 2015)	Serpiente
Pariente (Gaona, 2016)	Pariente
Demonios tus Ojos (Aguilera, 2017)	Demonios
Pajaros de Verano (Guerra and Gallega, 2018)	Verano
Monos (Landes, 2019)	Monos
El Olvido que Seremos (Trueba, 2020)	Olvido
El Paseo 6 (Triana, 2021)	Paseo
Los Reyes del Mundo (Ortega, 2022)	Reyes
Quicksand (Béltran, 2023)	Quicksand

Table 1

issues were: gender norms, family dynamics, spending habits, socioeconomic standings, and violent behavior. The same process applied to transcribing predetermined political issues, which were: conflicts/wars, use of and interaction with hard drugs, alcohol use, and economic systems and markets. Then, I restarted the movies and transcribed every recorded time stamp while translating the Spanish to English; if the Spanish was unclear, I first used subtitles to assist, then flagged and checked those sections with a native Spanish-speaker to ensure accuracy. Each transcription document included an overview of the storyline, the predominant theme of the movie, and tone indicators and scene descriptions within the excerpts. The transcriptions facilitated a systematic analysis highlighting the recurring themes in the dialogue while assessing the attitude of the speaker. Moreover, keeping the original transcriptions broad allowed the project to address North Americanization as a whole rather than a specific topic like Gender Relations or neoliberalism.

The analysis consisted of multiple rounds of thematic coding with the codes becoming narrower throughout. Thematic coding highlighted the most recurring dialogue and behaviors in the films. The first round of coding occurred when I watched the movies and marked down time stamps of scenes portraying those social or political issues. The second round was focused on the themes of North Americanization – Gender Relations, US omnipresence, neoliberalism, and Ideological Diversification – pulled from articles in König and Rinke’s (2022) collection “North Americanization of Latin America.” After this round of coding, I uncovered recurring issues: Gender Relations became themes like “marriage norms” and “sexualization of women,” US Omnipresence became “reference to US” and “military interference,” and neoliberalism was “consumerism” and “market-based economy.” Ideologi-

cal Diversification, being the least expansive, did not have any other codes. Thematic coding illuminated the most commonly portrayed themes of North Americanization in Colombian films. Juxtaposing the content of the films with issues and themes in König and Rinke’s (2022) collection highlighted the aspects of North Americanization Colombian cultural productions reflect more than others.

ANALYSIS

US Omnipresence

North Americanization in Colombian film is present in the form of common language and sayings from the US. While the US and Colombia do share some cultural traits, using English in films is disruptive in the otherwise Colombian contexts. The most common examples are the films’ use of English in dialogue to varying degrees (see Table 2). English is the main dialogue in *Quicksand* due to the US co-production of the film with Colombia, but the other films use it in few conversations or in passing. In *Paseo* (0:34:50), English is shown in the form of signs on a beach in San Andrés (see Appendix 2, Image 1). The use of English in Colombian cinema exemplifies the process of North Americanization, disrupting traditional contexts while also showing how Colombian cultural productions reflect North American cultural hegemony. English is a marker and symbol of US-American norms and values in Colombia and could potentially result in the marginalization of Colombian cultural expressions and identities in Colombian cinema.

Film	English Use	Frequency
<i>Sucias</i>	No	-
<i>Serpiente</i>	Yes	Rarely
<i>Pariente</i>	No	-
<i>Demonios</i>	Yes	Occasionally
<i>Verano</i>	Yes	Rarely
<i>Monos</i>	Yes	Rarely
<i>Paseo</i>	Yes	Rarely
<i>Reyes</i>	No	-
<i>Quicksand</i>	Yes	Often

Table 2

Colombian films are apt to portray certain products from the US more so than products of any other country. The most common US products in the films were alcohol, vehicles, and technology. For example, throughout *Verano*, the characters drive almost exclusively Ford pickups, and the brand is visible a majority of the times a vehicle is on the screen; similarly,

a leading character in *Olvido* drives a Plymouth Coupe – another American-made vehicle. In *Demonios*, the main character is shown with a variety of American products including Jack Daniel's brand whiskey, a Google phone, and a MacBook. While in some films the characters used nondescript social media to avoid brand names, *Quicksand* explicitly names WhatsApp and shows the lead using an iPhone and MacBook. US Omnipresence is one of the most explicit forms of North Americanization, therefore the presence of US products in films is a prime example of the process. These instances reflect a cultural preference and normalization of North American consumption patterns within Colombian society, further reinforcing the strength of North American cultural influence.

When brands are present in the films, they are almost exclusively American products, but a majority of the films avoid recognizable brands, eliminating a large aspect of the otherwise omnipresence of US products. Whether paid product placement, sponsorships, or copyright laws prevent the use of certain brands, the erasure of brand names eliminates demonstrations of US Omnipresence in Colombian films. During editing, the films *Paseo*, *Monos*, *Reyes*, *Pariente*, and *Sucias* scrub all clothing brands, technology brands, and car brands. Additionally, In *Serpiente*, despite the role of the US in the plot, the film does not utilize any of the previously mentioned products. Even though six out of the ten films do not have recognizable brands, the presence of widely known US brands in four popular films confirms the involvement of the US with Colombia enough to create a presence in the film industry. The primary visible brands belonging to US companies and lack of visible brands from elsewhere indicates how the relationship between the US and Colombia may limit the outreach of Colombia to products from other nations, as the theory of North Americanization argues.

Ideological Diversification

A subtler manifestation of the US influence in the films is depicted in the portrayal of political discourse aspiring to emulate American norms. The US encourages a process of modernization causing Latin American cultures to shift away from the predominant Catholic culture. The films illuminate this aspect of North Americanization through depictions of religious and educational diversification from previously taught norms and how the public receives the changes. In *Olvido*, the discourse around new ideas and inventions motivates the main plot of the movie, and one character directly criticizes the lack of Colombian progress in medicine in comparison to the US. This film, based on a true story, shows the main character's father as a doctor, philanthropist, and professor trying to encourage Colombian authorities to utilize a new medicine to fight a disease sweeping across impoverished communities, often voicing the argument of the US adopting the vaccine months ago. The doctor impresses ideas on his son and students, despite the Catholic upbringing of the children, causing the son to criticize the hired nun's

teachings and follow in the footsteps of and idolize his father (see Table 3). The comparison to progress in the US is a lesser example of North Americanization in this case. The encouragement away from the traditional teachings, however, highlights Ideological Diversification, an indicator of North Americanization.

Ideological Diversification in <i>Olvido</i>
Nun: When you pray, you must pray consciously, not like you are reciting a list. Héctor: Does my dad pray at night? I know he doesn't. Nun: He doesn't. That's why he will go to hell when he dies. Héctor: [...] I'll never pray before bed again. (0:11:36)
Silvia: It's astounding, the US will not authorize the vaccines which have been used for many months in the US. Héctor Sr: We're always way behind, it's horrible! (0:21:48)
Héctor (to the nun): What if people have been good but they don't go to church, will they still go to hell? Sol: He doesn't want to go to church. Nun: He will go, or I'll tell his mom, the archbishop's niece! (0:29:15).
Héctor Sr: This vaccine could put and end to polio all over the world, we just have to prove it works. [...] No one has tried it yet. But, after it is proven, we can start a national program. (he prepares a shot and gives it to his son, who does not protest and helps)

Table 3

A majority of Colombian films attempt to portray the effects of religious diversification – the split from the forced Catholic teachings back into indigenous cultures or protestant religions – through characters' interactions with a variety of cultural influences. Most predominantly, interactions with US-Americans cause the shifts in the films. *Verano* showcases these developments the most clearly, first showing members of an indigenous tribe interacting with US-Americans from the Peace Corps and then later with US-Americans during a drug trade (see Appendix 2, Image 2). The leads – initially in the Wayuu tribe – begin to develop a taste for the profits of the drug trade and start to exhibit a lifestyle similar to the US-Americans involved in the interactions, distancing themselves from the traditional beliefs of the Wayuu tribe. The film *Serpiente* shows how Catholic colonizers initially converted indigenous tribes through both physical and psychological torture; the production shows the conversion in a negative light with a US-American observer. These portrayals advocate for a return to the indigenous religions

and cultures and exemplify the religious diversification processes in Colombian films, both through the introduction of US-American characters. The portrayals of diversification show interactions between indigenous cultures, Protestant religions, atheism, and Catholicism in Colombian films, emphasizing the influence of interactions with US-Americans as the catalyst for change.

Many of the films portray the continuance of Catholic beliefs or no religion at all; the difference appears to lie mostly in the genre of the movie to determine whether or not religious undertones affect the plot or intended reception of the movie. In addition to including no indications of diversification, the same films also tended to lack US-American characters, but not in all cases. Of the sample, six films did not portray religious or cultural diversification; these six films, despite covering a diverse range of genres, did not fall into the category of historical documentary films, the genre of the remaining four (see Table 4). *Demonios*, *Pariente*, *Reyes* and *Paseo* show contemporary and/or accurate Colombian culture throughout the plot with little or no influence from the US in respect to religious or cultural beliefs. While the majority of films within the sample do not explicitly endorse the notion of US-American influence on religious and cultural diversification, they are not all free from US influence in other areas. The depiction of religious and cultural diversification might be more commonly found in particular genres rather than being consistently depicted across all cinematic narratives, yet the theory of North Americanization through ideological diversification remains applicable when the films explore such diversification.

Film	Genre
<i>Sucias</i>	Drama, Suspense, Thriller, Mystery
<i>Serpiente</i>	Horror, Action, Drama, History, Documentary
<i>Pariente</i>	Western, Drama, Suspense, Thriller
<i>Demonios</i>	Romance, Drama, Suspense, Thriller
<i>Verano</i>	Documentary, History, Western, Drama, Crime
<i>Monos</i>	War Drama
<i>Olvido</i>	History, Documentary, Melodrama
<i>Paseo</i>	Comedy
<i>Reyes</i>	Action, Adventure, Drama
<i>Quicksand</i>	Action, Thriller, Romance

Table 4

The problems and conflicts in some of the movies stemmed directly from the United States. Sometimes, the US is mentioned in passing as a reason for something happening, but other times, the effect of the US involvement in Colombia is directly involved in the plot of the film. In Landes' *Monos*, the main characters, a group of young guerrilla soldiers, are in a conflict with the US and the commanding officer has charged the group to keep captive a US-American engineer called "Doctora." The presence of Doctora is a joke among the young adults, and the group mocks the woman as she records videos as proof of life; even after the US military invades the camp – presumably in search of Doctora – the group attempts to maintain control of the engineer throughout an expedition through the jungle. A less concrete example is present in *Olvido* (0:46:06 and 2:01:23); the US entered the Cold War and "claimed" Latin American countries and tried to enforce capitalism over communism, and throughout the plot of the film, Héctor Abad Gomez tries to help impoverished communities even as he is labeled a communist and becomes a victim of slander and eventually assassination. These examples illustrate the United States' role in shaping the narrative and conflicts in Colombian cinema, further supporting the argument of North American lenses in Colombian films and by extension, Colombian culture. Colombian films imply that the influence of US' ideas is comparable to that of US-American characters, with both indicating a powerful influence of North Americanization in Colombian cinema.

Gender Relations

The introduction of women as objects of sexual desire in mass-produced Latin American media occurred first in Chile and Cuba through magazines the US military introduced to the public; now, Colombian films are consistent in how they portray women as people with agency as well as objects of sexual desire. The way women live, act, dress, and speak factor into how the male characters behave around different women. One explicit example is in *Verano* (0:55:50 and 1:29:08); the characters, initially in the Wayuu tribe – which holds women in place of honor – begin to exhibit more sexual behaviors towards women after interacting with US-Americans in a narco-trafficking scheme. *Paseo* revolves around the sexual willingness of all the different women, and how the women respond to the men's expectations; throughout the film, the male interest of the film completely ignores the main character whenever a more sexually available woman enters the scene (see Appendix 2, Image 3). *Paseo* (0:35:37) often shows the character losing interest until a woman begins to express her sexuality; this scene also shows a conversation between two women advocating for taking control over their sexuality. US magazines facilitated the introduction of women as objects of sexual desire in Latin American media according to the theory of North Americanization, and Colombian films confirm women are sexualized in modern media. Additionally, the agency given to women to act independently of male counterparts is an indicator of North Americanization. Colombian cinema's consistent portrayal of women as both individuals with agency and objects of desire reflects the enduring impact of the cultural shift.

In addition to the portrayal of women, in the last 10 years, characters in Colombian films showcase voyeuristic tendencies – the public showing or consumption of sexual scenes or nudity – in modern media. The commodification of sexual scenes or nudity is obvious in the films, as many of the films contain at least one example of these voyeuristic tendencies. One part of the voyeuristic tendencies is the previous mention of the films' use of nudity to draw attention to women, as *Paseo* portrays (see Appendix 2, Image 3). Furthermore, the characters in *Monos* provide an example through scenes showing characters' observation of the sexual interactions between other people in the group (see Appendix 2, Image 4). Half of the films portraying sexual implications did so completely separate from the plot (see Table 5). Using sex to elicit a reaction from the audience rather than to forward the plot or develop a character shows the voyeuristic tendencies of the industry and has deeper implications regarding Colombian culture outside of film and the role of North Americanization in the development. Although all portrayals of voyeuristic tendencies would support the argument of North Americanization, the use of sexual implications when they are not essential to the plot of the film emphasizes how thoroughly the commodification of sexual portrayals infiltrates Colombian cinema.

Film	Sex or Sexual Implications	Utilized as Plot Device
<i>Sucias</i>	Erotic dancing, discussion of sexual acts	No
<i>Serpiente</i>	Sexual assault, nudity, discussion of sexual acts	No
<i>Pariente</i>	Discussion of sexual acts	No
<i>Demonios</i>	Sex, nudity, discussion of sexual acts	Yes
<i>Verano</i>	Sex, nudity, discussion of sexual acts	No
<i>Monos</i>	Discussion of sexual acts, voyeurism	Yes
<i>Olvido</i>	Sex, nudity, discussion of sexual acts	Yes
<i>Paseo</i>	Discussion of sexual acts, voyeurism, sexual acts	Yes
<i>Reyes</i>	NA	-
<i>Quicksand</i>	NA	-

Table 5

Colombian-produced movies also exhibit voyeuristic tendencies in the grand scheme of production and writing, utilizing sex as a metaphor, plot device, or to show a sense of otherness. This goes deeper than surface-level portrayals of sexual scenes or nudity without any obvious meaning, as the sexual drive and motives are essential for the plot in many popular films. Of the ten films, a majority portray or imply sexual scenes and nudity, and some use sex as a plot device as opposed to a seemingly meaningless portrayal (see Table 5). Sex and sexual desire drive the plot of one of the films, *Demonios*, and shows the protagonist watching his half-sister's private life through a camera in her room. Furthermore, in *Paseo* (0:08:40), the conflict is based around a father trying to protect his daughter after overhearing a young man express plans to sleep with the girl to record and post the video. The voyeuristic tendencies of mass productions is an example of North Americanization through gender relations and norms. The theory of North Americanization argues Latin American societies accepted the original portrayals of sexuality in media so long as they represented the "otherness" of North American women, and the effects of this allowance have now worked their way into modern Colombian cultural productions.

The films across genres portrayed similar household dynamics; men had the power and control of the household whereas women were left in charge

of children, a sentiment present in interactions between husbands and wives and the lack of any women with jobs in the films, with only one exception. In respect to relationship norms, North Americanization seems to have little influence in Colombian cinema. This example, however, focuses exclusively on relationships and marital norms and does not disqualify or disprove any other exhibitions of North Americanization in regard to Gender Relations or other areas of discussion, but rather exists in spite of other implications.

The roles of men and women in relationships and marriages are consistent throughout popular Colombian films, often showing men try first to win over a woman, then become the head of the household. The depictions of relationships and marital expectations fall more into the Catholic influence from Spanish colonization than North Americanization. Examples of the expectations of each gender in a relationship are most prevalent in *Quicksand*, *Pariente*, and *Verano*; all of these movies contain direct mentions of a man's role in courting a woman and maintaining livelihood, and the last goes in-sofar as to show why a woman expects a man to put in effort (see Table 6).

Film	Quote
<i>Pariente</i> 00:11:30	Alfonso: "Are you planning to serenade my granddaughter?" Willington: "That's the plan. I'm going to win her back."
<i>Verano</i> 00:08:03	Zaida's father: "You know her dowry, you do not have the means to provide for my Zaida." Rapayet (pursuing Zaida): "I will return. With all of it."
<i>Verano</i> 00:13:55	Zaida's mother: "Do you know why I'm so respected? Why we demand this much? [...] Because we are capable of anything for our family, I guard it. Even if you get the dowry, the spirits warn me of you. Rapayet: I will protect her, I can, and I will return with the full dowry."
<i>Quicksand</i> 01:02:43	Sofia (to her husband): "I was top of our class, first to be published. Then I stopped. I was doing the right thing. I still believe that. I wanted to be around for the kids."

Table 6

Neoliberalism and Consumerism

Colombian films present, whether briefly or as a drive for a plot, the desire for wealth and preference towards a market-based economy opposed to the traditional economies of indigenous tribes. Most traditional economies are centered around the family and tribe, and trade of commodities is the

barter for most anything, rather than currency, a sentiment Colombian films address and disprove often. *Verano* highlights the market drive alongside the religious separation; while the main characters separate from the religion of the Wayuu tribe, they are subsequently advocating for and utilizing the profits of the drug trade to alter the economic system of the tribe. The tribe in *Verano* remains adamant against these actions, but the interference of the US-Americans in the lives of the main characters and dedication to trafficking to achieve wealth interferes with the lives of all the tribe members, not just the leads pursuing wealth. The difference between the characters' lifestyle as portrayed in the beginning of the film versus the end is dependent on the adaptation to market-based preferences and showcases the effects of a consumerist mindset in contrast to the indigenous systems (see Appendix 2, Images 5 and 6). This example especially highlights the role of US-Americans in directing a shift towards a market-based economy and symbolizes how neoliberalism has led to the diminishment of traditional economies of indigenous tribes in Colombia. The depictions provide evidence of how Colombian films imply a preference towards a market-based economy, aligning with the broader concept of North Americanization, as neoliberalism is a strong indicator of the influence.

Another theme skewing towards neoliberal ideals was the portrayal of wealth as the "key" to happiness. The films sometimes utilize economic success to motivate characters and drive the plot. In *Reyes*, a group of young boys are on an adventure to reclaim land trying to escape a life in poverty; the boys believe reclaiming the land will bring them comfort and wealth, and – true or not – go through hardships and life-or-death situations just on the dream of attaining a form of wealth or currency. The drive for wealth via drug trafficking is also present in *Sucias*; two of the characters take a risky job in order to receive a large cash sum for the drugs, and believe the money will allow them to move past traumatic occurrences in the past, further portraying money as a cure-all for any problems. By depicting wealth as the path to happiness, these films reflect the pervasive influence of neoliberal ideas originating from North America on Colombian cultural values. The cinematic representations not only mirror the neoliberal ethos North America encourages, but also contribute to its normalization within Colombian culture.

Unless the plot of the film revolved around attaining, chasing, or handling wealth, neoliberal and consumerist ideologies were not overtly present. Many films did not address or portray wealth in any form, choosing to ignore the role of economic factors in overall plots; one film even advocates *against* the pursuit of riches. Despite the luxurious lifestyle and vacation in *Paseo*, and the obvious wealth of the family in *Olvido*, neither of these films portrayed the characters as desiring wealth and did not focus on the economy or economic expectations in any form. *Monos*, *Demonios*, *Pariente*, and *Quicksand* do not utilize any drive or relevance of currency throughout interactions, and characters are not rich or poor; currency is not a factor in the

universe of the films, even if characters have jobs. *Verano* presents both sides of the argument, and while one set of characters is driven by wealth, another set – the Wayuu tribe – directly tries to steer the group away from consumerist ideas and rely on the traditional customs and way of life, and this side is portrayed as the “positive” and “heroic” side. Even though many films do not explicitly point out neoliberal and consumerist ideologies, they can be present in Colombian films in subtle or implicit ways. The depiction of certain lifestyles, aspirations, or values in characters still reflect underlying neoliberal or consumerist ideals, which are primary traits of North Americanization.

The highest rated and grossing film highlights how North American ideals and attachments to materialistic objects are not “normal” and creates a state of “incompatibility” between North Americans and tribes in the Colombian Amazon. The portrayal of a North American in the movie is subsequent to the neoliberal and consumerist ideologies the character embodies. *Serpiente* shows one man in two different times, both times the Amazonian man is assisting white explorers—one German and one US-American—in a search for a plant to heal the explorers’ illnesses. The film is a tribute to the loss of cultures in the Colombian Amazon; in two separate scenes – once with each explorer – Karamakate, the Amazonian “guide,” addresses the explorers’ attachment and dependence to objects like compasses, photographs, and the rest of the objects in their bags. The objects become a hindrance to the explorers’ survival, as the boat is weighed down, and still the explorers hesitate to get rid of any material possessions. Showing the consumerist traits of the explorers in a tribute to native Colombian-Amazon cultures highlights how the incompatibility between the two regions permeates into society. Even while portraying the direct opposite of North Americanization in the actual plot of the film, the role of North America in the creation and messages of the film are apparent.

The films emphasize neoliberalism and consumerism in tandem with the drug trafficking in Colombia. Narcotrafficking is often portrayed as the only thing happening in Colombia in American media, and the portrayal of similar themes in contemporary Colombian cinema indicates a North American lens may apply to certain aspects of Colombian film. Of the films focusing on wealth as a plot device – *Reyes*, *Verano*, and *Sucias* – two, *Verano* and *Sucias*, portray the only means of achieving wealth as being through the drug trade. The drug market is

explicitly due to US-Americans’ presence or desire to partake in narcotrafficking in *Verano*. *Sucias*, however, does not portray any North American characters, but still utilizes narcotrafficking as the only “economy” in Colombia, as the film shows very few other aspects of life for the characters. The portrayal of narcotrafficking as the only profitable “job” in two of the three films with a plot revolving around wealth indicates a more North

American lens was applied to the production of the films, even aside from the role of North America in the content of the films. North Americanization goes deeper into the cultural values of Colombia in this example, as the North American perspective penetrates the production of the films and marginalizes other ways of achieving wealth in Colombia.

DISCUSSION

Socio-Political Reflections in Film

The project reveals how Colombian filmmakers perceive and present themselves on a global platform. Viewing film as not only a means of entertainment but also communication allows the project to investigate the Colombian perspective in different aspects of national identity. Much like Lanzendoerfer's (2013) study of *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Colombian films often seek to address different aspects of Colombian history and cultural developments, such as the themes in *Verano*, to produce something representative of national identity. In a study of the film *Monos*, Betancourt (2019) explains how the film seeks to remain close to the characters to show how the population felt a disconnect with the conflict; my research indicated a similar idea, as the characters do not take the conflict seriously until soldiers invade the camp. Furthermore, the film "does away" with historical or political anchors to further the lack of connection to a cause, showing the kids hardly knowing or caring about what they supposedly "believe in" (Betancourt, 2019). The addition of this project to existing research is a broader study of cultural artifacts with an applied theory, rather than a study of a single work in a general context. Additionally, this project delves more into the causes and effects of cultural hegemony, rather than an informative study on a single work's impact.

The connection between the films in this project and the debate around the introduction of neoliberalism in Latin America underscores the potency of film as a medium for portraying real-world socio-political issues. The project illustrates how films address socio-political developments from the Colombian perspective. For example, my analysis of *Serpiente* aligns with the literature critiquing neoliberal influences in Latin America due to the materialistic attachments of the explorers. This film in particular is a tribute to the indigenous cultures in the Amazon, and the fictional approach to a true story allows Guerra to reflect indigenous sentiments without silencing the indigenous voice (Castrillón, 2019). My research revealed *Serpiente* serves as a critique of neoliberal ideas, and, while serving as a case study in this sense, highlights the notion of incompatibility between the two cultures, as discussed in the literature. This paper affirms the arguments stating neoliberalism has become a prominent topic in Colombia and would likely apply to other Latin American countries as well, as the film analyses reflect ideas of neoliberalism often. Furthermore, this project highlights the effects of neoliber-

eralism on indigenous cultures to the extent that contemporary productions reflect the themes of both neoliberal and consumerist ideas.

Indigenous Agency in Productions

Applying the lens of North Americanization to the films highlights the common use of North American cultural norms and values in Colombian cinema. The theory explains why certain parts of North American culture, such as language, products, and practices may be present in the films. In doing so, the films show power dynamics as they include more North American ideals than not. König and Rinke (2022) argue North Americanization is “understood and criticized as part of U.S. economic and cultural expansion.” So, the appeal of wealth in *Manos Sucias*, *Verano*, and *Los Reyes del Mundo* in this study all showcase North Americanization via the portrayal of a neoliberal ethos as a result of this expansion. Furthermore, the authors highlight the inequality of power relations throughout the history of interactions between North and Latin America and show North American norms and values in the films to support this argument (König & Rinke, 2022). In this regard, North Americanization explains the presence of certain norms and ideologies in Colombian films. The films’ use of North American values, intentional or unintentional, explain the power dynamics between the two regions, as the films portray North American economic and political values more than traditional Colombian values.

The portrayals of one theme as being more common than another or vice versa shows the parts of North Americanization the Colombian population appears to identify more with. In other words, the lens of North Americanization, while proving useful in some respects, maintained limitations in application to the films. For example, the literature surrounding North Americanization highlights death and religious rituals as a very important aspect of North Americanization, stating “mortuary practices” in Latin America – specifically Mexico – are reminiscent of those in North America (Lomnitz, 2022). However, my research revealed death is not mentioned much in the films and is not a reflection of North American practices the one time a film touches on death and the afterlife. By showing certain aspects of North Americanization more often than others, Colombian films illuminate how the Colombian population identifies with North Americanization. Even if an aspect of North Americanization is more present in real life, the fictitious frame of the films shows certain aspects of North Americanization are more likely to influence Colombian filmmakers than others.

Despite the influence of North Americanization, the analysis reveals moments of resistance and agency within Colombian cinema. By examining how filmmakers challenge North American culture norms spreading in Colombia, this project indicates Colombian culture perseveres through the “domination” of North American culture. While the films did portray an abundance of examples of North Americanization, some also tried to

preserve traditional identities and beliefs (Guerra & Gallega, 2018; Guerra, 2015). In a discussion over how North Americanization has interrupted the matriarchal communities in many Latin American countries, Stoner (2017) highlights the ways in which Cubans attempted to subvert North American influence but were still subject to identify in comparison to the US, rather than as a separate entity. This article and the films in my study, specifically *Verano*, both contain themes of attempting to separate national identity and cultures from North American influence but finding North American influence too pervasive in a quest to “push capitalism” (Stoner, 2017). North Americanization both perfectly encompasses why North American influence is so prominent in Latin America and why indigenous cultures seek to subvert the imposed hegemony. The theory, however, does not account for the agency of indigenous and native cultures nor the perseverance of traditional values in cultural productions.

CONCLUSION

Colombian films consistently portray themes of North Americanization, but not every aspect of the theory is observable in the films. Examining films from Colombian filmmakers reveals North American lenses, North American products, and North American ideologies are often present across genres and that those themes are more prevalent than others. The behaviors and dialogue of the characters in the films were merely one aspect of North Americanization, whether the example is characters talking in English, discussing US-American habits, or interacting with US-American characters. Some aspects of North Americanization are apparent in the pictures and themes of the films; wealth and idealization of North American culture or focus on North American conflicts are the most common examples of visual portrayals of the theory. The presence of North American influence in Colombian films highlights the depth of the impact of North Americanization in Colombian culture. Understanding this power dynamic between the two regions assists in comprehending how Colombian filmmakers depict and define themselves, as the cultural hegemony shapes national identity.

REFERENCES

- Acevedo-Munoz, E. (2004). Sex, Class, and Mexico in Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también*. *Film and History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies*, 34.1, 39-48.
- Aguilera, P. (Director). (2017). *Demonios tus ojos* [Film]. Ciudad Lunar Producciones.
- “As Usual, this December 25th, El Paseo 7 Premiered.” (2023, December 25). *CE Noticias Financieras English*.

- Barrientos-Guntierrez, I. et. al. (2015) Comparison of Tobacco and Alcohol Use in Films Produced in Europe, Latin America, and the United States. *University of South Carolina: Faculty Publications*, 15(1096), 1-7.
- Beltrán, A. (Director). (2023). *Quicksand* [Film]. Dawn's Light and Elemental Stories.
- Betancourt. (2019). Alejandro Landes's *Monos* and the Once and Future Colombian War Film. *Film Quarterly*, 73(1), 26–32.
- Bright, B. & Bakewell, L. (2022). *Looking High and Low: Art and Cultural Identity*. University of Arizona Press.
- Buchenau, J. (2022). Marketing 'Necessities': The casa boker and the emergence of the department store in fin-de-siècle Mexico City. In H.J. König & S. Rinke. (Eds.), *North Americanization in Latin America? Culture, Gender, and Nation in the Americas*. (pp. 89-108). Wissenschaftlicher Beirat.
- Castrillón, C. (2019). La sensatez del conocimiento: saber, poscolonialidad y crítica ambiental en *El abrazo de la serpiente* de Ciro Guerra. *Revista canadiense de estudios hispánicos*, 43(3), 579.
- Dennis, C. (2006). Afro-Colombian Hip-Hop: Globalization, Popular Music, and Ethnic Identities. *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, 25(1), 271-295.
- "Disney's animated film "Enchantment" showcases Colombian culture." (2021, November 25). *CE Noticias Financieras English*.
- Expressing the sense of US Congress to Annul the Monroe Doctrine, H. Res. 943, 118th Cong. (2024).
- Gaona, I. (Director). (2016). *Pariente* [Film]. La Banda del Carro Rojo Producciones.
- Gilderhus, M. T. (2006). The Monroe Doctrine: Meanings and Implications. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 36(1), 5-16.
- Guerra, C. (Director). (2015). *El abrazo de la serpiente* [Film]. Ciudad Lunar Producciones.
- Guerra, C & Gallega, C. (Directors). (2018). *Pájaros de Verano* [Film]. Ciudad Lunar Producciones.
- König, H., & Rinke, S. (2022). *North Americanization of Latin America? Culture, Gender, and Nation in the Americas*. Wissenschaftliche Beirat.
- Landes, A. (Director). (2019). *Monos* [Film]. Campo Cine.
- Lanzendoerfer, T. (2013). The Marvelous History of the Dominican Republic in Junot Díaz's "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao." *Melus*, 38(2), 127-142.
- Lomnitz, C. (2022). "Americanization" and Mortuary Ritual in Greater Mexico. In H.J. König & S. Rinke. (Eds.), *North Americanization in Latin America? Culture, Gender, and Nation in the Americas*. (pp. 69-85). Wissenschaftlicher Beirat.
- Ortega, L.(Director). (2022). *Los reyes del mundo* [Film]. Ciudad Lunar Producciones & Selva Cine.

- Quiroz, L. (2022). The American Way of Afterlife: Religious Convictions and Local Cultures in Transterritorial Communities North and South of the Rio Grande. *North Americanization of Latin America: Culture, Gender, and Nation in the Americas*, 109-125.
- Rinke, S. (2022). Voyeuristic Exoticism: The multiple uses of the image of U.S. women in Chile. In H.J. König & S. Rinke. (Eds.), *North Americanization in Latin America? Culture, Gender, and Nation in the Americas*. (pp. 159-188). Wissenschaftlicher Beirat.
- Stoner, K. (2017). Beauty, National Identity, and Cuban Interface with the United States: Journal depictions of elite nationalism between 1910 and 1950. In H.J. König & S. Rinke. (Eds.), *North Americanization in Latin America? Culture, Gender, and Nation in the Americas*. (pp. 129-171). Wissenschaftlicher Beirat.
- Triana, R. (Director). (2021). *El Paseo 6* [Film]. Dago Garcia Productions & Caracol Television.
- Trueba, F. (Director). (2020). *El olvido que seremos* [Film]. Caracol Television.
- Wladyka, J. (Director). (2014). *Manos sucias* [Film]. Márcia Nunes & Elena Greenlee.

APPENDIX



Image 1 (Triana, 2021, *El Paseo* 6, Netflix, 0:34:50)



Image 2 (Guerra & Gallega, 2018, *Pájaros de Verano*, Amazon Prime Video, 0:20:58 and 0:42:02)



Image 3 (Triana, 2021, *El Paseo* 6, 0:31:39)



Image 4 (Landes, 2019, *Monos*, Max, 0:14:36)



Image 5 (Guerra and Gallega, 2018, *Pájaros de Verano*, Amazon Prim Video, 0:31:04)



Image 6 (Guerra and Gallega, 2018, *Pájaros de Verano*, 01:18:42)

Silence on Xinjiang: Freedom of Expression on Chinese Social Media

Keira Dobbs
University of Kansas

This research investigates whether Chinese netizens possess the freedom to express political opinions, particularly opinions that disagree with the Chinese state media narrative on controversial news, due to the cybersecurity policies in place since President Xi Jinping came into power in 2012. Previous literature notes how countries, with either democratic or authoritarian government models, have used fears of fake news to silence political commentary opposing the government-curated view. Literature also observes the rise of self-censorship among netizens in response to government threats of punishment for violating censorship regulations. To discover the state of the global media narrative and the Chinese state media narrative, this research found patterns in topics and framing of articles from Chinese state-supported news agencies and independent global news agencies to represent each narrative. Using these narrative frames, this research thematically coded hundreds of social media posts from the Chinese social media site Weibo and the global social media site Twitter posted between 2012 and 2022 to determine which posts align with which narrative and if politics could be discussed freely on Chinese social media in comparison to global social media. This research project predicted netizens on Chinese social media would self-censor political opinions opposing the Chinese state media narrative to avoid punishment. However, the overwhelming lack of political discussion on Weibo made the reason behind the lack of data, either censorship or self-censorship, difficult to determine. Analyzing why netizens on Chinese social media cannot or do not discuss controversial political topics on Weibo can aid in the creation of new policies meant to reduce censorship in China and increase freedom of expression.

Key words: Social media, China, Xinjiang



Kansas Undergraduate Journal of International Studies, 2025, 1(1).

<https://journals.ku.edu/kujis>

© 2025 the Authors

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License.

Imagine a Chinese citizen hears about recent religious discrimination in Xinjiang from a friend, but this citizen hadn't heard anything about this issue in the news. They only see articles discussing efforts between CCP politicians and local Xinjiang authorities to cut down on terrorism in the region. All the articles warned that the West was lying about forced labor camps in Xinjiang. This citizen wants to know what other people are saying, so they log into Weibo, a popular Chinese social media website, and search posts on the issue. Nothing comes up but pictures from vacations and advertisements for Xinjiang food. This citizen grows frustrated and searches for footage of labor camps in Xinjiang. Only videos of happy, singing Uyghurs appear. They post a question about the issue and the lack of information on Weibo, hoping friends might have answers. Instead, the post is taken down and the citizen receives a government notice advising against asking questions for which the state has already provided answers.

The reality is the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) prevents freedom of expression on the Internet regarding discussion of controversial issues, like those concerning Xinjiang, through employment of censorship on social media as a means of maintaining the government's chosen narrative on each topic. Chinese state media under control of the CCP has projected an image of innocence surrounding mistreatment of the population of Uyghur Muslims in the Chinese autonomous region of Xinjiang. Recent articles by Chinese state media present allegations of misconduct towards Uyghurs in Xinjiang as false and intentionally damaging propaganda of foreign entities towards China ("So-called 'Xinjiang police files,'" 2022). State entities and media insist foreign countries, like the United States, perpetuate a false narrative for selfish political and economic gain ("US grills major," 2022). Continually releasing articles to fit the CCP's ideal image of China has resulted in increased state control of social media. With strict boundaries of what constitutes facts on controversial issues, Chinese netizens have little to no ability to discuss the validity of such facts without threat of punishment and censorship.

Media outlets in China post articles with a consistent portrayal of China to appease the CCP. State and media agreement on China's official account on an issue, especially a controversial one, confirm to audiences the notion that China functions without socio-political and ethnic turmoil. Chinese state media offered in English, such as the Xinhua News Agency, Global Times, and China Global Television Network, all perpetuate the official state narrative on controversial issues. Articles from all three agencies share the same message on Xinjiang-related stories, especially in denouncing allegations of mistreatment or oppression of Uyghurs by foreign countries and promoting a positive view of Xinjiang factories ("Xinjiang enterprises go," 2022). The concept of oneness, or togetherness, in the Chinese state reinforces an acknowledged, but largely unspoken, discouragement for dissent. If Chinese netizens could publicly disagree with the presented facts on a controversial

story or openly oppose the government's chosen account online, Chinese netizens would possess the right to freely express opinions without threat of punishment.

Social media posts in China experience censorship due to the CCP's strict regulations to the point where netizens often self-censor to avoid legal sanctions, especially after Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2012. Before the Internet's popularity in China, the government censored media outlets, like newspapers and television broadcasts, but government officials could not as easily regulate speech among citizens due to the country's vast size and population. With the Internet providing a central domain of communication, government censorship now possesses the capability to regulate discussions among citizens. China earned the title of having the most Internet users of any nation around 2008, and Xi Jinping became the leader of the People's Republic of China in 2012 ("20 Years of," 2014). The Internet and social media had become popular before Xi Jinping came into power, but President Xi's and the CCP's increased number of Internet restrictions under the guise of public safety has resulted in a significant decrease in freedom to disagree with the government online over the last decade. For example, netizens have utilized a variety of methods, including codifying messages with emoticons with similar meanings or pronunciation, to spread and hide censored messages (Bandurski, 2020). Self-censorship provides evidence against freedom of expression in Chinese Internet spaces. Without the ability to present materials and messages that the government disapproves of online, Chinese netizens lack the ability to freely discuss a vast number of topics on Chinese social media.

With the above information in mind, this research investigates how cybersecurity policies effective since President Xi Jinping came into power in 2012 impacted freedom of expression for Chinese citizens on the Internet. Following President Xi's inauguration tracks a clearly distinguished 10-year period when Chinese state policies evolved to include more restrictive online measures as the state of the Internet gained popularity around the world. To find answers, I searched English-language Chinese state media websites for articles pertaining to Xinjiang-related controversies posted from 2012-2022 to determine the official CCP stance on the topic. I then searched global news agencies, such as The New York Times and The Guardian, for similar article topics in the same date range for the global perspective on the controversies. Finally, I searched the Chinese social media platform Weibo and the global social media platform Twitter for posts on the same topics in the same date range to methodically code which perspectives, CCP-driven or global, exist among Chinese netizens. If Chinese netizens are not comfortable expressing opinions different from the state perspective on Chinese social media, then Chinese people lack freedom of expression on the Internet. Raising awareness may expose the issue, potentially leading to increased freedom of expression through netizens advocating for freedom and/or changes in government policy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars analyzing online content find that governments use new legislation, emerging nationalist thought, and fears of spreading fake news to control online content and freedom of expression. The literature shows a pattern of changes in government action towards increasing nationwide censorship in Southeast Asia in the past two years. The expanding influence of social media on national populations provides new possibilities for avoiding and enforcing censorship to promote government policies. For example, multiple national governments in Southeast Asia have prevented discussion of controversial topics and criticism of the government in online content, directing international attention to possible human rights violations (Gilder, 2022, p. 293). Several nations, including Indonesia and Thailand, have instated new legislation and government-funded agencies focused on censorship to combat fake news (Dang, 2021, p. 48). This project reveals how the censorship policies of the authoritarian government in China affect netizens' perceptions of news on social media. Additionally, this research examines how censorship measures in China control national sentiment on topics of national and international scale and restrict online freedom of expression.

Comparative studies of Southeast Asian nations provide examples of how different government censorship strategies have resulted in either online repression or freedom of expression for citizens. Depending on the country, citizens may express opinions without threat of punishment or risk arrest due to online content moderation policies. Research finds whether governments choose strict or *laissez-faire* censorship legislation relates to a desire to curate propaganda or impose a democratic image. Investigations studying Vietnam find the country implements strict Internet monitoring and detainment of netizens for dissenting political views (Duong, 2017, p. 34). In some Southeast Asian countries, researchers observed harsh punishment for critical speech on the Internet “entrenches autocrats and encourages democratic backsliding” (Ong, 2021, p. 159). Despite attempts to increase censorship surrounding the 2008 elections in Malaysia, the overall censorship policy of the authoritarian government does not impede online freedom of expression (Liu, 2014, p. 802). International audiences, such as the United States, may view China's censorship policies as repressive in comparison to other states based on differing political and cultural expectations of government. However, this research into China's specific pattern of censorship seeks to uncover if a less repressive system of censorship exists where netizens experience a mix of restrictions and freedoms.

In recent years, scholars investigating the COVID-19 pandemic have discovered that many Southeast Asian governments have increased censorship measures since the beginning of 2020, resulting in restrictions of topics citizens may discuss online. Governments excuse added task forces and stricter legislation for the sake of protecting citizens from fake news regarding the

pandemic (while benefitting from reduced criticism of government policies). Because of the lack of an agreed upon definition of what constitutes fake news, many Southeast Asian governments have over-censored social media websites discussing the reality of how the pandemic and new pandemic-related policies negatively affect citizens (Dang, 2021). Recent findings reveal government agencies have taken advantage of the chaos surrounding the pandemic to silence the marginalized, causing difficulty for activists and bloggers to criticize the handling of the pandemic (Manley, 2021, p. 239). How China's attempts to combat the spread of harmful information about controversial topics, like the COVID-19 pandemic, have or have not increased the amount of censorship of other topics of national importance on social media will similarly reflect how the CCP's approach to national censorship will evolve for the future of online freedom of expression. If only large-scale topics experience censorship, the Chinese government may implement censorship based on a goal of maintaining their national reputation.

Previous research provides many explanations of why people of a nation may choose to self-censor. Self-censorship may function as a tactic to avoid punishment under an authoritarian regime or even occur without individuals' full awareness. Shen & Truex (2021) found authoritarian governments differ in the degree to which citizens criticize or feel comfortable criticizing the government based on whether the head of government faces electoral competition. Under authoritarian governments, like Russia, many journalists must self-censor and collaborate with the government by loyally writing state narratives in order to receive information to report and maintain employment (Pasti et al., 2022, p. 215). The amount of government support and degree of self-censorship do not always equate, as found in Robinson & Tannenbergh (2019), especially in the case of the Chinese Communist Party. As in the authoritarian states studied, investigating the policies of the Chinese state may show an encouragement of and a result of self-censorship among citizens when writing online. Discovering how netizens perceive state censorship, and subsequently self-censorship, determines the state of autonomy and freedom of expression on the Internet in China. If this research discovers citizens perceive self-censorship as necessary for functioning under the current government in China, then the data will reveal an infringement of citizens' freedom of expression in online Chinese spaces.

Like the comparative content analyses of the presented literature in Southeast Asia and in various authoritarian regimes, this paper explores the pattern of censorship on social media in China and the effects of such censorship on Chinese netizens. Scholars agree the type of government does not directly determine online freedom; however, international scholars often assume China possesses a low level of freedom of expression based on the country's authoritarian government. To understand the current situation and hypothesize about the future of Chinese social media censorship, this paper analyzes Chinese state media narratives compared to global media

narratives to see how state media influences citizens' online posting behavior on Chinese social media. Unlike past research, this paper postulates what self-censorship and netizen autonomy means for the overall freedom of expression in the country. This research provides evidence on the current state of freedom of expression on the Internet in China and predicts future trends of online freedom of expression. An emerging pattern of complete alignment with state narratives could show a need to overhaul the current system to prevent citizens' revolting over censorship. A pattern of allowing criticism of state narratives could potentially satisfy Chinese netizens enough to quash calls for censorship reform.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To uncover the narratives and social commentary surrounding news on Xinjiang, this research utilizes secondary raw data from global news media, Chinese state media, global social media posts, and Chinese social media posts. I randomly selected three English-language global media agencies and three Chinese state media agencies to then find over twenty articles, ten from global media agencies and ten from Chinese state media agencies, on political Xinjiang-related news from each year between 2012-2022. After creating a Twitter account and searching on Weibo, both as anonymously as possible, I found Chinese- and English-language social media posts appearing within the week after the news articles were published. The global state media and Chinese state media provide comparable narratives, determined by diction and topic focus, on socio-political news about Xinjiang from 2012-2022. The similarities and differences between the narratives provide insight into how news about Xinjiang is discussed by the Chinese state versus the rest of the world. Analyzing the way state media frames Xinjiang news alongside how netizens on Chinese social media discuss such news showcases evidence of whether discussions outside of the state narrative experience censorship. Gathering data on which narratives of Xinjiang news, global or CCP, exist amongst Chinese netizens also suggests if political or controversial discussions can occur on Chinese social media.

To collect articles representing frames for Chinese state and global narratives regarding Xinjiang, I searched three Chinese state news agencies and three global news agencies for articles spanning from 2012-2022. I chose to search Global Times, China Global Television Network, and Xinhua News Agency to represent Chinese state-approved stories about Xinjiang. Al Jazeera, The Guardian, and The New York Times represent global narratives about Xinjiang news for this research. For all news databases, I randomly divided the eleven years to study among the databases, searching for articles published between 2012-2015 on The Guardian and Global Times, 2016-2019 on The New York Times and Xinhua News, and 2020-2022 on Al Jazeera and

CGTN. I chose one article from each calendar year from each news database using the data range search features and the search term “Xinjiang.” I read and selected articles with political themes and topics regarding Xinjiang after the search engines sorted articles by relevance and time. Randomizing the selection of news databases and years helps minimize bias in which articles represent the Chinese and global narratives. Using the same search term as well as only selecting politically-based articles also maintains relevance to the goals of this research project.

The original plan for collecting social media posts relating to Xinjiang news in China consisted of creating a Weibo and Twitter account. Technical issues prevented the creation of a Weibo account, but the research continued on Weibo due to the website’s allowance of non-users to search posts based on posting date and time and the website’s display of up to ten posts for each search for non-users. With this search ability and Twitter’s advanced search system, I compiled social media posts from both websites to gather data on whether Chinese netizens experience censorship or freedom of expression on social media. Specifically, I searched both Twitter and Weibo each day of week following the publication date of the articles for this research (Table 1). Like with the search for news articles, I only narrowed the search using the term “Xinjiang” in English and “新疆” in Simplified Chinese on Twitter and again in Simplified Chinese on Weibo to find the top ten relevant posts to the search. Unlike the news article search, posts underwent thematic coding regardless of political association, such as whether the poster was an individual or an organization and if the post’s topic was political. Using similar search terms and methods aligns the posts as closely to the news articles as possible. Thematic coding of posts compares narrative frames discovered in the collection and analysis of the global and Chinese state media articles.

Table 1:

Media	News Agency	Publication Year	Publication Month & Day
Chinese State	Global Times	2012	March 6
Global	The Guardian	2012	December 11
Chinese State	Global Times	2013	May 29
Global	The Guardian	2013	August 13
Chinese State	Global Times	2014	March 7
Global	The Guardian	2014	September 23
Global	The Guardian	2015	October 1
Chinese State	Global Times	2015	November 23
Global	New York Times	2016	January 3
Chinese State	Xinhua News	2016	January 15
Global	New York Times	2017	February 20
Chinese State	Xinhua News	2017	June 1
Chinese State	Xinhua News	2018	February 11
Global	New York Times	2018	November 6
Chinese State	Xinhua News	2019	November 19
Global	New York Times	2019	December 9
Chinese State	CGTN	2020	January 3
Global	Al Jazeera	2020	September 24
Chinese State	CGTN	2021	September 30
Global	Al Jazeera	2021	December 9
Global	Al Jazeera	2022	May 24
Chinese State	CGTN	2022	December 30

To appropriately analyze the articles and social media posts, I assigned two to three codes to each global media and Chinese state media article to indicate a distinct political narrative frame on Xinjiang-related news. I then designated each social media post with the same codes or marked the posts as “unrelated.” Using Microsoft Excel and basic statistics, I calculated the number of total posts and the percentages of posts from Weibo and Twitter aligning with each of the codes based on topic. After comparing the scale of percentages of posts according to each topic code, I compared the number of posts from official accounts or individual accounts and the number of posts in each language on Twitter. Analyzing the number of posts on Weibo and Twitter that contain politically themed messages about Xinjiang news shows whether controversial political topics can be discussed among Chinese netizens. Comparing the presence of political messages on Xinjiang news in each language, and which type of account posted the message, indicates comfortability on posting about such topics among Chinese netizens in comparison to global netizens and if only official, representative accounts are comfortable posting about politics. Disagreement with Chinese state narratives on political issues among Chinese netizens showcases freedom of expressing dissent on Chinese social media.

ANALYSIS

Chinese State Media Narrative

This research reveals Chinese state-supported news agencies largely publish articles depicting the Chinese Communist Party favorably, praising reform efforts and government policies regarding Xinjiang. News articles explain local and state policies to citizens and why the government has and continues to function with the well-being of citizens and the country in mind. Xinhua News Agency promotes a local Xinjiang government law prohibiting “differentiated treatment” in public spaces to convince Chinese citizens the government views people of all ethnicities equally (“China Exclusive: New,” 2016). In one of the only Chinese state media articles from this research with a listed author, Li’s (2015) article praises the Chinese state media for reporting details on a recent terrorist attack in Xinjiang and security procedure in the area following the attack. Researching the framing of Xinjiang-related news in Chinese state-supported media articles through word choice and themes reveals the government wants citizens to view policies and events positively. Seeing as the Chinese state media articles promote positivity around reform and ethnic solidarity, this research concludes that Chinese netizens posting these thoughts and feelings on social media would not experience censorship and legal punishment.

In addition to uplifting the ruling party and promoting solidarity among Chinese citizens, Chinese state media published anti-West narratives on Xin-

jiang news in the past decade. Many articles featured strategic attacks on journalists or state officials of Western nations in order to undermine anti-Chinese messages. Xinhua News Agency published an article about an unnamed Xinjiang government representative denying evidence from a New York Times report on the government's "de-radicalization efforts" ("Xinjiang's government spokesperson," 2019). Especially in the last five years, Chinese-supported media outlets published numerous articles about recent events and policies in Xinjiang with diction choices and framing tactics positioning the stories as exposing fake news from the West ("Fact Check: Lies," 2021). This depiction of division between China and the West in Chinese state media articles exemplifies how the Chinese state is willing to isolate the nation to protect the government's interests and, therefore, reveals how the state prioritizes defending the state media narrative. Calling out misinformation from Western reporters functions as a tactic of undermining non-state-regulated messages and signals to Chinese netizens to trust the state and relay state messages instead. Having to rely on the state for truth in reporting political news could make netizens resistant to aligning with global news media articles or reluctant to voice concern on Chinese state reporting on Chinese social media out of loyalty or fear.

The Chinese state narrative on Xinjiang-related news retains similar themes of ethnic and national unity throughout 2012 to 2022. The past decade has seen an evolution in leadership, policies, and ethnic tension in Xinjiang within the Chinese state, but the state media narrative largely remains the same. In 2013, an article about a CCP official touring Xinjiang wrote on efforts to foster "ethnic solidarity" through language and religious tolerance policies to improve Xinjiang's "stability" ("Yu tours Xinjiang," 2013). Emphasizing unity among Chinese people and opposing any foreign misinformation remain common themes of Chinese state media in 2022, especially following investigations into security and anti-terrorism efforts in Xinjiang ("So-called 'Xinjiang,'" 2022). Therefore, the government prioritizes maintaining the CCP's positive political reputation. This consistency in framing Xinjiang news to cater to CCP goals on Chinese state media may have encouraged the proliferation of pro-CCP posts or discouraged anti-CCP posts on social media throughout the decade.

Global Media Narrative

Politically independent, globally published news agencies often emphasize harmful actions the Chinese state government commits when discussing Chinese politics in news articles, especially when concerning Xinjiang and Uyghur Muslims. How these global agencies describe China and the government could negatively influence global perceptions of the country and citizens. Globally published articles gathered for this research depict China as an enemy of human rights by focusing on the state's shortcomings and the country's commitment to the Chinese state narrative in the face of in-

ternational pressure from specific countries as well as the United Nations (Cumming-Bruce, 2018). Word choices describing China as “aggressive” and saying the country’s media campaign to defend policies in Xinjiang as going “on the offensive” portray the government as distanced from humanity and empathy (Buckley & Ramzy, 2019). The result of these kinds of descriptions of China could spread hatred and misinformation about Chinese policies and people, affecting how netizens discuss these topics on international social media. Keeping the facets of both the Chinese state media and the global media narratives in mind provides potential origins of biases toward political affiliations and reasons why such opinions proliferate on Chinese social media, like Weibo, and global social media, like Twitter.

While the goal of collecting news articles from independent news agencies from around the world was to represent the global narrative of Xinjiang-related news, some of the news articles presented a bias towards the politics of Western countries. In addition to questioning Chinese politics in general, many articles solely looked to Western countries for data on Chinese news, especially in countries where citizens and politicians may hold anti-Chinese sentiments due to international relations. Though this recent article discusses the investigation into human rights offenses in Xinjiang by an unofficial tribunal based in the United Kingdom, bias against the Chinese government in the tribunal’s home country and among members potentially affected the writing of the article to include harsh retellings of facts instead of neutral reporting (Roache, 2021). The Australian Strategic Policy Institute reported an investigation into the facts surrounding Xinjiang internment camps, and this article included how the organization’s findings contrast with the Chinese State’s findings and align with other Western nations, like the United States (“China running 380,” 2020). Like the potential connection between how the Chinese state media influences Chinese social media, global news media may influence global social media platforms. This influence may have inspired netizens, especially netizens from Western nations, to write anti-Chinese posts specifically in favor of Western countries and politics.

The narrative on Xinjiang-related news among globally published media agencies maintains similar goals of criticizing the Chinese government throughout the past decade. Similar to Chinese state media, global news articles maintained consistency in topic selection and framing, such as calling out the Chinese government for political wrongdoings and speaking with whistleblowers on the state of Xinjiang. An example article from 2012 describes China as oppressive and radical with the conscious mention of torture being an alleged common practice to incite confessions in the Chinese court system (“China sentences three,” 2012). Al Jazeera published an article in 2022 concerning the Xinjiang Police Files, a document aimed at providing documentary and photographic evidence of human rights abuses in Xinjiang internment camps, which focuses primarily on the state police force’s

use of violence and discrimination in the region (“Xinjiang leak reveals,” 2022). Seeing as the global news articles retain a similar consistency in topic throughout the decade as the Chinese state media articles do, such consistency could influence global netizens on social media. If the global media articles influence global netizens, but not Chinese netizens, posts drawing from the framing tactics of these global media agencies potentially appear more on global social media than on Chinese social media.

Politics on Social Media

Compared to posts from the Chinese social media site Weibo, Twitter contained significantly more politically motivated posts, suggesting a higher level of comfort when discussing politics on Twitter. Due to Twitter’s tendency to maintain a low level of censorship and encourage free discussion about politics in the past, this phenomenon occurred according to initial predictions. Looking at the total number of politics-related posts on Twitter and Weibo in Figures 1, 2, and 3, the number of political posts on Twitter in English was 127, 159 on Twitter in Simplified Chinese, and 27 on Weibo. The percentage of political posts on Weibo only amounted to 3.9%, while political tweets made up the majority of tweets in both English and Simplified Chinese (see Figures 1, 2, & 3). Observing Twitter as a comparison for what

Figure 1:

Twitter in English	Total # of Posts	Percentage of Total Posts
Political -CCP	77	35.2%
Political +CCP	15	6.8%
Political News (no opinion)	35	16.0%

Figure 2:

Weibo	Total # of Posts	Percentage of Total Posts
Political	7	1.0%
Political News (no opinion)	20	2.9%

Figure 3:

Twitter in Simplified Chinese	Total # of Posts	Percentage of Total Posts
Political -CCP	76	34.5%
Political +CCP	36	16.4%
Political News (no opinion)	47	21.4%

political opinions netizens on Weibo might wish to express shows the extent of abnormality in finding next to no political discussion on Weibo. From this observation, netizens on Weibo either experience a high degree of political censorship or heavily self-censor political opinions.

Globally sourced opinions on Twitter tend to reflect a Western, anti-CCP bias. Such opinions often speak negatively about Chinese state policies and actions in Xinjiang, especially when discussing newly discovered information on forced labor camps in the area. Additionally, these posters may also praise Western countries' investigations or reporting on news about Xinjiang. The number of English-language tweets complaining about or outright attacking CCP policies and practices outnumbers the supportive posts by 62 posts (Figure 1). This same figure also indicates how Western-biased and anti-CCP tweets comprise a significantly larger percentage of political English-language tweets compared to pro-CCP and neutral political news tweets. Seeing as global social media posts reflect the global media narrative on Xinjiang-related news, the Weibo posts appear likely to reflect the same situation with Chinese state media influencing Chinese social media. However, this assumed parallel fails to account for the differences in government control over online content in China compared to the Western-biased but international Twitter platform. Only a large data pool of posts from Weibo could reveal if the possible parallels of influence exist.

While the political affiliations of netizens on Weibo remain difficult to predict, netizens on Twitter appear biased towards the global media narrative. Political data from Twitter indicate positive feelings towards Western governments and negative feelings towards the Chinese state government in both Simplified Chinese and English. Among political discussion on Twitter in English and Simplified Chinese, the highest category of political posts includes anti-CCP and or pro-West themes, according to Figures 1 and 3. Furthermore, the percentage of neutral political tweets varies slightly among the studied languages; however, the percentage of pro-CCP and or anti-West tweets increased only about ten percent when observing tweets posted in Simplified Chinese compared to tweets in English. This data could indicate fluent users of Simplified Chinese share political opinions with fluent users of English. Generally, such data may show Chinese netizens on Weibo may share some political opinions with Twitter users but lack the comfort or ability to post such opinions on Weibo due to state censorship policies.

Twitter, in both Simplified Chinese and English, showcases posts supporting and condemning the Chinese Communist Party and poor treatment of Uyghurs. Though evidence proves Twitter contains a large percentage of political posts, assumptions about increased self-censorship among netizens using Simplified Chinese online predicted a lack of dissent toward the CCP on tweets in Simplified Chinese. Figures 1 and 3 show the percentage of total posts indicating a dislike for the CCP and/or forced labor of Uyghurs in Xinjiang was around 35% on posts in Simplified Chinese as well as En-

glish. While pro-CCP tweets in Simplified Chinese outnumber supportive tweets in English, pro-CCP tweets do not experience censorship on Twitter (see Figures 1 & 3). This phenomenon of the two studied languages containing similar levels of complaints about the CCP supports the hypothesis of self-censorship on Chinese social media. Potentially, netizens posting on Twitter in Simplified Chinese, the primary written language of the People's Republic of China, post political opinions that netizens in the PRC hold as well. However, Twitter users may post in fluent Simplified Chinese without living in the PRC.

Lacking Representation & Opinions

Looking at the number of posts from social media accounts representing individuals instead of organizations or governments determines the degree of freedom of expression on each social media site. Posts from organizations or government agencies experience internal and external regulation and do not represent individual opinions. A higher volume of individual accounts posting on social media could reveal a higher level of freedom of expression and better represents individual opinions. Figures 4 and 5 show how Weibo posts and Twitter posts in English contain similar percentages of total posts from individuals at around 75%. Twitter posts in Simplified Chinese reveal a difference in percentage of total posts from individuals than on Weibo with 94% on Twitter and 75% on Weibo (see Figures 4 and 6). The hypothesis of this research assumed individuals on Weibo would experience more censorship than individuals on Twitter, especially regarding English tweets, and one method of censorship would be to have organizations overwhelm individual accounts to broadcast the Chinese state narrative on Weibo. Since both English Twitter posts and Weibo posts show a similar ratio of individual to official account posts, the data disproves this assumption.

Figure 6:

Twitter in Simplified Chinese	Official Posts	Individual Posts	Total Posts:
Total # of Each:	14	206	220
Percentage of Total:	6%	94%	

Censorship policies may keep netizens on Weibo from discussing politics, especially national political policies and practices on Chinese social media. Potentially, fear of carceral punishment may influence netizens to self-censor when tempted to post about politics, regardless of bias for or against the Chinese Communist Party. Figures 4 and 7 provide evidence of politics and political news receiving significantly fewer posts than other top-

ics with only 7 posts discussing a political opinion on Weibo and 20 of the 679 posts being about political news. The vast majority of posts on Weibo discussed unapplicable topics, according to this research’s coding system, because the content was not distinguishable enough to create new categories, like discussion of trips to Xinjiang or netizens’ favorite celebrities from Xinjiang (Figure 8). Because the data merely reveals a lack of evidence, difficulties arise in determining the cause of this lack of evidence. This research can only hypothesize reasons of why next to no politically supportive or dismissive posts regarding the Chinese government’s actions in Xinjiang exist on Weibo.

Figure 7:

Weibo	Official	Individual
Political	3	4
Political News (no opinion)	15	5
Economic	11	5
Culture	10	8
Food	11	88
Sports	14	40
NA (not applicable)	106	359

Figure 8:

Weibo	Total # of Posts	Percentage of Total Posts
Economic	16	2.4%
Culture	18	2.7%
Food	99	14.6%
Sports	54	8.0%
NA (not applicable)	465	68.5%

Assumptions may predict tweets in Simplified Chinese would replicate the lack of political posts on Weibo and result in fewer political tweets. However, tweets in Simplified Chinese turned out to be just as political as tweets in English. This occurrence could suggest that censorship and self-censorship on Chinese social media prevent netizens from having freedom of expression online. The total number of political tweets in Simplified Chinese outnumbered political tweets in English by about 30 tweets, according to Fig-

ures 1 and 3. The same figures show tweets on political news and anti-CCP sentiments exist as similar percentages of the total tweets. No evidence from this study reveals if or how tweets and Weibo posts resemble each other. Without a direct comparison of posts on each social media website, the data cannot draw conclusions about whether tweets reflect what Chinese netizens want to post about without the threat of censorship.

Because netizens on Weibo decide against discussing politics or lack the freedom to discuss politics on Weibo, the research could not conclude on the distribution of netizens' overall political affiliations. The data does not reveal whether Chinese netizens support the Chinese Communist Party or wish to critique the Chinese state government. Figures 2 and 7 show only one percent of all posts on Weibo appeared political and opinionated, but only four of those posts came from individuals instead of the government. Due to the majority of posts discussing inapplicable topics, Weibo lacks the wealth of political opinion Twitter has apart from the occasional local government conflict among individuals or state news media posting anti-Western propaganda (see Figures 1, 3, & 8). A lack of evidence cannot explain the existence of a phenomenon. Therefore, this research supports the need for further exploration to fully determine if Chinese netizens lack autonomy when posting political opinions on Weibo or self-censor to avoid legal punishment.

DISCUSSION

Policy Implications

Data from this research and past literature suggest a need for an international agreement to reduce the overall amount of censorship in the world. An internationally respected and powerful organization, such as the United Nations, should organize a joint policy between China and other U.N. member states to agree on how to allow for greater freedom of expression for netizens on social media. The nations should primarily agree to lift restrictions on political discussion on all social media sites that citizens use in each country and agree to form a non-partisan board of representatives from different parts of the world with education on social media and censorship to ensure compliance with the agreement. Previous literature shows journalists in some nations write political propaganda according to government desires in order to maintain employment, so allowing for freer political discussion could prevent governments from spreading corruption in this way (Pasti et al., 2022, p. 215). The data from this project showed a clear lack of political opinions present on Weibo, especially when compared to political opinions on Twitter, revealing netizens feel discouraged from discussing politics in some way. Therefore, reducing the amount of restrictions on political discussion will allow netizens to post opinions in discussions about local, national, and international politics without fear. Coming to an international agreement will prevent certain countries from feeling attacked for current

censorship policies and encourage collaboration between nations with differing ideals.

The lack of conclusive data explaining the reason behind a lack of political opinion on Weibo prompts a proposal for an international, independent study of Chinese users of Weibo. Without involvement from the Chinese government, an independent group of internationally-based, unbiased scholars should conduct a study asking users of Weibo in China questions to judge netizens' level of comfort with expressing political opinions online. As previous research explains, the amount of government support and degree of self-censorship among netizens do not always equate, so China's authoritarian government may wish to reduce censorship and punishments for violating censorship policies to maintain public support (Robinson & Tannenbunrg, 2019). The divide between pro- and anti-CCP posts in this research among netizens using Simplified Chinese on Twitter provides evidence of varying political affiliations and opinions netizens may also hold on Weibo. An independent research study will uncover why posts on Weibo are less often political compared to Twitter without anti-Chinese or anti-Western bias. With more knowledge on the reason behind this lack of free expression on politics, policymakers would possess data to know the origin of the problem and solve underlying issues, granting users of Weibo more freedom to discuss politics.

Global Relevancy

The future of communication lies within people's rights to communicate online, and censorship preventing important discussions, like politics, restricts human rights of free speech. Both existing literature and this research agree censoring political opinions online results in reduced communication between netizens and less public critique of governments. Previous literature has observed a trend of carceral punishment for netizens criticizing government practices within Southeast Asian countries, resulting in destabilization of democracies in the area (Ong, 2021, p. 159). The articles representing the Chinese state narrative and the global narrative on Xinjiang-related events in this research represent how different nations communicate news. Without the ability to criticize local, national, or international politics, injustice and corruption can fester and result in an increase in oppression. Acknowledging censorship and the consequences of censorship will increase international communication and freedom of expression for netizens on a global scale.

The general population should be concerned about censorship because it can function as an effective method for governments to hide corruption. Increasing the amount of censorship on certain topics, especially political and controversial topics, could prevent citizens from nations with a high amount of censorship from discovering critical information on corrupt political funding, election fraud, and more. In the past few years, research shows governments around the world have used the global pandemic to censor activists

and hide government malpractice (Manley, 2021, p. 239). This research found posts on Twitter expressed pro-Western as well as pro-Chinese state sentiments, showcasing the diversity of opinions existing without over-censoring political opinion. Censorship in other countries connects to and encourages research of censorship in one's own country, resulting in catching and punishing cases of political corruption. Advocating against political censorship will lead to the insurance of maintaining and increasing the right to express political opinions for all people.

CONCLUSION

Currently, netizens in China lack complete freedom for posting on the Chinese social media site Weibo. Chinese netizens lack the ability to or make a conscious choice not to discuss politics on Weibo, especially about controversial political topics. Without the freedom to discuss such topics, Chinese netizens lack overall autonomy on social media. The data could not conclude the reasoning behind the non-existence of political posts on Weibo due to a lack of political posts. However, the fact that political posts exist on Twitter but not on Weibo suggests such opinions should exist on Weibo. Therefore, some reason must exist, whether it be government policy and or individual choice, explaining why political posts by individuals do not appear on Weibo at the studied times. This data implies a lack of freedom on the Internet for Chinese netizens and an over-censorship of online content in China, meaning people in China are not allowed to or are afraid to post political opinions. Barring discussion of individuals' political affiliations, individuals should be able to post about politics on the Internet freely. As China gains political and economic power, the millions of Internet users in China should be able to have freedom of expression on social media domains to point out corruption and issues with political policies within and outside of the country to maintain individual autonomy and keep political powers from abusing human rights.

REFERENCES

- 20 Years of the Internet in China. (2014, April 20). *Xinhua News Agency*. <http://china.org.cn>
- Bandurski, D. (2020, April 28). Skirting Chinese censorship with emoticons and telegraph codes. *Brookings*. <http://brookings.edu>
- Buckley, C., & Ramzy, A. (2019, December 9). Facing Criticism Over Muslim Camps, China Says: What's the Problem? *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com>
- China Exclusive: New Xinjiang law to enhance ethnic solidarity. (2016, January 15). *Xinhua News Agency*. <http://www.english.news.cn>
- China running 380 detention centres in Xinjiang: Researchers. (2020, September 24). *Aljazeera*. <http://www.aljazeera.com>
- China sentences three Uighur men to death over alleged plane hijack. (2012, December 11). *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com>
- Cumming-Bruce, N. (2018, November 6). At U.N., China Defends Mass Detention of Uighur Muslims. *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com>
- Dang, H. L. (2021). Social media, fake news, and the COVID-19 pandemic: Sketching the case of Southeast Asia. *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, 14(1), 37-57. <https://doi.org/10.14764/10.ASEAS-0054>
- Duong, M. (2017). Blogging Three Ways in Vietnam's Political Blogosphere. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 39(2), 373-392. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/667781>
- Fact Check: Lies on Xinjiang-related issues vs. The truth. (2021, February 6). CGTN. <http://www.news.cgtn.com>
- Gilder, A. (2022). Contracting Space for Opposing Speech in South East Asia and Restrictions on the Online Freedom of Expression. *Asian Yearbook of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law*, 6, 293-308. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004520806_015
- Li, R. (2015, November 15). State media offers in-depth coverage of anti-terrorism action in Xinjiang. *Global Times*. <http://www.globaltimes.cn>
- Liu, Y. (2014). Controlling Cyberspace in Malaysia: Motivations and Constraints. *Asian Survey*, 54(4), 801-823. <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2014.54.4.801>
- Manley, S. (2021). Critical Speech in Southeast Asian Grey Literature During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Human Rights Law Review*, 21(1), 233-251. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hrlr/ngaa052>
- Ong, E. (2021). Online Repression and Self-Censorship: Evidence from Southeast Asia. *Government and Opposition*, 56(1), 141-162. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2019.18>
- Pasti, S., Logunova, O., & Davydov, S. (2022). Journalistic Role Performance in the Russian Press: A Post-Soviet Model for the Third Decade, 2012-

2022. *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 30(2), 211-237. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/853509>
- Roache, M. (2021, December 9). China sentences three Uighur men to death over alleged plane hijack. *Aljazeera*. <http://www.aljazeera.com>
- Robinson, D., & Tannenber, M. (2019). Self-censorship of regime support in authoritarian states: Evidence from list experiments in China. *Research & Politics*, 6(3), 1-9.
- Shen, X., & Truex, R. (2021). In search of self-censorship. *British Journal of Political Science*, 51(4), 1672-1684. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123419000735>
- So-called 'Xinjiang police files' misled intl perception: official. (2022, December 30). CGTN. <http://www.news.cgtn.com>
- US grills major automakers on Xinjiang-linked supply chains in fresh instance of denialism amid continued hostility toward China. (2022, December 23). *Global Times*. <http://www.globaltimes.cn>
- Xinjiang enterprises go full throttle to boost foreign trade. (2022, December 15). *Xinhua News Agency*. <http://www.english.news.cn>
- Xinjiang's government spokesperson refutes NYT fake report on Xinjiang. (2019, November 19). *Xinhua News Agency*. <http://www.english.news.cn>
- Xinjiang leak reveals extent of Chinese abuses in Uighur camps. (2022, May 24). *Aljazeera*. <http://www.aljazeera.com>
- Yu tours Xinjiang, stresses curbing extremism, terrorism. (2013, May 29). *Global Times*. <http://www.globaltimes.cn>

From Ostpolitik to Putinpolitik: The AfD's Affinity for Russia

Rachell Orce
University of Kansas

This project aims to identify why pro-Putin or pro-Russia sentiments are more common among Alternativ für Deutschland (AfD) members from the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). The project contributes to the ongoing discussion on populism, economic nationalism, and right-wing extremism by using the AfD in Eastern Germany as a case study. Using historical materialism as a theoretical lens, the paper investigates how the historical and material conditions in Eastern Germany contributed to pro-Putin sentiments among Eastern AfD members. The study analyzed social media posts and public statements from AfD members in the German parliament (Bundestag) to classify all 80 AfD MPs in the Bundestag on a scale from pro-Putin to anti-Putin. The study then utilized thematic coding, regression analysis, and content analysis to investigate the relationship between the pro-Putin MPs and economic, historic, or social conditions that may contribute to the AfD's support for Russia. This project argues that Eastern German MPs are more likely to advocate for pro-Russia policies due to historic and economic conditions in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) and post-reunification. By examining AfD MPs' statements in favor of Russia or Putin, this project demonstrates how the historical, social, and economic conditions during and after German reunification have affected German politics today. Ultimately, the research contributes to a better understanding of the political divide between Western and Eastern Europe, demonstrating how the legacy of the Cold War still influences contemporary European politics.

Key Words: populism, Germany, far-right politics



After more than 30 years since Germany's unification, the former East and the former West still differ significantly in terms of culture, politics, and quality of life. The fall of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the subsequent reunification in 1990 left many Eastern Germans with a sense of animosity towards the Western part of the country. In 2019, almost 60% of Eastern Germans reported feeling like second-class citizens, claiming *die Wende* ("the turn") was more of an annexation than a reunification (Köpping, 2019). Following reunification, Eastern Germany experienced the highest rate of deindustrialization in the post-socialist region, and the mass privatization of companies forced many Eastern German jobs to the West, creating a cycle of poverty and unemployment (Weisskircher, 2020). As Eastern Germany struggles to catch up to the West economically, the quality of life for Eastern Germans has stagnated while poverty and unemployment have risen (Laczó & Gabrijelčič, 2020; Weisskircher, 2020). The feeling of economic and cultural disenfranchisement in Eastern Germany worsens the East-West divide and pushes many Eastern Germans to define their cultural and political identity in opposition to the Western states. Right-wing populism is gaining popularity in the region as Eastern Germans distance themselves from "Western liberalism" and the concept of European collaboration.

The *Alternativ für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany, AfD) has emerged as Germany's most popular far-right party, garnering the most support from the states in the former GDR. The AfD gained much of this popularity by capitalizing on Eastern German resentment in political campaigns that highlighted the New States' economic stagnation and worsening cost of living crisis. During the 2021 German elections, the AfD finished second in the Eastern state of Brandenburg with 18% of the vote, but one year later, support for AfD had risen to 24%, tied with the ruling Social Democratic Party (Hoyer, 2022). In 2022, the AfD enjoyed 27% support in the polls in the Eastern federal states, nearly double the reported 15% nationwide support (Europe Elects, 2022). The AfD boldly declares on its official website, "*Unser Land zuerst - Wir stehen an Deiner Seite!*" ("Our country first - we stand by your side!"), playing on the rising discontent and the current economic struggles the majority of Germans experience (Alternativ für Deutschland, 2023). The AfD enjoys a stronghold in former East Germany, a region burdened with economic hardship and a fractured identity post-reunification. The AfD's nationalism and emphasis on fighting against the liberal West politically align the party with other illiberal European figures, especially Putin.

Since the party's founding, the AfD has increasingly demonstrated a pro-Russian stance, with several prominent members openly advocating for closer ties with Moscow. This trend has sparked concerns about Russia's potential impact on German politics, especially due to the party's growing electoral popularity. Tino Chrupalla, the AfD co-chair, accused Chancellor Olaf Scholz of fighting an "economic war" against Germans, urging the Social Democrat-led government to lift sanctions against Russian leaders (Schum-

acher, 2022). Hans-Thomas Tillschneider, the state parliamentarian in the Eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt, has repeatedly voiced open support for Putin, describing the Russian leader as an “authentic bloke, a real man with a healthy framework of values” (Connolly, 2022). The use of the word “war” in reference to the invasion of Ukraine sparked a dispute among AfD party officials, and the party conference in June of 2022 ended abruptly after the party failed to reach a consensus on whether to improve ties with Moscow (“Germany’s far-right AfD,” 2022). A major party in the German parliament expressing sympathetic views towards an autocratic leader like Putin may cause further wedges in German politics, especially if the AfD continues to gain parliament seats. The AfD could leverage Germany’s position as a key leader in the European Union and NATO to impede the adoption of sanctions and other legislation meant to penalize Russia.

This paper argues that AfD members from the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) are more likely to espouse pro-Putin sentiment compared to their counterparts from Western Germany. In part, this populist sentiment comes from a lingering sense of Eastern German resentment, stemming from the collapse of the GDR and the subsequent German reunification process. A feeling of neglect from Western Germans, combined with few economic opportunities and a historical friendship between the GDR and Russia, leads to pro-Russia sentiment developing in the Eastern New States. The literature review examines how economic and historical factors contribute to political differences between Central-Eastern Europe and Western European countries, including diverging styles of populism and nationalism. Through thematic coding and regression analysis, this study investigates AfD Bundestag members’ social media posts and public statements to determine the potential causes of pro-Russia stances in the party. Using content analysis of secondary literature, the project examines how historical events and economic conditions in Eastern Germany may have led to the development of pro-Putin sentiment in the former GDR. By investigating this dilemma through a historical materialist lens, the study aims to bring to attention the urgent need for Eastern Germans’ enfranchisement within the German political system. The paper argues that the German government must seriously address the economic and political disenfranchisement of Eastern Germans to combat the growth of populism and far-right extremism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Materialism

Previous research investigated possible connections between capitalism and nationalism by examining how the collapse of the USSR economically affected Central and Eastern European countries in the 1990s. Researchers framed Central and Eastern European nationalism through the lens of historical materialism, studying how right-wing movements formed their

post-socialist national identities around economic scarcity in the region. In *The Impact of Russia's Historical Economic Position on Russian Identity and Nationalism*, Gökirmak (2015), identified key features of Russian nationalism and suggested Russia's economic developments throughout history directly influenced the formation of national identity. The author compared the economic policies and nationalist sentiment of three main periods of Russian history: Tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union, and post-USSR collapse under Yeltsin and Putin, and argued a historic and economic analysis is crucial to understanding the development of Russian nationalism:

Predicting the implications of these developments and Putin's choices on the stability of political regime in Russia is not very easy but a historical analysis can help enhance our foresight. Therefore, the historical role of the economic factor on Russia's modernization and evolution into a nation-state should be revisited. (Gökirmak, 2015, p. 37)

This project contributes to previous literature that used Russia as a case study to analyze nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe from a historical materialist perspective by applying the same lens to the context of Eastern German right-wing nationalism. By incorporating a historical materialist theoretical framework, this project considers if the lack of economic advancements in Eastern Germany and the historic legacy of being a post-socialist state may contribute to a rise in nationalism.

Economic and social disparities between capitalist and socialist European countries in the 20th century similarly shaped divergent styles of populism on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Researchers have revealed a separation between Eastern and Western European-style populism, indicating a link between each style of populism and the historical and economic conditions of the respective regions. Political scientists compiled the political positions of several Western European political parties and determined the ideological frameworks and rhetorical tactics populists use to bolster support. A key characteristic of Western European populism is a crisis with the status quo, wherein a political party addresses the fears about the limits of representative democracy, and there is a divide between the "true country" and the "out-of-touch elites" (Taggart, 2004). Western European populists embrace transgressive behavior, preferring to speak directly to ordinary citizens in simple, sometimes vulgar, language—often with the intention to upset establishment politicians and position themselves as part of the "true people" (Ostiguy, 2017). However, Stanley (2017) distinguishes Central and Eastern European populism as having additional aspects: an overall cynical political culture, opposition to the dominance of *any* establishment parties rather than the ideological position of establishment parties, and hostility toward the political system as a whole. This research examines the AfD's synthesis of populist rhetoric and tactics from both Western and Central-Eastern Europe

and places it within the historical context of the post-socialist area. The study aims to build on existing literature by investigating how AfD politicians foster pro-Russia sentiment in the region, particularly by framing the economic or historical conditions in Eastern Germany through a populist lens.

Previous literature compared the emergence of right-wing populism in Eastern Europe to their Western counterparts and noted how the different historical contexts in each region change the priorities of each region's far-right populists. Scholars note key differences in how historical contexts change the motivations behind the respective regions' far-right populist movements. For example, Pirro (2013) points out how Western European far-right populists draw on the legacy of the 1968 student protests as a "silent counter-revolution," emphasizing issues such as immigration and a "return to European values." Far-right movements in Central-Eastern Europe instead tap into a "post-communist" syndrome, focusing on nostalgia for authoritarianism (read: social order), and resentment towards liberalism's broken promises to stabilize the region post-socialism (Pirro, 2013, p. 621). While Western European far-right populists generally still support democracy as an institution, Central-Eastern European far-right populists indicate dissatisfaction with democracy, even controlling for negative opinions toward specific politicians or parties (Allen, 2017). This project contributes to existing literature by analyzing Eastern Germany through a Central-Eastern European lens rather than a Western European lens. By assessing Eastern Germany's distinctive identity as a post-socialist region incorporated into a Western country, this project hopes to clarify potential cultural or historical factors that contribute to a comparatively higher rate of far-right populism.

This project combines existing research on European right-wing populism and economic nationalism with an examination of the socioeconomic conditions in regions most prone to far-right populism. While previous research has examined the differences between Western European-style populism and Eastern European-style, the goal of this research is to broaden current debates on far-right extremism in post-socialist Europe by including Eastern German right-wing populism in the discussion. By incorporating a historical materialist perspective, the project explores the popularity of the AfD and Russia in Eastern Germany through the context of being a post-socialist region rather than merely part of a Western European country. The study uses definitions of populism and economic nationalism (see above) to identify how the AfD MPs perpetuate anti-Western and pro-Putin attitudes in their rhetoric. This research adds to existing research investigating why far-right politics are more prevalent or distinct in former socialist countries compared to the West. As the impact of economic nationalism and Euroscepticism grows throughout Europe, far-right politics continue to threaten the stability of democracies and disconnect nations from the European Union. This project aims to provide a nuanced analysis of the historical and econom-

ic factors that may contribute to the AfD's popularity in Eastern Germany as well as highlight which factors may fuel the rise of pro-Putin far-right populist movements across Europe.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Quantitative Analysis

To collect primary data for this study, I gathered demographic information, including age, gender, and birthplace, for each of the 80 AfD members of parliament (MPs) serving in the 2021 Bundestag parliament. Using keywords in both German and English, I collected information from publicly available online sources. I searched for key demographic data on publicly available websites, such as the self-reported official Bundestag biographies on Bundestag.de, the MP's social media accounts, and campaign websites. I conducted a search on the politicians' social media websites and Google using each MP's name along with keywords such as "Putin," "*Russland/Russia*," "*Russisch/Russian*," and "*Russen/Russians*," to identify news article scandals or social media posts that may suggest a pro-Putin stance. I then recorded each result in the Excel spreadsheet and assigned each member a numerical code (the "Putin codes") based on their public stance towards Russia (see Table 2). Conducting searches on the easily accessible and publicly available official websites and social media accounts allowed for a consistent approach to gathering data across all AfD Bundestag members, minimizing the risk of selective reporting. Compiling and organizing demographic information into one spreadsheet built a dataset for regression analysis to analyze potential demographic patterns within the pro-Putin MPs.

I utilized content analysis of news stories and social media posts from AfD MPs to determine their stance on Russia or Putin. After examining each politician's statements, news articles, and social media posts, I thematically coded each politician and documented the rationale for each code. I coded a politician as pro-Putin for overtly praising Russia or Putin or spending a significant amount of time defending Russia, particularly in the aftermath of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. A politician received the neutral code if they either did not express a strong stance on Russia/Putin, both defended and attacked Russia/Putin, or if there was no clear evidence of their stance on Russia. Politicians received the anti-Putin code by repeatedly condemning Russia/Putin, expressing strong pro-NATO or pro-USA opinions (especially in the context of NATO or the USA as an alternative to Russia), or by repeatedly using negative descriptors for Russia or Putin (e.g., "autocracy," "repressive," or "dictator"). By applying a systematic method of coding to each politician, I established clear and objective criteria for categorizing each politician's stance on Putin. Compiling data into a spreadsheet built the data set for regression analysis.

The study used regression analysis of the data from the Excel spreadsheet. This regression analysis organized the quantitative data to identify potential correlations among AfD members according to each member's demographic categories and views of Putin. I imported the collected data from my Excel spreadsheet into the statistical software STATA. I then conducted a regression analysis of the "Putin codes" alongside the MPs' data to identify which demographic characteristics were most predictive of an AfD politician's support for Russia. I then collected the regression output to statistically analyze which demographic details were the strongest predictors for an AfD member's stance on Russia. Regression allowed for a quantitative analysis to determine the strength of the relationship between demographic variables and the politicians' stances on Putin, providing statistically significant evidence to support or reject potential correlations. This method provided a statistical basis and a visual representation to identify which characteristics are most strongly associated with support for Putin among the German far-right party.

Qualitative Analysis

To supplement the quantitative analysis, the second phase of data analysis examined historical and geopolitical events to explore the roots of pro-Russian sentiment in Germany. While regression analysis provided insight into the relationships between demographic variables and pro-Putin sentiment among AfD politicians, the qualitative phase of data analysis allowed for an exploration of historical and contextual explanations for these relationships. I consulted primary and secondary sources, such as news articles, academic papers, and historical texts to examine the historic, economic, and cultural factors in post-socialist countries that may have influenced the rise of the far-right in these regions. The historical analysis investigated how key events in German and European history, such as the division of Germany during the Cold War, the fall of the USSR, and German reunification may have affected Eastern German culture and pro-Russia sentiment in the region. Content analysis also examined how the economic impact of German reunification, the 2008 financial crisis, and the impact of anti-Russian sanctions on the German economy may have contributed to Putin-friendly views among AfD members and Eastern Germans. This project aims to provide a more thorough understanding of the causes influencing pro-Putin beliefs in the AfD by adding a qualitative analysis in addition to the quantitative analysis. The historical and economic examination adds to the results of the regression analysis by providing background information for the social and political context in Germany.

To explore potential explanations for AfD MPs holding pro-Putin views, I compiled, translated, and analyzed politicians' public statements and social media posts. I used thematic coding to organize and classify the MPs'

posts and statements by the subject matter the politicians discussed. I analyzed the collected data I earlier used to code each politician on the “Putin code” and thematically coded each statement or post by themes such as “economics,” “history,” or “sociocultural identity.” To ensure consistency throughout the project, I translated all statements and posts into English. I then compiled a spreadsheet of each statement or post and included the date of each statement, the original German statement, the translated English statements, and the URLs to the corresponding posts. By compiling the politician’s statements and quotes, I was able to contextualize the qualitative secondary sources about the region with direct insights into the beliefs of politicians from the region. By thematically coding the statements and social media posts, I was able to compare the primary sources with the secondary sources to identify patterns within the pro-Putin politicians in the AfD.

ANALYSIS

The German East/West divide

AfD members from Eastern Germany are more likely to support Putin or otherwise display pro-Russian sentiments. The regression results showed a statistically significant correlation between an AfD Bundestag member being from the former GDR (or another former Warsaw Pact state) and demonstrating pro-Putin or pro-Russia beliefs. Specifically, the regression in Figure 1 indicates AfD MPs from the Eastern New States are about 0.62 units more likely to support Putin than MPs from the Western states, which was statistically significant with a P-value of 0.00. Of the 80 AfD members of the 2021 Bundestag, only seven received the “anti-Putin” code (-1), with all having been born and raised in former West Germany. Other variables, such as gender, age, or level of education, had P-values greater than 0.05 and thus did not show a statistically significant correlation with AfD politicians’ attitudes toward Putin or Russia, indicating the East/West variable is the strongest predicting factor to determine if an MP is friendly toward Russia or Putin (see Figure 1). The regression results support the hypothesis that AfD MPs from the Eastern New States are more likely to espouse friendly views toward Putin and suggest geographic and sociocultural identity as *Ossis* (Eastern Germans) may be more significant predictors of friendliness to Putin within AfD MPs in the Bundestag. The prevalence of pro-Russian views within the AfD likely stems from a variety of factors, including the economic, social, and historical conditions of Eastern Germany before and after reunification.

Sociocultural and historical factors, namely a distinct *Ossi* identity and resentment towards former West Germany, may be contributing factors to pro-Russian views in the New States. By bringing up *Ossi* political and historical tensions with the West, AfD politicians reinforce an East/West divide and position Russia as a like-minded “Eastern country,” a natural ally against, and fellow victim of, the predatory West. Many Eastern Germans

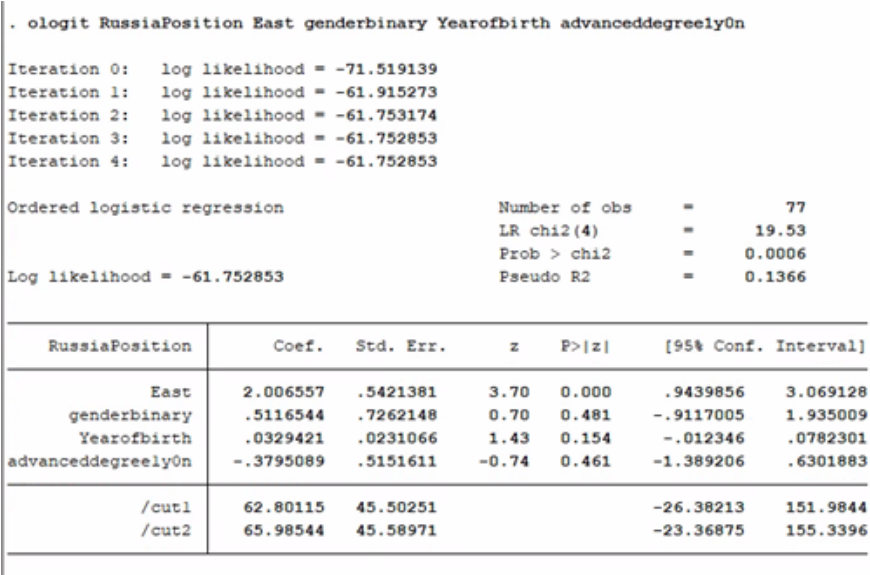


Figure 1: Regression results

saw reunification as an expansion of West Germany rather than a proper unification of two equal states, as the West took over nearly all decisions regarding reunification and administration of the newly unified country (Ther, 2020). Petra Köpping, a member of the Saxony state parliament and an East German who lived through reunification, summarized the popular Eastern sentiment during post-unification as “a scam by West German capitalists against the East German proletariat who had been so hopeful at unification” (Köpping, 2018). Still today, two-thirds of people living in Saxony, the most economically successful of the New States, believe East German achievements are underappreciated or ignored and feel forbidden to express any positive opinions about the GDR (Pickel & Pickel, 2023). Rather than promoting an East/West cultural unification, this sense of Eastern resentment has perpetuated a distinct *Ossi* identity, defined in opposition to the West. AfD politicians from the former East bring up this *Ossi* identity and hostility towards the West when defending Russia or criticizing Western countries.

AfD politicians from the Eastern New States frequently invoked Eastern German frustration with the West when speaking about Putin or Russia. MPs commonly cited an Eastern German identity and a feeling of disrespect from the West while expressing friendly views toward Putin and advocating for increased cooperation with Russia in social media posts and speeches. On social media, AfD MPs often frame pro-Russian opinions within the context of the East/West divide as an opportunity to connect with potential vot-

ers. Tino Chrupalla,¹ an MP from the Eastern German town of Weißwasser wrote on Facebook, “Studies show that one in five East Germans feels dissatisfied and unappreciated with what has been achieved. We in the AfD are not satisfied with what has been achieved either” (Chrupalla, 2020). Some Eastern AfD MPs, like Jürgen Pohl, overtly state their Eastern resentment and frequently discuss feeling silenced or censored by Westerners (see Table 1). Though Easterners like Chrupalla and Pohl speak out against a perceived Western German superiority complex, Eastern Germans express a sense of marginalization and social dissatisfaction not just with Western Germans but with the West as a whole. This anti-Western sentiment of an unappreciated and neglected Eastern Bloc further solidifies a sense of solidarity between Eastern Germans and Russia.

Jürgen Pohl, MP from Magdeburg:

“Instead, Mr. Wanderwitz stands out above all because he flatly belittles his East German compatriots. But this hardly serves as a distraction from his poor current account. Because even during his tenure, the gap between Eastern and Western Germany in terms of wages and income has hardly melted. Worse still, the West has now unassailably overtaken the East in the distribution of wealth. In short: the poorer Germans still live in the new federal states; the CDU still bears the main political responsibility for this.”

“But 30 years of German unity also mean the loss of jobs, the loss of credibility in politics, the theft of homeland and freedom of opinion.”

Table 1

Some AfD politicians leverage this Eastern animosity to explicitly advocate for closer relations with Russia, occasionally meeting with Russian officials or Russian state media. Another example of an Eastern AfD member publicly embracing anti-West sentiments is Eugen Schmidt, a *Russlanddeutsche Spätaussiedler* (“Russia German late repatriate,” ethnic Germans born and raised in the former USSR) from the Kazakh SSR. According to Fromm’s documentary, *“Russlands deutsche Propaganda-Krieger”* (2023), Schmidt earned the nickname, “Putin’s propagandist in the Bundestag” among the German press for overtly voicing Eastern discontentment, advocating for Russian interests, and working closely with Russian media. Two days before the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Schmidt, who is fluent in Russian, told the Russian newspaper *Комсомольская Правда*:

There is no democracy in Germany. This means that a unified opinion is being imposed, by the ruling elite, and all other political opinions are being suppressed by all possible means: on the Internet, in the

¹ All MPs mentioned are from Eastern German towns or other former socialist countries unless stated otherwise.

media, including physical assaults on those who think differently. (Fromm, 2023)

Schmidt's interview with the *Комсомольская Правда* aligns with Putin's propaganda strategy (highlighted in the introduction) to undermine German democracy and encourage distrust in Western institutions. Eugen Schmidt's comments highlight how populist rhetoric and distrust in Western countries and institutions contribute to an AfD politician's affinity for Russia.

While Eugen Schmidt has received international media attention for disseminating Russian propaganda, some MPs from Western Germany are equally as infamous for collaborating with the Russian government. Specifically, Markus Frohnmaier, a member of the ethno-nationalist AfD wing *Der Flügel*, is one of the party's most well-known MPs with credible accusations of ties to the Russian government. Frohnmaier, from the Stuttgart region,² visited pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk and met with Putin advisor and neo-fascist philosopher Aleksander Dugin ("Wie Putin die AfD," 2019). In 2019, the European media outlets BBC, ZDF, and Der Spiegel accused Frohnmaier of being a Russian plant, after leaked Kremlin documents revealed plans to support his 2017 election campaign and have an "absolutely controlled MP in the Bundestag" (Gatehouse, 2019). Though Frohnmaier vehemently denies direct ties with the Kremlin, the politician has repeatedly defended Putin and advocated for pro-Russian interests, including vocally supporting Russia's annexation of Crimea (Schmidt, 2019). However, while Easterners like Schmidt often cite an *Ossi* identity and Eastern resentment as reasons for supporting Russia, Frohnmaier seldom posts about Eastern Germany, preferring instead to speak out against immigration, globalism, and Islam from a unified German perspective. Though Frohnmaier is a Westerner with strong pro-Putin beliefs, Frohnmaier's affinity for Russia likely stems more from an anti-globalist and anti-liberal ideology rather than an anti-Western sentiment.

Even decades after reunification, Eastern Germans continue to express feeling disadvantaged and insulted by Western Germans, reinforcing a sociocultural divide between the East and the West. Recent comments by AfD politicians highlight this Eastern political and cultural frustration, which leads many Eastern Germans to look to Russia for solidarity against the Western world. For the past 25 years, 55 to 60% of Eastern Germans have consistently reported feeling disproportionately disadvantaged regarding the standard of living, compared to around 35% of Western Germans (Pickel & Pickel, 2023). As time went on, two stereotypes about the East and the West emerged: the *Besser-Wessis*, or know-it-all Westerners who look down upon the *Jammer-Ossis*; the "whiny Easterners" annoyingly complaining about reunification despite being the comparatively luckiest demographic in

² Frohnmaier was born in post-socialist Romania but was adopted by a German couple and raised in Weil der Stadt, a town located in the Stuttgart metropolitan area.

the former Warsaw Pact (Ther, 2020). In social media posts, AfD politicians reaffirm this sentiment and regularly cite experiences of discrimination and contempt from the *Besser-Wessis* (see Table 2). Comments by Eastern MPs demonstrate how the legacy of the Berlin Wall still contributes to distinct East and West identities and negative stereotypes, worsening Eastern resentment and anti-Western sentiment. Many Eastern German MPs see Russia as a potential ally against this paternalistic and neglectful West, which contributes to Eastern German politicians being more pro-Russia.

Tino Chrupalla, MP from Weißwasser:

"[At the] celebration of 30 years of German unity: Steinmeier gives a divisive speech and Claudia Roth can't stand sitting next to an East German. She had the seat card swapped next to me."

"Again and again, country bashing, village bashing, East bashing and especially Saxony bashing: Either from the perspective of pseudo-intellectual, 'urban', 'cosmopolitan' capital city journalists, you bash 'the East' or the allegedly backward people in rural regions, or you pretend to understand the East, who wants to take 'the worries and needs of the people' first – of course always with the goal of leading the 'progress rejecters' and 'modernization losers' ultimately into the brave new multicultural world."

Jürgen Pohl, MP from Magdeburg:

"And it is precisely these East Germans who suffer from low incomes, high unemployment, low pensions, and who now also have to be lectured about democracy and 'basic values,' although they – unlike the West Germans – already proved with the peaceful revolution of 1989 that they understood democracy."

Steffen Kotré, MP from East Berlin:

"We East Germans know what paternalism and what ideology mean."

Table 2

Post-socialist resentment toward the West

After the end of the Cold War, most post-socialist countries looked forward to joining the liberal Western world. Yet, decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, many Central and Eastern Europeans from former socialist countries still do not feel fully accepted by Western countries, leading to some AfD politicians advocating for greater cooperation with Russia. According to Kratsev and Holmes (2020):

Having escaped from Moscow's imperial grip and been promised that they could join the liberal world as politically equal partners, the formerly communist countries of the region felt that they were being treated with casual condescension as if they belonged to the non-Western 'rest,' as if they were not really 'Europeans' after all, but should be grouped alongside the peoples of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. (pp. 68)

As NATO grew to accept more post-socialist countries throughout the 2000s, some Russian politicians, including Putin, advocated for Russia’s entry into NATO and the EU as part of a continent-wide European cooperation movement (Rankin, 2021). Alexander Gauland, an AfD MP from Chemnitz, also pushed for more European cooperation with Russia, complaining to the Russian newspaper *Комсомольская Правда*, “Russia is part of Europe, unlike all sorts of strange countries in the Middle East with which it cannot be compared” (Chesnokov, 2019). To many in the AfD, the West would rather cooperate with “non-Europeans” than fully accept post-socialist countries as equal political partners in the liberal world. Therefore, some Eastern Germans express sympathetic views toward Russia due to a shared experience of exclusion from the Western world.

Many Western German MPs, on the other hand, have adopted the opposite stance towards Russia compared to Eastern German party members. Several Western MPs in the AfD, such as Jörg Schneider and Rüdiger Lucassen, proudly support Germany’s place in NATO and promote continued close ties to the West. Of the 80 AfD members of the Bundestag, only seven exhibited overtly anti-Putin views, representing just 0.09% of the party currently in parliament (see Figure 1). MP Jörg Schneider, from the Western German town of Solingen, was one of the few AfD MPs to openly support Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, posting on Facebook, “Whoever still says ‘warmonger NATO, peace angel Putin’ is – with respect – absolutely nuts!” (Schneider, 2022; see Table 3). Western MP Rüdiger Lucassen, another staunch advocate for NATO and Ukraine, defied the party line of German neutrality, pushing for continued military support to Ukraine and calling Russia “a notoriously corrupt and undemocratic oligarchic system” (Lucassen, 2022; see Table 4). The East/West divide often leads to Eastern MPs supporting Russia, while Western MPs tend to be more openly critical of Russia, likely due to the established participation of Western systems and West Germany’s historic affinity with the US. As long-standing members of the Western Bloc, Western Germans are more likely to express support for Western institutions, such as the EU or NATO, whereas Eastern Germans often feel resentment and exclusion from these organizations.

Jörg Schneider, MP from Solingen (Western Germany)
I envy the people of Ukraine [for having] this president. And those who call for Ukraine’s surrender “to avoid bloodshed”: After a surrender, there would be a Russian puppet government, summary courts, executions, ... [sic] I myself served as a soldier for twelve years. And [I would] not lay down my arms in the event of an attack on my country!

Table 3

Rüdiger Lucassen, MP from Westerholz (Western Germany)

"The responsibility for the current energy crisis lies with Angela Merkel and Vladimir Putin – not NATO. Socially, Russia's notoriously corrupt and undemocratic oligarchic system cannot be an ally either. The frequently voiced, justified criticism of Western decadence and decay of values, as well as Russia's reference to its Christian occidental heritage, do nothing to change this. Those who use Islamist hordes against a Slavic-Christian brother nation, who have one of the highest abortion rates in the world and who use non-cultural migrants as a weapon against Europe have no moral credibility. To bet on Russia is to bet on a loser."

Table 4

While Westerners like Lucassen and Schneider praise NATO and the US, many Eastern Germans look to Russia as an alternative to the United States' dominant position as a unipolar world superpower. In part, the Central and Eastern European right-wing push towards multipolarity and advocacy for less US involvement in Europe stems from a distrust of the West. As a result of the 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the 2008 financial crisis, many Germans became disillusioned with US hegemony and began to view Russia as a potential alternative to Western political dominance in Europe, advocating for Germany to be a neutral mediator between the US and Russia (Kundnani, 2015; Newnham, 2017). In a survey about the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, nearly 59% of Eastern Germans agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement, "NATO provoked Russia for so long that Russia had no choice but to go to war," compared to roughly 35% of Western Germans (Lamberty et al., 2022). On social media, AfD politicians frequently endorsed these anti-American sentiments and further cooperation with Russia, even in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Schmidt, 2022; see Table 5). After the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, Eastern AfD politicians continued to blame the invasion on NATO and the US and downplayed Russia's role in the war, demonstrating a growing disappointment in the US and increased tolerance toward Russia. As Germans' confidence in the West (particularly the United States) dwindles, Russia's popularity as a diplomatic alternative to Western hegemony increases, bolstering Putin's popularity in AfD strongholds like Eastern Germany.

Jürgen Pohl, MP from Magdeburg:

Oct-22

"Russia is not our enemy and America is not our friend."

"Since February 2022, the terrible war between the Slavic brother nations has been raging, especially in the southwest of Ukraine, which, as pawns of American great power interests, have bloodily attacked each other."

<p>Petr Bystron, MP from Olomouc, Czechoslovakia:</p> <p>“Why doesn’t this play a role in the current discussions?”</p> <p>(Referring to a quote from then-senator Joe Biden in 1997 saying, “What would force Russia to a hostile reaction is an expansion of NATO onto the Russian border.”)</p> <p>“NATO made a promise to the USSR, didn’t it?”</p>
<p>Steffen Kotré, MP from East Berlin:</p> <p>“In addition, regarding my statement that American think tanks are working out plans on how best to destabilize Russia, I would like to draw attention to the following source from the RAND Corporation. This is a large American think tank, which was funded with 350 million US dollars in 2020 alone (55% of which came from the US Department of Defense).”</p>
<p>Rene Springer, MP from East Berlin:</p> <p>Feb-23</p> <p>“For the US imperialism into the 3rd world war? Not with us! Do we as Germans really want to go into World War 3 for the preservation of global US imperialism?”</p>
<p>Tino Chrupalla, MP from Weißwasser:</p> <p>Press conference, 18 May 2022</p> <p>“This war also has several fathers. The role of NATO and the role of the German government must also be discussed here, of course.”</p>
<p>Christina Baum, MP from Mühlhausen:</p> <p>May-19</p> <p>“THE USA LEAD A PERMANENT WAR. POPULAR WARS, for which Hitler’s generals were sentenced to death and hanged in Nuremberg!!!! The USA brings no prosperity, no democracy to the sanctioned, the bombed countries, but only DESTRUCTION, only HUNGER, only HARSHIP.”</p>

Table 5

Despite warnings from the United States about Putin’s authoritarian tendencies, many Germans, especially in the AfD, still advocate for increased ties between Russia and the European Union. Cooperation with Russia has remained popular in Germany throughout the 2010s and into the 2020s, especially in the Eastern New States, fueled in part by Russia’s natural gas supply to Germany. Fifty-six percent of Easterners and 71% of AfD voters agreed or somewhat agreed with the populist statement, “Putin is going

against a global elite that is pulling the strings in the background" (Lamberty et al., 2022). According to a public survey in 2017, 78% of Germans favored more cooperation with Russia, only slightly below France, the first country, and far above the US, which had fallen to last place after the 2016 election of Donald Trump (Fix, 2020). Many AfD MPs endorse the idea of Russia as a misjudged country that the West often unfairly uses as a scapegoat, with MP Enrico Komning (2022) posting:

When you hear representatives of the old parties talk like this, you get the impression that the energy crisis is a great misfortune, for which the "evil" Putin from the Kremlin is mainly responsible.

Eastern AfD members' hesitance to criticize Russia and tendency to downplay the Kremlin's aggression further demonstrates the region's worsening alienation from the West. By utilizing populist language positioning Putin as an Eastern anti-elite leader fighting against the corrupt West, AfD MPs advertise Russia as an attractive alternative to US world hegemony.

Cultural affinity

After roughly 45 years of separation, cultural values on each side of the Iron Curtain had already diverged. Many former socialist countries, including Eastern Germany, experienced a sense of disappointment with Western progressivism following the end of the Cold War and thus turned to Putin's Russia as a leader of traditional values. Many Poles, for example, celebrated the end of the USSR as a victory for Christianity and traditionalism, and became disappointed when realizing "Western 'normality' means secularism, multiculturalism, and gay marriage" (Kratsev & Holmes, 2020). Similarly, Eastern Germans were once eager to join the liberal West, but now many consider the West lost to "cultural decadence and Islamization," a threat only the Russians seem to be brave enough to fight—or as Alexander Gauland said, "Germany needs Russia as a Christian bulwark against an Islamic invasion" (Pates & Leser, 2021; Troianovski, 2017). AfD politicians voice this disappointment with the West for not living up to Central and Eastern European expectations, and consequently, many in the AfD turn to Russia to fulfill conservative and religious expectations (see Table 6). Dissatisfaction with Western secularism and liberal values has exacerbated the alienation many Central and Eastern Europeans feel from the West. Many AfD politicians have begun to view Putin as a strong leader against the comparatively more liberal and progressive values prevalent in the West.

<p>Enrico Komning, MP from Straslund, quoting an article: “The weakness of the West is self-inflicted! Whoever gives up their identity, their culture, their ability to defend themselves, and their reproductive power shouldn’t be surprised when they are duped... ‘Putin knows that he is dealing with pussy states in the EU, with decadent, submissive, and self-conscious cultures in decline...they are sacrificing their national-cultural identity to vital immigrants who are advancing practically without a fight, and the nucleus of society, the family, to twisted ideologues.”</p>
<p>Christina Baum, MP from Mühlhausen: “The decadence of the West is Putin’s strength. The West has not considered that Russia feels like a humiliated great power.”</p>

Table 6

Though Eastern German MPs vocally denounce Western progressivism, admiration for Russia’s traditional cultural values is not exclusive to Eastern Germans. In fact, two Western AfD MPs, Stefan Keuter and Hans-Thomas Tillschneider, have become infamous in German politics for their strong pro-Russia stances, stemming mainly from anti-liberalism and a disdain for multicultural or inclusive social values. Keuter, an ethno-nationalist who has repeatedly downplayed Nazi atrocities and sent neo-Nazi memes on WhatsApp, personally met with Russian politicians and oligarchs, denounced “anti-Russian and pro-Ukrainian propaganda,” and served as an election observer in the 2021 Russian election (Bensmann & Löer, 2018; Becker, 2022). Hans-Thomas Tillschneider was being observed by the *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, BfV) for right-wing extremism, antisemitism, and vocal pro-Putin beliefs (“Höcke, Kalbitz, und Tillschneider,” 2020). In September 2022, Tillschneider traveled with four other AfD politicians to the Russian-occupied Donbas region of Ukraine as part of a pro-Russia propaganda trip (Connolly, 2022). Although pro-Putin MPs are not exclusively from the East, pro-Putin Westerners like Keuter and Tillschneider are outliers and have a different motivation than Eastern MPs for supporting Russia. Tillschneider and Keuter’s tendencies toward Nazi apologia show that these Western MPs praise Putin not out of a sense of post-socialist camaraderie or Eastern resentment, but rather out of admiration for Russia’s right-wing nationalism.

Historical solidarity

Eastern MPs may be friendlier to Putin due to East Germany’s historical ties to Russia during the Cold War. The GDR maintained very close political ties to the USSR, and East German citizens enthusiastically embraced Russian culture. This friendly relationship developed in part due to a feeling of mutual equality between East Germany and the USSR. Unlike many other Warsaw Pact countries, the GDR was not subject to Russification (the forced

assimilation to Russian language and culture), and as a result, East Germans were eager consumers of Russian media, culture, and language (Hoyer, 2022; Knight, 2022). Many Germans still hold positive opinions of Russia because of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's role in facilitating Germany's peaceful reunification (Schlögel, 2020). After Gorbachev died in 2022, Matthias Moosdorf posted a tribute to the Soviet leader on Facebook, praising the relationship between Germany and Russia, saying "Gorbachev reminds us of what Germany owes to the Russian empire. Above all, reunification" (Moosdorf, 2022). This historic connection between the two former allies fostered a feeling of mutual solidarity and contributed to lasting favorable sentiments towards Russia among many Eastern Germans. AfD politicians continue to draw on this historical relationship when defending the Russian state's actions.

Even after reunification, fondness for Russian culture and enthusiasm to continue cooperation with Russia persevered in the Eastern New States. Due to this close historical relationship between East Germany and Russia, Eastern AfD politicians often extend this goodwill toward modern Russia. According to Hoyer (2022), although most Eastern Germans report negative feelings toward the GDR, they do not associate the Soviets or Russians with the oppressive elements of the East German regime (such as the Stasi). On the contrary, many Eastern Germans still view the Soviet Union as liberators from Nazism rather than occupiers during the days of socialism and express deep remorse for the Nazi regime's aggression against the USSR (Hoyer, 2022). AfD MPs from the East frequently brought up positive feelings towards Russia, as well as a sense of historic solidarity between East Germany and Russia when discussing modern Russian-German relations (see Table 7). The close relationship between East Germany and Russia, as well as lingering guilt from Germany's atrocities during World War II, causes many Eastern German MPs to be more hesitant to criticize Russia. Eastern German AfD MPs speak positively about the USSR and modern Russia, and members show an enthusiasm to continue cooperation and close diplomatic ties with Russia.

Petr Bystron, MP from Olomouc, Czechoslovakia, quoting a tweet from Roger Köppel:

"German tanks are rolling toward Russia again. Is this the belated thanks for the Soviets peacefully withdrawing their troops from East Germany and allowing the Germans to reunify without bloodshed?"

Tino Chrupalla, MP from Weißwasser:

"Today we celebrate the #reunification of Germany. We thank those who made this possible. For me, these are primarily the former citizens of the GDR, but also the Russians, whose contribution to reunification has recently been greatly downplayed."

Steffen Kotré, MP from East Berlin:

“80 years after the beginning of the German-Soviet War in 1941, our Federal Chairman Tino Chrupalla traveled to Russia. An important sign for peace and détente between two European peoples. This visit is now problematized by parts of the federal executive committee. Thus, one stands against their own program. There is neither support nor backing for this from us. We Germans know that we can never go against Russia, but only with it.”

Table 7

Many Eastern Germans feel a sense of post-socialist solidarity with their former comrades in Russia. Eastern German politicians, including former chancellor Angela Merkel, have expressed a sense of familiarity with Russia, stemming from a common history during the Cold War and following the collapse of socialism. Many Eastern Germans empathize with Russians, owing to a shared experience of economic and social turmoil after the socialist collapse in the 1990s, as well as a modern feeling of unequal treatment by the West, which is an experience the capitalist Western Germans do not understand (Knight, 2022). This feeling of friendship lasted throughout much of the 2000s, with the leaders of the two countries also sharing a common GDR past and fluency in each other’s languages—Chancellor Angela Merkel learned Russian growing up in the GDR, and Russian President Vladimir Putin learned German while stationed in the GDR for five years (Newnham, 2017). AfD MPs echo this feeling of solidarity with Russians and describe a shared post-socialist struggle against Western mistreatment in the aftermath of the USSR collapse (see Table 11). Many Eastern Germans feel a mutual understanding with Russians as East Germany’s longtime ally and country that shared the post-socialist experience. Eastern German AfD MPs, like Moosdorf and Kotré, allude to this historic bond and anti-Western frustrations when advocating for increased cooperation with Russia.

Matthias Moosdorf, MP from Leipzig:

“After all, it was the political weakness of an economically run-down world power that [West] Germany and the United States found so appealing: they had won the Cold War and that was how it was to remain.”

“The concessions wrested from Gorbachev were like gold treasures paid for with glass beads, first politically and later, under Yeltsin, economically as well. The West, primarily the USA, began to stock up on everything that was needed or of value, like a junkie who had broken into the drugstore. How we loved the Russians for that!”

Steffen Kotré, MP from East Berlin:

“We East Germans know what a loss of homeland means.”

Table 8

Economic conditions

Another contributing factor to pro-Russian sentiment within Eastern German AfD members is the poor economic situation in Eastern Germany. The AfD, a vocal critic of the German economic system, frequently blames Eastern Germany's poor economic conditions on the European Union's financial policies and the post-reunification economic liberalization process in the region. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, people in post-socialist nations enthusiastically embraced liberalism, believing it to be the best system to promote freedom and liberty (Kratsev & Holmes, 2020). However, adhering to the notion of "shock therapy neoliberalism," West Germans economically transformed the New States with very little East German input, believing, as Margaret Thatcher said, "There is no alternative" (Ther, 2020). The implementation of shock therapy neoliberalism and Merkel's defense of austerity measures as "*alternativlos*" (without alternative), inspired Eurosceptic economics professor Bernd Lucke to found the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in protest of the German government's Euro bailout and the poor economic situation (Jahn, 2013). The "*alternativlos*" economic policies were made on behalf of Eastern Germans, ultimately creating economic disenfranchisement and resentment towards the Westerners who implemented the measures. The consequences of the Western German-led shock therapy neoliberalism in the East have therefore made Eastern Germans more receptive to cooperation with Russia as a means of bolstering the region's struggling economy.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, mass privatization and neoliberalization in Eastern Germany resulted in widespread job loss and economic hardship in the region. During the reunification process, the West German government created the *Treuhandanstalt* (trust agency) to oversee the mass privatization of East German businesses. Because Eastern Germans had little input in this liberalization process, the financial difficulties following mass privatization furthered feelings of bitterness towards the West. The *Treuhand* preserved only every fourth job in Eastern Germany, and by 1994, the agency had sold roughly 80% of East German assets and enterprises to West Germans, 14% to foreigners, and only 6% to former GDR citizens (Ther, 2020; Köpping, 2018). Industrial production in Eastern Germany declined substantially by the mid-1990s, dropping to 27% of the 1988 level, which was the steepest drop of any post-socialist country in Europe, including the war-torn Bosnia and Herzegovina (Pates & Leser, 2021). *Ossis* in the AfD frequently cite this poor economic situation when venting frustrations about the German reunification process, blaming much of Eastern Germany's economic conditions on a callous and greedy West (see Table 9). During reunification, Eastern Germans experienced mass unemployment and poverty while Western Germans gained jobs and industry, creating a deep sense of resentment toward liberal Western countries. Feeling unappreciated by the West, many Eastern Germans have sought out alternative economic allies, such as Russia.

<p>Tino Chrupalla, MP from Weißwasser:</p> <p>“There you also read: ‘the average economic power of the new federal states, measured in terms of gross domestic product per capita, reached a level of almost 73 percent of the overall German average in 2019.’ The federal government is seriously selling this as a success – in 2020!”</p>
<p>Jürgen Pohl, MP from Magdeburg:</p> <p>“The Treuhand ‘privatized’ 12,000 state-owned enterprises, selling off many of them for far less than they were worth, sometimes in dubious ways. 4,000 companies were liquidated altogether. Two-thirds of East German jobs were eliminated and employees laid off. This is how the East Germans paid for unification with their national wealth. They were left with none of the profits they realized, which all flowed to the West. Behind these figures, however, is the traumatic experience of an entire generation in East Germany. People were deprived of their prospects in life; one could also say that they were cheated out of their future.”</p>

Table 9

The dismantling of East German public sectors and welfare programs during the German reunification process further contributed to a sense of socioeconomic inequalities and injustices between the East and the West. This perceived injustice and comparative inequalities between the two regions further fueled Eastern animosity and reinforced an “East versus West” mentality. According to Petra Köpping (2018), after reunification, East German *Arbiture* (roughly equivalent to a high school diploma), college degrees, and other educational qualifications were mass devalued after a West German federal judge ruled a mass recognition of GDR degrees would “de facto devalue West German degrees.” Eastern Germans felt a sense of betrayal after the German reunification process dismantled GDR-era social safety nets, such as the healthcare system, unemployment benefits, and pensions (Köpping, 2018). Jürgen Pohl wrote, “Where is the promised and long overdue harmonization of East and West pensions? ...Why are the pension entitlements of divorced women in the GDR still not recognized?” (Pohl, 2019). In typical populist fashion, Pohl embodies the “voice of the unheard people,” speaking out for Easterners who still feel a sense of disenfranchisement from the Western government. By leveraging this Eastern frustration and speaking favorably of the Russian government, a vocal critic of the West, AfD politicians like Pohl perpetuate a sense of division between the “Eastern world” and the “Western world.”

The fall of the GDR and the subsequent economic restructuring of the 1990s contributed to current economic disparities between the Eastern states and the Western states. These poor economic conditions perpetuate a feeling of Western advantage over the East and contribute to the popularity of the AfD, who blame the West for the New States’ comparative poverty and vocally advocate for closer ties to Russia. For East Germans, the *Treuhand* be-

came a symbol of the “brutal turbo-capitalism” that deliberately eliminated potential competition from the East and bankrupted the region (Köpping, 2018). For many Eastern Germans today, the *Treuhand* still represents the colonialist, predatory capitalist Western German who orchestrated a massive asset transfer from the East to the West (Pates & Leser, 2021). In a Facebook video, MP Tino Chrupalla spoke about the negative economic impact the *Treuhand* had over the Eastern states, urged the Bundestag to let the AfD lead an investigation committee for the *Treuhand*, and angrily refuted accusations of right-wing extremism in the AfD as Western condescension (Chrupalla, 2020; see Table 10). Many in the AfD feel Eastern Germans have very little authority over their economy and are therefore worse off compared to the West. AfD MPs voice this feeling of comparative disadvantage to promote closer ties to Putin, who they feel would better advocate for the economic interests of a fellow post-socialist state.

Tino Chrupalla, MP from Weißwasser:

“30 years of German unity: Instead of tackling the economic and social problems, the established parties accuse East Germans of being inclined towards right-wing extremism. First, you took the people’s entire national wealth with the *Treuhand* and now you are defaming them.”

Table 10

Eastern Germany has still not recovered economically from the reunification over thirty years ago. Many Eastern Germans accuse the West of mishandling the reunification process, attributing the poor economic situation in the New States to the liberal German government both in the 1990s and today. Of the 17,500 millionaires in Germany, only 105 live in the former GDR, with the majority being Western Germans who moved to the East (Köpping, 2018). The average income of Eastern Germans is nearly 20% lower than in the West, with a third of Eastern Germans earning less than €10 an hour (Pates & Leser, 2021). AfD politician Jürgen Pohl regularly calls out the current German government for an alleged apathy towards Eastern Germany and continued mishandling of the economy at the expense of Eastern Germans (Pohl, 2022; see Table 11). Eastern Germans like Pohl regularly express a sense of desperation as their economic situation has still not improved since reunification. This feeling of neglect from the West further fuels hostility towards Western Germany and the European Union, contributing to Eastern German AfD MPs aligning themselves with Putin’s Russia, which offers an alternative economic, cultural, and political alliance.

Jürgen Pohl, MP from Magdeburg:

"The Greens don't care about the middle of Germany! We in the East are losing jobs! We in the East are losing the future of our families! We in the East are being driven into poverty!"

"30 years of German unity means that in the east of the republic, incomes are lower, unemployment is higher, the risk of poverty is higher, and the gross domestic product is lower than in the west. It also means that no East German heads a German university, that only two East Germans chair the 100 highest-turnover German companies, and that no East German presides over the federal courts."

"I used this opportunity to explain the positions of the #AfD and emphasized that the gap between East and West is still immense after more than 30 years of reunification. A special economic zone east and a strengthening of rural areas are therefore required."

Table 11

DISCUSSION

Historical Materialism

By analyzing how neoliberalization after reunification affected the Eastern German economy and the region's historical friendship with Russia, historical materialism provides a framework to understand the reasons for Eastern German disillusionment and resentment from the West. Western Germans' unfamiliarity with the history and economic conditions of the region has alienated *Ossis*, worsening the rise of Eastern German populism and pro-Russia sentiment. According to historical materialism, historical and economic conditions establish the political and ideological frameworks of all societies (Ehrenberg, 1984). The historical conditions of being a socialist country and Soviet ally, along with the post-reunification financial disparities between Western Germans and Eastern Germans, created an Eastern German political culture distinct from the West but comparable with Russian political culture (Levine & Sober, 1985; Pickel & Pickel, 2023). Historical materialism emphasizes the dialectic relationship between history and material conditions, wherein material conditions directly influence a society's historical events, and in turn, those events likewise influence material conditions (Resnick & Wolff, 1982). Using historical materialism allows for an analysis of the political and ideological motivations behind pro-Putin AfD members in the context of Germany's post-unification political landscape, such as a sense of Eastern disadvantage and anti-Western sentiment. This research presents a practical application of historical materialism, demonstrating how a holistic and dialectical approach can illuminate contributing factors to political issues like worsening populism and extremism.

Through historical materialism, we can understand how the unequal distribution of resources in the 1990s allowed Western Germans to profit off

reunification while living standards in the East deteriorated. According to historical materialism, conflict between social classes with different interests and the developing forces of production have driven all societal evolution throughout history. Historical materialism posits that groups with power and resources create economic and political systems to preserve this power and extract more resources (Resnick & Wolff, 1982). As populism is a “problem of social integration,” the wealth disparity between the two Germanies exacerbates East/West polarization and pushes many Easterners to political extremism (Weisskircher, 2020). Eastern AfD MPs frequently decried the poor material conditions and lack of economic opportunity in the East, worsening the sense of comparative disadvantage to the West. Contextualizing the East/West divide as a struggle between two social classes and competing interests reveals the historical conditions that contributed to Eastern Germany being disproportionately populated by “have-nots.” Examining both historical and contemporary class struggles in Germany highlights how economic conditions still influence the East/West divide and perpetuate widespread social acceptance of right-wing populism in the region.

Political enfranchisement

Mainstream political parties in the Bundestag should make more of an effort to establish a presence in the former GDR by listening to and advocating for *Ossis* in the federal government as well as prioritizing involvement in Eastern communities. By increasing party presence in local government, campaigning in the region, and bringing Eastern German concerns to the Bundestag, the other mainstream parties in parliament would increase political enfranchisement of Easterners. Today, the AfD positions itself as the “voice of the East,” the only party in the Bundestag willing to advocate for the interests of the New States (Pickel & Pickel, 2023). Although some smaller parties attempt to represent the East (with minority leftist party *Die Linke* advocating for an Eastern German quota), majority parties like the Social Democrats (SPD) or the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) rarely advocate for Eastern interests (“Ost-Quote in Bundesbehörden,” 2019; Somaskanda, 2019). Social media posts by AfD MPs (such as Pohl’s Facebook post complaining that the Green party does not care about Eastern Germans³) exemplify a mentality many Easterners have: the AfD is the only party that truly cares about the East. Political extremism in the region stems from an Eastern feeling of exclusion; therefore, increased representation could work to politically enfranchise more Eastern Germans. Involvement by other political parties in Eastern German communities would promote political inclusiveness and diversity of opinion, offering *Ossis* viable political alternatives to the AfD.

Rather than dismiss Eastern resentment as political posturing by the political extremists, Bundestag MPs must recognize and admit to the rep-

³ See Table 11 in the analysis section.

representational discrepancies of the Western-dominated German government. The AfD's popularity in the former GDR, as well as the region's pro-Russia sentiment, stems from the genuine sense of disenfranchisement and underrepresentation many Eastern Germans feel. To address the lack of Eastern Germans in positions of power, the German government should include Easterners in affirmative action policies, such as Article 3 of the German Basic Law. After reunification, many Western Germans were skeptical of Eastern Germans, considering them susceptible to authoritarianism or otherwise unqualified for politics (Souris, 2019). Angela Merkel and other Eastern German politicians had to downplay their *Ossi* identity or "emulate Western elites" to gain political significance and remain in power, leading to a dearth of Eastern perspectives in many positions of power (Yoder, 2010; "30 Jahre Mauerfall," 2019). Eastern German citizens see *Ossis* in leadership roles, like AfD MPs, being treated with condescension and dismissive attitudes, worsening the "us versus them" mentality and solidarity with Russia. By automatically treating Eastern Germans with suspicion, Western Germans have inadvertently created a cycle wherein *Ossis* do not rise to positions of power, including politics. Eastern Germans thus turn to the AfD and Russia out of a feeling of neglect by Western Germany (including the German government), but greater *Ossi* participation in the unified government and increased cooperation from Western Germans could reduce the appeal of political extremism. By recognizing the disadvantages Eastern Germans face and taking steps to increase representation, the German government can encourage true German reunification and begin healing the East/West divide.

Economic enfranchisement

To address persistent economic disparities between Western and Eastern Germany, the German government should implement infrastructure investment and job creation programs. By expanding the *Soli* tax, the German government can fund an economic revitalization effort and implement an oversight committee to ensure the Eastern New States receive the revenue. In 1991, the Western German government created the *Soli*, or "Eastern solidarity tax," to cover the costs of reunification and invest in Eastern German infrastructure, and since its introduction, Western Germany has invested roughly two trillion Euros in the East ("Germany largely abolishes," 2019). The German federal government eliminated the *Soli* for 90% of taxpayers in 2019, arguing the tax failed to address inequality; yet the German government collects more money from the *Soli* than it spends on Eastern Germany's infrastructure and economy ("Is Germany's government done," 2019; see Figure 2). Due to the massive asset transfer from the East to the West after reunification, 93% of Germany's 500 largest companies today remain headquartered in the West, leaving few economic opportunities for *Ossis* to bolster their own economy ("Eastern German economy," 2019). Although the *Soli* was intended as a temporary measure to support the reunification

of Germany, this research shows the full reunification of Germany is still incomplete. Expanding the *Soli* and investing the revenue in infrastructure and job creation measures will help alleviate the income inequality between the East and West as well as decrease the rates of unemployment and poverty in the East.



Figure 2

The German government could also promote economic recovery in the East by developing a green energy industry in the region. By building renewable energy plants, developing green energy infrastructure, and creating pollution clean-up jobs, the government would revitalize the Eastern German economy and ensure Germany meets its climate goals. The German government's pledge to entirely phase out coal energy by 2038 led to backlash from the AfD and worsened economic anxieties in the Eastern mining communities (Wecker, 2018). Not only do coal jobs in Eastern Germany offer some of the highest levels of job stability, wages, and benefits, but much of the region also lacks the necessary infrastructure to transition away from coal (Saraste, 2020). To many Eastern Germans (including Eastern MP Jürgen Pohl), the coal phaseout is another example of the Western government making decisions on behalf of *Ossis* while continuing to shut down jobs in the East (Chase, 2018; see Table 11). This green energy project would address *Ossis'* economic anxieties while giving the region a solid infrastructure to promote environmental sustainability and decreased reliance on Russian gas and oil. Additionally, bringing back ecological and well-paying jobs in the region would foster a sense of pride and East/West cooperation.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I argue that Eastern German AfD MPs are more likely to espouse pro-Putin rhetoric than Western Germans because the historical and material conditions after the German reunification led to a feeling of comparative disadvantage and anti-Western resentment. Eastern German AfD MPs frequently discussed feelings of frustration towards the Western-dominated German government, expressing feelings of neglect and contempt from Westerners. This feeling of disregard, coupled with the frustration of feeling unheard, cause many Eastern Germans to feel a sense of solidarity with Russia, another post-socialist power they believe understands the Eastern struggle. Additionally, the hastiness of the German reunification process resulted in a lack of economic opportunities in the East, trapping *Ossis* in a perpetual cycle of poverty and worsening far-right extremism and division. Finally, growing anti-US and anti-NATO sentiment across Germany has led many in the AfD to portray Putin as a populist hero fighting against the Western global elite. Germany is one of the key leaders of the European Union and an important country in the democratic world. As the far-right continues to grow worldwide, the presence of a divisive and openly Eurosceptic party in the German parliament weakens the EU from within. Putin's continuous power grabs, anti-democratic meddling in foreign nations, and alleged cooperation with far-right parties in the EU pose a threat to regional and global stability. Without understanding the root causes of right-wing populism, including the material and historic conditions of the region, the far-right will continue to gain in popularity worldwide, and we will likely see the reemergence of fascism in our lifetimes.

REFERENCES

- 30 Jahre Mauerfall: Wie viel „Ossi“ steckt in Bundeskanzlerin Merkel? (2019, October 28). *Focus Online*.
https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/spurensuche-30-jahre-mauerfall-wie-viel-ossi-steckt-in-bundeskanzlerin-angela-merkel_id_11204938.html
- Allen, T. (2017). All in the party family? Comparing right voters in Western and Post-Communist Europe. *Party Politics*, 23(3), 274-285.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068815593457>
- Alternative für Deutschland (Official Website). (2022, December 7). *Unser Land Zuerst!* <https://www.afd.de/unser-land-zuerst/>
- Amberger, C. (2022, May 19). Why right-wing extremism has a strong presence in eastern Germany. *Rise to Peace*. <https://www.risetopeace.org/2022/05/18/why-right-wing-extremism-has-a-strong-presence-in-eastern-germany/risetopeace/>
- Baum, C. (2019, May 13). *Die USA führen permanent...* [Written post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/drchristinabaum/posts/pfbid02Esn-HbaAVHJEnUUtCQTH4C6pxHxrDpSiETFJCVxY318Fx9q66dz68M4f-F5Uw4CssCl>
- Baum, C. (2022, February 25). *Die Dekadenz des Westens...* [Newscomment]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/drchristinabaum/posts/pfbid031sJnBzGusGWzDHDBj6jF3HNoSSytEvSDM5QGcD5bBL3fA1RfV4TqZ-318TQfDDC5l>
- Becker, A. (2022, May 6). AfD-Abgeordneter spricht auf russischer Konferenz. *Tagesschau*. <https://www.tagesschau.de>
- Bensmann, M. & Löer, W. (2018, October 30). AfD-Abgeordneter verschickt per Whatsapp Hitler-Bilder und Hakenkreuzfotos. *Correctiv: Recherchen für die Gesellschaft*. <https://correctiv.org/aktuelles/neue-rechte/2018/10/30/afd-abgeordneter-verschickt-per-whatsapp-hitler-bilder-und-hakenkreuzfotos/>
- Bohle, D. & Greskovits, B. (2020). Staring through the mocking glass. In F. Laczó, L.L. Gabrijelčič (Eds.), *The Legacy of Division: East and West after 1989* (pp. 59-70). Central European University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789633863756>
- Bystron, P. (2022, November 15). *Wo er recht hat...* [Image comment]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/bystronpetr/posts/pfbid0N2EaovHM-simkoHorrHDgn4rQEWY4CZ9iHA9Y3X31tHdpRLcom8k3j3sTPB8roX-sfl>
- Bystron, P. (2023, March 1). *Warum spielt das...* [Image comment]. Facebook post. <https://www.facebook.com/bystronpetr/posts/pfbid0tZWj5kgwGEdzPms1KZtLPDiS2huF9BdS2baFfh8zYKmsyp9tAL2kRzERuE-2grzVTl>

- Case, H. (2020). The Great Substitution. In F. Laczó, L.L. Gabrijelčič (Eds.), *The Legacy of Division: East and West after 1989* (pp. 59-70). Central European University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7829/j.ctv176kthp>
- Chase, J. (2018, October 19). Eastern German states demand coal phaseout cash. *Deutsche Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/en/eastern-german-states-demand-60-billion-for-coal-phaseout/a-45961437>
- Chesnokov, E. (2019, March 9). Глава партии «Альтернатива для Германии» Александр Гауланд: Ситуация в Донбассе — это внутреннее дело России и Украины. *Комсомольская Правда*. <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26951.5/4003938/>
- Chrupalla, T. (2019, April 4). *Immer wieder Land Bashing...* [Written post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/TinoAfD/posts/pfbid02iAnKM-F3hzx8u9ry7MgydZzHhYAcS4iXQ2SDRiEDG4nB71UstyRzXa8L5bgx-VGbGI>
- Chrupalla, T. (2019, October 3). *Wir feiern heute...* [Written post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/TinoAfD/posts/pfbid02zfgS3nPtY1y27tdY-wLZ7ahxxXXQuhv6EeF3qnzEzzN17tQYMZ6rVFYqys6Mjyt7Kl>
- Chrupalla, T. (2020, September 18). *30 Jahre Deutsche Einheit...* [Video]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/TinoAfD/videos/689336468336408/>
- Chrupalla, T. (2020, October 3). *Feierstunde 30 Jahre Deutsche Einheit...* [Written comment]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/TinoAfD/posts/pfbid02dNBnNP15Xtbf3LmvSSmmavURqXPuGwVGvjsmmBXmB4gBVGXRUT2iJykQurERiHHSml>
- Chrupalla, T. (2020, September 28). *Die gesellschaftliche Teilung ist...* [Written post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/TinoAfD/posts/pfbid02GbP3HAqr7iMRNMpdonm5Db2BJXjUarmLeMETyNM1A8f3RUBkQY-22ZUenKE8vVzul>
- Colantone, I & Stanig, P. (2019). The surge of economic nationalism in Western Europe. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 33(4), 128-151. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.33.4.128>
- Connolly, K. (2022, September 20). Far-right German politicians accused of pro-Putin 'propaganda trip.' *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/20/far-right-german-politicians-accused-of-pro-putin-propaganda-trip>
- Eastern German economy still trails the West. (2019, March 4). *Deutsche Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/en/eastern-germany-still-lags-three-decades-after-reunification-study/a-47769117>
- Ehrenberg, J. (1984). The Politics of Historical Materialism. *Contemporary Marxism*, 9(1), 44-55.
- Europe Elects. (2022, November 7). *Germany, INSA poll, 23-26 September 2022*. [Data]. <https://europeelects.eu/germany/>
- Fix, L. (2020, January 1). Russia in German public opinion. *Zentrum für Osteuropa und internationale Studien*. <https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/russia-in-german-public-opinion>

- Fraktion Die Linke. (2019, February 28). Ost-Quote in Bundesbehörden durchsetzen - Grundgesetz achten: Antrag - Drucksache Nr. 19/8013. <https://www.linksfraktion.de/nc/parlament/parlamentarische-initiativen/detail/ost-quote-in-bundesbehoerden-durchsetzen-grundgesetz-achten/>
- Fromm, R. (Director). (2023, March 10). *Russlands deutsche Propaganda-Krieger* [Russia's German Propaganda Warriors] [video]. Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen. <https://www.zdf.de/dokus/zdfzoom-110>
- Gatehouse, G. (2019, April 5). German far-right MP 'could be absolutely controlled by Russia.' *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47822835>
- Germany largely abolishes eastern solidarity tax. (2019, November 14). *Deutsche Welle*. <https://www.dw.com>
- Germany's far-right AfD conference ends early. (2022, June 19). *Deutsche Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/en/eastern-german-solidarity-tax-to-be-abolished-for-almost-all-taxpayers/a-51235971>
- Gökirmak, M. (2015). The impact of Russia's historical economic position on Russian identity and nationalism. *U.U. International Journal of Social Inquiry*, 8(2), 33-59.
- Höcke, Kalbitz und Tillschneider im Visier: Verfassungsschutz beginnt mit Überwachung von drei AfD-Politikern. (2020, February 3). *Tagesspiegel*. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/verfassungsschutz-beginnt-mit-uberwachung-von-drei-afd-politikern-7275238.html>
- Hoyer, K. (2022, July 2). East Germans still find it hard to see Russia as the enemy. *The Spectator*. <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/east-germans-still-find-it-hard-to-see-russia-as-the-enemy/>
- Hoyer, K. (2022, September 30). AfD support surges in east Germany. *The Post*. <https://unherd.com/thepost/afd-support-surges-in-east-germany/>
- Iacob, B., & Mark, J., & Rupperecht, T. (2020). The struggle over 1989: The rise and contestation of eastern European populism. In F. Laczó, L.L. Gabrijelečič (Eds.), *The Legacy of Division: East and West after 1989* (pp. 59-70). Central European University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7829/j.ctv176kthp>
- Is Germany's government done boosting the lagging East? (2019, August 11). *Deutsche Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/en/german-government-moves-to-end-solidarity-tax-for-eastern-germany/a-49983217>
- Jahn, J. (2013, April 14). Aufstand gegen Merkels 'alternativlose Politik'. *Frankfurter Allgemeine*. <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/wirtschaftspolitik/gruendungsparteitag-der-afd-aufstand-gegen-merkels-alternativlose-politik-12148549.html>
- Komning, E. (2022, February 27). *Treffende Analyse in...* [News comment]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/Enrico.Komning/posts/pfbid02TBgrzQsE2qAbYqkz22U36J1LJxb1CvwpuUMjKF3JNzeA7HPrKfzrFSx-QiAuiFJx3l>
- Komning, E. (2022, August 29). *Wenn man Vertreter...* [Written post]. Facebook.

- [BYeNnAMyzifK82drn5tHLqMAKdwaitAizuqb2vm4WaoKFTQf-cz9sm1z7KAiJqxAl](#)
- Knight, B. (2022, May 27). What's behind eastern Germans' empathy for Russia? *Deutsche Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/en/whats-behind-eastern-germans-empathy-for-russia/a-61954976>
- Köpping, P. (2018). *Integriert doch erst mal uns! Eine Streitschrift für den Osten*. Ch. Links Verlag.
- Kotré, S. (2018, September 27). *80 Jahre nach...* [Written comment]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/St.Kotre/posts/pfbid02vLVq2t9M8CroDwf-WvLcLZHNvpbt8q4MH7UBSFSDpJ6cYQPq5k2Jbe6FhBdpjwm9DI>
- Kotré, S. (2018, September 27). *Rede zur deutschen Einheit...* [Video]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=506471216488028>
- Kotré, S. (2022, March 25). *Zudem möchte ich hinsichtlich...* [Video]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=303594765132179>
- Kratsev, I. & Holmes, S. (2020). *The Light That Failed: Why the West Is Losing the Fight for Democracy*. Pegasus Books.
- Kundnani, H. (2015). Leaving the West Behind: Germany Looks East. *Foreign Affairs*, 94(1), 108-112.
- Laczó, F., & Gabrijelčič, L. (2020). *The Legacy of Division: East and West after 1989*. CEU Press. <https://doi.org/10.7829/j.ctv176kthp>
- Lamberty, P., Heuer, C., & Holnburger, J. (Nov 2022). Belastungsprobe für die Demokratie: Pro-russische Verschwörungserzählungen und Glaube an Desinformation in der Gesellschaft. *Alfred Landecker Foundation*.
- Levine, A., & Sober, E. (1985). What's Historical About Historical Materialism? *The Journal of Philosophy*, 82(6), 304-326. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2026564>
- Mankoff, J. (2016). Russia's Challenge to the European Security Order. *German Marshall Fund of the United States Foreign and Security Policy Program*, No. 39.
- Moosdorf, M. (2022, August 30). *Zur Unzeit. Im Tode...* [Written post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/matthias.moosdorf/posts/pfbid02hcExBxtmuJGOMELc9Se1LAu5EZuHr3ttnWaXe9GrNc7eVTNwu8fPrnChq4vHf5Bcl>
- Morozov, V. (2021). Class, culture and political representation of the native in Russia and East Central Europe: paving the way for the New Right? *New Perspectives*, 29(4), 349-363. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2336825X211052974>
- Mudde, C. (2014). The Far Right and the European Elections. *Current History*, 113(761), 98-103. <https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2014.113.761.98>
- Ostiguy, P. (2017). *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. Oxford University Press.
- Pates, R. & Leser, J. (2021). *The Wolves are Coming Back: The politics of fear in Eastern Germany*. Manchester University Press.
- Pickel, S. & Pickel, G. (2023). The Wall in the Mind – Revisited Stable Differences in the Political Cultures of Western and Eastern Germany. *German Politics*, 23(1), 20-42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2022.2072488>

- Pirro, A. (2014). Populist Radical Right Parties in Central and Eastern Europe. *Government and Opposition*, 49(4), 599-628. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2013.32>
- Pohl, J. (2018, October 12) *Bei dem Gesetzentwurf...* [Written post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/juergen.pohl.afd/posts/pfbid027WsxDLuUHbxH6Ry21KE5hXnfjuTdN279SR1qXX5nhGX5vXFXn9AqmcEsEqAfHzRGl>
- Pohl, J. (2019, June 27). *Die Treuhand hat 12.000...* [Written post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/juergen.pohl.afd/posts/pfbid0pEYmQ2lqsJu4RejwGW6ANL1eSD9GhdKYcAMtgs5zFuTe8hrXRGQoRfND5ooCUX-qjl>
- Pohl, J. (2021, June 2). *Von der Schaffung...* [Written post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/juergen.pohl.afd/posts/pfbid0DUXgpmuEAM8y-irozTwtrRhSMSXi6YV7MWMkUFb9CvH6Uq4xXGwwnEh7im1N-Cu6e9l>
- Pohl, J. (2021, August 24). *Ich habe bei dieser...* [Written post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/juergen.pohl.afd/posts/pfbid06EBRqwZniEuyX-kz16FtBKoLwnXd3ni6b9BeYmdf81t8Q9aT4P2N9xuqht4VkZ22MI>
- Pohl, J. (2022, October 2). *Wenn es nach 30 Jahren...* [Written post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/juergen.pohl.afd/posts/pfbid0fPG7eihCNY-fkRVmLoJPfcYN4kfVz9ySHXngkZ8j7RhHNPvzYyjbBhCixZdUiEo2jl>
- Pohl, J. (2022, October 12). *Seit Februar 2022 tobt...* [Written post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/juergen.pohl.afd/posts/pfbid0tc924Cqd-n6zxDHjE46DYVwFpG3DE8JtjmUXzEnV6saFuSWtLZtNTizxN-JE6euHKkl>
- Pohl, J. (2022, November 1). *Mitteldeutschland ist den Grünen...* [Video]. <https://www.facebook.com/juergen.pohl.afd/videos/1170458927011024/>
- Polykova, A. (2013). *The Dark Side of European Integration: Nationalism and Radical Right Mobilization in Contemporary Europe*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley]. California Digital Library.
- Rankin, J. (2021, November 4). Ex-Nato head says Putin wanted to join alliance early on in his rule. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/04/ex-nato-head-says-putin-wanted-to-join-alliance-early-on-in-his-rule>
- Resnick, S., & Wolff, R. (1982). A Reformulation of Marxian Theory and Historical Analysis. *The Journal of Economic History*, 42(1), 53-59.
- Saraste, A. (2020, June 1). ‘For climate protestors, we are like filth’: the German village where coal is still king. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2020/jun/01/climate-protesters-german-village-coal-still-king>
- Schlögel, K. (2020). *The Legacy of Division: East and West after 1989*. Central European University Press.
- Schmidt, C. (2019, April 10). Putins Erfüllungsgehilfen bei der AfD? *Norddeutscher Rundfunk*. <https://www.ndr.de/fernsehen/Putins-Erfuellungs-gehilfen-bei-der-AfD,zapp11800.html>

- Schmidt, K. (2023, February 3). Auftritt in russischer Propaganda-Show - Steffen Kotré verteidigt sich mit Medienschelte. *Lausitzer Rundschau*. https://www.lr-online.de/nachrichten/brandenburg/afd-politiker-aus-der-lausitz-auftritt-in-russischer-propaganda-show-_steffen-kotre-verteidigt-sich-mit-medienschelte-69004177.html
- Schmidt, M. (2022, May 17). Chrupallas verheerende Bilanz. *Tagesschau*. <https://www.tagesschau.de>
- Schumacher, E. (2022, September 27). Far-right AfD seeks a boost in times of crisis. *Deutsche Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-far-right-afd-hopes-for-a-boost-in-times-of-crisis/a-63252759>
- Somaskanda, S. (2019, June 30). An Unlikely Solution to Germany's East-West Divide. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/06/some-east-germans-want-jobs-quota-address-inequities/592264/>
- Souris, E. (2019, November 7). The (Eastern) German. *New America*. <https://www.newamerica.org/weekly/eastern-german/>
- Springer, R. (2023, February 14). *Für den US-Imperialismus...* [Video]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/springer.rene/videos/1628382180948107/>
- Stanley, B. (2017). *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. Oxford University Press.
- Taggart, P. (2004). Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 9(3), 269-288. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1356931042000263528>
- Ther, P. (2020). *The Legacy of Division: East and West after 1989*. Central European University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7829/j.ctv176kthp>
- Tipaldou, S., & Casula, P. (2019). Russian nationalism shifting: the role of populism since the annexation of Crimea. *Demokratizatskiya: the Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 27(3), 349-370.
- Trenin, D. (2018, June 6). *Russia and Germany: from estranged partners to good neighbors*, [Text]. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2018/05/russia-and-germany-from-estranged-partners-to-good-neighbors?lang=en>
- Troianovski, A. (2017, September 13). Merkel's Electoral Rivals Target her Russia Policy. *The Wall Street Journal*. [https://www.wsj.com/articles/merkels-electoral-rivals-target-her-russia-policy-1505295003?gaaat=eafs&gaa_n=ASWzDAjCOO7xmP6hZ1AABnshXqBf\]-ejER3w0p1FC-mai2n0vhlhqJ7JCOUa-y4-W8%3D&gaa_ts=68e42273&gaa_sig=zL_-qje-5mnp0CA9apy9Vy-M5S3zqiufU5CDBMN70Algh_PeCbne9mt_umfvd-8nheykyEje4iM0XvWZWxD8w%3D%3D](https://www.wsj.com/articles/merkels-electoral-rivals-target-her-russia-policy-1505295003?gaaat=eafs&gaa_n=ASWzDAjCOO7xmP6hZ1AABnshXqBf]-ejER3w0p1FC-mai2n0vhlhqJ7JCOUa-y4-W8%3D&gaa_ts=68e42273&gaa_sig=zL_-qje-5mnp0CA9apy9Vy-M5S3zqiufU5CDBMN70Algh_PeCbne9mt_umfvd-8nheykyEje4iM0XvWZWxD8w%3D%3D)
- Varga, M. (2020). The return of economic nationalism to East Central Europe: Right-wing intellectual milieus and anti-liberal resentment. *Nations and Nationalism*, 2021(27), 206- 222. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12660>
- Wang, J. (2020). *The Legacy of Division: East and West after 1989*. Central European University Press.

- Wecker, K. (2018, June 26). Germany's coal exit: first jobs, then the climate. *Deutsche Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-coal-exit-jobs-first-then-the-climate/a-44046848>
- Weisskircher, M. (2020). The Strength of Far-Right AfD in Eastern Germany: The East-West Divide and the Multiple Causes behind 'Populism.' *The Political Quarterly*, 91(3), 614-622. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12859>
- Wie Putin die AfD für seine Zwecke benutzt. (2019, April 5). *Der Spiegel*. <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/wie-putin-die-afd-fuer-seine-zwecke-missbraucht-a-00000000-0002-0001-0000-000163279501>
- Yatsyk, A. (2019). Biopolitical conservatism in Europe and beyond: the cases of identity-making projects in Poland and Russia. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 27(4), 436- 478. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2019.1651699>
- Yoder, J. (2010). The Integration of Eastern German Political Elites since 1989. *German Studies Review*, 33(3), 549-564. <https://doi.org/10.3167/gps.2020.380202>

Meilė Yra Visiems: The Evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania

Levi Brabec
University of Kansas

Baltic Pride started in 2010 with tremendous political and public opposition but is now a vibrant celebration and protest for the LGBTQ+ community in Lithuania. This project explores the evolution of Baltic Pride, one of Lithuania's most important LGBTQ+ advocacy events, from 2010 to 2019. Scholars studying Pride in Eastern Europe find a variety of political and social factors—from European Union association to nationalism—affect Pride's successful dissemination of rights. This project adds to this body of work by examining these factors over nine years and four Baltic Pride events in Lithuania. Examination of the European International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association's (ILGA) annual review, images from each year of Baltic Pride in Lithuania, and local news articles covering the events provide data to illustrate Pride in the social and political context of Lithuania. This project uses content analysis and thematic coding of ILGA Europe's annual review, news articles, and images of each Baltic Pride to determine and then compare themes in each data source from 2010 to 2019. Exploration of Baltic Pride's evolution reveals legal rights and social tolerance did not grow in parallel to this flourishing LGBTQ+ advocacy event. While Pride became increasingly popular, LGBTQ+ rights stalled in Lithuania's legislature, and conservative factions continued widespread moral opposition of the Western LGBTQ+ rights framework. Overall, this research demonstrates the existence of a robust Pride event and LGBTQ+ advocacy movement did not indicate the overall LGBTQ+ rights situation in Lithuania.

Key Words: LGBTQ+ rights, Lithuania, Baltic Pride



In 2010, as 800 police officers clashed with over 1,000 belligerent counter protesters, 350 individuals marched down isolated Upės Street in Vilnius for the first ever officially sanctioned Baltic Pride march in Lithuania. Lithuanians, diplomats, and NGO representatives marched for LGBTQ+ rights to the backdrop of tear gas clouds, galloping mounted units, and legions of riot police adorned with gas masks and shields. Only nine years later, 10,000 joyous figures marched through central Vilnius on Gediminas Avenue. Despite a few disgruntled onlookers, music blared, drag queens waved from the top of a party bus, and crowds of people reveled in the festivities. Police shed riot gear for their usual yellow vests, and the legions were replaced with the occasional police officer; one seen smiling while watching jovial marchers pass by. What happened to Baltic Pride in Lithuania from 2010 and 2019 and what this event meant for the country is at the heart of this project. Baltic Pride in Lithuania offers a case study to explore Eastern European LGBTQ+ rights advocacy in the shadow of Russia amid growing Western involvement.

While LGBTQ+ rights movements have become increasingly frequent in Eastern Europe, these movements experienced varied responses from host nations. Some Eastern European nations responded to flourishing LGBTQ+ rights movements with expanded legal protections. Other nations reacted to the calls of LGBTQ+ rights movements with anti-LGBTQ+ laws and claims these movements' goals were a threat to the moral fabric of traditional societies. In Poland, towns have lauded themselves as "LGBT-free zones" in rejection of growing LGBTQ+ acceptance in the country (Guy & Goilland-eau, 2020). Hungary's Prime minister, Viktor Orban, reacted negatively to growing rights movements by censoring LGBTQ+ content from children to push a dangerous narrative equating queer people to pedophiles (Kottasova, 2021). Adversely, in a first for a former socialist state, and despite the nation's socially conservative population, Slovenia recently legalized marriage and adoption for same-sex couples ("Slovenia: Slovenia introduces," 2022). The efforts of LGBTQ+ rights advocates are not certain to produce positive results given the varied reception in Eastern Europe. Therefore, this project's use of the Lithuania case seeks to reveal how the nation received LGBTQ+ rights advocacy compared to the rest of Eastern Europe.

A litmus test for determining baseline LGBTQ+ rights in these nations is European Union (EU) affiliation due to the institution's rights protection requirements. Although the EU does not hold unilateral authority to enforce these requirements, the institution expects a minimum adherence to some protections. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights' Article 21 specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or sex. Additionally, the EU protects LGBTQ+ people from discrimination in hiring, promotions, and the everyday workplace environment (European Commission, n.d.). However, some EU members, like Hungary, continue to push anti-LGBTQ+ legislation (Kottasova, 2021). These EU requirements are relevant to the Lithuanian case because the nation's membership status in the EU

establishes some accountability to LGBTQ+ rights. Therefore, because Lithuania does not exist in a vacuum, this project takes transnational institutions and foreign actors' involvement into consideration in exploration of Baltic Pride in Lithuania to get a full picture of the evolution of the event.

Despite these civil rights minimums imposed by the EU, the LGBTQ+ rights landscape of Lithuania is fraught with inequality. Lithuania denies LGBTQ+ people several rights the rest of the population enjoys. For example, while advocates continue to push for civil unions, the nation still denies same sex couples the right to legal marriage and adoption (Jačauskas, 2022). Additionally, Lithuania fails to protect people placed in compulsory military service against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (Kuktoraitė, 2017). Furthermore, Lithuania censors LGBTQ+ content in claims to protect children, and recently attempted to deny LGBTQ+ people's right to assembly in a failed bid to stop Kaunas Pride (Rainbow Europe, 2022). While an LGBTQ+ rights movement is growing in the region, the fight continues due to the persistence of oppressive structures in Lithuania. Exploration of Baltic Pride in Lithuania demonstrates how these events persist amid oppressive legal systems.

Baltic Pride rotates between Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania each year, and the event functions to strengthen each nation's respective LGBTQ+ community through transnational solidarity. This event occurs in Vilnius, Lithuania, once every three years as the nation's largest LGBTQ+ advocacy event. The first Baltic Pride occurred in Riga, Latvia, in 2009 amid controversy and a failed attempt by the Riga City Council to stop the event (Kitto, 2015). The Lithuanian government in Vilnius made a similar attempt the next year, but despite three-fourths of the population opposing the event, the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania asserted the LGBTQ+ community's right to assembly (Amnesty International, 2010). More recently circumstances have changed, and in 2019, Baltic Pride attracted some 10,000 participants in Lithuania compared to the only 350 sanctioned by officials in the 2010 march (Lithuanian Gay League, 2019). Baltic Pride's rapid growth in Lithuania, despite obstacles and oppression, suggests the movement's strength. Therefore, Baltic Pride and the LGBTQ+ community's persistence in Lithuania reflects their rejection of the status quo and a hope to subvert systemic oppression.

This project explores the evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania from 2010 to 2019. This exploration determines how laws around the event have evolved, the growth of the event, and tracks how public perception around the event changed. Images sourced from the organizers of Baltic Pride in Lithuania, the Lithuanian Gay League (LGL), and images from social media provide pictures to visually construct the event each year. To get an idea of public perception and political background of the event, this project relies on the annual review of the human rights situation of LGBTQ+ people in Lithuania by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA) of Europe. Baltic News Service articles for each year the event

took place in Lithuania corroborate the ILGA Europe annual review's established political background. Overall, exploration of the evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania documents a subversive LGBTQ+ rights movement. Additionally, scholarship on international LGBTQ+ advocacy movements brings attention to the understudied efforts of LGBTQ+ advocates in Lithuania.

The data reveals that while Baltic Pride and LGBTQ+ advocacy flourished in Lithuania between 2010 and 2019, legal rights for LGBTQ+ people largely stagnated in the country. Participation in Baltic Pride increased nearly 30-fold over a nine-year period and attracted support from international governments and corporations despite many politicians and much of the public's continued opposition to the event. In the literature review, this project overviews research on the East-West European divide on LGBTQ+ rights, what effects Pride has on Eastern European societies, and the qualitative methodology scholars used to investigate Pride in Eastern Europe. In the methods section, this project outlines collection of relevant Baltic News service articles, images, and NGO reports around Baltic Pride in Lithuania and how this project used thematic coding, content analysis, and semiotic analysis to determine Baltic Pride's evolution with social and political context. The analysis section interrogates images, news articles, and NGO report data around Baltic Pride to pinpoint significant changes in the event from 2010 to 2019. This paper concludes with a discussion of potential advocacy strategies for Baltic Pride organizers and the unclear future of LGBTQ+ rights in Lithuania.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nationalism and Rights Diffusion

Previous research explores the tension between the East-West European cultural divide and LGBTQ+ rights. Scholars asked how well LGBTQ+ rights integrate into Eastern European states' national images and what impact this integration has on these states' relationship with Western Europe. A case study explored this relationship by analyzing media and political coverage surrounding the first Baltic Pride in Lithuania, concluding the domestic Lithuanian response illustrated that Pride created growing support for LGBTQ+ integration into national norms and continuing opposition to pro-LGBTQ+ Western ideals seen as a threat to the traditional national image (Mažylis et al., 2014). Similar research on Lithuania's first Pride concluded Pride was "an opportunity to bolster the imaginary boundaries between the Lithuanian nation and its others" (Davydova, 2012, p. 34). Other research investigates cultural norms and East-West political tension in Europe by examining integration of LGBTQ+ rights in conservative post-Yugoslavian nations, once again asserting these societies equated Pride with Western culture, which sparked opposition to queer advocacy (Kahlina, 2015). This project compares

Pride events in Lithuania to the nation's political and social atmosphere to determine if this phenomenon continues today. Therefore, this project contributes to the literature by further exploring opposition of Western ideals' relationship with LGBTQ+ rights integration in Lithuania.

Research further traverses this tension between national identity, LGBTQ+ rights, and the East-West European divide in context of the European Union (EU). Scholars focus on the EU because despite cultural divides, the EU puts many Eastern and Western European nations under a transnational government. Ayoub (2015) explores how EU membership status, embedded transnational advocacy organizations, foreign social pressure, and domestic bottom-up advocacy primes governments to introduce LGBTQ+ legislation at different levels. Additionally, this research differentiated the effects of these factors between early EU members made up of mostly Western European states and later EU members made up of mostly of Eastern European states (Ayoub, 2015). Similar research studying LGBTQ+ recognition in Serbia and Croatia explored the EU as a norm diffuser noting how "strong identification with Europe accelerated LGBT recognition" in Croatia and "Serbia's relatively weaker identification with Europe slowed it down" (Vasilev, 2016, p. 748). Previous research's consideration of transnational actors and institutions in exploration of LGBTQ+ discourses is explicitly relevant the study of Baltic Pride in Lithuania because of the nation's membership in the EU. Therefore, I add to scholarship by studying Baltic Pride's evolution in context of EU influence on Lithuanian LGBTQ+ rights discourses.

Other research narrows this focus on transnational LGBTQ+ rights discourses to exploration of these events' effects on ordinary citizens' perceptions of LGBTQ+ people.

Scholars have illustrated various negative and positive outcomes related to Pride's dissemination to specific Eastern European societies. Johnson (2012) questions how the cancellation of Serbia's 2009 Pride amid public threats to organizers and activists in a nationalist state contributed to the construction of LGBTQ+ marginalization, illustrating how the rise of Pride can embolden nationalist opposition of queer people. However, other case study research asserts Pride expands LGBTQ+ tolerance in conservative societies and legitimizes LGBTQ+ discourses even if these effects are spatially restricted (Ayoub et al., 2021; Gruszczynska, 2009). This project studies Pride's effects in Lithuania to continue discussion of this event's effects on public perceptions of the LGBTQ+ community. Investigation of Baltic Pride in Lithuania explores what aspects of advocacy and equality marches create widespread positive outcomes, and what aspects produce increased opposition to LGBTQ+ rights.

Given some Eastern European societies oppose LGBTQ+ rights and Western ideals, research questions the efficacy of advocacy events to expand queer peoples' rights. Specifically, previous research asks if Pride events can

liberate sexual minorities in nationalistic Eastern European countries. As Davydova (2012) argues:

It is clear that affiliation of LGBT activists with Europe is used by Eastern European nationalist movements in order to merge the anti-gay and anti-European rhetoric and to maintain the boundaries of national belonging. Keeping these similarities of how gay rights are opposed throughout Eastern Europe in mind, the question arises whether Eastern European gay Prides are effective enough to rid sexual minorities of the image and status of the nation's "Other." (p. 44)

This project studies Pride in Lithuania because research illustrates Eastern European nationalists believe Western nations push LGBTQ+ rights to de-grade traditional national identities. Therefore, my project seeks to reveal the outcomes of Pride's evolution to illustrate how effective these events are at liberating LGBTQ+ people from otherness in Lithuania.

Methodology and Pride

Scholars often study single instances of Prides or LGBTQ+ advocacy events as subjects of interest in research. Although often contextualized, this in-depth investigation is temporally limited and does not explore how these events have changed over time. For example, research used the 2008 gay Pride in Budapest as a case study to illustrate the mainstream media's construction of LGBTQ+ identities in context of heteronormative assumptions (Rédei, 2012). Focus on single events is repeated by many other scholars studying LGBTQ+ advocacy in Lithuania, Poland, and other Eastern Europe states (Ayoub et al., 2021; Davydova, 2012; Gruszczynska, 2009; Johnson, 2012; Mažylis et al, 2014; Rédei, 2012) Swimelar's (2020) study stands out as an example seeking to indicate change over time by comparing the 2008 Queer Sarajevo festival to the 2019 Bosnian Pride parade while illustrating the effect of expanding LGBTQ+ normalization on ethno-nationalist opposition. Therefore, this project seeks to study a series of Pride events over time to expand upon previous studies' temporal limitations. Specifically, this project seeks to add to scholarship on single Baltic Pride events through exploration of multiple years Baltic Pride took place in Lithuania to reflect previous comparative work.

Scholarship on Pride events in Eastern Europe primary utilize qualitative methods in analyzing these events' implications. Scholarship tends to use analysis of narratives, interviews, images, and media surrounding the event to answer research questions. One study utilized semiotic analysis to qualitatively uncover discourses illustrated in anti-gay graffiti around Belgrade Pride in 2009 (Johnson, 2012). Another study utilized ethnography to provide a narrative experience of the first Baltic Pride in Lithuania and

a compelling articulation of heteronormativity and nationalism surrounding the event (Davydova, 2012). Many studies also qualitatively analyze interviews and media articles in exploration of LGBTQ+ advocacy events to establish these events' wider contexts (Gruszczynska, 2009; Johnson, 2012; Mažylis et al., 2014; Réдай, 2012; Renkin, 2009). This widespread usage of qualitative analysis of LGBTQ+ advocacy events in peer reviewed literature asserts the methodological legitimacy of this paper's analysis of Baltic Pride. Additionally, like previous research, this project uses this methodology in analysis of media, and images, and expands usage to relevant NGO reports around Baltic Pride.

Overall, this project follows the pattern of previous research in Eastern Europe by qualitatively analyzing a case study of LGBTQ+ advocacy to illustrate the evolution of Baltic Pride and the implications of the event on Lithuanian society and politics. Like previous research of nations in Eastern Europe, this project considers the context of the East-West European divide and the LGBTQ+ political atmosphere of Europe to investigate Lithuanian Pride. This project adds to previous research by exploring the evolution of Pride in Lithuania from 2010-2019 to interrogate the implications of Pride in a socially conservative Eastern European state over time. Additionally, upon examination of the Lithuanian case, this research investigates the discourse of differing outcomes post LGBTQ+ advocacy events to identify strategies ensuring equal rights advocacy results in positive outcomes in Eastern Europe. This work is significant because scholars are uncertain of how advocacy affects conservative societies' perceptions of the LGBTQ+ community. While dissemination of Pride events to Eastern Europe increases visibility for the queer community, evidence suggests the emergence of these rights movements threatens retaliatory opposition, thus continued research aiming to avoid opposition is required to better understand successful dissemination of LGBTQ+ rights.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This project used the Lithuanian sections of ILGA Europe's annual review to provide social and political context to the evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania. Specifically, I examined the sections of the ILGA report outlining developments in the LGBTQ+ rights situation in the country each year. The ILGA's annual review for the years 2011 to 2022 outlines each previous year's major legal updates for the LGBTQ+ community in Lithuania regarding gender recognition, same-sex civil unions, media censorship, violence, and the right to assembly. The updates most relevant to this project are legal battles involving the LGL, the organizers of Baltic Pride each year. These reports provide a connection between Baltic Pride and Lithuanian LGBTQ+ legal battles by outlining how the organizers of Baltic Pride are often involved

in legal fights for expanded rights nationally. Data from this NGO report outline major developments regarding LGBTQ+ people in Lithuania, and therefore provide necessary political and social context alongside data portraying Baltic Pride. Furthermore, this report data connects the organizers of Baltic Pride to the wider fight for LGBTQ+ civil rights in the country to illustrate how Baltic Pride and national LGBTQ+ rights discourses in Lithuania are not isolated.

This project also compiled media articles, social media images, and LGBTQ+ advocacy organization images to illustrate how Baltic Pride evolved from 2010 to 2019. Media articles from the Baltic News Service (BNS) built upon the NGO report's overview of the political and social situation of LGBTQ+ people in Lithuania for each year Baltic Pride took place and corroborated images depicting the event each year. Images provided visuals for the construction of Baltic Pride each year by depicting participants, counter-protestors, police presence, and the changing location of the event through the years. BNS articles explained which important political figures appeared at each Baltic Pride, local officials' thoughts of the event each year, the public discourses around each event, and gave an overview of legal fights the LGL engaged in to host Baltic Pride in Vilnius in 2010, 2013, 2016, and 2019. I chose media articles from the BNS because the organization is the largest news provider in the Baltic States, and therefore remains relatively mainstream in views regarding the LGBTQ+ community in Lithuania to appeal to their large audience. The BNS articles covering Baltic Pride provide a local media perspective on the event each year to corroborate NGO data and images. Images from the LGL provide a visual perspective from the organizers, and social media images provide a visual perspective from individual participants to incorporate varied viewpoints into data for analysis.

I collected Baltic News Service articles on the Lexis Nexis database for each year Baltic Pride took place in Lithuania. I also collected images of Pride from the LGL website and Instagram and Facebook images tagged with Baltic Pride. To collect the news articles on the Lexis Nexis database, I narrowed the search by specifying the English BNS as the media source, then I searched for articles from the years 2010, 2013, 2016, and 2019 using the keywords "Baltic Pride," and "Vilnius" and aggregated PDFs of these articles by year. I collected images from Facebook and Instagram, searching by post using the term "#BalticPride2010" and each consecutive year of interest. I collected LGL images of Baltic Pride by going to the organization's website, viewing the LGL Baltic Pride photo album for each year of interest, then organized all collected images into folders by year. This collection facilitated swift organization of publicly available data of Pride in Lithuania over time. Aggregation of this data by year provided the organization needed for temporal analysis of the evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania with both visual and textual evidence.

This project qualitatively examined the evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania with content analysis to temporally compare emerging themes in the event between the years 2010, 2013, 2016, and 2019. Additionally, I examined Baltic Pride's evolution with social and political context by thematically coding the NGO reports alongside BNS media articles. First, I copied and pasted relevant excerpts from news articles and NGO reports into source files by year. I engaged in a preliminary round of thematic coding of the data by year using the guiding concepts of identity, national belonging, foreign influence, corporate sponsorship, and nationalism, determined by distinct trends I noticed during data collection, and progressively narrowed my thematic search by aggregating data by year and theme. This approach illustrated how themes in Baltic Pride evolved alongside major legal developments for the LGBTQ+ community during the same period, facilitating comparative analysis between the event and the wider social and political atmosphere in Lithuania. Additionally, I used qualitative analysis in studying the evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania to emphasize a narrative discourse of how generalizable this case study's findings are to LGBTQ+ advocacy events across Eastern Europe.

This project also used semiotic analysis of images to visually explore the evolution of Baltic Pride over time. I used this qualitative analysis method to make sense of the changing imagery of Baltic Pride in Lithuania. Put simply, semiotic analysis seeks to examine how symbols convey meaning by determining the specific elements of text and images creating perceived effects (Chandler, 2022). To prepare data for semiotic analysis, I again systematically coded photos by year and used the guiding concepts of identity, national belonging, foreign influence, corporate sponsorship, and nationalism depicted throughout imagery during data collection to categorize each year's images into general themes. After I categorized these images into manageable sets, I used semiotic analysis to focus on specific elements of images such as clothing, flags, posters, signs, facial expressions, and body language to see how these elements signaled meaning. This method focused analysis on how changing visual elements evoked meaning in ways textual analysis could not illustrate alone. Additionally, by sorting the major thematic findings by year, I produced manageable data sets to pinpoint elements illustrating the evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania over time.

ANALYSIS

From Riot Shields to Rainbow Flags

Police presence at Baltic Pride decreased following officials' reduced anxiety for extraordinary safety concerns. Reduced violent threats and less rowdy behavior from counter protestors partially explains decreasing police presence in Baltic Pride from 2010 to 2019. For example, in 2010, officials sent 800 police officers to maintain order at the first Baltic Pride in Lithuania,

more than doubling the presence of 350 participants ("Baltic Pride 2010," 2010). Police presence halved in 2013, as officials sent only 400 officers to protect around 800 Pride participants reversing the ratio of police to participants present of 2:1 at the previous Lithuanian Baltic Pride (Rainbow Europe, 2014). Following the first two Baltic Prides in Lithuania, Interior Minister Tomas Zilinskas assured the public that no additional safety measures beyond basic police presence was required in 2016 and saw no reason for exceptional protections compared to previous years ("No additional safety," 2016). This intentional decrease in police presence indicates police and officials perceived a reduction of threats and therefore decreased extraordinary concern for safety of Baltic Pride over time. Overall, decreasing police presence demonstrates visibility of the event shifted from a high concern for safety to celebration of the participants.

From 2010 to 2019, the police decreased use of militarized equipment. While early Lithuanian Baltic Prides saw legions of police armed in riot gear, in later years, police are dotted around the event in regular uniform. In 2010, special police units were present at Baltic Pride "ready to suppress a riot" ("Crowds protest Baltic," 2010, p. 1; see Appendix 1). Figure 1 illustrates the first Baltic Pride in Lithuania where police are adorned with heavy armor, shields, and gas masks clearly prepared with the expectation to face violent counter protestors; this pattern of militarization continued into 2013 where officials fenced off the parade route in downtown Vilnius to maintain order during the event ("LGBT Pride Parade," 2013). Police in 2019 instead appeared dressed as regular civilian police (see Figure 2). Decreased militarization of police presence through the years of Baltic Pride in Lithuania suggests violent threats to the event decreased between 2010 and 2019. Opposition forces decreased overt belligerent behavior during Pride making Vilnius a safer place to host Baltic Pride in later years given this decrease in militarization.

Participation in Baltic Pride increased nearly 30 times from 2010 to 2019. Baltic Pride participation more than doubled consecutively each year Lithuania hosted the event. During the first Baltic Pride, officials legally restricted the event to 350 participants ("Baltic Pride 2010," 2010; see Figure 3). The number of participants over doubled to 800 in 2013 and increased again to 3,000 in 2016 ("LGBT Pride Parade to," 2013; Rainbow Europe, 2017; see Appendix 2). Baltic Pride 2019 attracted over twice the participants of the previous Baltic Pride in Lithuania as organizers estimated the streets of Vilnius during the event swelled with some 10,000 participants ("Thousands take part," 2019; see Figure 4; see Appendix 2). This increase of participation over time insinuates the LGBTQ+ community in Lithuania decreased concern for personal safety at the event and started to see Baltic Pride as a more legitimate source to voice concern for civil rights. Additionally, the growth of the event shows official restrictions became less effective at deterring participation in Baltic Pride and unity of the LGBTQ+ community between 2010 and 2019.



Figure 1 (Lithuanian Gay League, 2012)



Figure 2 (Lithuanian Gay League, 2019)



Figure 3 (Lithuanian Gay League, 2012)



Figure 4 (Lithuanian Gay League, 2019)

While participation in Baltic Pride increased from 2010 to 2019, the number of counter protestors continuously decreased throughout the same period. Rowdy counter protestors outnumbered Baltic Pride participants in early years but became outnumbered by participants in later years. During the first Baltic Pride, at least 1,000 counter protestors overshadowed the 350 Pride participants present (“Crowds protest Baltic,” 2010). While several hundred counter-protesters were also present at Baltic Pride in 2013, police noted these counter-protesters were much less belligerent than during the previous Lithuanian Baltic Pride making the police’s work easier (“Police detain 28,” 2013). In figures 5 and 6, counter protestors’ presence changed from large mobs in early years to groups of a couple individuals holding signs in 2016 (see Appendix 3). This decrease of counter protestors shifted visibility to participants during Baltic Pride away from the highly militarized police and belligerent counter protestors in early years. Additionally, reduced counter protester presence provided Vilnius with safer conditions to host public LGBTQ+ activities.



Figure 5 (Lithuanian Gay League, 2012)



Figure 6 (Lithuanian Gay League, 2016)

Baltic Pride and the Law

Baltic Pride organizers engaged in multiple legal battles involving the right to assembly in 2010 and 2013 to host the event. These legal battles established the right for the LGBTQ+ community to host Baltic Pride in Lithuania and to march through central Vilnius. In 2010, the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court temporarily blocked permits to host Baltic Pride after then prosecutor general Raimondas Petrauskas requested the court to suspend permits the Vilnius Municipality gave to the event's organizers ("Baltic Pride March," 2010). However, after organizers appealed to Lithuania's Supreme Administrative Court, the higher court reversed the regional court's decision and paved the way for the first Baltic Pride in Lithuania to take place ("Baltic Pride 2010," 2010). In 2013, organizers fought another legal battle, this time to host the march along the central Gediminas Avenue in Vilnius, instead of the 2010 location on isolated Upės Street, setting the legal precedent to allow this LGBTQ+ advocacy event to march in downtown Vilnius each year since (Rainbow Europe, 2014). Baltic Pride and organizers' ability to establish the right to assembly for LGBTQ+ people asserts Baltic Pride influenced human rights in Lithuania. Additionally, Baltic Pride's move from a symbolically peripheral site to a central avenue indicates higher tolerance for LGBTQ+ advocacy in Lithuania's Capital. Furthermore, Baltic Pride organizers' responsibility in this change suggests Baltic Pride disseminated tolerance within Lithuania's capital through legal advocacy.

Baltic Pride organizer's legal battles to host the event in previous years paved the way for easy access to permits in 2016 and asserted LGBTQ+ people's right to assembly in Lithuania. Through organizers' continuous legal advocacy, hosting Baltic Pride increased access to LGBTQ+ rights in Lithuania. In 2016, organizers easily obtained permits to host 1,000 people for Baltic Pride in central Vilnius and claimed working with law enforcement and city officials was easier in 2016 than previous years (Rainbow Europe, 2016). Despite officials only sanctioning 1,000 participants, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made the unprecedented decision to endorse Baltic Pride in 2016, and the event drew 3,000 participants (Rainbow Europe, 2017). Furthermore, in 2016, the President, Parliamentary Speaker, and Prime Minister conceded LGBTQ+ people have the right to assembly and to express beliefs, despite being morally opposed to the event ("Lithuanian leaders not," 2016). Reduced legal hurdles for the event indicates organizers successfully nurtured a productive relationship with the local government. Officials' willingness to reduce legal hurdles also implies local resistance to the event decreased, or tolerance of LGBTQ+ advocacy increased among these officials' local constituents.

Baltic Pride and the national fight for LGBTQ+ rights in Lithuania are connected. While Baltic Pride only occurs once every three years in Vilnius, the organizers of the event, the Lithuania Gay League, continuously advocate for expanded legal protections of LGBTQ+ rights nationally, and Baltic Pride is the culmination of this work. For example, the LGL appealed to the Inspector of Journalists' Ethics during regulators' attempts to label a Baltic Pride advertisement as adult content and to limit the advertisements broadcast to after nine pm to decrease discrimination-based censorship ("Lithuanian Gay League," 2013). The LGL also takes an active role in supporting LGBTQ+ migrants and asylum seekers facing discrimination from authorities and lacking resources in Lithuania (Rainbow Europe, 2021). In 2018, the LGL provided hate crime trainings to police officers, including how officers should treat victims of LGBTQ+ hate crimes (Rainbow Europe, 2019). Baltic Pride brought national attention to the work of LGBTQ+ advocates. Because Baltic Pride is the biggest LGBTQ+ advocacy event in Lithuania organized by the LGL, the event spotlighted national LGBTQ+ rights concerns and the work of organizers fighting to expand rights throughout the years.

While the LGL continues LGBTQ+ rights advocacy, legal rights stagnated for LGBTQ+ people alongside the growth of Baltic pride in Lithuania. The Lithuanian political and legal sphere was not receptive to initiatives to expand various LGBTQ+ legal rights throughout these years of Baltic Pride and beyond, despite advocates' efforts. In 2013, Lithuanian parliamentary proposals attempted to protect bias motivated speech against LGBTQ+ people, limit free speech and the right to assembly, limit the definition of family to heterosexual couples, prevent same-sex couples from adopting children, and outlaw gender affirming care (Rainbow Europe, 2014). In 2013, the Law on

the Protection of Minors partially censored advertisements for Baltic Pride and continues to disproportionately affect LGBTQ+ people today (Rainbow Europe, 2014). In 2020, supporters of same-sex civil unions in the Lithuanian government announced there was little chance any legal action to recognize same-sex civil unions was near, signaling a decade of stagnation for legal same-sex unions may likely continue (Rainbow Europe, 2021). While the growth of Baltic Pride in Lithuania may signal increased LGBTQ+ visibility, legal rights stagnated at the same time, so the event did not signal an increase in national LGBTQ+ legal rights. Therefore, Pride in Lithuania, and possibly across Eastern Europe, may not be a good indicator of national LGBTQ+ tolerance and legal rights. Just because a country hosts large Pride events, does not mean such a nation adequately treats LGBTQ+ citizens.

Competing Narratives and Values

Throughout the years of Baltic Pride, opponents to Baltic Pride in Lithuania frequently cited moral reasons for opposing the event. Many Lithuanians see Baltic Pride and the expansion of LGBTQ+ rights negatively because they perceive LGBTQ+ inclusivity as a threat to traditional family and religious values. For example, a sign held by many protestors in 2013 reads "*išsaugokime šeimą*" (let's protect the family), alluding to the feeling some have that LGBTQ+ advocacy threatens family values and structures (Lithuanian Gay League, 2013). In 2016, the Prime Minister of Lithuania asserted Baltic Pride and LGBTQ+ rights ran contrary to his moral values, thus legitimizing misguided moral opposition to Baltic Pride at the highest level of government ("Lithuania's PM cites," 2016). Additionally, the institute of Christian Culture lead an opposition campaign and distributed petitions to stop organizers from hosting Baltic Pride 2019 (Rainbow Europe, 2019). While previous data shows how Baltic Pride continually expanded between 2010 and 2019, this data asserts moral and religious opposition to Baltic Pride and LGBTQ+ rights is still entrenched in parts of Lithuanian society. LGBTQ+ advocacy in the country did little to reduce conservative opposition. This perpetual simultaneous opposition implies Baltic Pride's efforts to increase tolerance of LGBTQ+ rights and Lithuania were unable to effectively penetrate religious and conservative factions in the country.

Actors at all levels of Lithuanian society labeled LGBTQ+ advocacy and Baltic Pride as dangerous propaganda throughout the years of the event. Lithuanian society often perceived the expansion of LGBTQ+ rights as a threat to the Lithuanian national image. In 2010, counter protestors were vocal in opposition to Baltic Pride because of claims the event served as propaganda of homosexuality unwelcome in Lithuania ("Lithuania: Protesters outnumber," 2010). In 2013, then Mayor of Vilnius Arturas Zuoka claimed Baltic Pride was "a tool for propaganda of one's own values and lifestyle" ("Zuokas: Vilnius doesn't," 2013, p. 1). Additionally, in 2016, the Lithuanian parliament forwarded a controversial anti-propaganda bill aiming to outlaw free speech

and advocacy of LGBTQ+ rights ("Lithuania ranks 36th," 2016). While the most visible anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments and opposition came from high profile political figures, the data also shows civil society's opposition to LGBTQ+ rights. Therefore, value laden opposition to Baltic Pride and LGBTQ+ rights ran both bottom-up and top-down in Lithuania. These simultaneous systems of opposition rendered attempts to incorporate LGBTQ+ rights into Lithuania's national image and values arduous.

The growth of Baltic Pride paralleled counter protestors and politicians' continuous attempts to spread harmful stereotypes about LGBTQ+ people. While the event's growth afforded visibility to LGBTQ+ advocacy, Baltic Pride also increased visibility to the counter-protestors and harmful narratives surrounding the event. In 2013, a counter protestor wore a shirt reading "*toleruokit mane, kai sakau pederastams ne!*" (bear with me when I say no to pedophiles), and another counter protestor held a sign reading "stop AIDS" spreading harmful narratives relating LGBTQ+ people to AIDS and pedophilia (Lithuanian Gay League, 2013). While these images on the LGL website show the harmful rhetoric counter-protestors use, the presence of these images on Lithuanians' largest LGBTQ+ advocacy organization's website afford these narratives increased visibility as well (Lithuanian Gay League, 2013). Furthermore, the media around Baltic Pride made the voice of politicians like Ričardas Čekutis, the chairperson of the Lithuanian National Center and outspoken nationalist, highly visible as he spread narratives relating homosexuality to necrophilia, pedophilia, and perversion (Rainbow Europe, 2012; Rainbow Europe, 2013). A hasty reaction to seeing this brash rhetoric's increasing dissemination may prompt a need to increase direct LGBTQ+ advocacy. However, the data shows the stereotype laden, hostile environment LGBTQ+ advocates worked in. Knowing these harmful narratives are widespread in Lithuania explains Baltic Pride's organizers' careful efforts in early years to avoid appearing too non-normative and avoid intense, possibly violent, backlash.

While early Baltic Prides were more subdued in subverting heteronormativity and harmful narratives about the LGBTQ+ community, over the years the organizers and marchers made advocacy efforts more direct. Direct advocacy in the face of harsh opposition manifested in expanded LGBTQ+ symbology and efforts by organizers of Baltic Pride in later years to control the narrative. An ethnographic study describes how in 2010, Baltic Pride did not involve the raucous celebrations often associated with Prides in the West, and "marchers did not attempt to visually disturb gender and sexuality norms" because organizers wished to "counteract popular portraying of the Pride as an immoral and degrading festivity" (Davydova, 2012, p. 35). In 2016, Baltic Pride directly challenged these narratives and transgressed mainstream society's attempts at silencing LGBTQ+ people in Lithuania by using the slogan "We Are People, Not Propaganda" and including a human rights conference, a LGBTQ+ community meeting, a concert, a film festival, and

parties alongside the march in contrast to the first Baltic Pride (“LGBT march in Vilnius,” 2016, p. 1; see Figure 7). This trend continued in 2019, where marchers directly challenged heteronormativity with trans and non-binary symbology and challenged essentialist gender categories through signage (see Figure 8; see Appendix 4). While legal obstacles to organizing a Pride event partially explain the subdued Baltic Prides of early years, this data also forwards organizers’ awareness of Lithuania’s social climate to explain the subdued event. Baltic Pride organizers were intentionally slow to incorporate more direct advocacy practices, typical raucous festivities, and expanded gender representation to appeal to a socially conservative society more effectively.



Figure 7 (Mailo Stern, 2016)



Figure 8 (Lithuanian Gay League, 2019)

International Involvement

During the early years of Baltic Pride foreign governments and NGOs were the main sponsors of the event. In later years of Baltic Pride, private companies began to show support for Baltic Pride and Lithuanian LGBTQ+ rights with corporate sponsorship. For the first time in 2019, ten local Lithuanian brands created rainbow logos for June in support of Baltic Pride (Rainbow Europe, 2020). Large international private companies like Facebook, Barclays, and Booking.com were visible sponsors of Baltic Pride in 2019 (see Figure 9). Comparatively, images of the first Baltic Pride in 2010 show Amnesty International, ILGA Europe, foreign governments, and the Lithuanian Gay League's sister organizations in Latvia and Estonia supporting the event (Lithuanian Gay League, 2012; see Appendix 5). The increase of corporate sponsorship throughout the years of Baltic Pride insinuates private companies' reduced concern for relating brands to LGBTQ+ advocacy in a socially conservative country. Alternatively, this increase in corporate sponsorship suggests companies increasingly saw Baltic Pride as a chance to virtue signal support for LGBTQ+ rights on a global scale. Overall, the unclear nature of private international involvement's true intentions in Baltic Pride raises questions about the wider international community's efforts and intentions in support for Baltic Pride and LGBTQ+ rights in Lithuania from 2010 and 2019.



Figure 9 (Lithuanian Gay League, 2019)

International actors continuously supported Baltic Pride as NGO representatives, ambassadors, and other international politicians attended Baltic Pride and related Pride events each year in Lithuania. Baltic Pride is a transnational event and provided a chance for international actors to show support for global LGBTQ+ rights. In 2010, Sweden's minister for the EU, the Dutch ambassador to Lithuania, and representatives from Amnesty International were present at Baltic Pride ("Baltic Pride 2010," 2010; Appendix 5). In 2016, the embassies of the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Finland openly supported Baltic Pride with some promising to observe the march ("Ambassadors see Baltic," 2013). Ambassadors from the United States and Canada, the Swedish Foreign Minister, the Dutch member of the European Parliament, and a Scottish Minister participated in Baltic Pride 2019 ("Thousands take part," 2019). This data shows Western European countries continual concern for LGBTQ+ rights in a fellow EU member state and support for Baltic Pride. Foreign participation and support in Baltic Pride implies a strong European network of LGBTQ+ rights accountability. Conversely, seeing the limited jurisdiction of the EU on Lithuania and taking foreign nations limited transnational advocacy strategies into account demonstrates bottom-up LGBTQ+ advocacy provided a more effective avenue for rights expansion in Lithuania.

The EU and international actors justified support for Baltic Pride and involvement in Lithuania with a concern for human rights. The EU and international community typically invoked damaging Lithuania's internation-

al image to pressure the nation into protecting LGBTQ+ rights. In 2010, the European Commission argued Lithuanian political forces' attempts to stop Baltic Pride conflicted with the nation's obligations to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms ("EC voices concern," 2010). In 2013, Swedish Ambassador Cecilia Barbro Routhstorm-Ruin was critical of authorities in Lithuania noting how the international community's view of Lithuania depended on how well authorities would protect LGBTQ+ rights during the 2013 Baltic Pride ("Ambassadors see Baltic," 2013). In 2011, Lithuanian lawmakers succumbed to pressure from the international community and the European Parliament after trying to pass a law limiting "public promotion of homosexuality" (Rainbow Europe, 2012, p. 102). While the international community often performatively supported LGBTQ+ rights in Lithuania, the data also shows Baltic Pride put an international spotlight on the Lithuanian fight to expand LGBTQ+ rights from 2010 to 2019. Additionally, while in one case the international community successfully pressured Lithuania to limit discriminatory laws, considering the various cases the EU and foreign actors' efforts failed to produce change in Lithuania questions the efficacy of international involvement in Baltic Pride.

While the international community continued to support Baltic Pride, their involvement often failed to influence LGBTQ+ legal rights in Lithuania. Political constraints limited the international community's authority over Lithuania even though the nation is a member of the EU. A ruling by the European Court of Human Rights in 2007 stated Lithuania must provide all adults legal access to gender affirming care and as of 2012, no law enforced this ruling (Rainbow Europe, 2013). As of 2019, trans people in Lithuania continue to struggle despite legal gender recognition because regulations fail to account for discrimination in healthcare, private life, and everyday social environments (Rainbow Europe, 2020). Despite the European Commission's continuing support for Baltic Pride, the institution rejected a complaint by the LGL arguing the Law on Protection of Minors disproportionately discriminates against LGBTQ+ people by censoring LGBTQ+ media, thus the institution arguably failed to hold Lithuania to anti-discrimination requirements of EU members (Rainbow Europe, 2017). The inability of foreign governments or the EU to influence Lithuanian LGBTQ+ rights means much of the international involvement in Baltic Pride did little more than provide performative support. To further complicate this matter, the continuous efforts of foreign nations to support Baltic Pride came in the context of the opposition claiming Baltic Pride as un-Lithuanian propaganda. Therefore, further outside involvement in the event was precarious because foreign support further implicated Baltic Pride organizers in narratives about propaganda.

Domestic Politics

Domestic political support for Baltic Pride slowly became more mainstream in national Lithuanian politics from 2010 to 2019. While individual

politicians supported the event in early years, broad support from political parties and the highest level of government came in later years. The mayor of Vilnius in 2010 criticized the court's attempt to block Baltic Pride, and MP Rokas Zilinskas attended Baltic Pride in 2010 ("Crowds protest Baltic," 2010; "Vilnius mayor slams," 2010). In 2016, Parliamentary Speaker Loreta Grauziniene praised Baltic Pride but did not attend the event because she wanted to spend the day with family thus balancing support for LGBTQ+ advocacy with family values ("Lithuanian leaders not," 2016). In 2019, representatives of the Liberal Movement and the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania attended Baltic Pride in contrast to the previous year's marches lacking support from domestic political parties ("Thousands take part," 2019). Additionally, in 2019, former LGL staff member Tomas Vytautas Raskevičius was elected to the Vilnius city council (Rainbow Europe, 2020). While this data illustrates some increasing political support for Baltic Pride from the highest levels of government and political parties, this support does not directly correlate to increasing LGBTQ+ tolerance in Lithuania. Consideration of data illustrating the reasoning behind high profile politicians' support for Baltic Pride and the wider legal context of LGBTQ+ rights asserts inherent tolerance for LGBTQ+ rights remains largely absent.

While support for Baltic Pride became more mainstream in Lithuania, tolerance may not fully explain this increase in support. Political figures often cited maintaining order and adherence to general democratic principles as the most important factors in supporting the event. In 2013, Lithuanian Prime Minister Algirdas Bitkevicius only supported the event because the right to assembly is an essential part of a democratic country ("LGBT Pride Parade," 2013). In 2010, Parliamentary Speaker Irena Degutiene asked for people to accept the parade to decrease threats to public order; not to protect human rights ("Lithuania's parl't speaker," 2010). In 2016, Lithuania's president and prime minister limited support of Baltic Pride to supporting the right to free speech and assembly in a democratic nation ("Lithuanian leaders not," 2016). Politicians support for Baltic Pride based on vague support of democratic principles fails to consider the human rights concerns of LGBTQ+ people in Lithuania. This failure indicates politicians did not connect LGBTQ+ rights with human rights and perpetuated ideas claiming LGBTQ+ identities are morally reprehensible.

Despite the growth of Baltic Pride from 2010 to 2019, public tolerance of LGBTQ+ people and legal rights is continuously low in Lithuania. The growth of Baltic Pride did not wholly reflect the overall growth of LGBTQ+ legal rights in Lithuania. An EU survey in 2020 studying discrimination of LGBTQ+ people in Lithuania found 55% of LGBTQ+ respondents faced discrimination in the previous 12 months (Rainbow Europe, 2021). Despite the growth of Baltic Pride, an event just as large held in 2021 attracted 10,000 people for the Great Family Defense March to oppose LGBTQ+ advocacy and rights (Rainbow Europe, 2022). Furthermore, as of 2021, a poll indicat-

ed only a third of Lithuanians supported legalizing same-sex civil unions (Rainbow Europe, 2022). While looking at data of Baltic Pride alone implies a completely positive trend in LGBTQ+ rights in Lithuania, the importance of the wider political and social context is not lost in this study. After looking at the evolution of LGBTQ+ legal rights and general societal tolerance, data demonstrates Lithuania is far from being a completely safe place for LGBTQ+ identifying individuals.

DISCUSSION

Think Local, Think Big

While appealing to transnational support provides practical benefits and resources to LGBTQ+ rights organizers in Lithuania, LGBTQ+ organizers in the country ought to look more domestically in expanding efforts. The growth of Baltic Pride in Vilnius increased LGBTQ+ unity in the nation's capital and made the city a safer place for LGBTQ+ advocacy, therefore organizers should expand advocacy to cities across Lithuania. Research on LGBTQ+ Pride in a socially conservative country revealed the event only disseminated tolerance locally (Ayoub et al., 2021). As seen above, the growth of Baltic Pride from 2010 to 2019 accompanied decreasing resistance to the event locally and increased willingness from officials to permit the event and work with organizers. Organizers' expansion of LGBTQ+ advocacy and Pride events to more than just major cities in Lithuania may disseminate tolerance of LGBTQ+ people beyond Lithuanian urban centers. Additionally, expansion of advocacy beyond cities like Vilnius gives LGBTQ+ individuals in isolated areas a voice in their communities to show LGBTQ+ people exist across the country.

Legal advocacy for rights should engage with domestic Lithuanian institutions instead of appealing to transnational institutions and the EU. While legal battles engaging with domestic institutions expanded LGBTQ+ rights in Lithuania, appealing to the EU and the international community scarcely improved the Lithuanian LGBTQ+ rights situation. Mažylis, Rakutienė, and Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė (2014) follow this logic, asserting focusing on the Lithuania constitution and domestic laws provides a realistic pathway to legal rights expansion over EU legislation bearing little authority over the country. The EU's refusal of a LGL appeal about LGBTQ+ censorship in Lithuania, and the country's delayed response to adopting gender affirming care upon the EU's request, showcase the limits of international institutions in impacting LGBTQ+ rights in Lithuania (Lithuanian Gay League, 2013; Rainbow Europe, 2013). Conversely, domestic legal battles produced change in Lithuania in 2010 and 2013 as legal battles established the right of assembly for LGBTQ+ people by appealing to domestic courts ("Baltic Pride 2010," 2010; Rainbow Europe, 2014). Legal battles within domestic institutions work two-fold. First, laws enforced within Lithuania by Lithuania

circumvent narratives claiming foreign powers impose non-Lithuanian law. Additionally, when domestic legal institutions impose LGBTQ+ rights legislation, they hold real authority to enforce such laws with the consent of constituents.

Turbulent Past, Uncertain Future

This study of Baltic Pride in Lithuania complicates Ayoub's (2015) discussion claiming bottom-up transnationally connected advocacy primes recent EU adopter states to introduce LGBTQ+ legislation. While the LGL's transnationally connected bottom-up advocacy in Lithuania expanded the right to assembly, this organizations' perceived ties to Western Europe hampered calls for expanded LGBTQ+ legal rights. Ayoub (2015) claims "transnationally connected domestic groups in new-adopter states selectively choose and adapt foreign ideas to local traditions and practices, performing as brokers between international and domestic norms" (p. 311). In Baltic Pride, the LGL are unable to work as these brokers because nationalists in Lithuania view the organizers' LGBTQ+ advocacy as a threat to local norms and values. In the Lithuanian case, any relationship to the West presents an opportunity for nationalists and LGBTQ+ opposition to frame advocacy as propaganda and intrusive. This study supports the claim bottom-up embedded advocacy can prime EU adopter states to introduce LGBTQ+ legislation but illustrates advocacy organizations are unable to successfully incorporate foreign ideas with domestic values symmetrically across Eastern Europe. In Lithuania, narratives claiming LGBTQ+ rights are propaganda are too strongly entrenched and make local advocacy organizations relationship with Western European allies too precarious for wholly successful transnational advocacy. The Lithuania case indicates Eastern European nations with similar situations require caution when working with Western Europe in fighting for LGBTQ+ rights.

This study interrogates Vasilev's (2016) research claiming stronger identification with Europe expedited integration of LGBTQ+ rights in EU accession states and vice versa. Vasilev's 2016 research sought to emphasize the role of civil society actors and discourses around the EU, and this project supported this emphasis by focusing on tension between the LGL and LGBTQ+ opposition forces around EU involvement. Previous research on Croatia and Serbia cites civil society's "identity convergence" with Europe to indicate the speed LGBTQ+ rights will incorporate into EU accession states (Vasilev, 2016, p. 749). In Baltic Pride, counter protestors' holding signs rejecting the EU and relating the institution to the former Soviet Union signal portions of civil society do not identify with the EU and reject Western European values (Lithuanian Gay League, 2013). In this case, opposition forces' strong nationalist convictions rejecting the Western European LGBTQ+ rights framework hampered the LGL's efforts to expand legal rights. Overall, this study of Baltic Pride in Lithuania verifies claims that weak identification with Europe impedes LGBTQ+ rights integration in EU accession states. This research

also corroborates the explanation for this phenomenon because in Lithuania the process of rejecting European values is facilitated between competing stakeholders in civil society.

This study further developed previous methodology exploring the East-West European divide in context of LGBTQ+ rights in the first Baltic Pride by expanding research to the first four Baltic Pride events in Lithuania. While some studies outlined heteronormative society's use of LGBTQ+ rights to differentiate Lithuania from the West in one Baltic Pride, this project found despite this phenomenon continuing into the next three years of Pride, LGBTQ+ advocacy continued to flourish. Davydova (2012) outlines heteronormative nationalists' use of Baltic Pride to otherize the LGBTQ+ community as Western and non-Lithuanian. Mažylis, Rakutienė, and Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė (2014) corroborated Davydova's findings but cited uncertainty of what Baltic Pride meant for the future of Lithuania's LGBTQ+ rights situation by positing two possible trajectories: continued nationalistic opposition to LGBTQ+ rights expansion, or successful expansion of rights thanks to Baltic Pride organizers. My broader study of Baltic Pride found legal integration did not parallel Baltic Pride's growth because of persisting heteronormativity and nationalism in Pride's opposition. This study discovers the relevant findings of the East and West European divide in previous studies of the first Baltic Pride persisted through the next three years of Baltic Pride. However, while this research endeavored to observe whether heteronormative nationalism or LGBTQ+ rights prevailed in later years, the future of Lithuania's LGBTQ+ rights situation remains uncertain.

CONCLUSION

The rapid growth of Baltic Pride implies a strong future for LGBTQ+ rights and advocacy. However, while this advocacy movement is flourishing, legal rights stagnate, and a strong nationalist movement persists. Despite political leaders' surface level support for the event, these figures continued moral opposition to Baltic Pride alongside much of civil society. While Baltic Pride grew to an event of 10,000, in 2021, nationalists gathered for an event just as large to oppose LGBTQ+ rights and advocacy. Furthermore, while a former LGL staff member was elected to the Vilnius City Council in 2019, LGBTQ+ legal rights lack in the nation and discriminatory laws are still in place. The tension between a growing LGBTQ+ rights movement and stagnating rights and low tolerance for LGBTQ+ people assert organizers and allies of the movement should not become complacent in context of Baltic Pride's flourishing. A strong anti-LGBTQ+ nationalist presence persists in Lithuania, and widespread tolerance and legal rights are absent. Given this context, the fight to establish safety, tolerance, and rights for LGBTQ+ people in Lithuania is far from over.

REFERENCES

- Ambassadors see Baltic Pride march as good opportunity for Lithuania to show its progress. (2013, June 8). *Baltic News Service*. https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=e_f91a5a-c794-412d-9ed8ea5f1b-99922b&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A58M0-33W1-JCF2-01WV-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=99c9ae28-13c3-4f13-a7cc-4cd862fe2cae
- Amnesty International. (2010, May 7). Lithuania's Baltic Pride March Gets Green Light. [article] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2010/05/lithuanias-baltic-pride-march-gets-green-light/#:~:text=Amnesty%20International%20has%20welcomed%20a%20Lithuanian%20court%20decision,earlier%20ruling%20by%20a%20lower%20court%20suspending%20it>.
- Ayoub, P. M. (2015). Contested norms in new-adopter states: International determinants of LGBT rights legislation. *European Journal of International Relations*, 21(2), 293–322. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066114543335>
- Ayoub, P. M., Page, D., & Whitt, S. (2021). Pride amid Prejudice: The Influence of LGBT+ Rights Activism in a Socially Conservative Society. *American Political Science Review*, 115(2), 467–485. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420001082>
- Baltic Pride 2010 Gay Parade Held in Vilnius Saturday. (2010, May 10). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=e68ff0e9-878d-4fb9-a681-83980c558173&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A7YF2-H4V0-Y9SB-J00S-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=afa3431f-fe8a-42e6-859b-adcef1379214>
- Baltic Pride march organizers appeal Vilnius court's ban. (2010, May 5). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=77401f83-c476-4a52-aa77-ca34a7346688&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A7YD2-4XK1-2R98-V005-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr2&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr2&prid=8f2893a7-7974-42df-a2d0-2eb2f8aa82d0>
- Chandler, D. (2022). *Semiotics: The basics* (Fourth edition.). Abingdon, Oxon.
- Crowds Protest Baltic Pride Parade in Vilnius. (2010, May 10). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=664e-a16e-eb2b-4eb4-be14-3874d02c9164&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A7YF2-H4V0-Y9SB-J00P-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr5&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr5&prid=fc34f1cd-6b13-477e->

- [936c-3e9b42737277](#)
- Davydova, D. (2012). Baltic Pride 2010: Articulating Sexual Difference and Heteronormative Nationalism in Contemporary Lithuania. *Sextures*, 2(2), 32–46.
- EC voices concern over suspended Baltic Pride permit. (2010, May 7). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=92e3faeb-8a4e-4e91-8d85-36389ae02ef2&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A7YDD-KRG1-2R98-V00C-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=c4e24fe0-3555-4242-9794-f6e7ecc22134>
- European Commission. (n.d.) *Legal aspects of LGBTIQ equality*. [text] https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/lesbian-gay-bi-trans-and-intersex-equality/legal-aspects-lgbtq-equality_en
- Gruszczynska, A. (2009). Sowing the Seeds of Solidarity in Public Space: Case Study of the Poznan March of Equality. *Sexualities*, 12(3), 312–333. <https://doi.org/10.1177/136346070910389>
- Guy, J., Goillandeau, M. (2020, July 17). Dutch city cuts ties with Polish twin over ‘LGBT-free zone.’ *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/16/europe/netherlands-twin-city-poland-lgbt-scli-intl>
- Jačauskas, I. (2022, May 17). Lithuania’s new civil union bill imperfect but acceptable – human rights activists. *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=2572f2a9-c03e-40f3-90dd-17848396e2f3&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A65G5-RPX1-JCF2-0037-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=b8fd858a-05dc-43fc-bc49-da5d795d180f>
- Johnson, D. N. (2012). We are Waiting for You: The Discursive (De)construction of Belgrade Pride 2009. *Sextures*, 2(2), 6–31.
- Judeikis, Domantas. (2019, June 10). *Some pics from #balticpride2019. The #lgbt community is full of positive energy, love to see such a change since last #balticpride* [Image attached] [Generic Post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1CbEYzvvWU/>
- Kahlina, K. (2015). Local histories, European LGBT designs: Sexual citizenship, nationalism, and “Europeanisation” in post-Yugoslav Croatia and Serbia. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 49, 73–83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.07.006>
- Kitto, S. (2015, September 15). The Eastern European Gay Rights Movement Is Struggling to Be More Than a Western Cause. *Vice*. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/where-pride-means-protest-0000746-v22n9/>
- Kottasova, I. (2021, July 1). Eastern Europe was once a world leader on gay rights. Then it ran out of scapegoats. *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/01/europe/lgbtq-rights-hungary-eastern-europe-intl-cmd>

- Kuktoraitė, E. (2017, August 28). *Does the Lithuanian Military Need Gay Service Members?*. <https://www.lgl.lt/en/?p=18214>
- Levanaitis, Mantas. [@mantas_lev]. (2019, June 9). *Nu tokį kadrą užmatęs negaliu nepasidalinti:))) [domu ar jis suprato kad ne į tą vakarėlį pataikė...?:)) Turetu būti labai nefaina [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/ByfZgNpljlg/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFiZA==*
- LGBT pride parade overstated - Lithuanian PM. (2013, July 29). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=8d26365e-23e2-4d15-a910-eb0b-3142be55&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A590T-FJG1-JCF2-00P0-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr1&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr1&prid=c1d82443-d0c6-43c0-a5fb-2ac6e837d8b2>
- LGBT march in Vilnius aimed at increasing visibility, tolerance - organizers. (2016, June 10). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=e0fac304-7775-473f-8419-93d566291085&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A5K02-XMS1-JCF2-042H-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=cede304c-9ba9-4f01-b54a-19525fee27f8>
- LGBT pride parade to take place in Vilnius. (2013, July 27). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=560487d5-5da7-4efe-96bc-21218c7d4ae5&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A590C-H1W1-DYX3-P000-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=4f19ba7a-de0b-4e7d-a52f-e6862188bb3d>
- Lithuania ranks 36th among 49 European countries in terms of LGBTI rights - survey. (2016, May 16). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=22331fe3-539a-41ca-bae6-ce7b-9178f062&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A5JRN-T3Y1-DYX3-P00W-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=bd904913-8ac9-47e3-953e-455a9a0361c2>
- Lithuania: protestors outnumber participants of Baltic Pride 2010 parade. (2010, May 8). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=23734133-fbc5-43f5-a503-2175df3423e4&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A7YF2-H4V0-Y9SB-J00N-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=0f80c658-e029-4350-bfdc-c7196a599050>
- Lithuania's parlt speaker asks Baltic Pride opponents to accept parade. (2010, May 5). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/docu->

- [ment/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=830e1bf6-88c2-4c82-9367-c847cd9b-f063&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A7YD0-N661-2R98-V008-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=8394e2ac-c8ec-4595-b7ea-80792a1cbc3e](https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=830e1bf6-88c2-4c82-9367-c847cd9b-f063&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A7YD0-N661-2R98-V008-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=8394e2ac-c8ec-4595-b7ea-80792a1cbc3e)
- Lithuania's PM cites personal values as reason for not attending LGBT rights events. (2016, June 22). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=dc57a2ce-3ac4-43b6-9401-2a760017b695&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A5K2N-R181-DYX3-P0KP-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=21facbbb-0920-42cc-a0c6-4dbec428f838>
- Lithuanian Gay League slams natl broadcasters' restrictions on gay pride parade ads. (2013, July 15). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=ae06569e-9845-483a-afaa-e73d47717dd5&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A58WT-W781-JCF2-00S4-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=929ce461-a2b4-41df-8e1c-7db39ce1608f>
- Lithuanian Gay League. (2012, August 30). *Vilnius, Baltic Pride 2010* [photo gallery]. <https://www.lgl.lt/en/?p=2813>
- Lithuanian Gay League. (2013, August 30). *Vilnius, Baltic Pride 2013: March for Equality* [photo gallery]. <https://www.lgl.lt/en/?p=3157>
- Lithuanian Gay League. (2016, June 22). *Vilnius Celebrated Baltic Pride 2016* [photo gallery]. <https://www.lgl.lt/en/?p=13828>
- Lithuanian Gay League. (2019). *BALTIC PRIDE VILNIUS 2019*. Baltic Pride Vilnius.
- Lithuanian Gay League. (2019, June 21). *Record number of participants in the Baltic Pride 2019 March for Equality! in Vilnius* [photo gallery]. <https://www.lgl.lt/en/?p=22677>
- Lithuanian leaders not to march in Baltic Pride parade. (2016, June 15). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=dd84ac9a-ff3f-4941-b229-8fa600e3256b&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A5K14-SJX1-DYX3-P0VG-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=f3f05885-b6fe-4e4d-be86-f08892f89a22>
- Mažylis, L., Rakutienė, S., & Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė, I. (2014). Two Competing Normative Trajectories in the Context of the First Baltic Gay Pride Parade in Lithuania. *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics*, 7(2), 37–76. <https://doi.org/10.1515/bjlp-2015-0002>
- No additional safety measures needed for Baltic Pride LGBT rally - Lithuanian intermin. (2016, June 13). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/>

- [document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=396c15ac-09fe-419b-b262-11cbaa3f-74b5&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A5K0P-V6S1-JCF2-04HT-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=e5448b21-6913-4367-a6c0-4c57f1265a0d](https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=396c15ac-09fe-419b-b262-11cbaa3f-74b5&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A5K0P-V6S1-JCF2-04HT-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=e5448b21-6913-4367-a6c0-4c57f1265a0d)
- Police detain 28 in minor incidents during gay pride march in Vilnius. (2013, July 27). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=2edcc6de-c12c-4dd2-a482-4b886e159b68&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A590D-N2Y1-DYX3-P0MF-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=eaf7f6aa-0c6a-4120-b445-1a0def40ccf6>
- Rainbow Europe. (2012, May 19). *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe*. International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association of Europe. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/rainbow-europe-2012/>
- Rainbow Europe. (2013). *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe*. International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association of Europe. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/files/uploads/2022/04/annual-review-2013.pdf>
- Rainbow Europe. (2014). *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe*. International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association of Europe. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/files/uploads/2022/04/annual-review-2014.pdf>
- Rainbow Europe. (2016). *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe*. International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association of Europe. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/annual-review-2016/>
- Rainbow Europe. (2017). *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe*. International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association of Europe. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/files/uploads/2022/04/annual-review-2017.pdf>
- Rainbow Europe. (2019). *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People*. International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association of Europe. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/annual-review-2019/>
- Rainbow Europe. (2020). *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe and Central Asia*. International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association of Europe. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/files/uploads/2022/04/annual-review-2020.pdf>
- Rainbow Europe. (2021). *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe and Central Asia*. International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association of

- Europe. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/files/uploads/2022/04/annual-review-2021.pdf>
- Rainbow Europe. (2022). *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe and Central Asia*. International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association of Europe. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/files/uploads/2022/04/annual-review-2022.pdf>
- Rédai, D. (2012). Un/Queering the Nation?: Gender, Sexuality, Nationality and Homophobia in the Media Discourse on the Violence against the 2008 Gay Pride in Budapest. *Sextures*, 2(2), 47–64.
- Renkin, H. Z. (2009). Homophobia and queer belonging in Hungary. *Focaal — European Journal of Anthropology*, 2009(53), 20–37. <https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2009.530102>
- Shapovalov, Miroslav. (2016, June 19). 18.06.2016 Happy Pride, Vilnius ☺ #balticpride2016 #balticpride #lgbt #weareOrlando #LoveConquersHate #PeopleNotPropaganda [Image attached] [Generic Post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/17VbMbUc8u/>
- Slovenia: Slovenia introduces marriage equality. (2022, November 18). *Thai News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=b18668bd-5081-4ed6-b427-4cb-24c84bc25&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A66WF-J081-DXMS-84GD-00000-00&pddcontentcomponentid=404625&pdteaserkey=sr0&pdtab=allpods&ecom=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=6a6dc218-038a-4b94-ab26-ddbec503a20b>
- Stern, Mailo. [@sputnikflieshigh]. (2016, June 18). #BP16 #balticpride2016 #people #loveislove 🏳️ [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/BGz1bG4ohEn/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIOD-BiNWFIZA==
- Swimelar, S. (2020). LGBT Rights in Bosnia: The Challenge of Nationalism in the Context of Europeanization. *Nationalities Papers*, 48(4), 768–790. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2019.65>
- Thousands take part in Baltic Pride march in Vilnius. (2019, June 10). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=774e0c1b-026a-4890-b0b1-8ace6a43576b&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A5W9K-0W61-JCF2-0027-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pdtab=allpods&ecom=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=e56d1e26-8c7d-4eab-a1b6-668342efd55b>
- Vasilev, G. (2016). LGBT recognition in EU accession states: How identification with Europe enhances the transformative power of discourse. *Review of International Studies*, 42(4), 748–772. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210515000522>
- Vilnius mayor slams court's ruling to suspend Baltic Pride march permit. (2010, May 6). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/>

document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=4803f023-4196-4f40-bbd5-282ede4b8d6f&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A7YD8-31M1-2R98-V003-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=04a3248f-8c37-4621-8fd1-1196b5f98aa7

Diržys, Vladas. (2013, July 27). *Proud supporter of Human Rights in Lithuania*. #balticpride2013 [Image Attached] [Generic Post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/19Luzi3zKH/>

Zuokas: Vilnius doesn't need events like LGBT Pride Parade. (2013, July 29). *Baltic News Service*. <https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=5265dbf6-6855-40e7-8cc9-9fbfb59742e5&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A590T-FJG1-JCF2-00R1-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=172030&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecom-p=hc-yk&earg=sr0&prid=3beaff29-77ec-42c6-9d26-5df46accfca9>

Appendix 1

Police Presence at Baltic Pride



Lithuanian Gay League (2012)



Lithuanian Gay League (2012)



Lithuanian Gay League (2013)

Appendix 2

Participation at Baltic Pride



Lithuanian Gay League (2013)



Lithuanian Gay League (2013)



Vladas Diržys (2013)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)



Domantas Judeikis (2019)

Appendix 3

Counter Protestors at Baltic Pride



Lithuanian Gay League (2012)



Lithuanian Gay League (2012)



Lithuanian Gay League (2012)



Lithuanian Gay League (2013)



Lithuanian Gay League (2013)



Lithuanian Gay League (2013)



Lithuanian Gay League (2016)



Mantas Levanaitis (2019)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)

Appendix 4

Countering Cis and Heteronormativity



Miroslav Shapovalov (2016)



Lithuanian Gay League (2016)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)

Appendix 5

Foreign Baltic Pride Involvement



Lithuanian Gay League (2012)



Lithuanian Gay League (2012)



Lithuanian Gay League (2012)



Lithuanian Gay League (2016)



Lithuanian Gay League (2016)



Lithuanian Gay League (2016)



Lithuanian Gay League (2016)



Lithuanian Gay League (2016)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)