

Cornell International Affairs Review

Volume 16, Issue 2 (Spring 2023)

CORNELL INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS REVIEW
Volume 16, Issue II (Spring 2023)

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Published in partnership with the Cornell University Library and the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies.

ISSN: 2156-0528

Library of Congress Control Number: 2008224127

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Masthead: Spring 2023

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Table of Contents

- Page 9* Geopolitics on a Jersey: Gazprom's Sponsorship of
FC Schalke 04 and its Soft Power Implications

Caden Schepps
- Page 66* Keeping the Liancourt Rocks Dispute Afloat: Interactions
Between State and Society in Korea and Japan

Sean Starkweather
- Page 124* The Mekong River: Regional Planning,
Sustainable Development, and Transboundary
Cooperation in Southeast Asia

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Geopolitics on a Jersey: Gazprom's Sponsorship of FC Schalke 04 and its Soft Power Implications

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Abstract

Throughout the past two decades, elite sports, especially soccer, have seen an onslaught of lucrative investments by authoritarian states. Media outlets have branded these investments as “sportswashing,” while contemporary scholars have adapted soft power theory to sports in order to measure the geopolitical implications of these state-backed investments.¹ However, scholarship intersecting sports and soft power is limited to a broad, transnational scale, and primarily focuses on the diplomatic efficacy of mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup and Olympics. Therefore, this paper attempts to fill a gap in the literature and measure the soft power gains from a sports sponsorship on a regional level. More specifically, this paper analyzes Gazprom's sponsorship of German soccer club FC Schalke 04 to determine if the state-backed sponsorship successfully increased Russia's soft power among FC Schalke fans. With minimal scholarship in this area, I draw from social psychology theory to develop a unique and nuanced causal mechanism to measure soft power gains from a sports sponsorship. I then apply this causal mechanism to my FC Schalke case study and test two distinct hypotheses in order to identify soft power indicators from Gazprom's sponsorship. I

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first examine FC Schalke club politics to determine whether Schalke fans experienced a ‘good-will effect’ towards Gazprom and Russia, then track voting data from four Bundestag elections to measure if this ‘good-will effect’ became a motivating bias for pro-Russia political behavior among the FC Schalke constituency. With both confirming and disconfirming evidence for pro-Russia bias among Schalke fans, my ultimate soft power implications are ambiguous. However, this paper still provides a more nuanced mechanism to measure soft power as a result of a sports sponsorship and illuminates the need for future studies to further measure the geopolitical implications of sports investments by authoritarian regimes.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, imagery and branding from authoritarian regimes have become commonplace in elite soccer. From club ownership by UAE and Qatari heads-of-state¹ to corporate sponsorship from state-backed airlines,² to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar³ and acquisition of English club Newcastle United by the Saudi Arabia Public Investment Fund,⁴ authoritarian regimes, primarily Gulf Monarchies, have become increasingly calculated, but also overt, with their investments. Politicians and media have branded these recent investments as “sportswashing” – “trying to use the glamour of sport as a public relations tool to improve [a state’s] image.”⁵ Successful play in competition, hosting of a mega-event, or a lucrative sponsorship of a popular

[1] Jamie Doward, “Amnesty Criticises Manchester City over ‘Sportswashing.’” *The Guardian*, November 11, 2018.

[2] Barney Ronay, “Sportswashing and the Tangled Web of Europe’s Biggest Clubs,” *The Guardian*, February 15, 2019.

[3] Spencer Bokart-Lindell, “The Qatar World Cup Is Peak ‘Sportswashing.’ But Will It Work?” *The New York Times*, December 14, 2022.

[4] “Newcastle United Deal Was Always ‘Blatant’ Saudi Sportswashing,” *Amnesty International UK*, July 30, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/newcastle-united-deal-was-always-blatant-saudi-sportswashing>.

[5] Lynn Maalouf, “Saudi Arabia: Launch of Women’s Football League Should Not Distract from Abysmal Human Rights Situation,” *Amnesty International*, August 13, 2021. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/02/saudi-arabia-launch-of-womens-football-league-should-not-distract-from-abysmal-human-rights-situation/>.

club team, especially on the international scale of elite soccer, can “cut through the noise of the global information society to disseminate a series of widely heard, reputation-promoting messages over a sustained period.”⁶ In other words, these states have engaged in sportswashing in an attempt to reframe negative socio-political narratives into positive branding based on the cultural connectedness of soccer. While popular media label these investments sportswashing, scholars argue that states invest in elite sport to increase their international prestige through “soft power.”⁷ Soft power occurs when a state highlights its positive social, cultural, and political qualities in order to appear more attractive and legitimize its policy preferences to other international actors. In this context, sportswashing regimes attempt to increase their soft power and prestige through the cultural resonance generated by state investment in elite sports.

While authoritarian regimes have increasingly engaged in sportswashing within international soccer, no investment scheme has been as robust as Russia’s. For example, during the 2014-15 European soccer season, England’s Chelsea FC and Germany’s FC Schalke 04 played each other in the UEFA Champions League tournament.⁸ This matchup between Europe’s most prestigious clubs was largely funded by Russia. In 2014, Chelsea FC was owned by Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich, while FC Schalke 04 was sponsored by Russian state-owned oil-conglomerate Gazprom, which was also the official sponsor of the UEFA Champions League. Throughout the 2010s, Russia asserted itself as a powerful entity in international soccer through club ownership, corporate sponsorship, and the hosting of the 2018 World Cup. At the same time, Russia’s investments were juxtaposed with its declining prestige.

[6] Paul Brannagan and Richard Giulianotti, “The Soft Power-Soft Disempowerment Nexus: The Case of Qatar,” *International Affairs* 94 (September 7, 2018): 1181, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iyy125>.

[7] Jonathan Grix and Paul Michael Brannagan, “Of Mechanisms and Myths: Conceptualizing States’ ‘Soft Power’ Strategies through Sports Mega-Events,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 27.2 (April 2, 2016): 251–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2016.1169791>.

[8] Haylett, Trevor. “Stubborn Schalke Fight Back to Hold Chelsea.” *UEFA Champions League*, September 17, 2014.

In the past two decades, Russia has faced increasing criticism from the international community for democratic backsliding and antagonistic foreign policy, and Russian investors were ultimately excommunicated from soccer following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. If Russia's investments were ultimately undermined by foreign policy, then what can their strategy tell us about the efficacy of sportswashing? How does a state generate prestige through sports? What are the limits of this phenomenon? Why sportswash at all?

This paper will attempt to discover *why* Russia invested in international soccer and test whether these investments *successfully increased* Russia's soft power. However, scholarship about sports as a soft power tool is limited in scope, mostly focusing on global mega-events and sponsorship on a transnational level. Therefore, this paper will attempt to analyze soft power at a regional scale and specifically test how Gazprom's sponsorship of FC Schalke 04 influenced Russian soft power among everyday Schalke supporters within Germany.

With that said, I will first review existing literature about soft power theory and soft power within sports. I will then contextualize the Gazprom case study, providing a brief historical analysis of Russia's engagement with soft power, sports diplomacy, and the rationale behind Gazprom's sponsorship of FC Schalke within the soft power framework. In the following section, I will develop soft power's causal mechanisms within my sports-specific case study and discuss my methodology to test soft power among FC Schalke supporters. Finally, I will conclude this paper with a discussion of my results and the ultimate soft power implications. I will define the limits of soft power through sports investment and the efficacy of sportswashing as a foreign policy strategy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Explanation of Soft Power

Soft power has become an important component of international relations theory, as the interconnectedness of information has allowed for states to influence policy and behavior based on implicit messaging,

rather than overt coercion. According to international relations theorist Joseph Nye, who coined the concept, soft power occurs when an international actor uses its socio-political characteristics to implicitly co-opt other actors to define their interests and policy similar to its own.⁹ For Nye, the deemphasis of military power in the post-Cold War world has opened the door for alternative “intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions” to influence interstate political interactions.¹⁰ States can mobilize these socio-cultural power resources to “communicate with and attract the publics of other countries.”¹¹ In generating soft power, a state will engage in performative politics to legitimize itself and its policy preferences within international diplomacy. This legitimacy should result in increased prestige and ultimately inspire voluntary deference to the state’s preferred policy from other international actors. According to Nye’s logic, just as “we like those who are similar to us,” states will shape their policy in concordance with those that demonstrate “likeable” qualities.¹²

Scholars have debated soft power’s mechanisms, theoretical vagueness, and empirical limitations. Some have argued that soft power is subjective because what may be considered *attractive* can differ between the acting state and its soft power target. In other words, attraction politics can be fruitless if the target has a different political-cultural orientation.¹³ As a result of its ambiguity, scholars have theorized that soft power can be expressed both explicitly and implicitly. On one hand, soft power may not actually be “soft,” as it can be deliberately employed as a public relations campaign towards a specific audience.¹⁴ On the oth-

[9] Joseph S. Nye, “Soft Power,” *Foreign Policy*, 80 (1990): 153–171, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148580>; “The Changing Nature of World Power,” *Political Science Quarterly* 105.2 (1990): 177–92, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2151022>.

[10] Nye, “Soft Power,” 167.

[11] Joseph S. Nye, “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (2008): 95.

[12] Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power: Its Changing Nature and Use in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, United States: PublicAffairs, 2011): 91.

[13] Craig Hayden, *The Rhetoric of Soft Power: Public Diplomacy in Global Contexts* (MD, United States: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2011).

Janice Bially Mattern, “Why ‘Soft Power’ Isn’t So Soft: Representational Force and the

er hand, international actors can passively express soft power through socio-cultural stereotypes.¹⁵ Other scholars have attempted to conceptualize the structural process of soft power attraction, as well as resources that constitute a soft power “asset” used by a state to increase their international prestige.¹⁶ Finally, scholars have theorized that states can combine attractive soft power assets with tangible “hard power” resources (military strength, economic influence, natural resources) to enact more persuasive “smart power” strategies primarily based on nation-building and development.¹⁷ Although scholars have not settled on a concrete “mechanism” for soft power, Nye’s “power of attractiveness” has become a legitimate foreign policy strategy, with international actors using soft power principles in attempts to implicitly (or explicitly) co-opt others to support their preferred diplomatic policy.¹⁸ This paper likewise follows Nye’s soft power theory and assumes soft power can be deliberately used as a foreign policy tool to increase a state’s attractiveness.

Soft Power and Sports

Sports have become an outlet for states to engage in soft power politics, as the transnational nature of elite sport provides a global audience for states to advertise attractive qualities through positive imagery and messaging. The most prominent outlet for sports diplomacy is the host-

Sociolinguistic Construction of Attraction in World Politics,” *Millennium* 33.3 (June 1, 2005): 583–612, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298050330031601>; Laura Roselle, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O’Loughlin, “Strategic Narrative: A New Means to Understand Soft Power,” *Media, War & Conflict* 7.1 (2014): 70–84.

[15] Hayden, *The Rhetoric of Soft Power*, 37–39.

[16] Hayden, *The Rhetoric of Soft Power*, 53; Steven Lukes, “Power and the Battle for Hearts and Minds,” *Millennium* 33.3 (June 1, 2005): 477–93, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298050330031201>; Ty Solomon, “The Affective Underpinnings of Soft Power,” *European Journal of International Relations* 20.3 (September 1, 2014): 720–41, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066113503479>.

[17] Joseph S. Nye, “Smart Power,” in *The Future of Power: Its Changing Nature and Use in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, United States: PublicAffairs, 2011): 207–35, and, Joseph S. Nye, “Hard, Soft, and Smart Power,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, ed. Andrew Cooper, Jorge Heine, and Ramesh Thakur (Oxford University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199588862.013.0031>.

[18] Joseph S. Nye, “Soft Power and American Foreign Policy,” *Political Science Quarterly* 119.2 (June 22, 2004): 255–71.

ing of a mega-event such as the FIFA World Cup or Olympics, which offers states a platform to increase soft power by highlighting positive socio-cultural characteristics while under the international microscope of its event.¹⁹ For example, Germany's hosting of the 2006 World Cup helped to improve its image and geo-political status post-reunification. The German government deliberately highlighted Germany's cultural identity, modern infrastructure, and technological innovation, which resulted in a soft power boost that increased foreign investment and tourism.²⁰ Likewise, China used the 2008 Beijing Olympics to showcase its attractive social, cultural, economic, and technological achievements to a western-dominated audience and elevate the country's status as a modern state.²¹ In the same way, sports mega-events can be used to increase national pride and an authoritarian regime's support base, thus increasing a state's domestic soft power.²² During the 1980 Moscow and 2014 Sochi Olympics, the Soviet Union/Russia generated patriotism and domestic soft power by framing the mega-event as an opportunity to showcase Russian hegemony and strength through sporting success and

[19] Jonathan Grix and Donna Lee, "Soft Power, Sports Mega-Events and Emerging States: The Lure of the Politics of Attraction," *Global Society* 27.4 (October 1, 2013): 521–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2013.827632>; Jonathan Grix, Paul Michael Brannagan, and Barrie Houlihan, "Interrogating States' Soft Power Strategies: A Case Study of Sports Mega-Events in Brazil and the UK," *Global Society* 29.3 (July 3, 2015): 463–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2015.1047743>; Jonathan Grix and Paul Michael Brannagan, "Of Mechanisms and Myths: Conceptualizing States' 'Soft Power' Strategies through Sports Mega-Events," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 27.2 (April 2, 2016): 251–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2016.1169791>.

[20] Grix and Brannagan, "Of Mechanisms and Myths."

[21] Chwen Chwen Chen, Cinzia Colapinto, and Qing Luo, "The 2008 Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony: Visual Insights into China's Soft Power," *Visual Studies* 27.2 (June 1, 2012): 188–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2012.677252>.

[22] Jonathan Grix and Nina Kramareva, "The Sochi Winter Olympics and Russia's Unique Soft Power Strategy," *Sport in Society* 20.4 (April 3, 2017): 461–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2015.1100890>; Nina Kramareva and Jonathan Grix, "'War and Peace' at the 1980 Moscow and 2014 Sochi Olympics: The Role of Hard and Soft Power in Russian Identity," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 35.14 (September 22, 2018): 1407–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2019.1610400>; Sven Daniel Wolfe, "'For the Benefit of Our Nation': Unstable Soft Power in the 2018 Men's World Cup in Russia," *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 12.4 (October 1, 2020): 545–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2020.1839532>.

infrastructure achievement.²³ The hosting of a mega-event is the primary mechanism by which states have used sports to increase their soft power and attractiveness to both broad global audiences and a targeted domestic support base, and these mega-events have received the bulk of the attention from soft power and sports scholarship.

While mega-events loudly increase a state's profile and broadly highlight its attractive qualities, sports sponsorships are another way to subtly increase soft power through positive fan attachments. Sponsorships can communicate specific social, economic, and cultural ideals to a target audience, the fans of the sponsored club, in order to improve awareness of a state's attractive qualities and increase prestige with sporting success.²⁴ However, there is limited scholarship about the soft power intentions and implications of state-backed corporate sponsors, and current empirical results are inconsistent. Some cases of state-backed corporate sponsorship within sports have generated tourism, positive press coverage, and prestige for the sponsors' home states, but others have not.²⁵ On one hand, 'Fly Emirates' and 'Etihad Airways,' the Emirati state-backed jersey sponsors of Manchester City FC, Real Madrid, AC Milan, and numerous other elite European soccer clubs, have significantly improved both those airlines' revenue and the UAE's state "brand strength."²⁶ On the other hand, the 'Qatar Airways' jersey sponsorship of Paris Saint Germain and FC Barcelona generated negligible soft power gains for Qatar, as the state adversely damaged its prestige as a result of human rights abuses during stadium construction for the 2022 World Cup.²⁷ While state-backed sponsorship has become a prominent method to increase brand awareness within sports, especially among authoritarian

[23] Kramareva and Grix, "'War and Peace' at the 1980 Moscow and 2014 Sochi Olympics."

[24] Simon Chadwick, Paul Widdop, and Nicholas Burton, "Soft Power Sports Sponsorship – A Social Network Analysis of a New Sponsorship Form," *Journal of Political Marketing* 21.2 (April 3, 2022): 196–217, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377857.2020.1723781>.

[25] John S. Krzyzaniak, "The Soft Power Strategy of Soccer Sponsorships," *Soccer & Society* 19.4 (May 19, 2018): 498–515, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2016.1199426>.

[26] *Ibid.*, 509.

[27] *Ibid.*, 508.

regimes, it is unclear whether these sponsorships ultimately generate soft power, as there is a dearth of literature studying this topic.

SOFT POWER IN RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND THE RATIONALE FOR GAZPROM'S SPONSORSHIP

Soft Power in Russian Foreign Policy

Russia began using the politics of attraction to rebuild its image during Vladimir Putin's second Presidency, from 2004-2008. In a July 2004 speech to Russian diplomats, Putin declared that "relations between CIS states and Russia should be made as attractive as possible."²⁸ Russia's initial soft power engagements were focused on strengthening its influence within Eurasia with "large information and cultural centers for work with expatriates."²⁹ Later in the decade, Russian leaders began to explicitly reference attraction politics within foreign policy rhetoric. For example, Russia's 2008 Foreign Policy Concept aimed to "[promote] the Russian language and... culture" in "foreign states."³⁰ In a 2008 interview with *Rossiyska Gazetta*, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov remarked that "[Russia's] diverse links with compatriots should be constructed" cognizant of the growing role of "'soft power' – an ability to affect the environment through... forms of attractiveness."³¹ By 2010, Russia had adopted explicit soft power tactics not only within CIS states, but also in Eastern Europe. Most notably, the Kremlin began its 'Russian World' foreign policy initiative to construct a narrative of pan-Russian identity among former Soviet states, especially Ukraine, using socio cultural institutions such as the Russian Orthodox Church, NGOs such as the

[28] CIS, or The Commonwealth of Independent States, is a Eurasian regional inter-governmental organization formed in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

[29] Fiona Hill, "Moscow Discovers Soft Power," *Current History* 105.693 (October 1, 2006): 345, <https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2006.105.693.341>.

[30] Dmitry Medvedev and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," July 12, 2008, https://russiaeu.ru/userfiles/file/foreign_policy_concept_english.pdf.

[31] Alexander Sergunin and Leonid Karabeshkin, "Understanding Russia's Soft Power Strategy," *Politics* 35.3-4 (November 1, 2015): 352, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12109>.

‘Ruskyi Mir’ (Russian World) Foundation, and mass media outlets, such as the English-language TV channel ‘Russia Today.’³² By 2013, Russia had officially committed to soft power as a foreign policy tool to strengthen its image and international standing, with the Kremlin initiated projects helping promote attractive qualities like culture and national identity.³³

History of Russian Sports Diplomacy

While Russia’s soft power strategy primarily focused on projecting a pan-Russian identity across Eurasia, the Kremlin also pursued sports diplomacy through mega-events as a way to increase its attractiveness on a global scale. For example, Russia’s promotional campaign for the 2014 Sochi Olympics, titled ‘Gateway to the Future,’ highlighted Russia’s commitment to modernization through a state-of-the-art Olympic Games.³⁴ For Russia, the Sochi Olympics was intended to showcase Russia’s attractiveness as a modern state with appealing tourist destinations like Sochi. This rhetoric was again echoed in “Russia’s Information Support Objective of the Foreign Policy Concept 2013, 2016,” which aimed to “[deliver] the international community unbiased information about Russia’s... process and plans of its socioeconomic development and Russia’s cultural and research achievements.”³⁵ Thus, the Sochi Olympics was an effective component of the Kremlin’s soft power strategy because it was used to showcase Russia’s ingenuity and unique cultural identity to an international audience.

Russia’s soft power rhetoric for the 2018 FIFA World Cup mirrored that of the Sochi Olympics. Russia marketed the tournament as an opportunity to promote infrastructure development, social advancement,

[32] Valentina Feklyunina, “Soft Power and Identity: Russia, Ukraine and the ‘Russian World(s),’” *European Journal of International Relations* 22.4 (December 1, 2016): 782-783, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066115601200>.

[33] *Ibid*, 781.

[34] Nina Kramareva, “An Analysis of Russia’s ‘Alternative’ Soft Power Strategy and National Identity Discourse via Sports Mega-Events” (d_ph, University of Birmingham, 2018): 280, <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/8589/>.

[35] *Ibid*, 285.

and Russia's openness to the world.³⁶ Alexei Sorokin, a former Russian diplomat and head of the 2018 World Cup organizing committee, confirmed the Kremlin's sports diplomacy strategy when he proclaimed in 2014 that "football is foreign policy."³⁷ According to the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, mega-events such as the Olympics and World Cup were "an important element of foreign policy activities of the Russian Federation... to ensure that the world has an objective view of the country."³⁸ In other words, Russia employed a soft power strategy in sporting events as a means to counter negative narratives and stereotypes expressed by western media. For example, Russia highlighted its religious diversity during the 2018 World Cup by emphasizing the Russian Orthodox churches in the host city of Nizhny Novgorod along with Mosques in Kazan.³⁹ In another use of performative politics during the World Cup, Russian cities displayed soccer street art that would normally be characteristic in Western Europe to show acceptance of Western culture.⁴⁰ Thus, Russia used the 2018 World Cup as an outlet to advertise its positive socio-cultural characteristics, constructing various attractive narratives that highlighted Russia's unique identity as well as its embracing of Western cultural imagery and modernity. Similar to the Sochi Olympics, Russia used the 2018 World Cup as an outlet to advertise its positive socio-cultural characteristics and increase soft power.

In addition to mega-events, Russia also engaged in soft power politics within European club soccer through its state-owned oil conglomerate, Gazprom. In 2005, Gazprom purchased 75% ownership of Zenit St. Petersburg⁴¹ and turned the club into an attractive destination

[36] Wolfe, "Benefit of Our Nation," 284-285.

[37] Anna Kemper, "Gazprom: Schalke ist es Wurst, woher das Geld kommt," trans. Google Translate, *Die Zeit*, March 20, 2014, <https://www.zeit.de/2014/13/russland-gazprom-schalke-04-werbung/komplettansicht>.

[38] Kramareva, "An Analysis of Russia's 'Alternative' Soft Power Strategy and National Identity Discourse via Sports Mega-Events," 284-285.

[39] Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk, "The 2018 World Cup in Russia and Its Regimes of Visibility: The Cases of Nizhny Novgorod and Kazan," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 44.5 (October 1, 2020): 381, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723520919814>.

[40] Ibid, 383-384.

[41] Jean Julien Beer, "Gazprom: Bis Zu 100 Mio. Für Schalke," trans. Google Translate,

for high-profile players, an outlet to display Russian infrastructure achievement, and a competitive mainstay within elite European soccer. Through Zenit, Gazprom - and by extension, Russia - became culturally resonant within European soccer discourse. In 2012, Zenit shocked European soccer with the signings of rising stars Hulk and Axel Witsel, who were courted by Europe's most prestigious clubs. In an example of Russian soft power at work, a 2012 article from *The Guardian* cited Russia's "huge infrastructure improvements" as a reason why "more and more top players seem likely to follow Hulk and Witsel to Russia."⁴² In other words, Zenit's recruitment of high-profile, western players became an example of Russia's cultural attractiveness as a modernizing state. In addition to player transfers, Zenit's Gazprom Arena, a state of the art stadium partially funded by Gazprom, was similarly used as a tool to increase Zenit's profile in European soccer. Prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Gazprom Arena was set to host the 2022 UEFA Champions League Final,⁴³ a one-day mega-event that would draw similar crowds and viewers to that of the World Cup. While not an explicit soft power policy from the Kremlin, Gazprom's ownership and lucrative financing of Zenit St. Petersburg increased Russia's relevance within European soccer, and further broadcasted the state's positive socio cultural qualities to a European audience as a competitive mainstay and attractive destination within western-dominated elite soccer.

In addition to Zenit, Gazprom broadly projected its brand through partnership with UEFA and FIFA, the two largest governing bodies in world soccer. Between 2012-2020, Gazprom became an official sponsor of the UEFA Champions League, all FIFA international competitions (including the 2018 World Cup), and the 2020 UEFA European Cham-

kicker.de (*Kicker*, October 10, 2006), https://www.kicker.de/gazprom_bis-zu-100-mio-fuer-schalke-355928/artikel.

[42] Paul Doyle, "Zenit St Petersburg Hope Hulk and Axel Witsel Money Will Do the Talking," *The Guardian*, September 4, 2012, sec. Football, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/blog/2012/sep/04/zenit-st-petersburg-hulk-alex-witsel>.

[43] Evans, Simon. "UEFA Moves Champions League Final from St Petersburg to Paris." *Reuters*, February 25, 2022, sec. Sports. <https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/uefa-moves-champions-league-final-st-petersburg-paris-2022-02-25/>.

pionships.⁴⁴ These sponsorships allowed Gazprom to broadcast its imagery, commercial ambitions, and attractive qualities to a broader European audience. At the same time, Gazprom introduced its “Football for Friendship” charitable organization, and the company frequently broadcasted its philanthropy through UEFA/FIFA imagery. For example, when announcing the renewal of Gazprom’s sponsorship in 2021, UEFA Chief Guy-Laurent Epstein not only emphasized Gazprom’s “heritage in football,” but also their “Football for Friendship programme, which helps give youngsters valuable life skills.”⁴⁵ Gazprom’s partnerships with UEFA and FIFA allowed the company to highlight its philanthropic qualities and socio-cultural attractiveness as a proponent of equitable access to global soccer. In other words, Gazprom’s partnerships exemplified soft power politics because the company leveraged its sponsorships to frame itself as an altruistic actor while concurrently promoting its energy ambitions.

Gazprom’s Energy Politics and the Soft Power Sponsorship of FC Schalke

In 2006, Gazprom raised gas prices for Ukraine, which injured Russia’s credibility as an energy supplier to the European market. For skeptical European decision-makers, Gazprom’s dispute with Ukraine indicated that the Kremlin would “consider the weaponization” of energy resources in order to achieve geo-political goals.⁴⁶ The negative publicity clashed with Russia’s energy ambitions, as the Kremlin had formulated plans to expand Gazprom’s transit network. In 2005, Gazprom joined with other European energy suppliers to construct the Nord Stream gas pipeline from Russia to Germany underneath the Baltic Sea. With lim-

[44] BBC News. “Fifa Admits Scandal Deters New Sponsors.” July 24, 2015, sec. *Business*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-33649448>.

[45] UEFA.com. “Gazprom Partners with UEFA National Team Football and Renews UEFA Champions League Sponsorship | Inside UEFA.” *UEFA*, May 19, 2021. <https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/news/0269-124ffe0cee51-2308c1da4764-1000--gazprom-partners-with-uefa-national-team-football-and-renews/>.

[46] Valentina Feklyunina, “Russia’s International Images and Its Energy Policy. An Unreliable Supplier?” *Europe-Asia Studies* 64.3 (May 1, 2012): 454, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2012.661923>.

ited political influence, Russia needed to rebuild Europe's trust in Gazprom in order to advance the Nord Stream project. As such, the Kremlin campaigned to improve Gazprom's image, initiating image-rebuilding strategies at the 2006 G8 Summit,⁴⁷ as well as targeted public relations campaigns in the UK and Germany through Gazprom's regional subsidiaries.⁴⁸ To rebuild its energy credibility and expedite the Nord Stream pipeline project, Russia launched a soft power campaign intended to improve Gazprom's attractiveness in Europe.

Gazprom's most consequential soft power maneuver was the 2006 sponsorship of Germany's second most popular soccer club: FC Schalke 04. While officially a corporate sponsorship, Gazprom's investment was brokered at the highest levels of government between Vladimir Putin and former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, then an advisor for Gazprom.⁴⁹ Formal negotiations occurred between FC Schalke's Supervisory Board⁵⁰ and Alexei Miller, Gazprom's chairman who was considered a "close confidant" of Vladimir Putin.⁵¹ In a further example of the sponsorship's political importance, the official contract was finalized at the 2006 Petersburg Dialogue in Dresden, an annual diplomatic summit between Germany and Russia. This summit was attended by high-level politicians and business leaders, including Vladimir Putin and Chancellor Angela Merkel.⁵² When Clemens Tönnes, Chair of Schalke's Supervisory Board, officially announced the sponsorship, he held a Gaz-

[47] Ibid, 458.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Reinsch, Michael. "Eine Flamme Züngelt Auf Schalker Brust." trans. Google Translate, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, November 10, 2006. <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/sport/fussball/bundesliga/millionen-deal-perfekt-eine-flamme-zuengelt-auf-schalker-brust-1385281.html>.

[50] The FC Schalke Supervisory Board oversee day-to-day operations of the club. Members of the supervisory board are elected to three-year terms by the Schalke supporters. The Chair of the Supervisory Board is the highest-ranking member and has ultimate authority over club operations.

[51] Reinsch, "Millionen-Deal perfekt."

[52] "Russian-German Talks," DW (Germany), October 9, 2006, <https://www.dw.com/en/not-everything-can-revolve-around-gas/a-2199460>.

prom-branded Schalke jersey alongside Vladimir Putin.⁵³ While the Kremlin did not characterize Gazprom's sponsorship of FC Schalke as an official foreign policy maneuver, its negotiations involved key decision-makers and received political priority, suggesting its importance to Russia's diplomatic strategy.

Within the soft power framework, Gazprom's sponsorship appears a targeted investment to improve Russia's attractiveness among a key German constituency. FC Schalke is located in Gelsenkirchen, a working-class city with a population of about 260,000 within the industrial Ruhr Valley. Gelsenkirchen, in particular, was a nucleus for German coal mining, and FC Schalke likewise developed the reputation as "an underdog working-class club tied to the local mining industry." FC Schalke supporters prided themselves on their club's "participatory emotional community based on mining heritage."⁵⁴ The club's working-class identity and connection to Germany's energy industry made it a perfect beneficiary of Gazprom's sponsorship. In other words, FC Schalke fans would be expected to find Gazprom a resonant partner for the club and support the Nord Stream project. Russian negotiators likewise highlighted Schalke's blue-collar identity as a reason for the sponsorship. According to Sergei Fursenko, Chief Executive of Gazprom German subsidiary Lentransgaz and negotiator of the sponsorship:⁵⁵

"...[FC Schalke 04]'s image, its history, its unique bond with its fans and the international ambitions of its team harmonize well with the spirit of Gazprom...our sponsorship will be an important step to optimize the brand awareness of Gazprom and to improve the way it is perceived on

[53] Team of the Official Website of the President of Russia, "President Vladimir Putin Met with Klement Tennis, Director of German Football Club Schalke-04, and Sergei Fursenko, Head of Lentransgaz and President of St Petersburg Football Club Zenit," Kremlin: President of Russia, October 11, 2006, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/36420>.

[54] Julia Wambach, "Feeling Political Through a Football Club: FC Schalke 04, 1904–2020," in *Feeling Political: Emotions and Institutions since 1789*, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022): 252.

[55] Feklyunina, "Russia's International Images and Its Energy Policy. An Unreliable Supplier?"

European markets.”

For Fursenko, Gazprom’s branding would resonate with the coal-mining identity of Schalke supporters. He suggested the sponsorship was a deliberate attempt to rebuild Gazprom’s image among a trusting constituency. In the same way, Alexei Miller in a 2011 interview specifically confirmed the sponsorship’s image-rebuilding strategy: “Schalke is a brand in German football the same way that Gazprom is a brand here [in Russia]. Sport and culture bring people together. They help us respect and trust each other more.”⁵⁶ Miller’s comments further implied that Gazprom’s investment was intended to rebuild ‘respect and trust’ among Germans. In sponsoring Schalke, Gazprom intended to engage in soft power politics and improve its image and attractiveness among a constituency with strong ties to the German Energy Industry.

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Soft Power’s Causal Mechanisms Within a Sports Sponsorship

Principles of social psychology provide an additional theoretical basis to my research by explaining soft power’s causal mechanisms and illuminating discernable soft power indicators from Gazprom’s sponsorship. With that said, German soccer fans who pay money to become an official member of their club are considered the most dedicated fans and therefore most likely to hold strong emotional attachments and incorporate their club into their own identities.⁵⁷ Emotionally attached fans are likely to develop a “good-will effect” when their club’s corporate sponsor appears credible, loyal, and fundamental to the club’s stature

[56] “Spiegel Interview with Gazprom Chief Alexei Miller: ‘We Are Only Serving Our Customers’ Demand for Russian Gas,” *Der Spiegel*, January 3, 2011, Spiegel International, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/business/spiegel-interview-with-gazprom-chief-alexeimiller-we-are-only-serving-our-customers-demand-for-russian-gas-a-737443.html>

[57] Richard Giulianotti, “Supporters, Followers, Fans, and Flaneurs: A Taxonomy of Spectator Identities in Football,” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 26.1 (2002): 25–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723502261003>.

and competitiveness.⁵⁸ As of then, Gazprom became the source of the largest sponsorship in the history of German soccer, providing the club the financial stability to maintain its standing and success.⁵⁹ The credibility of Gazprom's sponsorship of FC Schalke was also evident as the company's only sponsorship within Europe's "big five" leagues.⁶⁰ Therefore, Gazprom's sponsorship of FC Schalke may have created strong positive fan attachments as a result of its largesse, loyalty, and credibility. Dedicated fans who viewed the club as part of their identity would similarly view themselves as a personal beneficiary of Gazprom's financial support. In the soft power framework, FC Schalke fans would inherently view Gazprom (and Russia) as culturally resonant and attractive because of its support for their beloved soccer club. FC Schalke fans would be expected to develop positive feelings and a good-will effect towards Gazprom, thus increasing Russia's soft power as these fans come to view Gazprom and Russia as more favorable and prestigious.

If FC Schalke fans develop a strong good-will effect towards Gazprom, then these positive feelings could translate to political decision making. Fans experiencing a good-will effect towards Gazprom could make pro-Russia political decisions in concordance with the "hot cognition"

[58] Tony Meenaghan, "Understanding Sponsorship Effects," *Psychology & Marketing* 18.2 (2001): 95–122, [https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6793\(200102\)18:2<95::AID-MARI001>3.0.CO;2-H](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6793(200102)18:2<95::AID-MARI001>3.0.CO;2-H); Rui Biscaia et al., "Sport Sponsorship: The Relationship Between Team Loyalty, Sponsorship Awareness, Attitude Toward the Sponsor, and Purchase Intentions," *Journal of Sport Management* 27.4 (2013): 288–302, <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.27.4.288>; Alfredo Silva, "Team Identification and Sponsors' Altruistic Motives on the Effectiveness of Professional Soccer Sponsorship," *Managing Sport and Leisure* (2022): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2022.2084636>.

[59] DW Staff, "Record Bundesliga Deal," DW (Germany), October 9, 2006, <https://www.dw.com/en/gazprom-to-pump-millions-into-schalke/a-2199406>.; During the period of Gazprom's sponsorship, Schalke competed in the highly prestigious UEFA Champions League seven times, even reaching the semi-finals (for the first/only time) in 2010 (see: "Schalke | History | UEFA Champions League | UEFA.Com," <https://www.uefa.com/uefachampionsleague/history/clubs/57388--schalke/>).

[60] The "big five" is a colloquial term used to characterize the English Premier League, Spanish La Liga, French Ligue 1, Italian Serie A, and the German Bundesliga. These leagues are the five wealthiest and most watched in Europe, and likewise produce the most competitive clubs and players.

hypothesis,⁶¹ in which decision-makers use the affect heuristic and recall their first impressions in order to evaluate a political issue. In other words, Schalke fans may make political decisions about Russia based upon their preconceived positive opinion of Gazprom as sponsor. With Russia a pertinent issue in German politics, Schalke fans experiencing a good-will effect may use motivated reasoning based on hot-cognition to support pro-Russia political parties. The hot cognition hypothesis would explain the causal mechanism of a Russian soft power increase among Schalke fans, as their ‘good-will effect’ towards Gazprom would implicitly shape their political preferences to match those of the Kremlin. Hot-cognition serves as a soft power indicator for voluntary deference, as supporters of Schalke use their motivated bias to implicitly shape their own voting behavior to support pro-Russia parties and policy.

Figure 1: The Causal Mechanisms of Russia’s Soft Power – Sponsorship to Voluntary Deference



Methodology

I employ two research strategies to test soft power from Gazprom’s sponsorship. First, I track Schalke club politics to determine whether fans experienced a good-will effect. I then analyze voting data to assess whether the good-will effect translated into hot-cognition through voting behavior. If Russia’s soft power did increase, I would expect a positive correlation between an established good-will effect and hot-cogni-

[61] Milton Lodge and Charles S. Taber, “The Automaticity of Affect for Political Leaders, Groups, and Issues: An Experimental Test of the Hot Cognition Hypothesis,” *Political Psychology* 26.3 (2005): 455–82.

tion. Schalke fans would demonstrate positive attachments to Gazprom as a sponsor and alter their voting behavior to increasingly support pro-Russia parties and policies.

For the first study, I analyze the club politics of FC Schalke during the period of Gazprom's investment to determine whether fans experienced a good-will effect towards their sponsor. In German soccer, clubs have a '50+1' rule, in which supporters control a more than 50% stake in their club and have oversight of the club's hierarchy and operations, with regular public elections to hold leadership accountable.⁶² Therefore, the fans had the opportunity to be complicit with or reject FC Schalke's relationship with Russia through these elections.

With press releases and club statements as my primary evidence, I track the Schalke-Russia relationship during Gazprom's sponsorship from 2006-22.⁶³ If Gazprom's sponsorship did increase soft power, then I would expect Schalke's Supervisory Board and supporters to be deferential, or even supportive, of their club's relationship with Russia. Should fans be complicit in the Schalke-Russia relationship, then this would suggest that the supporters experienced a good-effect that muddied their assessment of the club's dynamic with Russia.

Hypothesis 1: If FC Schalke supporters demonstrated a good-will effect towards Gazprom/Russia, then they would have been complicit in the Schalke-Russia relationship by electing pro-Russia club leaders to the Supervisory Board.

A second component of my methodology is voting data. I will assess whether Gazprom's sponsorship of FC Schalke translated to voluntary deference among fans. I analyze the voting results from four Bundestag Elections from 2009-2021 to determine if Schalke fans increasingly vot-

[62] In general, supporters must pay a fee to their club in order to participate in elections and other operations. This financial commitment may further integrate the emotional attachments between supporter and club.

[63] I use Google Translate to read and quote sources in German. Any translation is indicated in the citation.

ed for pro-Russia political parties as a result of hot-cognition. I will use data from FC Schalke's official supporters' club database to isolate voting constituencies with the highest concentrations of FC Schalke fans.⁶⁴ I will then select three constituencies to analyze and compare their voting results to a demographically similar municipality, the broader election district, and the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). I source my data from local election centers published through Vote iT GmbH's votemanager public database.⁶⁵ In this way, I isolate and control for Germans who would be most likely to view Russia as culturally attractive and prestigious as a result of their positive attachments to Gazprom. While FC Schalke fans may have developed a positive opinion of Gazprom as a sponsor, voting data can illustrate whether the good-will effect was strong enough to elicit pro-Russia political behavior.

Hypothesis 2: If Gazprom's sponsorship was strong enough to elicit hot-cognition, then FC Schalke constituencies would have disproportionately voted for pro-Russia political parties in Bundestag elections.

GOOD-WILL EFFECT WITHIN FC SCHALKE CLUB POLITICS

2006-2010: Initial Reaction to the Sponsorship

Gazprom's 2006 sponsorship immediately transformed FC Schalke from a debt-ridden club struggling to reclaim its historic success to "one of the big boys" in European soccer.⁶⁶ The deal received broad support from FC Schalke fans, while members of the club's Supervisory Board

[64] "Supporters Club - FC Schalke 04," website, *FC Schalke 04*, <https://schalke04.de/en/members-fans/supportersclub/>.

[65] VoteIT is a German election management software that processes and displays votes for municipalities in local, state, and federal elections. The 'open data' represents the official reported election results from a local election center that used VoteIT's 'vote manager' software. The software then compiles and displays these election results.

[66] Rob Hughes, "Russian Gas Fueling Quest by Schalke - Sports - International Herald Tribune," *The New York Times*, October 1, 2006, sec. Sports, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/17/sports/17iht-soccer.3194585.html>.

introduced new aspirations for the club with Gazprom's financial backing. According to Rolf Rojek, chairman of the FC Schalke Fan Club Umbrella Association and member of the Supervisory Board, fans had "a whole range of new hopes" for their club, which ranged from lower food prices to increased spending on stronger players.⁶⁷ Clemens Tönnies, Chair of the Supervisory Board, proclaimed that Gazprom's sponsorship enabled the club to enter "a new dimension," while board member Gerhard Rehberg affirmed the sponsorship was indicative of "the respect that our club earned especially on the international stage."⁶⁸ Gazprom's sponsorship created optimistic ambitions among FC Schalke's leadership and fanbase. However, the excitement was not necessarily for the club's business savvy, but rather a reaction to the financial crisis that underlined the sponsorship. At the time, FC Schalke faced debt that at best paralyzed the club's upward mobility and at worst threatened bankruptcy. The club was estimated to be at least 120 million euros in debt⁶⁹ and faced investigations from soccer authorities about its bookkeeping.⁷⁰ With Schalke having negated future revenues borrowing against itself until 2026, the club needed immediate financial rescue to ensure long-term success.⁷¹ Hans-Joachim Watzke, Managing Director for rival Borussia Dortmund,⁷² summarized the necessity of the sponsorship when he claimed that, despite being an intense rival, "if Schalke has everything under control financially, we are happy about

[67] Richard Leipold, "Gasprom-Einstieg Bei Schalke: Russen Wecken Hoffnungen - Und Machen Angst," trans. Google Translate, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 9, 2006, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/sport/fussball/bundesliga/gasprom-einstieg-bei-schalke-russen-wecken-hoffnungen-und-machen-angst-1379236.html>.

[68] DW Staff, "Record Bundesliga Deal."

[69] Ibid.

[70] Hughes, "Russian Gas Fueling Quest by Schalke - Sports - International Herald Tribune."

[71] Helmut M. Dietl and Egon Franck, "Governance Failure and Financial Crisis in German Football," *Journal of Sports Economics* 8.6 (2007): 665.

[72] The FC Schalke-Borussia Dortmund rivalry is considered to be one of the most intense and historic club rivalries in the world. The two clubs represent neighboring cities and both claim roots to the industrial history of the Ruhr Valley. Therefore, it is uncharacteristic that one club would praise the other.

that.”⁷³ Gazprom’s lucrative financial support saved Schalke from future bankruptcy and certainly provided the Russian company more credibility and good-will among supporters.

Despite positive messaging about Schalke’s competitive direction, club leaders misled the public about Russian influence in club operations. Board member Gerhard Rehburg reaffirmed that Gazprom would “have no influence whatsoever on the operative business or sports decisions” of the club,⁷⁴ and according to Fan Association Chair Ralph Rojek, only ten percent of supporters were skeptical of the Russian investment.⁷⁵ However, Gazprom immediately exerted influence on Schalke. As a part of the sponsorship, FC Schalke entered a partnership with Russian club Zenit St. Petersburg, which was 75% owned by Gazprom.⁷⁶ This partnership was unfavorable for Schalke, as Zenit St. Petersburg had a poor image due to racism and white supremacy among their fans.⁷⁷ Even still, the partnership was framed as a positive by Schalke’s then manager Mirko Slomka. He claimed that the “cooperation” with Zenit was beneficial for his club and “interests [him] even more [than the sponsorship] as a coach.”⁷⁸ However, the broader German soccer community was weary about Russian influence. An unnamed rival manager in comment to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* expressed concern about Schalke’s autonomy: “A main sponsor practically always has the opportunity to exert influence,” and that Russian influence “always come[s] through the back

[73] Richard Leipold, “Gasprom-Einstieg Bei Schalke: Russen Wecken Hoffnungen - Und Machen Angst,” trans. Google Translate, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 9, 2006, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/sport/fussball/bundesliga/gasprom-einstieg-bei-schalke-russen-wecken-hoffnungen-und-machen-angst-1379236.html>.

[74] DW Staff, “Record Bundesliga Deal.”

[75] Richard Leipold, “Gasprom-Einstieg Bei Schalke: Russen Wecken Hoffnungen - Und Machen Angst,” trans. Google Translate, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 9, 2006, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/sport/fussball/bundesliga/gasprom-einstieg-bei-schalke-russen-wecken-hoffnungen-und-machen-angst-1379236.html>.

[76] Beer, “Gazprom: Bis Zu 100 Mio. Für Schalke.”

[77] Sonia Oxley, “Advocaat Dismisses Racism Concerns Over Zenit Fans,” *Reuters*, May 14, 2008, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-soccer-uefa-zenit-idUKL1315539720080514>.

[78] Beer, “Gazprom: Bis zu 100 Mio. für Schalke.”

door, never through the main entrance.”⁷⁹ While the Schalke community supported the sponsorship, the German soccer community uninvolved with Schalke, which did not experience a good-will effect, expressed reservations about Gazprom’s influence and intentions. The unclear and conflicting messaging from FC Schalke regarding Gazprom’s influence illustrates an immediate good-will for their Russian sponsors. In other words, Schalke was grateful for Gazprom’s bailout.

2011-2016: Intrusion, Pushback, and Complicity

Clemens Tönnies became the Kremlin’s primary point of intrusion into Schalke’s club affairs through his personal relationship with Vladimir Putin.⁸⁰ In May 2011, Tönnies traveled to Moscow to negotiate a new five-year Gazprom sponsorship for upwards of 120 million Euros, but also met with Putin to discuss Schalke’s club affairs. Putin, who is a self-proclaimed Schalke supporter, was disappointed with the planned transfer of star goalkeeper Manuel Neuer to perennial Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich.⁸¹ According to Tönnies, Putin “asked [him] to do everything we could to keep Manuel.”⁸² Tönnies undermined his own credibility as Schalke’s transfer negotiator when he complied with Putin and attempted to renege the deal. This interaction was confirmed by Neuer, who claimed that Tönnies “appealed to [him] that the most

[79] Richard Leipold, “Gasprom-Einstieg Bei Schalke: Russen Wecken Hoffnungen - Und Machen Angst,” trans. Google Translate, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 9, 2006, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/sport/fussball/bundesliga/gasprom-einstieg-bei-schalke-russen-wecken-hoffnungen-und-machen-angst-1379236.html>.

[80] Between 2006 and 2008, Tönnies collaborated with Putin to fund the construction of a factory in Russia for his meat manufacturing business, and since used his personal relationship with Putin to mediate contact between Gazprom and Schalke. (See: Olaf Sundermeyer, trans. Google Translate, “Sportpolitische Kampagne: Russland Gibt Gas,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 25, 2012, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/sport/fussball/sportpolitische-kampagne-russland-gibt-gas-11931678.html>.)

[81] Florian Scholz and Tobias Altschäfl, “Fußball Bundesliga, Die Ganze Wahrheit: So Kämpfte Putin Um Manuel Neuer,” trans. by Google Translate, *Sport Bild*, December 27, 2011, <https://sportbild.bild.de/bundesliga/2011/die-ganze-wahrheit-21780470.sport.html>.

[82] Patrik Stollarz, “Putin Tried to Prevent Sale of German Goalkeeper,” *The Times*, October 28, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/putin-tried-to-prevent-sale-of-german-goalkeeper-p93svtzzjw2>.

powerful man in the world wanted to keep him with his money.”⁸³ While Neuer’s transfer proceeded, Putin’s request indicated a growing acquiescence by Schalke’s leaders towards their Russian sponsors, and Schalke received negative press coverage following the incident.

Despite the clear intrusion into club affairs, Schalke fans still supported Tönnies even after complying with Putin’s clear overstep. In 2013, less than two years after Neuer’s transfer, FC Schalke supporters overwhelmingly reelected Tönnies as Chair of the Supervisory Board, winning 4496 out of 5725 (78%) votes cast at the 2013 club election.⁸⁴ While it is unclear whether the Neuer transfer changed Tönnies’ reputation among supporters, his resounding reelection was positive reinforcement for his enabling behavior towards Russia. When offered the opportunity to reject Russian influence, Schalke supporters instead maintained their commitment to Tönnies during the 2013 club election. In reelecting their compromised Chair, Schalke supporters displayed trust, confidence, and good-will towards the club hierarchy amidst its growing relationship with Russia.

Other Schalke leaders mirrored Tönnies’ complicit behavior, reaffirming their commitment to Gazprom despite Russia’s declining prestige within Germany following the annexation of Crimea. Rather than mirror public opinion and condemn Russia’s behavior, Schalke’s messaging fluctuated between neutrality and outright support for Russian interests. On one hand, the official club statement cautiously labeled its partnership with Gazprom as “reliable, trusting, and constructive,” and refused to comment on the political situation in Gazprom’s “home country.”⁸⁵ On the other hand, Schalke leaders again appeared complicit and def-

[83] Scholz and Altschäffl, “Fußball Bundesliga, Die Ganze Wahrheit: So Kämpfte Putin Um Manuel Neuer.”

[84] “Clemens Tönnies Bleibt Aufsichtsratsvorsitzender Des FC Schalke 04,” trans. Google Translate, bild.de (*Bild Magazine*, June 30, 2013), <https://www.bild.de/regional/koeln/clemens-toennies-bleibt-aufsichtsratsvorsitzender-31051556.bild.html>.

[85] Saskia Aleythe, “Moralisch fragwürdige Verbindungen,” trans. Google Translate, Süddeutsche.de (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 7, 2014), <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/sport/vertrag-mit-gazprom-schalke-geraet-wegen-putin-in-verlegenheit-1.1906197-2>.

erential towards Russian interests. For example, Alexander Jobst, Schalke's marketing director, in a 2014 interview affirmed that "Gazprom is [Schalke's] most important partner" despite Russian aggression in Crimea. More importantly, Jobst discussed Schalke's commercial ambitions in Russia: "Russia is one of [Schalke's] most important markets for the future... [and] we are planning further steps in the long term to position ourselves as FC Schalke."⁸⁶ Jobst's rhetoric illustrated Schalke's favoritism for its Russian investors. Rather than distance itself from the increasingly-aggressive (and unpopular) Russian state, the club's commercial ambitions matched Russia's economic preferences.

However, Jobst's rhetoric was not the only instance of Schalke's acquiescence during the Crimea crisis. Days before Russia invaded Crimea, the club received an invitation for the squad to meet Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin. While Schalke stalled formal plans to proceed with the trip, Clemens Tönnies particularly harmed Schalke's prestige when he demonstrated blatant favoritism for Putin when responding to criticism for the visit. Rather than follow German public opinion in opposing Putin, Tönnies suggested the club instead delay not in protest, but because "president [Putin] currently has much more important topics on the agenda."⁸⁷ Tönnies's bias engendered broad negative publicity and backlash from prominent German politicians. Peter Tauber, Secretary General of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), claimed that "accepting an invitation to the Kremlin... does not really show tact," while Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, Member of the European Parliament for the Free Democratic Party, had already called for the removal of Gazprom as Schalke's sponsor in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea.⁸⁸ At a time in which German opinion was shifting against

[86] Thomas Mersch Von and Stefan Merx, "Schalke-Vorstand Jobst: Gazprom Ist Unser Wichtigster Partner," trans. Google Translate, *The Wall Street Journal* (Dow Jones & Company, March 7, 2014), <https://www.wsj.com/amp/articles/schalke-vorstand-jobst-gazprom-ist-unser-wichtigster-partner-1394192313>.

[87] Jörg Strohschein, "Kritik an Hauptsponsor Gazprom: FC Schalke 04 - der Preis der Moral," trans. Google Translate, *Der Tagesspiegel Online*, April 24, 2014, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/sport/fc-schalke-04-der-preis-der-moral-5163448.html>.

[88] "Verhältnis zu Russland: Schalke 04 plant Putin-Besuch - Kritik von CDU," trans.

Russia's foreign policy, Tönnes illustrated a deliberate favoritism towards Putin. The trip to the Kremlin represented the most public, and consequential, exertion of Russian influence over FC Schalke. At this point, Schalke was not only complicit in negotiating with Gazprom, but club leaders were obedient to the Kremlin and pursued strategies that directly harmed the club's popularity. Following the Crimea crisis, FC Schalke controversially strengthened the club's relationship with Russia despite it being antithetical to German public opinion and Schalke's credibility as autonomous from its Russian sponsor.

While Schalke's acquiescence to the Kremlin engendered some discontent during the Crimea crisis, club supporters were ultimately complicit in their club's relationship with Russia. In response to the trip, Roman Kolbe, a lifelong registered Schalke member and author of the popular fan magazine *Schalke Unser*, penned a letter to Schalke's leadership that criticized the club's relationship with Russia. Kolbe juxtaposed Schalke's "democratic foundation" with Russia's democratic backsliding and annexation of Crimea, and directly indicted Tönnes when he asserted Schalke "should not serve an autocrat."⁸⁹ Kolbe's letter claimed to reflect a broad opposition to the Schalke-Gazprom relationship. Consequently, Kolbe's opposition to Tönnes translated into political action. During the 2016 club election, supporters campaigned against Tönnes, while three members of the Supervisory Board privately negotiated to oust him as club Chair, citing concern about Schalke's "external presentation."⁹⁰ However, this substantial opposition was unsuccessful and

Google Translate, *Der Tagesspiegel Online*, April 24, 2014, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/schalke-04-plant-putin-besuch-kritik-von-cdu-5439550.html>; "Schalke 04: Tönnes verteidigt Putin und Sponsor Gazprom," trans. Google Translate, *Der Spiegel*, March 24, 2014, <https://www.spiegel.de/sport/fussball/schalke-04-toennies-verteidigt-putin-und-sponsor-gazprom-a-960383.html>.

[89] Kit Holden, "Vladimir Putin, Gazprom and Schalke 04: How Russia sending troops to the Crimea is being felt in the Bundesliga," *The Independent*, March 7, 2014, <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/european/vladimir-putin-gazprom-and-schalke-04-how-russia-sending-troops-to-the-crimea-is-being-felt-in-the-bundesliga-9177403.html>.

[90] Oliver Müller, "FC Schalke 04: So Schmutzig Läuft Der Machtkampf Hinter Den Kulissen," trans. Google Translate, *WELT*, June 25, 2016, <https://www.welt.de/sport/fuss->

Tönnes was reelected by Schalke supporters, receiving 5367 (56%) of 9447 votes.⁹¹ While Tönnes did not receive the support he had in previous elections, he still maintained a significant base despite his blatant favoritism for Russia. By the 2016 election, the Tönnes regime had cemented a subservient relationship with Gazprom and the Kremlin, and allowed Schalke to be influenced by Russia even to the detriment of the club's popularity and prestige within Germany. Supporters had developed an unwavering good-will effect towards Gazprom and Russia, and these positive associations were activated when voting for Tönnes despite his ties to Putin. While Schalke's leaders were publicly acquiescent to Russia, its supporters were equally complicit in continually choosing to elect Russian-sympathetic leadership. With Tönnes clearly obedient to the Kremlin, this election suggests that supporters not only reaffirmed trust and confidence in their club leaders, but also trust and good-will towards Russia as a visible actor in club operations. When German opinion shifted against Russia for the Crimea crisis, Schalke antithetically strengthened its relationship with the Kremlin.

2017-2022: Further Russian Intrusion and Collapse of the Tönnes Regime

During the final period of Gazprom's sponsorship, Schalke engaged in public relations initiatives aimed to advertise Russian interests. In 2018, Schalke sent two members of their Youth Academy to the Football For Friendship Forum in Moscow, a Gazprom international children's social project.⁹² In addition, Schalke maintained its partnership with Gazprom's Zenit St. Petersburg, whose fans once again created negative pub-

ball/bundesliga/fc-schalke-04/article156560742/So-schmutzig-geht-es-hinter-Schalke-Kulissen-zu.html.

[91] Jens Greinke, "Mitgliederversammlung: Tönnes und Lange im Aufsichtsrat," trans. Google Translate, WA.de, June 26, 2016, <https://www.wa.de/sport/schalke-04/mitgliederversammlung-schalke-zieht-heute-aufsichtsrat-ein-vier-kandidaten-zwei-platze-6519246.html>.

[92] FC Schalke 04 (@s04), "Als deutscher Vertreter schicken wir 2 @knapenschmiede-Kicker zum Football For Friendship Forum nach Moskau. <https://t.co/ZBEi5mtQOO>," *Twitter*, April 14, 2018, <https://twitter.com/s04/status/985127407664459776>

licity for chanting a Nazi slogan during a 2018 league game.⁹³ Despite Zenit's poor image, Schalke maintained this relationship at the behest of Gazprom and even played an exhibition with Zenit at the end of 2018.⁹⁴ However, Schalke's most blatant compliance with Russian interests was its support for Gazprom's Nord Stream 2 pipeline, a controversial expansion of the original Nord Stream pipeline. Many European actors opposed the project because of Russia's aggressive behavior in Ukraine and continued weaponization of energy prices. Even still, Schalke took a public political stance in advertising Nord Stream 2. In 2018, the club was the only professional club to send associates to Switzerland to compete in a soccer tournament against "teams from the energy industry" collaborating on Nord Stream 2.⁹⁵ Schalke continued to politicize its position on Nord Stream when, in 2019, the Supervisory Board appointed Matthias Warnig, Chairman of the Nord Stream 2 Executive Board and close confidant of Vladimir Putin, to a special 2-year term with the club. Warnig's presence within the Schalke hierarchy reflected the growing interconnectedness between the club and the Nord Stream 2 project as Schalke became a credible institution for which Gazprom could promote their controversial pipeline.

Schalke's controversy, declining success, and financial instability compelled supporters to oust the Tönnes regime. Following a poorly-planned exhibition with Russian club FK Baltika Kaliningrad, the *Schalke Unser* fan magazine strongly criticized Schalke's relationship with Gazprom, claiming their sponsor did not have the best interest of the club.⁹⁶ Fans again expressed anti-Gazprom resentment when they

[93] "Spartak, Zenit Fined for Fans' Racist Chants," *ESPN*, April 25, 2018, <https://www.espn.com/soccer/russian-premier-league/story/3471658/spartak-moscow-and-zenit-st-petersburg-fined-for-fans-racist-chants>.

[94] "S04 to Face Zenit St. Petersburg in a Friendly," *Schalke 04*, n.d., <https://schalke04.de/en/team/s04-face-zenit-st-petersburg-friendly/>.

[95] "Traditionself Gewinnt Mit Gerhard Schröder Turnier von Nord Stream," trans. Google Translate, website, *Schalke 04*, July 2, 2019, <https://schalke04.de/traditionself/traditionself-gewinnt-mit-gerhard-schroeder-turnier-von-nordstream-2/>.

[96] "Keine Liebesgrüße aus Moskau," trans. Google Translate, *Schalke Unser*, February 15, 2018, <https://schalke-unser.de/beitrag/5167>.

protested against the appointment of Matthias Warnig.⁹⁷ Finally, Tönies was suspended by the club's supervisory board in August 2019 for racism after substantial public protest from Schalke supporters. Hans Sarpei, a former Schalke player and influential member of the supporters' group, called for the Supervisory Board to take a "clear stand" against Tönies.⁹⁸ These protests continued through the end of the 2019-20 season until Tönies officially resigned.⁹⁹ The following season, the remaining members of the Tönies regime also faced opposition from supporters. At this point, Schalke faced insolvency due to a 200-million-euro debt amidst the COVID pandemic.¹⁰⁰ Equally important, the team had been relegated from the German Bundesliga for the first time since 1988. The Schalke Ultras Supporters Group labeled club leaders as "morally bankrupt," and fans retrospectively accused Tönies of running the club as "patriarchal" and "autocratic."¹⁰¹ Another prominent Schalke supporters' group displayed banners at the stadium addressed to Alexander Jobst and Joachim Schneider, both holdovers from the Tönies regime: "To Alex and Jochen... your painful mistakes can no longer be excused. Terminate your contracts, for the good of the association."¹⁰² FC Schalke's poor performances, financial mismanagement, and racism from Tönies inspired supporters to pressure resignations and an overhaul of the club hierarchy.

[97] Roman Goncharenko, "Who Is Nord Stream's Matthias Warnig, Putin's Ex-Stasi Pal?" *Deutsche Welle*, January 25, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/who-is-nord-streams-matthias-warnig-putins-friend-from-east-germany/a-56328159>.

[98] David Vorholt, "Opinion: Tönies' Resignation Is Inevitable," *Deutsche Welle*, August 3, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-clemens-t%C3%B6nnies-resignation-is-inevitable/a-49880319>.

[99] Davis VanOndorp, "Schalke Chairman Clemens Tönies Resigns," *Deutsche Welle*, June 30, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/bundesliga-schalke-chairman-clemens-t%C3%B6nnies-resigns/a-54001677>.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Matt Ford, "Schalke Relegated from Bundesliga: A Royal Case of the Blues," *Deutsche Welle*, April 21, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/schalke-relegated-from-the-bundesliga-the-inside-story-of-a-royal-case-of-the-blues/a-57184763>.

[102] Andy Brassell, "Schalke and the Hole That They Can't Stop Digging for Themselves," *The Guardian*, December 21, 2020, sec. Football, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/blog/2020/dec/21/schalke-and-the-hole-that-they-cant-stop-digging-for-themselves-bundesliga>.

However, Schalke supporters did not indict Gazprom during the overhaul of the club hierarchy, as the Russians remained a sponsor until the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Following the invasion, Schalke, along with the rest of the European soccer community, broke ties with its Russian investors. The club terminated its contract with Gazprom while Matthias Warnig, who was elected to a second term on the board, resigned from his position. Even still, Schalke's split from Gazprom was not a unilateral decision by the club. The German Football Association tabled "solidarity of other clubs in Germany" to assist Schalke through its financial turbulence and loss of Gazprom's support.¹⁰³ In this sense, Schalke's disassociation with their Russian sponsors was not a premeditated decision, but rather a swift reaction to Gazprom's role in the invasion of Ukraine. Had Russia not escalated in Ukraine, it is likely that Gazprom and Matthias Warnig would still remain part of Schalke.

The Good Will Effect of Gazprom's Sponsorship

Gazprom's sponsorship of FC Schalke generated both hard power and soft power indicators. While Gazprom's investment inspired a good-will effect among fans, it is the enabling behavior of Schalke's leadership that indicated a more coercive 'hard power' by Russia. The lucrateness of Gazprom's investment saved Schalke from financial recession and bankruptcy. This bailout established a coercive transactional relationship between Gazprom and Schalke's leaders who became dependent on the sponsorship to maintain the club's historic reputation and competitiveness. Club leaders, in particular Clemens Tönnies, were acquiescent as the Kremlin became increasingly blatant in influencing club operations. As evidence of the coercive nature of Gazprom's investment, Tönnies pursued club policy at the behest of Putin even when it injured Schalke's prestige. By the end of Gazprom's sponsorship in 2022, FC Schalke became a tool of Russian foreign policy to broadcast Putin's 'love' of soccer and advertise Gazprom's Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

While club leadership's acquiescence indicated a transactional relationship of hard power, the Schalke supporters demonstrated a good-will

[103] VanOpdorp and Speight, "Schalke to End Partnership with Gazprom."

effect in concordance with soft power. Despite the negative publicity generated from the Schalke-Russia relationship, supporters reaffirmed trust and support for Schalke's compromised leaders through the club elections. It was not until Tönnies's racist remarks, financial mismanagement, and relegation from the Bundesliga that supporters overthrew their club's pro-Russia leadership. Despite the abuse of power by Gazprom, the supporters did not publicly undermine their sponsor until Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Their trust in the club's pro-Russia leadership exemplifies a reframing of policy preferences that indicates soft power. In other words, Schalke supporters expressed voluntary deference to Russia when electing compromised leaders who continually allowed their club to become an object of the Kremlin.

HYPOTHESIS 2: HOT-COGNITION WITHIN GERMAN VOTING

This section analyzes voting patterns among FC Schalke supporters in four Bundestag elections from 2009-2021 in order to determine whether the good-will effect towards Gazprom translated into 'hot-cognition' during political decision making. I track the rhetoric of key political leaders and party platforms prior to each election and determine if any changes to a party's pro-Russia policy had a positive correlation with voting results. To isolate Schalke supporters from the rest of the German population, I analyze voting from three locations in North Rhine-Westphalia: the Gelsenkirchen electoral district, the city of Rheda-Wiedenbrück, and the town of Wetztingen. I compare the voting results of the three locations to constituencies with similar socio-demographics to control for common indicators of voting behavior that would explain broad voting patterns, so any discrepancies may be related to hot-cognition.¹⁰⁴

While Gelsenkirchen contains the largest proportion of Schalke fans, the other two test locations contain influential FC Schalke Fan Clubs.

[104] I compare the results in Gelsenkirchen to the neighboring Ruhr Valley city of Herne (see table 4). For Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Wetztingen, I use their larger voting districts (Gütersloh and Steinfurt I) as the control.

Rheda-Wiedenbrück's fan club was founded in 2004, and has over 400 members including Clemens Tönnies,¹⁰⁵ so these fans may be more primed to positively associate with Russia because of their personal connection to the club Chair. Likewise, Wettringen's Schalke Fan Club has one of the highest proportions of registered Schalke supporters relative to the municipality's total constituency. Wettringen's Fanclub has over 750 members,¹⁰⁶ while the town itself only has about 6000 voters, which means that political decisions of Schalke fans have a significant impact on Wettringen's voting results.¹⁰⁷

Russia in the 2009-2013 Bundestag Elections

Germany's centrist governing coalition¹⁰⁸ shared a diplomatic approach towards Russia for the 2009 and 2013 elections. The platform of the center-left Social Democrat Party (SPD) included *Ostpolitik*, which called for diplomatic relations and strong dialogue with Russia. In 2007, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, leader of the SPD, advocated for "a new European Ostpolitik" with Russia that emphasized German-led economic integration projects such as the Nord Stream Pipeline.¹⁰⁹ While Ostpolitik was originally conceived as a West German policy initiative to pursue cordial bilateral relations with East Germany and the Soviet Union, Steinmeier and the SPD adapted this friendly rhetoric to advocate for strong diplomacy with Putin's Russia. Likewise, Chancellor Merkel and the CDU generally echoed Steinmeier's diplomatic approach. The

[105] "Historie Fanclub Schalke 04 Rheda-Witdenbrück," n.d., trans. Google Translate, <http://www.fanclub04.de/pages/historie.html>.

[106] "Aktuell | Attacke 94 e.V. Wettringen," n.d., trans. Google Translate, <http://attacke94wettringen.de/ticker>.

[107] "Wahl Zum Deutschen Bundestag - Wahl Zum Deutschen Bundestag 2017 in Der Gemeinde Wettringen - Gesamtergebnis," *Gemeinde Wettringen*, https://wahlen.citeq.de/20170924/05566096/html5/Bundestagswahl_37_Gemeinde_Gemeinde_Wettringen_Erststimmen.html.

[108] The centrist coalition was between Germany's two most popular parties, the center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU), and the center-left Social Democrat Party (SPD).

[109] Marco Siddi, "A Contested Hegemon? Germany's Leadership in EU Relations with Russia," *German Politics* 29.1 (2020): 102, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2018.1551485>.

Chancellor continually reaffirmed Germany's partnership with Russia, most notably at a 2008 NATO Summit when Germany opposed inviting Georgia and Ukraine into NATO. Following Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia, the SPD and CDU condemned the aggression, but still cautiously advocated for cooperation with Russia.¹¹⁰ Despite Russia's democratic backsliding and political repression after Putin's victory in the 2011-12 elections, SPD and CDU leaders still maintained a strained, yet diplomatic position.¹¹¹

While Germany's centrist coalition prioritized diplomacy with Russia, the fringe parties had differing platforms. For example, the Green Party, with a leftist platform focusing on social justice and climate policy, opposed Russia's foreign policy and the Nord Stream pipeline. In contrast, the democratic socialist Die Linke (The Left) party, with roots from East Germany, expressed a "radical" pro-Russia tone during these same debates and favored a strong relationship with Russia.¹¹² Finally, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) entered political discourse with an anti-Eurozone platform and called for close ties with Russia. Die Linke and the AfD were the only other parties to demonstrate resolute support for Putin's regime. However, the disagreements among Germany's fringe parties were overshadowed by the dominant diplomatic narrative from the CDU-SPD coalition.¹¹³

2009-2013 Voting Behavior

The results from the 2009 and 2013 Bundestag election suggest a minimal correlational relationship between pro-Russia political rhetoric and hot-cognition voting. The strongest evidence for hot-cognition is in the Gelsenkirchen electoral district (see tables 1 & 1.1). Voters in Gelsenkirchen more strongly rejected the anti-Russia Green Party (-3.9%) when

[110] Marco Siddi, "An Evolving Other: German National Identity and Constructions of Russia," *Politics* 38.1 (2018): 43, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395717715819>.

[111] Siddi, "A Contested Hegemon? Germany's Leadership in EU Relations with Russia," 104.

[112] Siddi, "An Evolving Other: German National Identity and Constructions of Russia," 42.

[113] *Ibid.*

compared to Herne (-2.1%) and North Rhine-Westphalia (-1.4%). In Gelsenkirchen, the Greens lost more than half of its support base from 2009. In addition, Die Linke, which did not receive any first-place votes from Gelsenkirchen in the 2009 election, drastically increased its vote share by 6.1% in 2013.¹¹⁴ Die Linke was the only left-wing party to steadfastly support Russia, as the Greens were explicitly anti-Russia while the SPD took a friendly, but reserved stance. While the correlation is not strong enough to claim that hot-cognition was the primary motivator, it does suggest that Russia's influence did play a role in voting decisions. As further confirmation, Die Linke lost half its support base in Herne, while voters increased support for the SPD. This voting behavior suggests that Herne's left-wing voters did not factor Russia into the decision when choosing a new party. In other words, Die Linke's uncharacteristic increase in Gelsenkirchen supports hot-cognition among left-wing voters. However, AfD results in Gelsenkirchen dispute hot-cognition as a motivator for voting decisions. Gelsenkirchen voters selected the AfD at a similar proportion to Herne meaning that AfD's pro-Russia platform was not a unique decider for Gelsenkirchen's right-wing Schalke voters. Either way, nearly 10% of Gelsenkirchen voters changed their vote to an explicitly pro-Russia party during the 2013 election, and this disproportionate increase does indicate that Russian sentiment was prevalent in voting decisions.

Hot-cognition did not influence voting decisions in Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Wetztingen. While voters in Rheda-Wiedenbrück (see tables 2 & 2.1) did retract support for the Greens, this voting change was not an outlier when compared to the Gütersloh district and NRW results. Rheda-Wiedenbrück's voting mirrored the statewide patterns which disproves the notion that the city experienced unique voting behavior because of a good-will effect. Moreover, voters increased support for the SPD-CDU coalition fairly evenly, which suggests that Russian sentiment did not explicitly influence voting behavior, as there would have been a

[114] Die Linke did receive a large amount of 'second-choice' votes from Gelsenkirchen in the 2009 election. However, this study only focuses on first-choice votes as a measure for hot-cognition.

stronger support for the explicitly pro-Russia parties. In Wetztrungen (see tables 3 & 3.1), support for the Greens slightly increased while Die Linke and AfD decreased, which also suggests that pro-Russia hot-cognition was not a factor for voters.

Russia in the 2017 Bundestag Election

Russia's annexation of Crimea, support for separatists in the Donbass region, and Gazprom's Nord Stream 2 pipeline made Russia an important issue during the 2017 Bundestag election. Most notably, the SPD and CDU diverged in their Russia platform following the annexation of Crimea. While the SPD initially echoed popular opinion and condemned Russia's action, party leaders soon shifted back to their *Ostpolitik* platform when Crimea de-escalated and supported new forms of dialogue and cooperation with Russia.¹¹⁵ Steinmeier and then Vice Minister Sigmar Gabriel championed the SPD's updated platform. Both Steinmeier and Gabriel opposed long-term sanctions against Russia, while Steinmeier advocated for Russia's reincorporation into the G8, and Gabriel positioned himself as the primary defendant for Nord Stream 2 against EU opposition and United States sanctions.¹¹⁶ Despite their involvement in sanctions negotiations, the SPD's commitment to *Ostpolitik* repositioned the party as pro-Russian following the annexation of Crimea. In contrast, the CDU became an anti-Russia party following the Crimea crisis. Angela Merkel sharply criticized Russia's foreign policy and led EU sanctions, while other prominent CDU politicians harshly opposed Russia.¹¹⁷ In addition, the CDU allied with the Greens and advocated for a long-term opposition to Russian foreign policy. Even after de-escalation,

[115] Marco Sidi, "German Foreign Policy towards Russia in the Aftermath of the Ukraine Crisis: A New Ostpolitik?," *Europe-Asia Studies* 68.4 (2016): 675, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2016.1173879>.

[116] Tuomas Forsberg, "From Ostpolitik to 'Frostpolitik'? Merkel, Putin and German Foreign Policy towards Russia," *International Affairs* 92.1 (2016): 31-32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12505>; Bjorn Gens, "Germany's Russia Policy and Geo-Economics: Nord Stream 2, Sanctions and the Question of EU Leadership towards Russia," *Global Affairs* 5, no. 4-5 (October 20, 2019): 324, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2019.1681013>.

[117] Forsberg, "From Ostpolitik to 'Frostpolitik'?" 30.

lation in Crimea, the two parties called for additional sanctions should Russia continue to sponsor separatists in Eastern Ukraine.¹¹⁸ While the SPD's *Ostpolitik* reaffirmed the party's pro-Russia stance, the CDU's sanctions regime reset the party platform as anti-Russia.

Germany's fringe parties used the annexation of Crimea to define themselves as pro-Russia. The AfD reorganized to become an anti-Eurozone, anti-immigration, far-right populist party that maintained close ties with the Putin regime. AfD politicians expressed discontent with Russian sanctions,¹¹⁹ and AfD leader Frauke Petry met with Russian officials and Putin allies in Moscow months before the 2017 election.¹²⁰ In addition to the AfD, the Free Democrats Party (FDP) also used the Crimea crisis to define themselves as a pro-Russia party. In August 2017, one month before the election, FDP leader Christian Lindner claimed that Russia's annexation of Crimea was a "permanent provisional solution."¹²¹ Lindner's comments officially positioned the FDP alongside the AfD as a right-wing Russia sympathetic party, and his comments inspired Germany's other fringe parties to delineate their Russia position. Die Linke's Sahra Wagenknecht similarly asserted that Germany needed to "return to the roots of détente policy towards Russia," while AfD's Alexander Gauland remarked that "it is right to recognize Crimea as part of Russia."¹²² While the FDP and Die Linke referenced principles of *Ostpolitik* as informing their foreign policy, the AfD went a step further and defined themselves as explicitly pro-Kremlin.

[118] Ibid, 33.

[119] Frédéric Lemaître, "Germany's Eurosceptics Broaden Their Appeal and Win Regional Votes," *The Guardian*, (September 23, 2014), sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/23/alternative-germany-eurosceptic-votes-afd>.

[120] "Leader of Germany's Far-Right Party Meets Putin Allies in Moscow," *Reuters*, (February 21, 2017), sec. World News, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-election-afd-idUSKBN16012C>.

[121] Esther King, "Christian Lindner: Germany Should Accept Crimean Annexation as 'Permanent Provisional Solution,'" *POLITICO*, blog, (August 6, 2017), <https://www.politico.eu/article/christian-lindner-germany-should-accept-crimean-annexation-as-permanent-provisional-solution/>.

[122] Gens, "Germany's Russia Policy and Geo-Economics," 323.

2017 Voting Behavior

Gelsenkirchen voting results suggest that hot-cognition may have informed voting decisions. While vote share on the left marginally changed from the 2013 election, centrist voters shifted to the more radical, pro-Russia parties. The FDP's renewed pro-Russia platforms helped its resurgence throughout Germany, and the party's vote share increased by 5% in Gelsenkirchen and neighboring Herne (see table 1.2). While votes for Die Linke did not change from 2013, Gelsenkirchen's best evidence for hot-cognition was the quadrupling of support for the AfD. In 2017, many AfD voters were also historic nonvoters and held radical anti-immigrant views as well as weak views on democracy compared to the other parties.¹²³ Gelsenkirchen was an even greater outlier for AfD support, with nearly 17% of voters selecting the far-right party, 3.1% more than Herne and 8.8% more than NRW. In Gelsenkirchen, the AfD attracted nonvoters and centrist coalition voters, which lost a combined 16% vote share. AfD platforms were radically different from the centrist coalition, suggesting that Gelsenkirchen voters switched because of a single issue. Given the AfD's simplistic populist platform, it is likely that pro-Russia sentiments contributed to Gelsenkirchen's 3.1% higher vote share in 2017 compared to 2013. In other words, Gelsenkirchen's outlier support for the AfD suggests the party may have activated pro-Russia sentiments as a motivated bias.

In contrast, 2017 voting results in Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Wettringen (see tables 2.2 & 3.2) do not correlate to hot-cognition. Voting results in the two municipalities mirrored broader patterns, which means that FC Schalke voters did not demonstrate unique voting behavior. The SPD, despite defining itself as pro-Russia, lost 4.27% and 4.21% of the vote share in Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Wettringen, respectively, while the Greens' vote share in these municipalities did not change. While the FDP and AfD did see substantial increases in vote share, there was not

[123] Michael A. Hansen and Jonathan Olsen, "Flesh of the Same Flesh: A Study of Voters for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the 2017 Federal Election," *German Politics* 28.1 (January 2, 2019): 12-15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2018.1509312>.

an atypical level of support for pro-Russia parties that would suggest that hot-cognition informed voting decisions.

Russia in the 2021 Bundestag Election

Nord Stream 2, Russian militarism in Eastern Ukraine, and the Kremlin's poisoning of Alexei Navalny received political attention in the years preceding the 2021 Bundestag election. Centrist leaders now attempted to balance opposition to Russian foreign policy with geo-economic incentives of Nord Stream 2.¹²⁴ In 2018, Merkel stressed that the pipeline was “not possible” unless Russia respected Ukraine's oil transit rights.¹²⁵ She frequently criticized Putin's policies in Eastern Ukraine but still prioritized “dialogue”¹²⁶ with the Kremlin. At the same time, the CDU formalized its geo-economic position in rejecting a 2021 Bundestag motion by the Greens to oppose Nord Stream 2 construction.¹²⁷ Despite Merkel's ambivalence, other CDU leaders voiced strong opposition to Russia. Following the 2020 poisoning of Alexei Navalny, party leader Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer proclaimed she was “not fond” of Nord Stream 2 and threatened to sanction the pipeline as a threat to “security interests of Eastern [Europe].”¹²⁸ As German Defense Minister, Kramp-Karrenbauer also affirmed an anti-Russian stance with an

[124] Germany and Russia have shared a “strong economic interdependence... based on trade and energy.” Following US sanctions against Nord Stream 2, Germany's business elite lobbied the government to defend German economic sovereignty from American encroachment. In addition, Germany's business elites downplayed the political importance of Nord Stream 2 and consistently served as a strong domestic pushback against anti-Russia foreign policy (see: Gens, “Germany's Russia Policy and Geo-Economics,” 329-330).

[125] Gens, “Germany's Russia Policy and Geo-Economics,” 329.

[126] Laurenz Gehrke, “Germany's Scholz Calls for EU Ostpolitik,” *POLITICO*, (August 12, 2021), <https://www.politico.eu/article/youre-so-vague-germanys-scholz-calls-for-new-russia-policy/>.

[127] Götz Hausding, “Deutscher Bundestag - Antrag Zum Kurswechsel in Der Russlandpolitik Abgelehnt,” *Deutscher Bundestag*, n.d., <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2021/kw23-de-russlandpolitik-843426>.

[128] Andreas Rinke, “German Politicians Question Russia Gas Project after Navalny Suspected Poisoning,” *Reuters*, (September 15, 2020), sec. APAC, <https://www.reuters.com/article/russia-politics-navalny-germany-idUSKBN25X0KV>.

increase in United States military personnel in Germany.¹²⁹ Moreover, the SPD similarly reshaped its platform to ambivalently support Nord Stream 2 but also oppose the Putin regime. These sentiments were best expressed by SPD Chancellor candidate Olaf Scholz. As Finance Minister, Scholz claimed United States sanctions on Nord Stream 2 were “an infringement of sovereignty” and allegedly offered German state money to progress the project.¹³⁰ At the same time, Scholz described Russia’s annexation of Crimea as “a huge problem” for European security.¹³¹ Similar to the CDU, the SPD rejected the 2021 motion to oppose Nord Stream 2 construction.¹³² The centrist parties opposed Russian aggression within the Putin regime while still supporting geo-economic cooperation.

Germany’s fringe parties had contrasting Russia platforms. The AfD championed pro-Russia advocated for new legislation to remove Russian sanctions, criticized the expulsion of Russian diplomats after the poisoning of a Chechen opposition leader in Berlin, and celebrated Putin’s reelection.¹³³ In addition, leaked Kremlin documents characterized Markus Frohnmaier, a 2017 AfD parliamentary candidate from Southeast Germany, as Russia’s “own absolutely controlled [member of parliament] in the Bundestag” should he be elected.¹³⁴ Die Linke joined with

[129] Jim Garamone, “Austin Announces 500 More Service Members to Be Based in Germany > U.S. Department of Defense > Defense Department News,” *US Department of Defense*, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2570254/austin-announces-500-more-service-members-to-be-based-in-germany/>.

[130] Rob Schmitz, “Germany Reportedly Offered U.S. \$1 Billion To Save Russian Pipeline,” *NPR*, (September 18, 2020), sec. Europe, <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/18/914281571/germany-reportedly-offered-u-s-1-billion-to-save-russian-pipeline>.

[131] Rebecca Staudenmaier, “Exclusive: Olaf Scholz calls for ‘new policy’ toward Russia,” *DW*, August 11, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/exclusive-german-chancellor-candidate-olaf-scholz-calls-for-a-new-policy-toward-eastern-europe-and-russia/a-58832603>

[132] Götz Hausding, “Deutscher Bundestag - Antrag Zum Kurswechsel in Der Russlandpolitik Abgelehnt.”

[133] Steve Wood, “‘Understanding’ for Russia in Germany: International Triangle Meets Domestic Politics,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 34.6 (2021): 779, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1703647>.

[134] Timothy Jones, “AfD Parliamentarian Could Have Russian Support: Report.”

AfD in supporting Russian interests. In 2018, AfD and Die Linke politicians attended an economics conference in Crimea that was funded by the Kremlin.¹³⁵ Additionally, months before the 2021 election, Die Linke suggested replacing NATO with a new European security structure that included Russia.¹³⁶ For the 2021 Bundestag Election, the radical AfD and Die Linke parties reaffirmed themselves as staunchly pro-Russian. Conversely, the Greens and FDP opposed Russia's foreign policy. Annalena Baerbock, the Green Party's chancellor candidate, claimed her foreign policy would prioritize "increasing the pressure on Russia" in response to their interference in Eastern Ukraine. She also demanded that political support for Nord Stream 2 be "withdrawn."¹³⁷ Likewise, The FDP joined the Greens in opposition to Russia and called for a moratorium on the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.¹³⁸

2021 Voting Behavior

While Gelsenkirchen still had a strong vote share for the AfD (see table 1.3), voters also mirrored broader voting patterns with significant increased support for the Greens (+5.6%). However, Gelsenkirchen's support for the AfD was still disproportionately higher than Herne (+3.8%) and NRW (+6.9%). Despite 2021 voting trends shifting away from the radical parties, Gelsenkirchen still demonstrated some evidence for hot-cognition with its outlier support for the AfD. At the same time, the 7.4% increase in support for the anti-Russia Greens and FDP combined with the 7.1% decrease for pro-Russia Die Linke and the AfD means that any disparate support for the AfD in Gelsenkirchen is too minimal to

DW, April 5, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-afd-parliamentarian-could-be-under-russian-influence-report/a-48221119>.

[135] Wood, "'Understanding' for Russia in Germany," 781.

[136] David F. Patton, "Catalysts for Change: Small Parties in the 2021 Bundestag Election," *German Politics and Society* 40.3 (2022): 82, <https://doi.org/10.3167/gps.2022.400304>.

[137] "Annalena Baerbock Urges Hard Line on Russia, China," DW, April 25, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-greens-annalena-baerbock-urges-hard-line-on-russia-china/a-57325437>.

[138] Maria Shagina and Kirsten Westphal, "Nord Stream 2 and the Energy Security Dilemma: Opportunities, Options and Obstacles for a Grand Bargain," *SWP Comment* 46 (2021): 4, <https://doi.org/10.18449/2021C46>.

completely attribute to hot-cognition. If hot-cognition were the primary motivator for Gelsenkirchen voters, then the AfD and Die Linke would not lose votes proportionate to the staunchly anti-Russia Green Party.

The 2021 election results in Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Wetztingen do not indicate hot-cognition was prevalent in voting decisions (see tables 2.3 & 3.3). The anti-Russia Green Party and FDP's vote share substantially increased in concordance with the broader voting trends. In Rheda-Wiedenbrück, votes for the Greens and FDP increased by 8.48%, while Wetztingen votes increased by 10.89%. In addition, support for the AfD and Die Linke decreased, with the parties losing over half of their vote share between the two constituencies. As a further disconfirmation of hot-cognition, the AfD had a disproportionately lower vote share in Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Wetztingen compared to the broader voting district and NRW.

Summary of Results

Voting behavior that would support hot-cognition was inconsistent in the four Bundestag elections during Gazprom's sponsorship. The Gelsenkirchen constituency demonstrated evidence for hot-cognition with an outlying pro-Russia vote share that would indicate hot-cognition as a motivator. This disproportionate support was most evident for the AfD in the 2017 and 2021 elections. The far-right party, despite its radical platform, appeared to pull voters and nonvoters from across the political spectrum, suggesting that the vote switch was the result of a single issue. Likewise, the AfD performed the best in Gelsenkirchen compared with Herne and the NRW. It is certainly possible that the AfD's strong performance was because the party's pro-Russia stance activated similar feelings within Gelsenkirchen voters.

However, Russia may not have been the deciding issue for most AfD voters. The AfD's primary political issue was opposition to the German government's EU asylum seeker and pro-immigration policies, while campaign statements about foreign policy were "moderate."¹³⁹ Likewise,

[139] Wood, "'Understanding' for Russia in Germany," 778.

AfD voters were predominantly concerned with immigration and resonated with the AfD's xenophobic rhetoric.¹⁴⁰ Given that Gelsenkirchen had a large asylum-seeking population during the 2017 and 2021 election cycles, this anti-immigration sentiment may certainly have been a motivating factor for the Gelsenkirchen AfD voter. However, when comparing Gelsenkirchen to Herne, it is unclear why Gelsenkirchen would have a consistently stronger vote share for the AfD based on anti-immigrant sentiment alone. Herne's socio-demographics (see table 4) predict an equal, if not stronger support for the AfD compared to Gelsenkirchen. While it is possible that Gelsenkirchen's constituents better resonated with the anti-immigration message, the AfD's pro-Russia platform would also have activated the good-will effect among Gelsenkirchen's Schalke fans. Therefore, the AfD had a stronger support base in Gelsenkirchen because of Schalke voters' good-will effect-inspired motivated reasoning when making a voting decision. In other words, Gelsenkirchen had the highest vote share for the AfD because its voters uniquely chose the AfD based on pro-Russia hot cognition.

While Gelsenkirchen's support for AfD illustrated support for hot-cognition, the voting behavior in Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Wetztingen disconfirmed hot-cognition as a motivating bias during political decisions. The two constituencies did increase vote share for pro-Russia parties during the 2017 election, but this phenomenon mirrored the broader voting trends. The two municipalities, despite their influential Schalke fanclubs, did not demonstrate any unique pro-Russian voting behavior that would illustrate that good-will and hot-cognition motivated voting decisions.

CONCLUSION

The ultimate soft power implications of Gazprom's sponsorship of FC Schalke are unclear and ambivalent. In evaluating hypothesis 1, Schalke supporters did experience a good-will effect in reelecting pro-Russia club leaders, but the subservient dynamic between these leaders and

[140] Hansen and Olsen, "Flesh of the Same Flesh," 15.

Russia does not match voluntary deference that indicates soft power. For hypothesis 2, voting results offer limited support for hot-cognition as Schalke constituencies had contradictory voting for pro-Russia parties. Therefore, Gazprom's sponsorship does not neatly fit Nye's description of soft power, but rather demonstrates indicators of a more nuanced "smart power" that incorporates principles of hard and soft power. On one hand, the transactional nature of Gazprom's sponsorship engendered hard power coercion and acquiescence within club operations which allowed the Kremlin to explicitly leverage Schalke as a foreign policy tool. On the other hand, Schalke supporters demonstrated soft power through voting behavior – supporters reshaped their preferred policy to match Russia through the reelection of compromised club leaders and disparate support for pro-Russia parties in Gelsenkirchen. In this sense, Gazprom's sponsorship explicitly "bought" the loyalty of Schalke's club leaders, but also implicitly generated trust and deference from everyday Schalke fans.

Whether soft power or smart power, any prestige gains from Gazprom's sponsorship were substantially undermined, and ultimately proved fruitless, by Russia's foreign policy. Russia's militarism in Ukraine dissuaded German public opinion and injured Schalke's credibility as a Russian strategic partner, which severely diminished any prestige acquired from the sponsorship. While this case study proved especially difficult as a result of Russia's unpopularity in Germany, it also illuminates the limits of soft power as a tool for foreign policy. These limits were evident when measuring soft power through voting behavior. At times, voters in Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Wetztingen disconfirmed hot-cognition and soft power with opposition to the radical pro-Russia parties, while Gelsenkirchen's outlier status in voting for pro-Russia parties does corroborate the soft power indicators for this study. If my voting results study were expanded to thoroughly analyze voting from all Schalke constituencies across Germany or assess the individual decisions of FC Schalke policymakers in the Bundestag,¹⁴¹ then we could receive a more definitive picture on whether Gazprom's sponsorship did

[141] The 'Kuppelknappen' is an official FC Schalke Fanclub within the Bundestag.

produce soft power despite Russia's unpopularity, or if Gelsenkirchen's disproportionate support for the AfD was a unique case. For now, we have an ambivalent picture on the political implications of Russia's soft power from Gazprom's sponsorship.

While Gazprom's sponsorship of Schalke has been the most controversial attempt at sportswashing, it is far from unique in elite soccer. Despite this paper's ambiguous results, this study still discovered a more nuanced mechanism for analyzing sportswashing as a tool of foreign policy based on good-will effect and hot-cognition. Sports sponsorships are inherently transactional and coercive, and therefore do not definitively fit Nye's vision of soft power. However, the Gazprom case study does illustrate the potential political implications of a sports sponsorship, as Schalke fans still demonstrated some soft power indicators (even if ambiguous) in spite of Russia's overt intrusion in club affairs and broad unpopularity. While further studies into other sports investments are necessary to generalize any concrete implications, the FC Schalke case study suggests that lucrative sponsorships can accomplish soft power goals with hard power tactics. In this sense, a sportswashing regime can buy soft power.

APPENDIX

Gelsenkirchen, Herne, and NRW Election Results

Table 1: 2009 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Die Linke	AfD ¹⁴²
Gelsenkirchen	54.30%	26.10%	7.00%	7.60%	N/A	N/A
Herne	40.60%	22.90%	9.00%	8.10%	12.90%	N/A
NRW	35.1%	39.6%	8.9%	7.8%	7.1%	N/A

Table 1.1: 2013 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Die Linke	AfD
Gelsenkirchen	50.50%	28.60%	1.70%	3.70%	6.10%	3.80%
Herne	44.20%	28.30%	2.80%	6.00%	8.10%	4.00%
NRW	36.70%	43.80%	2.40%	6.4%	5.1%	1.8%

Table 1.2: 2017 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Die Linke	AfD
Gelsenkirchen	38.30%	24.50%	6.70%	4.60%	6.50%	16.90%
Herne	42.45%	23.98%	6.82%	5.15%	7.47%	13.80%
NRW	31.3%	38.3%	8.0%	6.5%	6.4%	8.1%

Table 1.3: 2021 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Die Linke	AfD
Gelsenkirchen	40.50%	19.80%	8.1%	10.20%	3.20%	14.0%
Herne	44.06%	20.41%	6.80%	10.80%	3.49%	10.20%
NRW	31.1%	30.1%	8.6%	15.2%	3.20%	7.10%

Table 1-1.3 Source: This data is sourced from vote iT's historical Gelsenkirchena database, Herne municipally published resultsb/c/d, and federally published North Rhine-Westphaliae/f statewide results:

- Google Translate, trans., "Wahlergebnisse Gelsenkirchen," n.d., <https://wahl.gelsenkirchen.de/index.php>.
- Jürgen Venghaus et al., "Statistikstelle der Stadt Herne und Infodienst: Westring 123, 44629 Herne," n.d.
- https://www.herne.de/Migration/wahlen/Wahlanalyse_Bundestagswahl_2013.pdf
- "Wahlergebnispräsentation Stadt Herne Bundestagswahl," KRZN Wahlergebnispräsentation, September 26, 2021, <http://wahl.krzn.de>
- "Results Nordrhein-Westfalen - The Federal Returning Officer," n.d., <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2013/ergebnisse/bund-99/land-5.html>.
- Results Nordrhein-Westfalen - The Federal Returning Officer," n.d., <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2021/ergebnisse/bund-99/land-5.html>.

Rheda-Weidenbrück, Gütersloh I Voting District, and NRW Election Results

Table 2: 2009 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Left	AfD
Rheda-Wiede nbrück	27.76%	47.56%	9.86%	7.57%	6.66%	N/A
Gütersloh I	31.83%	44.99%	9.03%	7.49%	5.95%	N/A
NRW	35.1%	39.6%	8.9%	7.8%	7.1%	N/A

Table 2.1: 2013 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Left	AfD
Rheda-Wiede nbrück	30.23%	53.15%	2.05%	5.66%	4.35%	2.56%
Gütersloh I	33.57%	50.25%	1.88%	5.43%	4.27%	2.50%
NRW	36.70%	43.80%	2.40%	6.4%	5.1%	1.8%

Table 2.2: 2017 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Die Linke	AfD
Rheda-Wiede nbrück	25.96%	47.94%	8.01%	5.56%	4.53%	7.16%
Gütersloh I	28.03%	46.56%	6.53%	5.72%	4.34%	8.01%
NRW	31.3%	38.3%	8.0%	6.5%	6.4%	8.1%

Table 2.3: 2021 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Die Linke	AfD
Rheda-Wiede nbrück	23.68%	41.58%	8.93%	13.12%	6.13%	2.45%
Gütersloh I	25.76%	39.96%	7.58%	12.83%	2.41%	7.19%
NRW	29.10%	26%	11.40%	16.10%	3.70%	7.30%

Table 2-2.3 source: This data is sourced from vote iT's database of Rheda-Wiedenbrück and Gütersloh results, and federally published North Rhine-Westphalia statewide results:

- Google Translate, trans., "Wahltermine Stadt Rheda-Wiedenbrück," n.d., <https://wahlen.regioit.de/2/05754028/index.html>
- Google Translate, "Wahltermine Kreis Gütersloh," n.d., <https://wahlen.regioit.de/2/05754000/index.html>.

Wettringen, Steinfurt I Voting District, and NRW Election Results

Table 3: 2009 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Left	AfD
Wettringen	24.61%	54.13%	11%	4.80%	4.89%	N/A
Steinfurt I	30.16%	44.55%	12.37%	6.19%	5.86%	N/A
NRW	35.1%	39.6%	8.9%	7.8%	7.1%	N/A

Table 3.1: 2013 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Left	AfD
Wettringen	25.71%	60.76%	2.26%	4.88%	2.98%	N/A
Steinfurt I	31.85%	52.01%	2.79%	5.11%	3.76%	N/A
NRW	36.70%	43.80%	2.40%	6.4%	5.1%	1.8%

Table 3.2: 2017 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Die Linke	AfD
Wettringen	21.47%	58.39%	6.42%	5.15%	4.12%	4.46%
Steinfurt I	25.84%	51.30%	6.58%	5.30%	4.93%	6.05%
NRW	31.3%	38.3%	8.0%	6.5%	6.4%	8.1%

Table 3.3: 2021 Bundestag Election Results

	SPD	CDU	FDP	Green	Die Linke	AfD
Wettringen	24.37%	45.33%	10.65%	11.81%	1.98%	3.53%
Steinfurt I	28.30%	40%	9.30%	12%	2.40%	5.40%
NRW	29.10%	26%	11.40%	16.10%	3.70%	7.30%

Table 3-3.3 source: vote iT's database of Wettringena and Steinfurt Ib results, and federally published North Rhine-Westphalia statewide results:

- Google Translate, "Wahltermine Gemeinde Wettringen," n.d., <https://wahlen.citeq.de/05566096/index.html>.
- Google Translate, "Wahltermine Kreis Steinfurt," n.d., <https://wahlen.citeq.de/05566000/index.html>.

Key

Bold: Pro-Russia Party

Red: Increase by more than 1%

Blue: Decrease by more than 1%

Black: No change greater than 1%

Table 4: Gelsenkirchen and Herne Voting Districts Compared

	Population (per 1000)	Refugees (per 1000)	GDP/ inhabitant (Euros)	No Secondary Certificate	University Entrance Qualification	Unemployment Rate
Gelsenkirchen	260.3	27.5	29,284	10.0%	30.7%	12.8%
Herne	156.5	28.9	22,918	9.1%	35.7%	11.7%

Source: The data is from a survey collected by the German government for the 2019 European Parliament election. The actual data is as of December 31, 2017.

- a. "Structural Constituency Data Gelsenkirchen, Stadt - The Federal Returning Officer," n.d., <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/europawahlen/2019/strukturdaten/bund-99/land-5/kreis-5513.html>.
- b. "Structural Constituency Data Herne, Stadt - The Federal Returning Officer," n.d., <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/europawahlen/2019/strukturdaten/bund-99/land-5/kreis-5916.html>.

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Keeping the Liancourt Rocks Dispute Afloat: Interactions Between State and Society in Korea and Japan

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Abstract

Originating in its modern form during the postwar period, the Liancourt Rocks dispute between South Korea and Japan has long exasperated observers who recognize the need for cooperation in an increasingly volatile regional political environment.¹ While the existing literature centers on variables ranging from nationalism in the public sphere to resource acquisition, this study argues that a more powerful explanation lies in the interactions between the two governments and their respective publics. Specifically, each state has actively engaged in a major nation-building process to integrate the dispute into their national identities in order to rally the public around perceived territorial transgressions. Through these consolidated identities, the Korean and Japanese publics later compel their governments to sustain more hostile policies even during periods where the two governments may desire reconciliation or compromise, and punish them in instances of perceived defection. This dynamic between the two governments and their citizenry suggests that conventional explanations grounded in material variables—such as competition over resources—are insufficient in explaining the severity and longevity of the dispute, leaving room for identity to occupy a major role.

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Map of the East Sea/Sea of Japan*



*Ulleung Island is a territory of South Korea, while the Oki Islands are territories of Japan. The Japanese government considers the Liancourt Rocks to be a part of Okinoshima, a town on the Oki islands.

Source: You-Jin Lim, "Liancourt Rocks," ArcGIS StoryMaps, April 12, 2021, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/a6c56b1cd05047dc956c1c167bd2a9f0>.

INTRODUCTION

On July 25, 2008, the US Board on Geographic Names (BGN) issued a seemingly innocuous revision that ignited a diplomatic firestorm, garnering enough attention and backlash as to involve then-US president George W. Bush: they changed the status of the Liancourt Rocks (known as Dokdo, or 독도, in Korea; Takeshima, or 竹島, in Japan) from “South Korean territory” to “undesignated sovereignty.”² Immediately following the name change, Korean and Japanese media outlets, public figures, and government officials aggressively asserted their respective countries’ claims of ownership over the group of islands. This sudden antagonism between these American allies was so severe that President Bush personally intervened to reverse the BGN’s decision and reinstate the status quo of recognizing the Liancourt Rocks as South Korean territory.³ This remarkable display led to confusion among Western observers largely unfamiliar with East Asian history as to how such a controversy could be generated from such a small series of rocks.

The continuously changing ownership of the islands has augmented the complexity of the dispute. Beyond material considerations, the significance of the Liancourt Rocks lies in their ability to invoke powerful nationalist sentiments among both Korean and Japanese publics, fueling anti-Korean and anti-Japanese perceptions and thereby inhibiting both states from actively cooperating to resolve the disagreement over the territory. Despite the evident complexity that has defined the dispute, however, most of the current literature is limited in scope and focuses on particular aspects of the dispute, including: the strategic impact

[2] In this paper, I use “Dokdo” when discussing South Korean policy, “Takeshima” when discussing Japanese policy, and “Liancourt Rocks” when discussing the territory in a general sense. The name “Liancourt Rocks” originates from the discovery of the island by French whalers in 1849 and has since become the default choice of name for Western observers. For additional context over the name change, see: “U.S. Did Not Inform S. Korea about Change to Dokdo Classification,” Hankyoreh, July 29, 2008, https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/301303.html.

[3] “US Reinstates S. Korean Sovereignty Over Dokdo,” *The Korea Times*, July 31, 2008, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2022/06/113_28523.html.

of the Liancourt Rocks on Korean and Japanese foreign policymaking; the effect of the dispute on Korean and Japanese national identities; the ability of both states to use the dispute as a distraction or leverage for other policy issues; and so forth. Previous research has evaluated how disputes between South Korea and Japan have inhibited security cooperation between the two countries by creating an environment characterized by mistrust, making it difficult to coordinate responses to challenges posed by states such as North Korea.⁴ It is therefore important to trace the contours of the dispute and determine the causes of the dispute's longevity. This analysis examines how Korean and Japanese nation-building has integrated the territory into their respective people's national identities, and how public opinion in turn compels the governments to sustain an inflexible policy vis-a-vis the territory, thereby restricting the policy options that states see as viable and decreasing the probability that a resolution be reached which satisfies both countries.

A CENTURIES LONG DISPUTE?

A Brief History

The struggle for control of the Liancourt Rocks spans centuries. According to South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), its claim to the territory extends back to the *Samguk Sagi* (The Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms).⁵ Although this historical record was only published in 1145, it included an account of the 512 discovery and subsequent

[4] Kathryn Botto, "Overcoming Obstacles to Trilateral U.S.-ROK-Japan Interoperability," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, March 18, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/03/18/overcoming-obstacles-to-trilateral-u.s.-rok-japan-interoperability-pub-81236>; Victor D. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle*, 1st edition (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2000); Krista E. Wiegand, "The South Korean-Japanese Security Relationship and the Dokdo/Takeshima Islets Dispute," *The Pacific Review* 28.3 (May 27, 2015): 347-8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2015.1011209>; Snyder, "Why the Japan-South Korea Dispute Just Got Worse," *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 27, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/why-japan-south-korea-dispute-just-got-worse>.

[5] "Why Dokdo Is Korean Territory," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Republic of Korea, accessed April 27, 2023, <http://dokdo.mofa.go.kr/m/eng/>.

takeover of Usan-guk (State of Usan), which included Dokdo.⁶ Today, Korean media proudly tells the story of how Ahn Yong-bok, a Korean fisherman, repelled Japanese competitors from Dokdo in 1693.⁷ The Korean government argues that Japan recognized Dokdo as Korean territory following this incident — according to South Korea, Japan banned travel to Dokdo in 1696, later recognizing Dokdo as a territory of the Joseon Dynasty in 1870.⁸ Japan disputes the Korean version of events. Specifically, Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) asserts that Japan recognized Takeshima's existence as early as 1618 and has claimed sovereignty over the islands since the mid-1600s. In January 1905, the Japanese government declared that the islands were to fall under a branch of the Shimane Prefectural Government.⁹ The ordinance reflected broader Japanese imperialist ambitions; the ordinance was issued as Japan was engaged in a bitter military conflict with Russia over control of the Korean peninsula and Manchuria, which would conclude later that year with the Treaty of Portsmouth. Included in the treaty was a concession

[6] For a broad overview of the dispute, see: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-19207086>; for Korea's history of Dokdo, see: <https://dokdo.mofa.go.kr/eng/dokdo/reason.jsp>.

[7] Little is known about Ahn himself, and most of the evidence concerning his travels to Dokdo consists of second-hand accounts written by Confucian scholars in Korea in the mid-18th century; for more information, see: "Ahn Yong-Bok, the Defender of Dokdo in Joseon Era," *KBS World*, August 9, 2012, http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/contents_view.htm?lang=e&menu_cate=history&id=&board_seq=60850&page=20&board_code=; Ji-soo Kim, "Ahn Yong-Bok Told of Dokdo, Ulleungdo," *The Korea Times*, April 16, 2013, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2023/04/139_134022.html.

[8] "Why Dokdo Is Korean Territory," *KBS World*, accessed April 27, 2023, <http://world.kbs.co.kr/special/dokdo/english/history/base.htm>; while KBS World does not represent the Korean government, the information used in the page is noted as having been provided by the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Michael Weinstein, "South Korea-Japan Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute: Toward Confrontation," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, May 6, 2006, <https://apjpf.org/-Michael-Weinstein/1685/article.html>; as a note, Weinstein places the date as 1693—the Korean MOFA notes it is 1696.

[9] "Incorporation of Takeshima into Shimane Prefecture," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, accessed April 27, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/takeshima/page1we_000060.html; For a broad overview of Japan's history of Takeshima, see: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/takeshima/position.html>; for their description concerning Japanese sovereignty over Takeshima, see: https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/takeshima/page1we_000058.html.

on the part of the Russians to concede the Korean peninsula to Japanese control.¹⁰

Unsurprisingly, then, in the context of Korea, it has been observed that the Liancourt Rocks have taken on an almost “sacred” quality as proof of Japan’s long-time efforts to infringe on Korean sovereignty.¹¹ Losing the rocks, therefore, would invite comparisons to earlier losses to Japanese imperialism.¹² To the Japanese, losing the rocks would both undermine the sense of superiority which often lingers in the mindsets of former colonial powers and validate existing feelings of unfairness at the hands of Koreans, who already suffer from a stereotype of being “untrustworthy.”¹³

However, while both Korea and Japan sought to assert control over the Liancourt Rocks for quite some time, the dispute that exists between the two countries today is a modern phenomenon which began with Japan’s defeat in the Pacific War. In 1951, Japanese and American officials gathered in San Francisco to negotiate the contours of the post-World War II settlement. The resultant treaty asserted that Japan renounce its rights to “Korea, including the islands of Quelpert, Port Hamilton and

[10] To further emphasize the association between the Liancourt Rocks and Japanese imperial ambitions, it is worth noting that while the Treaty of Portsmouth never referenced the Liancourt Rocks themselves, Japan evidently held great interest in controlling the islands in its periphery—the treaty would involve the ceding of the southern half of Sakhalin by Russia to Japan; Andrew Glass, “Theodore Roosevelt Brokers Peace Treaty, Sept. 5, 1905,” *POLITICO*, September 5, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/09/05/theodore-roosevelt-brokers-peace-treaty-sept-5-1905-806208>.

[11] Brandon Palmer and Laura Whitefleet-Smith, “Assimilating Dokdo: The Islets in Korean Everyday Life,” *ASIANetwork Exchange A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts* 23, no. 1 (2016): 23.

[12] Masako Ikegami, “Solving the Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute: Searching for Common Ground Through the Aland Model,” *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 23.1 (2009): 8.

[13] Victor D. Cha, “Hate, Power, and Identity in Japan–Korea Security: Towards a Synthetic Material-Ideational Analytical Framework,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 54.3 (November 1, 2000): 313, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049910020012598>; Sayaka Chatani, “How to Address the Racism at the Heart of Japan–South Korea Tensions,” *United States Institute of Peace*, January 17, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/01/how-address-racism-heart-japan-south-korea-tensions>.

Dagelet” without mention of the Liancourt Rocks.¹⁴ However, the Liancourt Rocks were not included in the treaty, and then-Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs Dean Rusk later rejected a subsequent ROK appeal to have the territory explicitly included in the text.¹⁵ A variety of theories persist as to the cause, including one which posits that John Foster Dulles sought to insert “wedges” between Japan and its neighbors in order to defend against Communist expansion by retaining sources of discord.¹⁶ However, it is more probable that American diplomats were uncertain if Korea or Japan had been the original owners of the territory and deferred the dispute by allowing South Korea and Japan to come to a settlement.¹⁷

Following the end of the U.S. occupation of Japan in 1952, the U.S. once more “feigned disinterest” to avoid having to determine final ownership of the territory, a move that would foreshadow U.S. policy for the next 70 years.¹⁸ In response to the U.S.’ decision not to settle the dispute, South Korean president Rhee Syngman announced in 1952 the *Presidential Proclamation of Sovereignty over Adjacent Seas*, which asserted Korea’s control over a large maritime zone which included Dokdo. This unilaterally-established boundary would come to be known as the Syngman Rhee Line (known in Korea as the “Peace Line”). Two years later, South Korea took military control of Dokdo, stationed its coast guard in the region to patrol the area surrounding the islands, and later implemented the *Fishery Resources Conservation Law*, which enabled the Korean

[14] Min Jung Chung, “Analysis of the Territorial Issue Regarding the Liancourt Rocks between Korea and Japan,” *The Korean Journal of International and Comparative Law* 7.1 (May 9, 2019): 53, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134484-12340116>.

[15] Kimie Hara, “Takeshima/Dokdo Problem in the San Francisco System: Reconsidering Its Origin and Settlement in a Multilateral Framework,” *The Korean Journal of International and Comparative Law* 4.1 (May 30, 2016): 32, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134484-12340067>.

[16] *Ibid*, 32-3.

[17] *Ibid*, 54.

[18] Alexis Dudden, “Dangerous Islands: Japan, Korea, and the United States,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, August 1, 2008, <https://apjif.org/-Alexis-Dudden/2852/article.html>.

coast guard to seize any vessels found fishing within the zone.¹⁹ While there were brief flare-ups in tension over the dispute, both South Korea and Japan remained largely conflict-averse until March 15, 2005, when Japan's Shimane Prefecture's assembly proposed a bill that declared February 22nd a new holiday known as "Takeshima Day."²⁰ Henceforth, the Liancourt Rocks became—and remained—a focal point of contention in Korean and Japanese elite and popular discourses.²¹

Literature Review

Territories are symbolic of a national sense of identity as they reflect and represent a broader national history.²² To Korean and Japanese people, it is not important that the Liancourt Rocks consist of only one permanent resident; that the infrastructure on the islands consist of only a handful of buildings, most of which are used to house Korean police officers and service small groups of tourists; or that in terms of resources, the area around Dokdo offers only fish and suspected pockets of natural gas.²³ What is important is that the territory is inherently

[19] Sang-ho Song, "S. Korea Holds Event to Commemorate 1954 Dokdo Battle," *Yonhap News Agency*, November 19, 2021, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20211119003200325>; Hideo Takabayashi, "Normalization of Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea: Agreement on Fisheries Note," *Japanese Annual of International Law* 10 (1966): 16; for Japan's official perspective on the 1954 policies by Korea, see: https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/takeshima/pagelwe_000064.html.

[20] Michael Weinstein, "South Korea-Japan Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute: Toward Confrontation," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, May 6, 2006, <https://apjif.org/-Michael-Weinstein/1685/article.html>; "Annual Event Pushes Japan's Claim to South Korea-Held Islets," *Nikkei Asia*, February 22, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Japan-South-Korea-rift/Annual-event-pushes-japan-s-claim-to-south-korea-held-islets>.

[21] Ji-Young Lee and Jaehyun Lee, "Dokdo in South Korean Education, Media, and Culture," in *The Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute* (Brill Nijhoff, 2021), 201–21, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004447899_010; Yuji Fukuhara and Takeshi Sato, "Takeshima in Japanese Education, Media and Culture," in *The Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute*, 10, *Maritime Cooperation in East Asia* (Brill | Nijhoff, 2021), 171–200, <https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9789004447899/BP000016.xml>.

[22] Jan Penrose, "Nations, States and Homelands: Territory and Territoriality in Nationalist Thought," *Nations and Nationalism* 8.3 (2002): 282.

[23] Euan McKirdy and Sophie Jeong, "Widow, 81, Sole Resident of Remote Island Disputed by South Korea and Japan," *CNN*, February 15, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/14/asia/south-korea-japan-disputed-islands-one-resident-intl/index.html>;

theirs and part of their respective national stories.²⁴ In this sense, the Liancourt Rocks' value as a symbol is tied to its status as comprising part of the larger Korean or Japanese "homeland."²⁵ However, much of the existing literature either fails to appreciate the degree to which the Liancourt Rocks remain embedded in public consciousness in Korea and Japan or takes it for granted. At this point, a large percentage of the literature on the Liancourt Rocks dispute has centered on the dispute's resolution.²⁶ Questions related to the political problems of who has the stronger claim to sovereignty over the islands and how the dispute can be navigated and, ultimately, legally resolved are also among the more common topics of focus.²⁷ More recent research has begun to investigate the impact of the dispute on national identities, domestic politics, and foreign policymaking. To many outside observers, the seemingly obvious explanation is the geographic value of the islands. Sitting at the midpoint between Korea and Japan, the geopolitical importance of the

"Police Officer Stationed on Dokdo Urges Tourists to Visit Island," *Korean Culture and Information Service*, September 28, 2021, <https://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/HonoraryReporters/view?articleId=204337>; "Islands Disputed between Seoul and Tokyo," *Reuters*, July 14, 2008, sec. World News, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-korea-japan-islands-sidebar-idUST13712020080714>.

[24] For a discussion of the centrality of territory to national histories, see: O. Yiftachel, "Territory as the Kernel of the Nation: Space, Time and Nationalism in Israel/Palestine," *Geopolitics* 7.2 (September 1, 2002).

[25] For a discussion of the relationship between "homelands" and national identities, see Chapter 3 of Walker Connor's *Ethnonationalism* (1994). Also see: Jan Penrose, "Nations, States and Homelands: Territory and Territoriality in Nationalist Thought," *Nations and Nationalism* 8.3 (2002).

[26] Garret Bowman, "Why Now Is the Time to Resolve the Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute," *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 46.1 (January 1, 2014): 433.

[27] Laurent Mayali and John Yoo, "Resolution of Territorial Disputes in East Asia: The Case of Dokdo," *SSRN Scholarly Paper* (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, January 18, 2019), <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3320079>; Seokwoo Lee, "Dokdo: The San Francisco Peace Treaty, International Law on Territorial Disputes, and Historical Criticism," *Asian Perspective* 35.3 (2011): 361; Rio H. Kwon, "Resolving the Legal Status of Dokdo/Takeshima: Why Join Referral to the International Court of Justice Is a Realistic Approach Comments," *University of Hawai'i Law Review* 40.2 (2018 2017): 212; Daisuke Akimoto, "Takeshima or Dokdo? Toward Conflict Transformation of the Japan-Korea Territorial Dispute," *Asian-Pacific Law & Policy Journal* 22.1 (Fall 2020): 52.

islands initially seems to be great. Certainly, they can impact the two country's maritime borders and, by extension, access to fishing and natural resources such as natural gas.²⁸ However, South Korea and Japan have reached bilateral agreements that address access to resources in the Sea of Japan/East Sea in the past. During the 1960s, South Korea and Japan reached a bilateral agreement to determine equitable fishery regulations in relation to the aforementioned Peace Line.²⁹ Emphasizing the symbolic value of the Liancourt Rocks, other scholars argue that the dispute may also play a functional role for the Japanese and especially the Korean governments—both North and South—by serving to strengthen the countries' respective national identities and invoke powerful nationalist sentiments.³⁰ Specifically, political elites in Korea and Japan may have intentionally politicized the dispute for their own personal gain by reaping domestic political benefits.³¹ Notably, it has been found that Korea's bilateral disputes with Japan over Dokdo directly contribute to increased presidential popularity among the public.³²

At the local level, a number of scholars have sought to explore the significance of the Liancourt Rocks as a symbol within the national ethos. Unsurprisingly, some of these arguments arose in response to earlier

[28] Norman Cherkis, "Natural Gas Is Key Issue," *The Korea Times*, August 18, 2008, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2022/06/356_29572.html; "Why Are the Dokdo Islets so Vital for Korea, Japan?," *Korea JoongAng Daily*, July 28, 2008, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2008/07/28/etc/Why-are-the-Dokdo-islets-so-vital-for-Korea-Japan/2892904.html>.

[29] Hideo Takabayashi, "Normalization of Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea: Agreement on Fisheries Note," *Japanese Annual of International Law* 10 (1966): 17.

[30] Bec Strating, "The Symbolic Politics of the Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute," *The Interpreter*, December 6, 2017, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/symbolic-politics-dokdotakeshima-dispute>; Balazs Szalontai, "Instrumental Nationalism? The Dokdo Problem Through the Lens of North Korean Propaganda and Diplomacy," *Journal of Northeast Asian History* 10 (December 1, 2013): 105–62.

[31] M. Erika Pollmann, "The Politicization of the Liancourt Rocks Dispute and Its Effect on the Japan-South Korea Relationship," *Pacific Forum CSIS, Pacific Forum CSIS Issues and Insights*, 15.10 (October 2015): 27.

[32] Wonjae Hwang, Wonbin Cho, and Krista Wiegand, "Do Korean-Japanese Historical Disputes Generate Rally Effects?," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 77.3 (2018): 702-705.

realist arguments focusing on the material aspects of the dispute.³³ In particular, the role of Dokdo in Korean historical memory and national discourse as a symbol of Japanese colonialism presents an increasingly popular and interesting line of inquiry.³⁴ Though typically seen as applicable more to Korea, many scholars argue that Dokdo's importance, and the two countries' inability to reach a resolution, derives from the fact that the Korean and Japanese publics have placed the territory within the scope of their own sense of national identity.³⁵

The biggest strength, as well as the most significant drawback, of most of the literature has been its narrow scope. Representing a first step towards comprehensively explaining the dispute, this literature provides invaluable insight into the origins, scope, and possible resolutions of the dispute. Yet, many scholars have put too much stock into the explanatory power of single factors: for example, Bec Strating asserted that "the key to understanding the dispute lies in domestic politics and the way the rocks have become totemic in broader historical debates."³⁶ Moreover, while the scholarship on the significance of the dispute on Korean and Japanese national identities and the role of historical memory in driving the conflict has been informative, most scholars have focused

[33] Sungbae Kim, "Understanding the Dokdo Issue: A Critical Review of the Liberalist Approach," *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 24.2 (2010): 1–27.

[34] Mikiyoung Kim, "A War of Memories: Dissecting The Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute," *Global Asia*, September 2012, https://www.globalasia.org/v7no3/feature/a-war-of-memories-dissecting-the-dokdo-takeshima-dispute_mikiyoung-kim; Bec Strating, "The Symbolic Politics of the Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute," *The Interpreter*, December 6, 2017, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/symbolic-politics-dokdotakeshima-dispute>; Tasevski, "Islands of Ire: The South Korea–Japan Dispute," *The Interpreter*, April 27, 2020, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/islands-ire-south-korea-japan-dispute>.

[35] Alexander Bukh, "Shimane Prefecture, Tokyo and the Territorial Dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima: Regional and National Identities in Japan," *The Pacific Review* 28.1 (January 1, 2015): 47–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2014.970040>; Dong-Joon Park and Danielle Chubb, "Why Dokdo Matters to Korea," *The Diplomat*, August 17, 2011, <https://thediplomat.com/2011/08/why-dokdo-matters-to-korea/>.

[36] Bec Strating, "The Symbolic Politics of the Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute," *The Interpreter*, December 6, 2017, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/symbolic-politics-dokdotakeshima-dispute>.

on national identity as it applies to the national group; few, if any, focus on how such identity conceptions impact the decision making of foreign policy elites and vice versa.

Therefore, the most promising research in this area has been done by researchers looking into the intersection of two domains of the dispute and Korea-Japan relations more broadly. Perhaps the most notable has been forwarded by Victor Cha, whose framework sought to synthesize materialist and culturalist explanations of Korea-Japan friction into a coherent whole.³⁷ More specific analyses on the dispute have likewise sought to integrate material and ideational variables; in particular, Ralf Emmers sought to examine the intersection between nationalism and natural resources.³⁸ Focusing on the “triggers” of the dispute’s periodic escalation, Sung-jae Choi argued for the importance of identifying the ways in which extralegal and “extrahistorical” variables interacted with one another.³⁹ Similarly, Krista E. Wiegand asserts that domestic accountability in South Korea—that is, pressures exerted through public opinion and actions by civil society groups—is responsible for the inability of South Korea and Japan to cooperate on security issues.⁴⁰ However, Choi’s study does not assess the role played by the Korean and Japanese governments in integrating the territory into their national identities, instead focusing on the impact of civic groups and nongovernmental organizations; Wiegand’s study likewise focuses on the Korean context, leaving space for a similar analysis to be conducted on Japan.

This study seeks to expand on the work done by Choi and Wiegand

[37] Victor D. Cha, “Hate, Power, and Identity in Japan–Korea Security: Towards a Synthetic Material-Ideational Analytical Framework,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 54.3 (November 1, 2000): 309–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049910020012598>.

[38] Ralf Emmers, “Japan-Korea Relations and the Tokdo/Takeshima Dispute: The Interplay of Nationalism and Natural Resources,” *S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies*, 212 (November 10, 2010): 43.

[39] Sung-jae Choi, “The Politics of the Dokdo Issue,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 5.3 (December 2005): 465–66, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1598240800002071>.

[40] Krista E. Wiegand, “The South Korean–Japanese Security Relationship and the Dokdo/Takeshima Islets Dispute,” *The Pacific Review* 28.3 (May 27, 2015): 347–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2015.1011209>.

by evaluating the impact of the interactions between state (country leaders, executive agencies, and legislative bodies) and society (public opinion and civic groups). In particular, this study will examine how nation-building efforts by both countries' governments have created a culture in which the Liancourt Rocks became an integral part of Korean and Japanese national identity. Moreover, it seeks to evaluate how nationalist sentiment has, in turn, ensured that each government maintains little flexibility in how they carry out their policy vis-à-vis the Liancourt Rocks, ultimately unable to pursue any sort of compromise. As Andrew Oros notes, "there is an intersubjective relationship where identity and interests are linked; actors influence their environment, and the environment influences them."⁴¹

STATE INTERESTS AND TOP-DOWN SOCIAL ENGINEERING

Material Variables

To be clear, there are definite strategic interests which contribute to the shape and form of the dispute around the Liancourt Rocks. As Japan's 2021 Diplomatic Bluebook suggests, the permanent stationing of security personnel on the territory by the Korean military as well as the military's occasional exercises near the territory have consistently led to diplomatic protests by the Japanese MOFA.⁴² The military and geographic components of the dispute were reemphasized the following year in the 2022 Diplomatic Bluebook.⁴³ In response, South Korea responded that Dokdo is part of Korea "in terms of history, *geography* and international law," though it is also possible to interpret the term as referring to conceptions of the Korean "homeland."⁴⁴ Indeed, in 2012, then-South Ko-

[41] Andrew L. Oros, *Normalizing Japan: Politics, Identity, and the Evolution of Security Practice* (Stanford University Press, 2008), 30.

[42] "Diplomatic Bluebook 2022: Japanese Diplomacy and International Situation in 2021," diplomatic bluebook (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Japan, 2022), 63-64, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2021/pdf/pdfs/2021_all.pdf.

[43] "Diplomatic Bluebook 2022: Japanese Diplomacy and International Situation in 2021," Diplomatic Bluebook (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Japan, 2022), https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2021/pdf/pdfs/2021_all.pdf.

[44] "MOFA Spokesperson's Commentary on Japan's Diplomatic Bluebook 2022," *Min-*

rean President Lee Myung-bak visited Dokdo in response to a defense white paper published by the Japanese government earlier that year, which had laid claim to the territory. Speaking to police officers stationed on the islands, he reportedly asserted that “Dokdo is truly [Korean] territory, and worth defending with our lives.”⁴⁵

While analysts often overstate the geopolitical significance of Dokdo, there is some truth to the notion that there *are* material components which contribute to both states’ desire to control the territory. Japan may feel that it must commit to the Liancourt Rocks dispute because to withdraw from it would mean jeopardizing Japan’s claims to other Pacific territories—namely, the Senkaku Islands and Kurile Islands (known in Japan as the Northern Territories).⁴⁶ Any concessions made over the Liancourt Rocks may embolden China and Russia—the other disputants in the Senkaku/Diaoyu and Kurile/Northern Territories disputes—to view Japanese claims as a sign of weakness and more aggressively contest Japan over those territories.⁴⁷ In addition, the problem of determining each states’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) has a number of implications for access to natural resources, which will factor into each states’ respective calculus over whether to continue pursuing control of the territory. For example, the Korea National Oil Corporation detected for the first time in 1998 a commercially viable layer of natural gas near the islands; drilling began in 2004, with two other deposits being located nearby since then.⁴⁸ Given that both Japan and South Korea are among

istry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, April 22, 2022, https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5676/view.do?seq=322036&page=2.

[45] Sang-Hun Choe, “South Korean’s Visit to Disputed Islets Angers Japan,” *The New York Times*, August 10, 2012, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/11/world/asia/south-koreans-visit-to-disputed-islets-angers-japan.html>.

[46] Tasevski, “Islands of Ire: The South Korea–Japan Dispute,” *The Interpreter*, April 27, 2020, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/islands-ire-south-korea-japan-dispute>.

[47] This dynamic, whereby initially small defeats produce a positive feedback loop such that a state’s enemies perceive the state as weak and therefore prone to conceding on other issues, is discussed in greater detail in Robert Jervis’ *System Effects* (1999).

[48] Shin, Hyon-hee, “[Weekender] Dokdo’s Promising Resources, Ecology,” *The Korea Herald*, January 17, 2014. <https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20140117000879>.

the top importers of liquefied natural gas, even the possibility of large deposits of natural gas near the Liancourt Rocks would incentivize both to lay claim to the territory.⁴⁹

Considering the above factors, as well as the popularity of economic- and resource-based arguments with regard to the origins of Japan's imperial ambitions in the middle of the 20th century, it would seem reasonable to perceive Dokdo as being the product of resource-based motivations.⁵⁰ However, materialist explanations fail on several accounts. To begin with, legal scholars have noted that it is unlikely that the Liancourt Rocks would alter a state's EEZ given that the rocks lack self-sustaining resources that allow for human habitation.⁵¹ More significantly, if the dispute was strictly limited to material considerations, it is highly probable that the two states would have reached a bilateral agreement long before the its revival in 2005. After all, as noted earlier, South Korea and Japan have successfully reached an agreement over fishing rights before, and it is difficult to imagine that other resource-based factors would preclude a similar agreement from being reached today. This becomes especially apparent considering that most of the estimated natural gas deposits near the Liancourt Rocks have not actually been discovered, and the perceived need for natural gas has declined in both countries as a result of decreasing domestic demand and increased nuclear energy production.⁵²

[49] Eric Yep et al., "South Korea, Japan Natural Gas Surpluses Offset Heat Wave-Driven Demand in Rest of Asia," *S&P Global*, April 25, 2023, <https://www.spglobal.com/commodityinsights/en/market-insights/latest-news/energy-transition/042523-south-korea-japan-natural-gas-surpluses-offset-heat-wave-driven-demand-in-rest-of-asia>.

[50] For an explanation of Japanese imperialism grounded in economics, see: Kaoru Sugihara, "The Economic Motivations behind Japanese Aggression in the Late 1930s: Perspectives of Freda Utley and Nawa Toichi," *Journal of Contemporary History* 32.2 (1997): 261-262.

[51] Phil Haas, "Status and Sovereignty of the Liancourt Rocks: The Dispute between Japan and Korea," *Gonzaga Journal of International Law* 15.1 (2012 2011): 8.

[52] Eric Yep et al., "South Korea, Japan Natural Gas Surpluses Offset Heat Wave-Driven Demand in Rest of Asia," *S&P Global*, April 25, 2023, <https://www.spglobal.com/commodityinsights/en/market-insights/latest-news/energy-transition/042523-south-korea-japan-natural-gas-surpluses-offset-heat-wave-driven-demand-in-rest-of-asia>.

Additionally, given the U.S.' recognition of the importance of the U.S.-Japan-South Korea trilateral relationship, it is unlikely that a territorial conflict rooted solely in disagreements over resource acquisition would see the U.S. remain on the sidelines for 70 years.⁵³ More concretely, materialist arguments fail to explain the fact that Korean protests against Japanese policy towards Dokdo are often tied to complaints over Japanese history textbooks, lack of culpability over the comfort women issue, and other explicitly identity-based factors.⁵⁴ The inability of material factors to sufficiently explain the dispute leaves space for ideational considerations as well as identity to assume a major role in explaining how the dispute has managed to become generational.

Seeing Like a State: Perception, Memory, and Identity

Identity formation is a process laden with emotions related to perceived commonalities among an in-group and differences with out-groups, often grounded in abstract “memories” of the experiences of a group. In developing what would become one of the cornerstones of social psychology—social identity theory—Henri Tajfel argued that in categorizing themselves into social groups and comparing their group against other out-groups, people will seek to determine the negative elements of out-groups in order to enhance their self-esteem. These social identities are causative in that someone’s social identity partially determines their behavior.⁵⁵ Thus, one can expect that the emotions and identities of de-

[53] White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* (Washington DC: White House, 2022), 8, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>; Hideo Takabayashi, “Normalization of Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea: Agreement on Fisheries Note,” *Japanese Annual of International Law* 10 (1966): 17.

[54] “MOFA Spokesperson’s Commentary on Japan’s Diplomatic Bluebook 2022,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Republic of Korea, April 22, 2022, https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5676/view.do?seq=322036&page=2; “MOFA Spokesperson’s Statement on Japan’s Authorization of Textbooks,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Republic of Korea, March 30, 2022, https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5676/view.do?seq=322023&page=4.

[55] Henri Tajfel, “Social Identity and Intergroup Behaviour,” *Social Science Information* 13.2 (April 1, 1974): 91-93, <https://doi.org/10.1177/053901847401300204>; for a review of social identity theory and the process of social identity formation, see: Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke, “Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory,” *Social Psychology Quarterly*

cision makers play a significant role in shaping the dispute and increasing its longevity as a byproduct. In the context of the dispute between South Korea and Japan over the Liancourt Rocks, there are two main components of identity that are especially relevant: 1) Identity helps shape how decision makers themselves perceive their adversary, determines which options and alternatives are viable, and dictates how committed a state is to a particular interest. It can transform topics that are otherwise of no interest into a vital interest which commands national attention from policymakers and the public.⁵⁶ 2) Identity is a malleable construct, thereby allowing the state to manipulate its form and content.⁵⁷

While competing ideas exist over the substance of their respective national identities, both Korea and Japan retain a strong sense of national pride. As Sven Saaler argues, history forms the core of Japanese nationalism, and historical memory — the contours of Japan's national identity.⁵⁸ Indeed, as a parliamentarian, former prime minister Shinzo Abe played a critical role in organizing the Historical Examination Committee within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in 1993, where he helped advocate for historical revisionist perspectives on Japanese aggression in the Pacific, comfort women, the Tokyo War Crimes Trials, and other historical issues.⁵⁹ Yet Abe's mission was just one part of a broader LDP effort to produce and reinforce a conservative and nationalist identity in Japan.⁶⁰ While the two major parties in Korea have not experienced the

63.3 (September 2000): 224–37, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2695870>.

[56] While the transformation of political issues into a vital security issue suggests the applicability of securitization theory, the case of the Liancourt Rocks precludes easy application. Although Dokdo/Takeshima is seen as an important geographic and symbolic issue, both governments tend to avoid tying the issue to security.

[57] Referred to as “official nationalism” by Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities* (1983), national identities crafted in a top-down manner have become a popular area of research, with imperial Japan being a prominent case study.

[58] Sven Saaler, “Nationalism and History in Contemporary Japan,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 14.20 (October 15, 2006), <https://apjff.org/2016/20/Saaler.html>.

[59] *Ibid.*

[60] Junki Nakahara, “Deconstructing Abe Shinzo's ‘Take Back Japan’ Nationalism,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 19.24 (December 15, 2021), <https://apjff.org/2021/24/>

same form of single-party dominance as the LDP has enjoyed in Japan, both promote a sense of Korean nationalism; since the two Koreas split in 1945, both regimes have sought to assert themselves as the legitimate representative of the Korean nation.⁶¹

Unsurprisingly, then, one of the more interesting—and prominent—dynamics in the Korea-Japan relationship concerns their colonial past. As Victor Cha argues, the colonial history of Japan manifests in contemporary politics as a superiority complex towards Korea — a complex “inherent in the collective mindsets of former colonizers.”⁶² For Japan, then, losing to Korea is unacceptable because it would compromise their sense of exceptionalism, which defines Japanese national identity. For Korea, on the other hand, a sense of anti-Japanism pervades discourses on Korean national identity; government officials loathe the prospect of losing to Japan because each loss is perceived against the backdrop of the historical memories related to Japan’s colonization of Korea.⁶³ In fact, as Cha asserts, Korea’s anti-Japanism is sometimes intense enough whereby “making a concession to Japan becomes synonymous with treason.”⁶⁴ Thus on August 2, 2019, at the outbreak of a trade dispute between Korea and Japan, then-president Moon Jae-in promised cabinet members as well as the Korean public that they would “never again lose to Japan,” signaling the beginning of a prolonged quarrel between the two states.⁶⁵

This highly personal view of the other as an antagonist—or even an enemy—derives from their identities, grounded in a particular understand-

Nakahara.html.

[61] Gi-Wook Shin and Paul Yunsik Chang, “The Politics of Nationalism in U.S.-Korea Relations,” *Asian Perspective* 28.4 (2004): 127.

[62] Victor D. Cha, “Hate, Power, and Identity in Japan-Korea Security: Towards a Synthetic Material-Ideational Analytical Framework,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 54.3 (November 1, 2000): 313, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049910020012598>.

[63] *Ibid.*, 314.

[64] *Ibid.*

[65] Moon, Jae-in, “Opening Remarks by President Moon Jae-in at Emergency Cabinet Meeting,” *Cheong Wa Dae*, August 2, 2019, <http://english1.president.go.kr/Briefing-Speeches/Speeches/630>.

ing of their national histories. Both Korean and Japanese policymakers, therefore, have a personal stake in ensuring that they come out victorious over the other.⁶⁶ As such, although both Korea and Japan wish to be perceived by the international community as adhering to international legal norms, both countries' commitment to "winning" the dispute means their commitment to resolving disputes between one another through established legal mechanisms is weakened.

Manufacturing an Official Nationalism

Education represented the most effective means by which the Korean and Japanese governments could advance their concept of their respective national identities as well as their particular understanding of the dispute. In Japan, the nationalist character of education has become a topic of intense scrutiny as external observers began to criticize the revisionist versions contained within textbooks and taught in classrooms. Notably, a number of textbook publishing executives have deep networks with LDP officials and share many of the same conservative views on Japan's recent past. One such executive is Hiromichi Moteki, the founder of the publishing firm Sekai Shuppan and acting chairman of the right-wing and historical revisionist Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact, which has affiliations with government officials.⁶⁷ In 2016, when South Korean lawmakers visited Dokdo on Liberation Day, Hiromichi Moteki described the act as "stupid and ridiculous" and "purely propaganda."⁶⁸ Later in 2017, Hiromichi Moteki even went so

[66] This need for "winning" in order to bolster their own self-esteem as well as elevate the status of their nation is not limited to the context of Korea-Japan relations; as Joseph Yi and Wondong Lee argue, Korea's approach to the pandemic was nationalist and politicized by the ruling party at the time—for their argument, see: Joseph Yi and Wondong Lee, "Pandemic Nationalism in South Korea," *Society* 57.4 (August 1, 2020): 446–51, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-020-00509-z>.

[67] Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Un-Remembering the Massacre: How Japan's 'History Wars' Are Challenging Research Integrity Domestically and Abroad," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* (blog), October 25, 2021, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2021/10/25/un-remembering-the-massacre-how-japans-history-wars-are-challenging-research-integrity-domestically-and-abroad/>.

[68] Julian Ryall, "Stupid and Ridiculous': Japan Groups Slam South Korean MPs Visit to Disputed Islets," *South China Morning Post*, August 18, 2016, <https://www.scmp.com/>

far as to deny that Korea was oppressed by Japan, arguing instead that “Japan spent so much money that you could say it was the Koreans that exploited us.”⁶⁹ Moreover, despite the volume of international criticism and outrage found in Korea, China, the Philippines, and other former colonies of Japan, Abe Shinzo himself had asserted that such revisions were necessary to eradicate the postwar regime that had been established during the period of US occupation from 1945-1952.⁷⁰

Government manipulation of historical education extended to the question of Takeshima as well. In 2012, Japanese textbooks referred only to “disagreements” over Takeshima.⁷¹ However, as part of a broader effort by Shinzo Abe to eliminate “masochistic” feelings among Japanese regarding their history, replace such feelings with patriotism, and strengthen their territorial claims, Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) announced in 2014 that it would revise its teaching guidelines and recommend that teachers instruct students that Takeshima, as well as the Senkaku Islands, were both Japanese territories.⁷² Later in 2019, Japan’s MEXT announced that beginning in 2020, social studies textbooks for 5th and sixth graders would state that Takeshima is an “inherent part of Japan’s territory” and

news/asia/diplomacy/article/2005195/stupid-and-ridiculous-japan-groups-slam-south-korean-mps-visit.

[69] At the time, Sekai Shuppan was embroiled in a controversy concerning the use of a particular set of history textbooks published by Sekai Shuppan and used across 50 junior high schools. Specific grievances regarding the textbooks included the omission of the Nanjing Massacre of 1937, which saw hundreds of thousands of Chinese dead, the omission of the comfort women issue, wherein hundreds of thousands of women in Korea, China, the Philippines, etc. were forced into sexual slavery, and for asserting that the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 was justified as the US’ prior embargo was itself an act of war; Julian Ryall, “Japan’s ‘nationalist’ School Books Teach a Different View of History,” *Deutsche Welle*, August 15, 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/japan-nationalist-school-books-teach-a-different-view-of-history/a-40092325>.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Justin McCurry, “Japan: Teachers to Call Senkaku and Takeshima Islands Japanese Territory,” *The Guardian*, January 28, 2014, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/28/japan-teachers-call-senkaku-takeshima-island-japanese-territory>.

[72] Ibid.

that it is illegally occupied by Korea.⁷³ This trend in education over historical and territorial issues marks a broader generational shift in Japan. As Andrew Horvat noted in an interview with Reuters, “the failure to reach consensus on a difficult past ... has resulted in a lack of tolerance in a new generation that sees things in a less nuanced manner, devoid of real experience.”⁷⁴ With these developments, some Japanese scholars noted that Takeshima was now “consolidated among people”—that Japan had embraced a nationalist perspective on the Takeshima dispute.⁷⁵ In other words, the Japanese government had succeeded in integrating the territorial dispute over Takeshima into Japan’s national identity, and was able to use it to ensure that its policy towards the territory remains stable.⁷⁶ Taking advantage of these developed nationalist inclinations, Japanese officials, including former Foreign Minister Kono Taro, repeatedly described Korea’s actions in disputes as being unfair and resulting in “unjust disadvantages” for Japan.⁷⁷ Japan then sought to shore up support to continue with the dispute by presenting Japan’s own approach as being in accordance with international norms—Japan was attempting to resolve the disputes through established legal mechanisms, and Korea was unilaterally and unfairly rejecting Japan’s proposals and behaving irrationally.⁷⁸ With the dispute framed as Japan fighting against an irra-

[73] “Japanese School Textbooks to State Dokdo Is Japanese Territory Starting in 2020,” *Hankyoreh*, March 27, 2019, https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/887653.html.

[74] Linda Sieg, “Japan, Led by Less Apologetic Generation, Stays Tough in South Korea Feud,” *Reuters*, August 8, 2019, sec. Emerging Markets, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-japan-labourers-history-an-idUSKCN1UY1BA>.

[75] Yuji Fukuhara and Takeshi Sato, “Takeshima in Japanese Education, Media and Culture,” in *The Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute*, 10, Maritime Cooperation in East Asia (Brill | Nijhoff, 2021), 171, <https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9789004447899/BP000016.xml>.

[76] For an explanation on how Takeshima became integrated into Japanese identity construction, see: Alexander Bukh, “Shimane Prefecture, Tokyo and the Territorial Dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima: Regional and National Identities in Japan,” *The Pacific Review* 28.1 (January 1, 2015): 47–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2014.970040>.

[77] Taro Kono, “Extraordinary Press Conference by Foreign Minister Taro Kono,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, January 4, 2019, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken4e_000593.html.

[78] *Ibid.*

tional, unfair Korea, the LDP could rally support around the perceived need to overcome injustice and punish cheaters. Importantly, this process is not unique to Japan, and a similar process can be observed in South Korea.

Following its impressive economic development and transition to democracy, as well as the rise of new generations who did not live through the Pacific War, South Korea has become another illustrative example of how the state can use education to ensure that views conducive to its policy choices are sustained.⁷⁹ Certainly, while some observers interpreted Japan's 2012 history textbooks as referring to Takeshima in relation to other ongoing disagreements, the Korean government interpreted the term as being suggestive towards a claim over the islands.⁸⁰ In response to this perceived slight, the Korean Ministry of Education announced that it would distribute supplementary textbooks to all public schools dedicated entirely to teaching Dokdo's history and "raise students' awareness of the necessity for guarding [their] territorial rights over Dokdo and the history of strong responses against Japan's territorial claim."⁸¹ Later, in 2017, the Korean Ministry of Education indicated that it would strengthen education on Dokdo by designating a full week in April to Dokdo, in which schools would organize events and contests to raise awareness.⁸² The ministry also stated that it would provide materials suggesting that the idea of Dokdo being a Korean territory is, in fact, not disputable.⁸³

While the Korean government's focus on educating the public about Dokdo may appear uniquely intense, this phenomenon is in fact not exclusive to Dokdo. Korean education on Japanese colonialism more

[79] While not a rigid date, South Korea's democratic transition can be marked as having finalized in 1987 with the first democratic national election, which resulted in the election of president Roh Tae-woo.

[80] Woo-young Lee, "Korea Ups Education on Dokdo," *The Korea Herald*, April 3, 2012, <https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20120403001223>.

[81] *Ibid.*

[82] "S. Korea to Reinforce Education on Dokdo against Japan's Claim," *Yonhap News Agency*, March 24, 2017, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20170324009200315>.

[83] *Ibid.*

broadly tends to focus on the Koreans' lived experiences and, in particular, their victimhood.⁸⁴ Understandably, victim groups—whether they be former comfort women, laborers, or other victimized individuals—have served as especially strong advocates for education regarding these topics.⁸⁵ This focus, while perhaps more historically accurate than what is represented in Japanese textbooks, has greatly contributed to modern feelings of animosity towards the Japanese among Koreans who never directly experienced the brutality of colonial rule.⁸⁶ But efforts to raise awareness on Dokdo go beyond the classroom. In the Central Hall of the War Memorial of Korea in Yongsan-gu, one can find a small display containing a scaled-down model of Dokdo and information on the island's history. Above it is a screen which plays a film on the dispute, wherein it is argued that Dokdo is Korean territory and, more importantly, that Japan *knows this*.⁸⁷ Just as in Japan, the Korean government has found that framing Japan's role in the dispute as an unjust and unfair one does much to appeal to the powerful emotions which accompany national identities, thereby functioning as a means to elevate the status of the territory and the significance of the dispute in the minds of Korean citizens, in turn securing their position regarding the dispute.⁸⁸

Along a similar line, several Korean organizations, including Samsung and the Northeast Asian History Foundation, have established museums devoted to educating the Korean public about Dokdo's history and

[84] Hu Young Jeong and Johanna Ray Vollhardt, "Koreans' Collective Victim Beliefs about Japanese Colonization," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 27.4 (2020): 635, <https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000496>.

[85] *Ibid.*, 637.

[86] Michael Bergmann, "Patriotism of Victim Country," *The Korea Times*, June 17, 2016, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/opinion/2022/06/162_207260.html.

[87] Unfortunately, there is no information regarding the display on official websites, though a photo is attached in Appendix A. Furthermore, it is on open display in the Central Hall near the Korea War Rooms I and II.

[88] Ji-Young Lee and Jaehyun Lee, "Everyday Politics of 'Dokdo' and South Korean National Identity: An Analysis of Education, Media, and Civil Society," *The Korean Journal of International and Comparative Law* 7.1 (May 9, 2019): 87, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134484-12340117>.

politics.⁸⁹ While not within the strict context of government, many of these economic and academic elites have deep connections within the Korean government, and on many occasions, lawmakers themselves have publicly supported, participated in, and even helped organize efforts initiated by these groups.⁹⁰ In other cases, policymakers themselves founded groups such as the Dokdo Love Society, an organization founded in 2000 by twenty-nine Korean legislators for the express purpose of pushing the National Assembly to enact policies that would reinforce Korea's claim on Dokdo.⁹¹ These educational institutions play a similarly critical role to national education by advancing perspectives of Dokdo as Korean territory and promoting views favorable to the Korean state's foreign policy objectives. The result has been to integrate Dokdo into the broader national narratives, and that South Koreans have been socialized into understanding "Koreanness" as involving a belief in Dokdo as being inherently part of Korea.⁹²

However, while many in the public sphere began to openly express powerful anti-Japanese sentiments, the Korean government consistently decided not to escalate disputes with Japan prior to 1996, instead opting to normalize relations. Faced with other issues that demanded more immediate attention, South Korean leaders made the conscious decision not to pursue the series of grievances which had surfaced immediately following the end of Japanese colonization. Two components of this phenomenon are that the authoritarian governments of Rhee Syngman,

[89] Krista E. Wiegand and Ajin Choi, "Nationalism, Public Opinion, and Dispute Resolution: The Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute," *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* 27.2 (January 1, 2017): 241, <https://doi.org/10.1075/japc.27.2.05wie>; the museums themselves contain an impressive collection of materials on Dokdo's history and present much of this information in 3-D format—for more information on the Dokdo Museum in Seoul, see: <http://dokdomuseumseoul.com/en/about/>.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Sung-jae Choi, "The Politics of the Dokdo Issue," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 5.3 (December 2005): 470, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1598240800002071>.

[92] Ji-Young Lee and Jaehyun Lee, "Everyday Politics of 'Dokdo' and South Korean National Identity: An Analysis of Education, Media, and Civil Society," *The Korean Journal of International and Comparative Law* 7.1 (May 9, 2019): 84, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134484-12340117>.

Park Chung-hee, and Chun Doo-hwan were highly insecure about the stability of the regime and, ideologically, more anti-Communist than they were anti-Japanese—Rhee in particular had spent considerably more time living and being educated in the U.S. than in Korea, and had to contend with other political figures such as Kim Gu, an independence activist who had led the Korean government-in-exile and maintained a legendary stature.⁹³ Thus, although the early Korean leaders did harbor anti-Japanese sentiment, these feelings were overshadowed by the need to consolidate their domestic authority and the looming threats of North Korea and China.⁹⁴

However, by far the most significant reason was that South Korea needed to secure the economic aid that would provide the stimulus to grow the Korean economy in the decades following the Korean War. For example, in 1983, then-Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro had announced that he would become the first prime minister to visit South Korea, not only as a sign of goodwill but also to discuss plans to provide \$4 billion in loans to South Korea.⁹⁵ In addition, 1983 saw the twelfth Korea-Japan ministerial meeting and the eleventh round of meetings between members of the Korea-Japan Assembly Members' League. Just the year prior, however, a program hosted in 1982 by the government-owned Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) debuted Jeong Kwang-tae's song, "Dokdo is Our Land," which immediately achieved

[93] Nak-chung Paik, "On 'Eradicating the Vestiges of Pro-Japanese Collaborators,'" *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, November 1, 2021, <https://apjff.org/2021/21/Paik.html>; Key Ray Chong, review of *Review of The Politics of Anti-Japanese Sentiment in Korea: Japanese-South Korean Relations Under American Occupation, 1945-1952*, by Sung-hwa Cheong, *Journal of Third World Studies* 10.1 (1993): 438; Soojin Chung, "Rhee Syngman, First President of the Republic of Korea," *Boston Korean Diaspora Project*, accessed May 6, 2023, <https://sites.bu.edu/koreandiaspora/individuals/1910s/rhee-syngman-first-president-of-the-republic-of-korea/>; Charles Kraus, "Kim Gu on Reunification and War, 1948," *Wilson Center*, accessed May 6, 2023, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kim-gu-reunification-and-war-1948>.

[94] Nak-chung Paik, "On 'Eradicating the Vestiges of Pro-Japanese Collaborators,'" *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, November 1, 2021, <https://apjff.org/2021/21/Paik.html>.

[95] Sung-jae Choi, "The Politics of the Dokdo Issue," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 5.3 (December 2005): 469, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S159824080002071>.

popular acclaim.⁹⁶ Fearing that the song could provoke anti-Japanese sentiment, the authoritarian Chun government preemptively banned the song from July to November 1983.⁹⁷

Later in 1987, South Korea underwent a democratic transition, after which the government began to publicly express offense at perceived Japanese neo-colonialism, such as high-level visits to Yasukuni Shrine—that is, a Shinto shrine used to honor Japan’s war dead, including the fourteen Class-A war criminals, among many Class-B and Class-C war criminals, convicted during Tokyo War Crimes Trials following World War II.⁹⁸ Yet, there was a delay between Korea’s democratic transition, which occurred in 1987, and its changing policy vis-a-vis its disputes with Japan, which is identified as taking place in 1996. This lag can be explained by several factors. To begin with, although Korea held its first democratic elections in 1987, the winner of the presidential election was Roh Tae-woo, a former general in the army and close ally of the former dictator Chun Doo-hwan. As such, although Korea had democratized, the Roh administration retained many authoritarian tendencies. For instance, despite descriptions of Roh’s 1987 liberalization drive as a “golden age” for the Korean press, such impressions belie the fact that through the Roh administration, all cultural products were required to undergo a review system and receive official authorization before being publicly circulated.⁹⁹ Worse yet, while the Roh administration made meaningful

[96] “Dokdo is Our Land”, Khan, August 16, 2021, <https://m.khan.co.kr/article/202108160300115>.

[97] Since the ban was lifted in November 1983, the song has grown in popularity to become a household name, even being represented in the recent globally-acclaimed South Korean film *Parasite*.

[98] Steven E. Lewentowicz, “In Response to Yasukuni: The Curious Approach the Chinese and South Korean Governments Take toward an Unresolved Link to the Past” (Master’s Thesis, Monterey, California, *Naval Postgraduate School*, 2013), 87, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/34697>; the author is careful to note that the political system, and the increased importance of public opinion, is only one factor, albeit a major one—economic development also played a significant role in giving the state a greater range of options that it could pursue; Higurashi Yoshinobu, “Yasukuni and the Enshrinement of War Criminals,” *nippon.com*, July 1, 2023. <https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/a02404/>.

[99] Hun Shik Kim, “Media, the Public, and Freedom of the Press,” *Social Indicators*

attempts to open up diplomatically to the Communist bloc— a long-term process which required careful diplomatic maneuvering throughout the entirety of his presidency—the administration was also largely concerned with amassing personal wealth and power. Later in 1995, Roh would be convicted alongside Chun Doo-hwan and others within his circle on charges of bribery, having amassed over \$300 million in bribes from thirty corporate entities.¹⁰⁰

The post-1996 shift in the Korean government's policy regarding disputes itself can be explained in three ways. First, between 1945 and 1993, the South Korean government maintained strict control over all media. Deemed necessary to maintain the fragile relationship with Japan and secure key loans that would stimulate Korea's economic development, the controls enabled the Korean government to prevent information about Japanese provocations from entering public consciousness and manifesting in anti-Japanese attitudes that could sour relations between the two states.¹⁰¹ These controls were largely removed in 1996, when the South Korean Supreme Court ruled them unconstitutional.¹⁰² Second, Kim Young-sam, who was elected president in 1993 after Roh Tae-woo's, did not face provocations from Japan between 1993 and 1995. However, between 1995 and 1996, Korean policymakers became increasingly

Research 62/63 (2003): 345-6; Seungjin Han, "Paving the Path to Soft Power: Crucial Moments in South Korea's Cultural Policies," *Wilson Center*, September 27, 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/paving-path-soft-power-crucial-moments-south-koreas-cultural-policies>.

[100] Teresa Watanabe, "South Korean Ex-President Arrested : Corruption: Roh Tae Woo Is Jailed on Charges of Taking More than \$300 Million in Bribes from Business Tycoons," *Los Angeles Times*, November 17, 1995, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-11-17-mn-4124-story.html>.

[101] Emily Ambrose, "What Seoul Saw, What Gwangju Knew: Journalism and Censorship During the Gwangju Pro-Democracy Movement" (Bowling Green, OH, *Bowling Green State University*, 2020), 6-7, <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/honorsprojects/479>; Seungjin Han, "Paving the Path to Soft Power: Crucial Moments in South Korea's Cultural Policies," *Wilson Center*, September 27, 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/paving-path-soft-power-crucial-moments-south-koreas-cultural-policies>.

[102] Seungjin Han, "Paving the Path to Soft Power: Crucial Moments in South Korea's Cultural Policies," *Wilson Center*, September 27, 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/paving-path-soft-power-crucial-moments-south-koreas-cultural-policies>.

angered by a series of comments made by Japanese policymakers, including an assertion by Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama that the annexation of Korea was legally valid.¹⁰³ Third, there were domestic political incentives to adopt a harsher line on Japan. Although President Kim maintained approval ratings nearing 90% between 1993 and 1995, his party faced one of the largest scandals in the country's history on October 1995—just half a year before the 1996 general election—when it was finally discovered that Roh Tae-woo and Chun Doo-hwan, both members of the same party as Kim Young-sam, had engaged in corrupt practices. Kim's approval rating crashed to 33.4%, and other polls indicated that the opposition party was leading the incumbent party in the upcoming general election by over 16%.¹⁰⁴ Recognizing the dire prospects they would face if the country's attention remained on the Roh presidency, the ruling party saw an opportunity to exploit the Japanese provocation concerning Dokdo—in fact, the party's president, Kim Yun-hwan, bluntly asserted that “[the dispute] is clearly good material for us since an external trouble unites a nation.” In February 1996, following Seoul's announced plans to construct a wharf facility on the Liancourt Rocks, the Japanese foreign minister claimed the territory as Japanese.¹⁰⁵ Seoul issued public statements countering the claim in response, and President Kim personally and publicly called the maritime police stationed on the territory, a move that was followed by the deployment of naval and air forces to conduct exercises near the islands. Despite having lost the country's first nationally-held local elections in December 1995, Kim's party, the New Korea Party, rebounded during the legislative elections held in early 1996 to win the majority of seats in the National Assembly, though it failed to win a majority.¹⁰⁶

[103] Sung-jae Choi, “The Politics of the Dokdo Issue,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 5, no. 3 (December 2005): 479, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1598240800002071>.

[104] *Ibid.*

[105] *Ibid.*

[106] B. C. Koh, “South Korea in 1996: Internal Strains and External Challenges,” *Asian Survey* 37.1 (1997): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2645768>; unfortunately, no verifiable public opinion data regarding the Kim administration in 1996 appears to exist—while figures can be found to be referenced in Namuwiki, the Korean equivalent of Wikipedia, there is no sourcing found. Searches in the digital archives for the major Korean news-

Taking this into consideration, it is clear that in instances of Japanese provocations, “political systems appear to have some bearing on anti-Japanese nationalism because the government felt compelled to be responsive to public opinion in a manner different from the previous decades.”¹⁰⁷ Moreover, they are able to utilize diversionary tactics to distract the public from internal issues. Altogether, the efforts to integrate the territorial issue within the scope of national identity and use it to advance their particular policies have ultimately been successful in both South Korea and Japan. Across two surveys conducted by Genro NPO in both Japan and Korea in 2013, 50.1% of Japanese respondents and 84.5% of Korean respondents indicated that the Takeshima/Dokdo dispute was a cause of the negative attitudes of both countries towards the other.¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, in order to bolster its claim on Takeshima, Japan leveraged another opinion survey conducted by the Territorial and Sovereign Issues Planning and Coordination Office, which found that 94.5% and 63% of Japanese respondents were familiar with the Takeshima dispute and agreed with the assertion that South Korea was illegally occupying the territory, respectively.¹⁰⁹ In response, South Korea filed a formal complaint against the “provocative action” amidst further public anger.¹¹⁰ More recently, the dispute was inflamed once more during the 2018 PyeongChang Olympics, when the Inter-Korean Unification flag that represented the joint North-South Korean team included a depic-

papers also yielded no results.

[107] Steven E. Lewentowicz, “In Response to Yasukuni: The Curious Approach the Chinese and South Korean Governments Take toward an Unresolved Link to the Past” (Master’s Thesis, Monterey, California, *Naval Postgraduate School*, 2013), 86, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/34697>.

[108] “The 1st Japan-South Korea joint opinion poll,” *The Genron NPO*, May 14, 2013, https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion_polls/archives/5263.html.

[109] “Japan Uses Public Survey to Bolster Dokdo Claim,” *Korea JoongAng Daily*, August 2, 2013, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2013/08/02/politics/japan-uses-public-survey-to-bolster-Dokdo-claim/297555>

[110] The institute that carried out the survey was founded in February of 2013 by the Shinzo Abe administration; “Japan Uses Public Survey to Bolster Dokdo Claim,” *Korea JoongAng Daily*, August 2, 2013, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2013/08/02/politics/japan-uses-public-survey-to-bolster-Dokdo-claim/2975550.html>; “Japanese Poll on Dokdo Enrages South Korea,” *KBS World*, August 2, 2013, http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/news_view.htm?lang=e&Seq_Code=97563.

tion of Dokdo.¹¹¹ In response, Tokyo lodged a complaint with the International Olympic Committee, resulting in a pledge by South Korea not to use the same flag in the future.¹¹² Later that year, Japan passed guidelines to teach high school students about Takeshima, and through 2023, roughly two-thirds of the Japanese public remains interested in the territorial dispute.¹¹³

Beyond support for policy options themselves, the effect of this project of nation-building around issues of historical memory—including those involving territorial disputes such as Dokdo/Takeshima—has real benefits for incumbent leaders and parties in Korea. In particular, the Dokdo dispute not only has the capacity to rally domestic support for these issues, but also to increase presidential approval ratings, a dynamic which became critical following Korea's democratic transition.¹¹⁴ The dispute would benefit later presidencies as well. In particular, President Lee Myung-bak's approval ratings increased following his controversial visit to Dokdo in 2012.¹¹⁵ The 2021 controversy over a Japanese diplomat's comments leading up to the Tokyo Olympics presents an even stronger case. During the lead-up to the Tokyo Olympics, which took place in summer 2021, Korea and Japan became embroiled in another Dokdo-related controversy when a senior diplomat at the Japanese embassy in Seoul suggested to a Korean reporter that President Moon's upcoming visit to Tokyo to repair relations amounted to "masturbation."¹¹⁶

[111] Paul Huth, Sunwoong Kim, and Terence Roehrig, "Conclusion," in *The Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute* (Brill Nijhoff, 2021), 244, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004447899_012.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid; "Two-Thirds of Japanese Remain Interested in Takeshima Dispute, Survey Finds," *The Japan Times*, February 19, 2023, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/02/19/national/politics-diplomacy/japanese-interested-takeshima-islets/>.

[114] Wonjae Hwang, Wonbin Cho, and Krista Wiegand, "Do Korean-Japanese Historical Disputes Generate Rally Effects?," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 77.3 (2018): 698.

[115] In-Soo Nam, "President Gets Small Ratings Pop After Islets Visit," *Wall Street Journal*, August 23, 2012, sec. Korea Real Time, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-KRTB-3096>; Kee-seok Kim, "Lee Myung Bak's Stunt over Disputed Islands," *East Asia Forum*, August 19, 2012, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2012/08/19/lee-myung-baks-stunt-over-disputed-islands/>.

[116] "South Korea's Moon Cancels Japan Trip amid Spat over Insult," *Al Jazeera*, July

Contributing to the controversy was a decision made earlier that May by the Tokyo Olympic Committee to include Takeshima in its torch relay map; when South Korea protested to the International Olympic Committee, Japan doubled down.¹¹⁷ Unsurprisingly, the Korean public was outraged; in response, Moon canceled his planned trip to Tokyo, a move supported by over 65% of Koreans.¹¹⁸ However, what makes this incident especially interesting is the domestic context in which Korean leaders were operating. Several months earlier, in March, the Democratic Party—President Moon’s party—had been embroiled in the largest scandal of Moon’s presidency. Ten individuals, all associated with the party, were found to have been engaging in real estate speculation, a discovery viewed as particularly offensive given President Moon’s very strong commitment to curbing skyrocketing housing prices.¹¹⁹ In light of this scandal, Moon’s approval rating dropped to 34.1%, with his disapproval rating jumping to 62.2%, the highest it had ever been.¹²⁰ After Moon’s public decision to cancel his trip to Tokyo, his approval rating jumped to 46.9%, demonstrating the effectiveness of satisfying popular demands not to concede to Japan on improving presidential approval ratings, even in light of otherwise large domestic scandals.¹²¹

19, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/19/south-koreas-moon-cancels-japan-trip-amid-spat-over-insult>.

[117] Joseph Egidio, “Japan and South Korea’s Battle over Dokdo/Takeshima at the Olympics,” *East Asia Forum*, October 9, 2021, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/10/09/japan-and-south-koreas-battle-over-dokdo-takeshima-at-the-olympics/>.

[118] “[Newsmaker] Over 65% of S. Koreans Support Moon’s Decision Not to Visit Japan: Survey,” *The Korea Herald*, July 21, 2021, <https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20210721000435>.

[119] Choe Sang-Hun, “‘The Den of Thieves’: South Koreans Are Furious Over Housing Scandal,” *The New York Times*, March 23, 2021, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/23/world/asia/korea-housing-lh-scandal-moon-election.html>.

[120] Jaewon Kim, “South Korea Property Scandal Hurts Moon Ahead of Key Polls,” *Nikkei Asia*, March 22, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/South-Korea-property-scandal-hurts-Moon-ahead-of-key-polls>.

[121] “[Newsmaker] Over 65% of S. Koreans Support Moon’s Decision Not to Visit Japan: Survey,” *The Korea Herald*, July 21, 2021, <https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20210721000435>.

Therefore, it can be theorized that in the case of Korea, the top-down nation-building effort serves two purposes: 1) to shore up public support for the government's policy position on Dokdo, based in large part on leaders' own nationalist beliefs regarding territorial sovereignty and the prospect of "losing" to Japan, and 2) to allow the government to use the dispute as a distraction to either engage in other policies or divert attention away from controversies. Indeed, the first is one of the major findings of Ji-Young Lee and Jaehyun Lee's study on South Korean domestic politics in relation to the dispute—that is, that "narratives on Dokdo ... are first and foremost designed to enhance South Korean territorial sovereignty over the islands."¹²² While this may also be the case for Japan, there have yet to be similar empirical studies conducted. Similar to Japan, the manner in which Korea has designed its educational materials on Dokdo has fulfilled a similar purpose in provoking nationalist sentiments over Japanese colonialism and perceived neo-colonial ambitions, and thereby shoring up domestic support for Korea's foreign policies on Dokdo.

This section began with a brief discussion on the material value—that is, value derived from the resources that can be extracted, such as oil and fish—of the Liancourt Rocks. Despite the initial appeal of resource-based arguments, however, the Liancourt Rocks dispute has evaded the same sort of resolution that has been reached in other disputes over resources, even in the narrow context of South Korea-Japan relations, thereby suggesting the relevance of other, non-material factors. This study focuses on the significance of national identity and how it shapes the way in which Korean and Japanese leaders perceive their counterparts, or adversaries, and helps frame the desirability of certain policy options. Furthermore, how leaders understand their nation's history in particular—including the history of the Liancourt Rocks—informs what they perceive to be the right course of action. In order to sustain the dispute

[122] Ji-Young Lee and Jaehyun Lee, "Everyday Politics of 'Dokdo' and South Korean National Identity: An Analysis of Education, Media, and Civil Society," *The Korean Journal of International and Comparative Law* 7.1 (May 9, 2019): 71, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134484-12340117>.

and achieve victory—or perhaps to distract from domestic issues and gain favorability among domestic audiences—the two governments are incentivized to use education to nurture a national identity in which the territory is tied to people’s sense of “homeland.” While the content of history textbooks have been the most visible evidence of this dynamic, the process of official nation-building extends beyond written text to include trips to museums, special exhibitions, and annual commemorations, all designed to raise awareness and interest in the territory and the dispute concerning it among the respective populations.

DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND BOTTOM-UP PRESSURES

Disdain between the Korean and Japanese governments was not always externally obvious. For instance, in an analysis of reactions by the Korean and Chinese governments following visits to Yasukuni Shrine by Japanese prime ministers, Steven E. Lewentowicz found that the South Korean government ignored all Japanese visits prior to 1996, the time period that encompasses Korea’s authoritarian period. After 1996—that is to say, soon after Korea’s democratic transition—the Korean government objected to such visits.¹²³ Describing Korea’s approach under the dictatorship of President Park Chung-Hee, Lewentowicz argues that while normalization of diplomatic relations was a core element within Park’s plan for South Korean economic development, the Korean public reacted negatively at what it saw as a governmental betrayal.¹²⁴ This public backlash against visits to the shrine would have impeded Park’s efforts to normalize Korea’s economic relations with Japan, however “Park’s violent political suppression in 1965 ensured that public opinion did not guide policy nor challenge the regime.”¹²⁵

[123] Steven E. Lewentowicz, “In Response to Yasukuni: The Curious Approach the Chinese and South Korean Governments Take toward an Unresolved Link to the Past” (Master’s Thesis, Monterey, California, *Naval Postgraduate School*, 2013), 71, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/34697>.

[124] *Ibid.*, 74.

[125] *Ibid.*

However, while policy shifts were easier to implement in South Korea under the authoritarian regime, the status of the two countries today as modern democracies presents a significant challenge—the two governments may find themselves unable to shape public opinion to be amenable to cooperation with the other regarding the territorial dispute. Identities, while malleable, are also typically slow-changing. Old identities can be replaced only when alternative ideas are proposed and achieved through “social salience,” whereby they are supported by important constituencies or influential groups.¹²⁶ Without adequate political willpower on the part of political elites, it is likely that the status quo will remain unchanged. In Japan, this has certainly been the case, as the LDP retains staunchly conservative views of the Japanese nation. If a state were to shift its narrative to an extent that is too far and too sudden, it risks losing its audience and its legitimacy among voters.¹²⁷ Naturally, this risk is far greater in states with democratic forms of government. Using an experimental approach, Michael Tomz found that audience costs—that is, domestic political costs that a leader incurs as a result of backing down in a dispute, typically in the form of lower approval ratings or decreased support in future elections—arise in conditions where the country’s citizens care about the reputation of the country or its leader.¹²⁸ In fact, audience costs can sometimes be so great that “war may be preferable to concessions.”¹²⁹

Public opinion can therefore exert significant pressure on a government to sustain or even escalate their policy in a dispute, particularly in cases where the other actor is perceived as a rival.¹³⁰ In the case of

[126] Andrew L. Oros, *Normalizing Japan: Politics, Identity, and the Evolution of Security Practice* (Stanford University Press, 2008), 27.

[127] James D. Fearon, “Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes,” *The American Political Science Review* 88.3 (1994): 577–92, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2944796>.

[128] Michael Tomz, “Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations: An Experimental Approach,” *International Organization* 61.4 (2007): 835.

[129] Shuhei Kurizaki and Taehee Whang, “Detecting Audience Costs in International Disputes,” *International Organization* 69.4 (ed 2015): 949–80, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818315000211>.

[130] It is unclear whether South Korea and Japan can be considered to be rivals. None-

Korea specifically, attempts to change tack and reach compromises with Japan would simply be unacceptable in the eyes of many Koreans who often perceive such shifts as bowing before the former colonial power. In Lewentowicz's analysis, one of the political consequences of the democratic transition was public demands for responses to Japanese provocations.¹³¹ On this point there is a difference in the degree of freedom which Korea and Japan can exercise in selecting among policy alternatives. In Japan, the LDP has maintained near hegemonic power over the domestic political scene since 1955 with the exception of two brief periods (1993-1994 and again in 2009-2012). While Japan is not necessarily a one-party state, the LDP's deep and expansive system of pork barrel politics has allowed it to wield an immense amount of political clout, shadowing all other opposition parties.¹³² Korea, on the other hand, is similar to the U.S. in that two parties are dominant, with power regularly shifting between the two parties. Therefore, Korean leaders must be more sensitive to public opinion, as failing to do so gives opportunities for the opposition party to make electoral gains.

The 2005 Transition

Similar to how Korean objections to Japanese visits to Yasukuni Shrine became consistent only after 1996, Korean assertions over control of Dokdo and objections to Japanese claims became pronounced after 2005, when Shimane Prefecture instituted "Takehima Day" as a prefectural holiday. Prior to 2005, both Korea and Japan had largely allowed the territorial dispute to lurk in the background in order to pursue clos-

theless, the literature on rivalries in international politics poses interesting questions; for an introduction on Asian rivalries, see: Aaron L. Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia," *International Security* 18.3 (1993): 5–33.

[131] Steven E. Lewentowicz, "In Response to Yasukuni: The Curious Approach the Chinese and South Korean Governments Take toward an Unresolved Link to the Past" (Master's Thesis, Monterey, California, *Naval Postgraduate School*, 2013), 45, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/34697>.

[132] Haruhiro Fukui and Shigeko N. Fukai, "Pork Barrel Politics, Networks, and Local Economic Development in Contemporary Japan," *Asian Survey* 36.3 (1996): 268, 282, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2645692>; Jun Saito, "Pork Barrel Politics in Contemporary Japan" (Ph.D., United States -- Connecticut, Yale University, 2006), 179, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/304987040/abstract/497B93DC08EE4D5BPQ/1>.

er bilateral relations. In fact, just two months prior to Shimane Prefecture's announcement, then-Korean president Moo-hyun Roh made an official visit to Japan—during the visit, the two governments designated the year 2005 as the “Korea-Japan Friendship Year” to mark the 40th anniversary of Korea and Japan's diplomatic normalization in 1965.¹³³ But, having been picked up by Korea's domestic media outlets, Shimane Prefecture's February proposal generated a public firestorm in Korea, made worse when the Japanese ambassador to Korea, Toshiyuki Takano, made a statement asserting that Takeshima was Japanese territory. The situation became further inflamed on March 16, when the bill was passed and February 22 officially became Takeshima Day.¹³⁴ Just two days prior to the official announcement, a large demonstration demanding that Japan drop the new policy was organized in front of Japan's embassy in Seoul.¹³⁵ In the wake of this public outrage, Korea's MOFA issued official complaints on February 23 and March 16 pressing Shimane Prefecture to remove the ordinance and asserting that Dokdo is Korean territory.¹³⁶ Thereafter, Korean media would report on every Takeshima Day celebration in Japan, and nearly every time, Korea's MOFA issues a press

[133] “Opening of the Korea-Japan Friendship Year 2005,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Republic of Korea, January 17, 2005, https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5676/view.do?seq=297652&srchFr=&%3BsrchTo=&%3BsrchWord=ROK-New&%3BsrchTp=&%3Bmulti_itm_seq=0&%3Bitm_seq_1=0&%3Bitm_seq_2=0&%3Bcompany_cd=&%3Bcompany_nm=&page=819&titleNm=.

[134] Norimitsu Onishi, “Dispute Over Islets Frays Ties Between Tokyo and Seoul,” *The New York Times*, March 22, 2005, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/22/world/asia/dispute-over-islets-frays-ties-between-tokyo-and-seoul.html>; Kosuke Takahashi, “Japan-South Korea Ties on the Rocks,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, March 28, 2005, <https://apjff.org/-Kosuke-Takahashi/1767/article.html>.

[135] Alexander Bukh, “The ‘Protect Dokdo’ Movement in South Korea,” in *These Islands Are Ours* (Stanford University Press, 2020), 96, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503611900-006>.

[136] “Comments by the Spokesperson of the MOFAT on the designation of ‘Dokdo Day’ by Japan,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Republic of Korea, February 23, 2005, https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5676/view.do?seq=295575&page=2; “Statement by the Spokesperson of the MOFAT on the designation of ‘Dokdo Day’ by Japan,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Republic of Korea, March 16, 2005, https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5676/view.do?seq=295587&page=2.

release on the event.

Three factors offer partial explanations of this shift: 1) from the perspective of the political elite, Korea's successful economic development made economic relations with Japan less critical (especially in light of Japan's Lost Decade), thereby allowing the Korean government to pursue historical issues; 2) the Korean media apparatus in the 2000s was more robust compared to the 1990s, allowing news to be disseminated more rapidly across a broader audience; 3) the democratic transition allowed Korean voters to have a greater influence on foreign policy—leaders who failed to match the public's expectations about proper responses to Japanese actions would be voted out in the next election and replaced by opposition candidates. The latter two factors are of particular interest in the context of bottom-up pressure impacting foreign policy decision making.

Democratic Accountability and Commitment Problems

The value of public opinion lies partly in its ability to prevent a government from pursuing particular policy options that are deemed undesirable. In Korea, activists spent decades establishing a more accountable government. Korea's democratic transition helped ensure that the government would be compelled to respond to public opinion to a far greater degree than under previous regimes. Thus, in the context of the Liancourt Rocks dispute more broadly, if either the Korean and Japanese governments wish to make amends, reach a compromise, or otherwise adopt a more friendly approach to improve bilateral relations, they may be unable to do so without risk of major political costs domestically. While this has affected both Korea and Japan, it is especially significant in Korea, where two parties must continuously compete with one another for domestic political power. As discussed previously, Korean domestic public opinion and civil society groups have been major factors in preventing more friendly security relations with Japan.¹³⁷ In

[137] Krista E. Wiegand, "The South Korean–Japanese Security Relationship and the Dokdo/Takeshima Islets Dispute," *The Pacific Review* 28, no. 3 (May 27, 2015): 363–364, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2015.1011209>.

other words, democratic accountability, while a critical feature of democratic governance, may have increased the dispute's longevity by preventing either government from pursuing compromise.

At first glance, public opinion in Korea and Japan on the Liancourt Rocks seems to provide a favorable outlook. In both countries, over 70% of respondents to the 2013 Genro NPO survey indicated that relations with the other country were important.¹³⁸ Furthermore, over 80% of Japanese and over 90% of Korean respondents indicated that the Takeshima/Dokdo issue was the primary barrier to the development of deeper bilateral relations.¹³⁹ Under normal circumstances, this appears to suggest that the Korean and Japanese publics would push their governments to seek and reach an agreement to settle the dispute, allowing the two countries to cooperate further on other security, economic, and diplomatic fronts. Yet, the opposite has been observed. While Koreans and the Japanese alike wish to resolve the dispute, both groups view the territory as inherently theirs and therefore blame the other for maintaining the dispute unjustly, leading to calls for each government to pursue the dispute even more vigorously.

In the case of Korea: in reaction to the Tokyo Olympics controversy described earlier, nearly 70% of Koreans responding to a survey taken by the Korean Society Opinion Institute supported an official boycott of the Tokyo Olympics, and a later survey by Realmeter showed that over 60% opposed President Moon's planned visit to Japan during the Olympics.¹⁴⁰ While Moon resisted public pressure to boycott the Olympics entirely, he opted instead for the softer alternative and canceled his scheduled visit to Japan during the Olympics. In this way, he was able

[138] "The 1st Japan-South Korea joint opinion poll," *The Genron NPO*, May 14, 2013, https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion_polls/archives/5263.html.

[139] *Ibid.*

[140] Ron Chang, "Poll: Seven In 10 S. Koreans Support Tokyo Olympics Boycott," *TBS*, June 7, 2021, http://tbs.seoul.kr/eFm/newsView.do?typ_800=P&idx_800=3438582&seq_800=20431159; "6 in 10 S. Koreans Oppose Moon's Visit to Japan during Tokyo Olympics: Poll," *Yonhap News Agency*, June 28, 2021, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20210628002600315>.

to satisfy domestic expectations while not angering Japan even further.

In Japan, while the impact of public opinion may be weaker relative to Korea as a result of its single-party dominance, public opinion still functions as a signal to Japan's foreign policy elites regarding the extent to which they are able to pursue the dispute. Assessing the results of several different surveys, Kevin Stahler found that following Korean president Lee Myung-bak's visit to Dokdo in 2012—which, as was noted earlier, resulted in higher approval ratings among Koreans—Japanese perceptions of Korea experienced an unprecedented collapse as roughly 58% of respondents indicated they did not feel that Japan was close to Korea; in mid-2011 that figure was roughly 35%. Caught between the need to maintain relations with South Korea in the face of increased Chinese military activity and North Korean missile tests, as well as the need to respond to mounting public outcries among the Japanese public, Tokyo also opted for a “softer” policy by summoning the Korean ambassador, Shin Kak-soo, and later recalling the Japanese ambassador from Korea.¹⁴¹

To further illustrate the efficacy of public opinion in shaping foreign policy outcomes, the 2022 controversy concerning a Korean marine survey offers perhaps the strongest case for how public opinion can compel a government to sustain a more hostile approach. At a press conference on May 17, Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa announced that Japan suspected that a research vessel owned by a Korean state-owned company was operating just south of Takeshima.¹⁴² As Korea itself would confirm later that month, the Hae Yang 2000, which belonged to the Korea Hydrographic and Oceanographic Agency, had been con-

[141] “Japan Taking Lee’s Dokdo Visit ‘Extremely Seriously,’” *Hankyoreh*, August 11, 2012, https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/546710.html; Jack Kim, “Japan Recalls Envoy after South Korea’s Lee Visits Disputed Islands,” *Reuters*, August 10, 2012, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-korea-japan/japan-recalls-envoy-after-south-koreas-lee-visits-disputed-islands-idUSBRE87904K20120810>.

[142] “Press Conference by Foreign Minister HAYASHI Yoshimasa,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, May 17, 2022, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken24e_000131.html.

ducting a marine survey in an area north of Takeshima that was within Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone.¹⁴³ The incident led to public anger among the Japanese public, especially as Japanese media outlets made clear in their reports that the incident marked a break in Japan's bid to maintain calm relations with Korea, thereby reinforcing perceptions of Korea as the sole instigator.¹⁴⁴ In response to the ship's presence, Tokyo, once again balancing the need to respond to the latest apparent provocation and the more important need to cooperate with Seoul on regional security issues, forwarded formal complaints to several Korean diplomats.

What is particularly interesting about this incident, however, is not the Japanese response to the incident, but rather Korea's reaction. In contrast with his predecessor, Korea's new president, Yoon Seok-yeol, had throughout his campaign signaled his intention to "reset" relations with Japan.¹⁴⁵ Considering his desire to improve the Korea-Japan relationship, many tentatively expected Yoon to seek to avoid conflict with Japan—he had, after all, criticized former President Moon's antagonistic and conflict-prone posture towards Japan.¹⁴⁶ Instead, the Yoon administration

[143] "Press Conference by Foreign Minister HAYASHI Yoshimasa," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, May 31, 2022, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken23e_000024.html; Sunny Um, "Japan Protests South Korea's Maritime Survey in East Sea," *Maritime Fairtrade* (blog), June 14, 2022, <https://maritimefairtrade.org/japan-protests-south-koreas-maritime-survey-in-east-sea/>.

[144] "Japan Says South Korean Ship Conducted Survey near Disputed Takeshima Isles," *The Japan Times*, May 30, 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/05/30/national/south-korea-research-ship-takeshima/>; "South Korea Ship Conducted Survey near Disputed Isles: Japan Gov't," *Kyodo News+*, May 30, 2022, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2022/05/8c247c7e070c-s-korea-ship-conducted-survey-near-disputed-isles-japan-govt.html>.

[145] Eunil Cho, "South Korea's New Government Looks to Reinvigorate Japan-South Korea-US Trilateral," *The Diplomat*, May 11, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/south-koreas-new-government-looks-to-reinvigorate-japan-south-korea-us-trilateral/>; Julian Ryall, "As South Korea's Yoon Reaches out to Japan, Hopes Are High for a Reset in Ties," *South China Morning Post*, April 27, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3175694/south-korea-japan-ties-likely-improve-when-president-elect-yoon>.

[146] Hiroshi Minegishi, "South Korea Presidential Hopeful Aims to Change Attitudes on Japan," *Nikkei Asia*, July 20, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Japan-South-Korea-rift/South-Korea-presidential-hopeful-aims-to-change-attitudes-on-Japan>.

has made no concessions to Japan, nor did it make any announcements indicating that maritime research near Dokdo would cease, a development which Japan views as critical when considering that South Korea's Institute of Ocean Science and Technology had planned to send its own research ship, the *Dokdo Nuri*, to conduct regular surveys near Dokdo.

While a variety of factors likely contributed to Yoon's decision not to concede to Japan, the strongest explanation is that Yoon had to confront the realities of directing Korean foreign policy, and has found that pursuing a reset in Korea-Japan relations was not as simple as it seemed during his campaign trail. As Japanese audiences reacted with anger at what they perceive to be Korean encroachment of Japanese territory, Korean audiences responded in kind with anger toward what they see as Japanese anti-Korean sentiments.¹⁴⁷ Having to consider domestic public opinion in order to maintain his own support base, Yoon likely feels it necessary to refrain from appeasing Japan over the incident. Given the anti-Japanism that is ever-present in Korea's national consciousness, ending the maritime survey would have appeared to Koreans as caving in to Japanese pressure instead of as defending Korean interests.¹⁴⁸ That the incident occurred only five months into his presidency makes the importance of public opinion even greater as Yoon seeks to establish his agenda and retain his voter base through concrete policies. As such, even though Yoon desired a rapprochement with Japan and an end to the controversy, Korean public opinion has compelled him to continue a far less conciliatory path in order to avoid incurring domestic political costs, thereby preventing the South Korean government from pursuing a settlement with Japan over the dispute.

CONCLUSION

[147] As Genro NPO's 2013 survey showed, 31% of Koreans believe that anti-Korean sentiment among the Japanese people is a barrier to the development of bilateral relations.

[148] Julian Ryall, "Why South Korea's Marine Survey in Disputed Waters Is Vexing Japan," *South China Morning Post*, June 1, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3179989/seoul-mission-how-marine-survey-disputed-waters-affecting-south>.

A curiosity of the South Korean-Japanese relationship has been the relative lack of security agreements despite sharing a large, active, mutual ally. In many cases, disputes in certain domains appear to spill over into other domains and become tied into broader national discourses of antagonism by the other. This study argues that dynamics between decision makers in government as well as the collective public opinion in Korea and Japan explain the severity and longevity of the Liancourt Rocks dispute. The state succeeds in their effort to continue the dispute by shaping the content of their national identity, integrating the territory into the national story. Public opinion, in turn, keeps officials “on course” by imposing political costs for perceived instances of defection. The Liancourt Rocks dispute itself has managed to remain relevant for over half a century because Korea and Japan have sought to integrate the dispute into their respective national identities for the purpose of aligning popular conceptions of the nation with elite conceptions, thereby leading to increased support for the government’s chosen foreign policies. Then, largely because of these consolidated national identities, the Korean and Japanese publics can, and often do, compel their governments to sustain their more hostile policies even during periods where the two states may desire reconciliation or compromise.

Since 1965, the Korean government has sought to continue normal relations with Japan so that it could maintain favorable economic ties. However, the 2005 transition became a catalyst for the dispute to leap to the forefront of larger debates over Korean and Japanese identity and historical memory. Recognizing that relations with Japan were not as critical as they were in the 1960s, and pushed by domestic public opinion, the Korean government thereafter consistently and publicly opposed any perceived Japanese provocations related to Dokdo. At first, Seoul found this public support helpful in moments when it actively sought conflict with Tokyo; the history curricula it had designed successfully created powerfully nationalist sentiments grounded in historical memories of victimization by Japan. However, the Korean government came to realize that the increased importance of public opinion and democratic accountability is a double-edged sword, as it also found that public opinion could compel it to maintain its current hostile approach even

in moments when it wished to pursue a more reconciliatory approach, such as during the recent maritime survey incident.

In contrast with Korea, Japan's political system, defined by pork barrel politics and single-party domination, has rendered the impact of Japanese public opinion slightly less crucial. The LDP has been able to exercise relatively more freedom in how it engages Korea in its disputes as a result. Nonetheless, domestic public opinion still has a similar influence in shaping the elites' perceptions of viable alternatives and the degree to which they can engage in a conflict with Korea. Similar to Korea, Japan has found a consolidated national identity to prove useful in pursuing disputes with Korea. But while national identity in Korea vis-à-vis Japan is predicated on a sense of victimhood, national identity in Japan vis-à-vis Korea is predicated on a colonial mindset of superiority, often implied in Japanese stereotypes of Koreans as "emotionally" or "irrationally" rejecting Japanese proposals to resolve the dispute through legal mechanisms.

Approaches synthesizing material and ideational explanations have the potential to offer more comprehensive explanations for current events. Unfortunately, in the context of the Liancourt Rocks, a resolution is unlikely in the near future as it would require an immense amount of political will on the part of both political elites as well as the public in Korea and Japan. Both sides would be required to make concessions despite neither side wanting to do so—and even when one side wishes to, they may find themselves unable. Nonetheless, looking at the interactions between state and society in Korea and Japan may reveal new ways to comprehend the dispute as well as novel ways to resolve it. One possible solution is the "Åland model," whereby Korea and Japan pursue a strategy of "softening sovereignty" through demilitarization, neutralization, and autonomy for the local population.¹⁴⁹ Specifically, Seoul and Tokyo should first declare the rocks as part of their national parks without de-

[149] The "Åland model" refers to a dispute over the Åland Islands between Finland and Sweden that was settled by the League of Nations in 1921; Masako Ikegami, "Solving the Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute: Searching for Common Ground Through the Åland Model," *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 23.1 (2009): 15.

nying the other's claim—this would serve to “soften the border”; second, both states must reach agreements concerning shared access to natural resources similar to ones made previously; third, both coast guards should conduct joint patrols to monitor for poaching and illegal fishing—the significance here lies in engaging in joint security operations and building trust; lastly, the territory and surrounding areas should be declared a demilitarized zone.¹⁵⁰

The Aland model represents a unique solution; however, it would also be prudent for Tokyo to apply pressure to Shimane Prefecture to repeal its claim to the territory, and for both states to pursue an agreement regarding education. It is clear that the narratives surrounding the territory are strongly nationalist ones. Given this, both countries should form a joint historical committee to develop a de-mythologized history of the islands and detach the territory from people's beliefs concerning their “homeland.” Moreover, just as the Aland model suggests instituting joint coast guard patrols, it may be worthwhile to convert independent research surveys, which at this point are largely conducted by South Korean teams, into joint operations to further build trust and break down feelings of animosity. Beyond political solutions, it would be in both South Korea and Japan's best interest to continue investing in nuclear power to reduce demand for natural gas, thereby undermining any potential efforts to sustain the dispute by referring to the natural gas deposits that are suspected to exist nearby. Fortunately, both states have already declared a commitment to increasing nuclear energy production, with South Korea and Japan hoping to see nuclear energy make up 30% and 20-22% of total energy production by 2030.¹⁵¹ However the two

[150] Masako Ikegami, “Solving the Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute: Searching for Common Ground Through the Aland Model,” *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 23.1 (2009): 19-20.

[151] Jessie Yeung and Gawon Bae, “South Korea Bets on Nuclear Power, Restarting Construction on Two Reactors,” *CNN*, July 6, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/06/asia/south-korea-nuclear-plants-renewable-energy-intl-hnk/index.html>; The Associated, “After the Fukushima Disaster, Japan Swore to Phase out Nuclear Power. But Not Anymore,” *NPR*, December 22, 2022, sec. Asia, <https://www.npr.org/2022/12/22/1144990722/japan-nuclear-power-change-fukushima>.

states decide to pursue resolution, traditional means of conflict resolution have proven to be insufficient, and more creative means to temper public reactions and satisfy the others' interests are necessary.

APPENDIX



아름다운 섬, 독도

Dokdo, Korea's Beautiful Island

독도는...
대한민국 정부 소유의 국유지로서 원면적일률 336.0로
지정되어 있다. 주소는 경상북도 울릉군 울릉읍 독도리
1-0이다.
독도는 1874년 1월 1일 조선의 영토에
포함되어 있다. 1955년 1월 1일 제정된 독도법
은, 독도를 울릉도 및 독도특별자치도라 규정한다.

Dokdo is...
the territory of Korea and has had a history of
being ruled by the Korean government since
1874. Its address is Dokdo-ri 1-0,
Ulleung-eup, Ulleung-gun, North
Gyeongsang province, Korea.
Dokdo was included in the Korean territory
in 1955. The Dokdo Special Self-Governing
Province Law stipulates that Dokdo is
a part of Korea.



아름다운 섬, 독도

Dokdo, Korea's Beautiful Island

독도는...
대한민국 정부 소유의 국유지로서 원면적일률 336.0로
지정되어 있다. 주소는 경상북도 울릉군 울릉읍 독도리
1-0이다.
독도는 1874년 1월 1일 조선의 영토에
포함되어 있다. 1955년 1월 1일 제정된 독도법
은, 울릉도·독도특별자치도라 규정한다.

Dokdo is...
the territory of Korea and has had a history of
being ruled by the Korean government since
1874. Its address is Dokdo-ri 1-0,
Ulleung-eup, Ulleung-gun, North
Gyeongsang province, Korea.
Dokdo was included in the Korean territory
in 1955. The Dokdo Special Self-Governing
Province Law stipulates that Dokdo is
a part of Korea.

독도의 기원은...
한류의 난류가 교차하여 어류자원의 풍부한 광풍의 장이라,
계속된 추경부터 정월까지 물김말 제작되어 있다.
많은 회귀철새들이 친해하고 있는 생태박물관이자 갈매
조류의 보육장 및 극아산포에 필요한 습지장 또한 있고
있다.

The value of Dokdo...
Warmth of Dokdo are an intersection of warm
and cold current that provide rich fishing ground,
and there is a layer of oceanic air above them.
It is biologically important and culture site
situated in South-East Asia.

유리 개항상의 독도
- 1912년 조선국의 신라에 귀속 한국영토 지정.
- 1955년 법률에서 일본으로부터 영토 반환을 규정하여,
- 1955년 이후에 대륙법, 및 관련 법령으로 독도를
대한민국 영토로 규정하여 선언.

History of Dokdo
- AD 1912: King Geon of Silla designated Dokdo as
the territory of Korea.
- AD 1955: Yoon Bo-gu, who received permission
from the Japanese government of Japan that
Ulleungdo and Dokdo are Japan's territories.
- AD 1955: President Syngman Rhee declared
the Dokdo Law including Dokdo in Korean territory.

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The Mekong River: Regional Planning, Sustainable Development, and Transboundary Cooperation in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

This paper offers an examination of the complex dynamics within the Mekong River Basin, a region historically intertwined with the Mekong River's abundance but now marked by a shift towards hydroelectric power as a resource.¹ Focusing on the reluctance of China—a key player in the basin—to join the Mekong Agreement, this paper uncovers the environmental and social consequences of this non-cooperation. It discusses the historical context of international environmental law related to transboundary water resources, emphasizing how China's actions challenge established principles and responsible resource management norms. Highlighting the significance of transboundary collaboration underscores the essential role it plays in ensuring the sustainable governance of shared water resources in the Mekong River Basin.

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INTRODUCTION

The Mekong River Basin is a sweeping landscape that has been deeply intertwined with the richness of its river for thousands of years. Significant economic growth in recent decades in the Mekong countries—China, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam—has occurred because these Southeast Asian states see a new resource in the river. Not in its bountiful fisheries or in its diverse agriculture, but in its hydroelectric capacities. China has asserted itself as a strong force along the river by building eleven dams and planning more for this vital region.² As evidence of its apparent disregard for international environmental law, China has consistently refused to join the Mekong Agreement, a transboundary framework for sustainable development along the river; such inaction will shape the effectiveness of the Agreement's governance structure in the region. This paper aims to highlight the difficulties involved in transboundary water cooperation, with a specific focus on the role that the riparian countries, most notably China, play in ensuring its effectiveness.³

This paper will begin by describing the geographic region in which the Mekong Agreement and the Mekong River Commission's governance structure operate. It will then delve into the Mekong Agreement, China's reluctance to become a member, and the significant environmental and social impacts resulting from China's non-cooperation. The sections following will explore the historical context of international environmental law on transboundary cooperation and governance of shared water resources to highlight how China's actions go against these principles and disregard the norms of responsible resource management. Through this analysis, this paper aims to shed light on the importance of transboundary collaboration to ensure sustainable governance of vital and shared water resources.

[2] Brian Eyster, "Science Shows Chinese Dams Are Devastating the Mekong," *Foreign Policy*, April 22, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/22/science-shows-chinese-dams-devastating-mekong-river/>.

[3] Riparian areas are located adjacent to a watercourse such as a river or stream.



Figure 1: The Mekong River runs through China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam (USGS).

THE MEKONG RIVER

The Mekong is a transboundary river that weaves through China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, making it the longest river in Southeast Asia at approximately 3,050 miles (Figure 1).⁴ The Mekong is divided into upper and lower regions, each with its distinctive character. The Mekong's headwaters begin high in the Tibetan plateau, considered to be the Upper Mekong region that includes China. The Lower Mekong is where about three-fourths of the drainage area of the Mekong lies within Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam.⁵ It is estimated that approximately 40 million people in the Lower Mekong are engaged in wild capture fishery, one of many livelihoods that are en-

[4] S. Liu, et al., "Pinpointing the sources and measuring the lengths of the principal rivers of the world," *International Journal of Digital Earth* 2.1 (March 2009): 84, DOI: 10.1080/17538940902746082.

[5] Gilbert F. White, "Mekong River," *Britannica*, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mekong-River>.

tirely dependent on the rivers' health.⁶ The Mekong Basin has experienced a surge in population growth and urbanization coupled with economic development among the riparian countries. These changes have placed a significant strain on the geopolitical relationships between the countries and on the region's ability to use the water for agriculture and fishing due to increased hydropower development. The forthcoming section will touch on various conditions present in each Mekong River country while also identifying commonalities and interconnectedness across the region.

THE COUNTRIES OF THE MEKONG

CAMBODIA

Cambodia is a lower riparian country along the Mekong River Basin. It benefits greatly from the Mekong River as it provides essential nourishment for the country. Agriculture plays a significant role in the country's economy, accounting for 28% of it.⁷ The country's freshwater fisheries are "among the most productive in the world due to the presence of large floodplains around the Mekong River."⁸ Given that nearly 86% of its territorial boundary lies within the basin, Cambodia arguably has the most to lose from unregulated development of the river, which results in destructive downstream impacts on the country's floodplain and aquatic production.⁹ Research has shown that the Cambodian people oppose dam projects primarily due to the transboundary ecological and social impacts felt by people living here.¹⁰

As population growth and urbanization place more energy demands on the region, the need for hydropower will only increase. For this reason,

[6] Mekong River Commission, "State of the Basin Report," 49, last modified April 2010, <https://www.mrcmekong.org/assets/Publications/basin-reports/MRC-SOB-report-2010full-report.pdf>.

[7] WWF, "Mekong River in the Economy," 93.

[8] *Ibid.*, 93.

[9] *Ibid.*, 9.

[10] Akarath Soukhaphon, Ian G. Baird, and Zeb S. Hogan, "The Impacts of Hydropower Dams in the Mekong River Basin: A Review," *Water* 13.265 (2021): 3, <https://doi.org/10.3390/w13030265>.

Cambodia will likely depend on China—its largest trading partner and benefactor—for economic assistance and foreign investment. However, the dams along the Mekong River are a double-edged sword for Cambodia. In 2018, Cambodia’s electrification rate stood at 60%, and 50% of the country’s rural population lacked readily accessible electricity.¹¹ The proposed Sambor dam in Cambodia has the potential to generate more electricity than the entire current consumption of the country.¹² Yet, according to a Cambodian government-commissioned report by the Natural Heritage Institute—an American watchdog that monitors the world’s major river basins—the Sambor could “literally kill the Mekong River and devastate Cambodia’s economy.”¹³ Cambodia needs energy, but the country also needs to maintain the seasonality of the river to protect the productivity of its floodplains and the identity of its people.¹⁴

VIETNAM

The Mekong River Delta covers a relatively small portion of Vietnam that starts in Phnom Penh where the river divides into the Mekong and the Bassac.¹⁵ Despite having access to a smaller fraction of the delta, rice growers in Vietnam depend on the fertile soil in this region that is a by-product of the river.¹⁶ 27% of Vietnam’s GDP stems from the production of rice, fruit, and fish in the Mekong River Delta.¹⁷ Vietnam accounts for an estimated 42% of the Mekong’s irrigation-equipped land, and the river supports many Vietnamese subsistence farmers and fishers.^{18, 19}

[11] Soukhaphon, Baird, and Hogan, “The Impacts of Hydropower Dams in the Mekong River Basin,” 3

[12] Beech, “Our River Was Like a God.”

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] Michael Sullivan, “‘I Will Lose My Identity:’ Cambodian Villagers Face Displacement By Mekong Dam,” *NPR*, August 26, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/08/26/546036670/i-will-lose-my-identity-cambodian-villagers-face-displacement-by-mekong-dam>.

[15] White, “Mekong River.”

[16] WWF, “Mekong River in the Economy,” 61.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Ibid.*, 47.

[19] *Ibid.*, 60-64.

Sediment has flowed from Yunnan province in China to Vietnam for thousands of years and is critical for the aforementioned agricultural activities related to the delta. Threatening this flow is China's plans to build more dams on the Lower Mekong.^{20, 21} The release of hydropower upstream has already created an unpredictable pattern of water flow for Vietnam, causing saltwater intrusion, decreasing the ability to navigate the delta, and weakening the functioning of ecosystems.²² In 2020, millions of Vietnamese people lost access to fresh water after China's dams blocked an unprecedented amount of water from entering the lower Mekong for six months in 2019.²³ Though Vietnam has dealt with negative consequences from Chinese dams, in 2019 the country joined Laos in promoting one of the largest dams yet on the lower Mekong.²⁴ Vietnam's recent decision to support the construction of a dam on the Mekong River marks a departure from their previous stance of defending the river delta which they had held for almost two decades.²⁵ This shift highlights the intense geopolitical tensions over the control of water flow, hydropower investment, and sovereignty.

LAOS

Laos, a geologically diverse country, is bordered by Myanmar and China to the northwest, Vietnam to the east, Cambodia to the southeast, and Thailand to the west and southwest.²⁶ It is the only landlocked country in Southeast Asia, and it lies almost entirely within the lower Mekong basin. Laos has strongly pursued hydropower to meet local energy needs and to export to neighboring Thailand and Vietnam; China is a major

[20] Fawthrop, "Did Vietnam Just Doom the Mekong?" *The Diplomat*, November 26, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/11/did-vietnam-just-doom-the-mekong/>.

[21] WWF, "Mekong River in the Economy," 9.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] Eyler, "Science Shows Chinese Dams Are Devastating the Mekong."

[24] Tyler Roney and Piyaporn Wongruang, "Impending Luang Prabang dam sparks Unesco heritage impact assessment," *The Third Pole*, June 28, 2021, <https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/energy/luang-prabang-dam-raises-unesco-concerns/>.

[25] Fawthrop, "Did Vietnam Just Doom the Mekong?"

[26] Arthur J. Dommen, "Laos," *Britannica*, accessed April 5, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Laos>.

player in Laos' ambitious hydropower plans.²⁷ As of September 2021, Laos had 78 dams in operation and, in partnership with the Chinese government and entrepreneurs through the Belt and Road Initiative, the Laotian Government has approved over 246 other hydroelectric projects.²⁸ Heavily indebted, Laos stands at "a high risk of collapsing under the weight of its debt to China, leaving it dangerously susceptible to influence from Beijing."²⁹ In addition, according to environmentalists, the dams are also damaging the Mekong River Basin's fragile ecosystem. Existing dams have affected downstream fishermen and farmers by disrupting fish migration patterns and blocking water and vital sediment flows needed to refresh farmland.³⁰ As a Laotian farmer asked a New York Times reporter, "... what power does an illiterate farmer like her have in the face of China's might?"³¹

THAILAND

Like Vietnam and Cambodia, Thailand also benefits from the Mekong River as it provides a substantial amount of nutrient-rich soil for rice cultivation. In northeast Thailand, more than "80% of the cultivated area is used for growing rice or a mix of rice and upland crops."³² Thailand intends to draw water from the river and its tributaries for irrigation and has even planned to divert some of the Mekong's water to other rivers within its territory.³³ Thailand is also eager to get more hydro-power from the Mekong, mainly through electricity-buying agreements with Laos and China because of its own limited electricity generation

[27] International Hydropower Association, "Laos," accessed April 27, 2022, <https://www.hydropower.org/country-profiles/laos>.

[28] Roseanne Gerin, "Laos Pushes Ahead With Large Dam Projects, Despite Uncertainty of Power Purchases," *Radio Free Asia*, August 9, 2021, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/laos/dam-projects-09082021152447.html#:~:text=Laos%20has%2078%20dams%20in,to%20neighboring%20countries%2C%20primarily%20Thailand>.

[29] Citowicki, "China's Control of the Mekong."

[30] Le, "Laos and its Dams."

[31] Beech, "Our River Was Like a God."

[32] WWF, "Mekong River in the Economy," 106.

[33] Keskinen, Mehtonen, and Varis, "Transboundary cooperation vs. internal ambitions," 84.

capabilities.³⁴ However, hydropower dams have the potential to severely impact the availability of adequate sediment flowing downstream that Thailand's agricultural sector relies on.³⁵ Low levels of sediment flow, even during wet seasons, are a consequence of upstream dams that withhold water.³⁶

CHINA

This section will briefly discuss China's role in the region with further analysis to follow. The Mekong River is one of the most important rivers in Southeast Asia, spanning six countries and serving as a source of food and income for millions of people. The construction of hydropower dams along the Mekong River has raised concerns about the negative impact on the river's ecosystem, downstream communities, and the livelihoods of millions of people who depend on the river for food and income. The situation is further complicated by the role of China which has supported hydropower projects and plans to build dams on the Upper and Lower Mekong, further reducing the flow of water and sediment to downstream countries. As the most upstream country in the entire Mekong River Basin, China has control over the Upper Mekong and, as a result, its actions impact all of the countries along the Lower Mekong.

China's plans include building a cascade of several large hydropower dams in the Yunnan province, the southwesternmost province in China along the Lancang. The Chinese view dam construction positively because "during the dry season the amount of water in the river could be increased and during the rainy season flood protection improved."³⁷

[34] Gerin, "Laos Pushes Ahead With Large Dam Projects, Despite Uncertainty of Power Purchases."

[35] Soukhaphon, Baird, and Hogan, "The Impacts of Hydropower Dams in the Mekong River Basin," 5.

[36] David Solimini, 2022, "Mekong Dam Monitor at One Year: What Have We Learned?" *Stimson Center* (blog). March 3, 2022, <https://www.stimson.org/2022/mdm-one-year-findings/>.

[37] Keskinen, Mehtonen, and Varis, "Transboundary cooperation vs. internal ambitions" 93.

Due to this belief, China has largely failed to acknowledge the serious environmental and social impacts of its projects on countries downstream.³⁸ China has also refrained from committing to even the most basic Mekong River Commission (MRC) customary international law responsibilities by not consistently sharing detailed information on its plans.³⁹ This lack of cooperation has proven to be a source of contention for downstream nations.⁴⁰ In 2020, Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang stated the country would share more water management data from its portion of the Mekong River with its neighbors in Southeast Asia.⁴¹ However, that statement is yet to be backed by legitimate information sharing.⁴²

Controlling the flow of the Mekong via its dams is a way in which China exerts influence over the region; dams that are located upstream tend to control water levels downstream. Water is considered a “sovereign commodity rather than a shared resource to be made available in an equitable manner.”⁴³ The need for economic development and energy security is struggling to be balanced with the need to protect the river’s ecosystem and the livelihoods surrounding agriculture and fisheries.

The upcoming sections aim to provide an analysis of the governance structure in the Mekong River Basin and the reasons for China not being a member of the Mekong Agreement, a dynamic and legally binding framework for managing the resources and development in the basin. These sections will also emphasize the presence of international environmental law governing complex river issues to depict how China’s reluctance fits in with other views of cooperation for sustainable devel-

[38] Einhorn, “A Water Fight Like No Other.”

[39] “If China Won’t Build Fewer Dams, It Could at Least Share Information,” *The Economist*, May 14, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2020/05/14/if-china-wont-build-fewer-dams-it-could-at-least-share-information>.

[40] Citowicki, “China’s Control of the Mekong.”

[41] Reuters, “China pledges Mekong River data-sharing, details unclear,” *Reuters*, August 24, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mekong-river/china-pledges-mekong-river-data-sharing-details-unclear-idUSKBN25K0Y5>.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Eyler and Weatherby, “New Evidence.”

opment. By discussing these topics, the complex legal, political, and environmental issues surrounding the management of the Mekong River Basin—critical to the well-being of millions of people in the region—can be better understood.

HISTORICAL GOVERNANCE OF TRANSBOUNDARY WATER RESOURCES

Previous cases in international environmental law have illustrated the challenges and opportunities posed by shared water resources that underlie and support the foundations of the Mekong Agreement. International law is a crucial framework that establishes rules and principles governing relations between states and other international actors and provides a framework for cooperation, stability, and justice. By comparing and analyzing past international legal cases and conventions, it is evident that international environmental law recognizes the importance of sustainable development and imposes obligations on states to utilize resources reasonably and equitably, avoid causing significant harm, and notify and consult affected parties and the public. These values offer important governance structures for countries dealing with complex issues, such as the development along the Mekong River.

The UN Watercourses Convention, to begin with, is an international treaty adopted in 1997 to regulate the use and conservation of water resources that cross international boundaries. It requires member states to inform other states about their planned uses allows time for objections, and emphasizes equitable and reasonable utilization of international watercourses. Despite challenges in its implementation, the Convention highlights the need for cooperation and sustainable management of shared water resources.⁴⁴

[44] The UN Watercourses Convention has been ratified or signed by only 37 states, and remains outside the scope of most countries. Among the Mekong countries, only Vietnam has ratified it, while China, one of the charter members of the United Nations and a permanent member of its Security Council, voted against its ratification due to concerns about provisions on dispute settlement. However, China has expressed support for many of the norms included in the Convention, particularly the principle of equitable and reasonable use.

The Espoo Convention, an international treaty adopted in 1991 under the UNECE, established specific requirements and procedures for transboundary environmental impact assessments (EIAs), including monitoring compliance by its signatories.⁴⁵ Parties to the convention have the right to participate in consultations and find consensus, and the convention aims to support efficient public participation during EIAs where the impacts extend beyond national boundaries.

In the context of pivotal international law cases, in Central Europe, the Danube River is a transboundary river between Slovakia and Hungary. A 1977 treaty signed in Budapest between Slovakia and Hungary was meant to develop sections of the Danube River, a shared watercourse, for hydroelectricity and other purposes, but Hungary suspended work on the project while Czechoslovakia began an alternative project.⁴⁶ The International Court of Justice's 1997 decision endorsed the theory of equitable and reasonable utilization of natural resources—now universally accepted as the cardinal rule of international water law—recognizing the need to reconcile economic development and the protection of the environment with the objective of sustainable development. The court established that there exists in international environmental law the obligation of states to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction respect the environment of other states.⁴⁷

In regards to the duties to inform, the Pulp Mills case decided in 2010, was a dispute between Argentina and Uruguay regarding Uruguay's construction of two pulp mills on the Uruguay River. The case centered on a state's procedural obligations when activities within its jurisdiction threaten to damage another state.⁴⁸ According to Dr. Allen Springer in

[45] "Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context," open for signature February 25, 1991, *United Nations Treaty Series* 1989, https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XXVII-4&chapter=27&clang=_en.

[46] "Gabcikovo-Nagymaros Project (Hungary/Slovakia)," *Judgement, I.C.J. Reports* 1997, 7 (Judgment of September 25, 1997).

[47] *Ibid.*, 7.

[48] "Pulp Mills on the River Uruguay (Argentina v. Uruguay)," *International Court of Justice*, accessed April 6, 2022, <https://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/135>.

his book, *Cases of Conflict*, during the Court's deliberations, "...three distinct procedural obligations [emerged], the duty to inform, the duty to notify, and the duty to negotiate in good faith with a state that might be affected detrimentally by a proposed project."⁴⁹ The court emphasized the significance of notifying other states about new projects or activities that may have transboundary impacts and has connected this notification requirement to the customary obligation of due diligence to prevent significant harm.⁵⁰

The aforementioned cases and conventions showcase the difficulties involved with managing transboundary river systems as well as the importance of international frameworks for doing so. Adherence to international law fosters a sense of predictability and consistency, allowing states to build trust and work together toward common goals and preventing the arbitrary exercise of power by states.⁵¹ In the context of this paper, the Mekong River flows through six different countries, each with its own set of laws and regulations. Underpinning the structure that has governed them for close to thirty years is a viable institutional framework for regional governance in an international context that harbors the same values as the crucial cases and conventions.

THE MEKONG RIVER COMMISSION AND THE MEKONG AGREEMENT

The Mekong River Commission (MRC), governed by the Mekong Agreement, is a cooperative mechanism for MRC Member Countries to work together to manage the river in a way that is mutually beneficial and sustainable for all parties. Regional cooperation in the Mekong River began in 1957, making it "one of the first transboundary rivers gov-

[49] *Springer, Cases of Conflict*, 210.

[50] McIntyre, O. 2010, "The Proceduralisation and Growing Maturity of International Water Law: Case Concerning Pulp Mills on the River Uruguay (Argentina v Uruguay), International Court of Justice, 20 April 2010," *Journal of Environmental Law* 22.3: 475, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jel/eqq019>.

[51] Monica Hakimi, 2020, "Why Should We Care About International Law?" *Michigan Law Review*, 118.6: 1283. <https://doi.org/10.36644/mlr.118.6.why>.

erned by an international river body.”⁵² At this time, the Mekong River was not yet considered to be tamed and countries were eager about the economic potential of “hydropower, irrigation and flood control development” in the region.⁵³ That same year, the Committee for Coordination of Investigations on the Lower Mekong River Basin—often referred to as the Mekong Committee—was sponsored by the United Nations and included membership by Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam.⁵⁴ According to the Mekong River Commission, “it was the largest single development project the United Nations had undertaken; no international river body had ever attempted to take on such encompassing responsibilities for financing, management, and maintenance of water resources.”⁵⁵ In 1995, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam established the Mekong River Commission by signing the Agreement on Cooperation for Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin (also known as the Mekong Agreement) to jointly manage and coordinate the use of the Mekong.⁵⁶ The Mekong Agreement started a new era of cooperation in the Lower Mekong Basin with research and knowledge sharing for sustainable management at the forefront.

Articles 1-10 under Chapter III, “Objectives and Principles of Cooperation,” involve commitments and agreements to protect the ecological balance, respect the territorial integrity and sovereign equality, avoid, minimize, and mitigate harmful effects, ensure notification, prior consultation, and prior agreement, and maintain freedom of navigation.⁵⁷ Member Countries—signatories of the Mekong Agreement—acknowledged that the development of the basin must be carried out reasonably and equitably and underscored the importance of balancing the

[52] “History,” Mekong River Commission, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://www.mrcmekong.org/about/mrc/history/>.

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] *Ibid.*

[55] *Ibid.*

[56] *Ibid.*

[57] Mekong River Commission, “Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin,” April 5, 1995: 3-5, <https://www.mrcmekong.org/assets/Publications/policies/agreement-Apr95.pdf>.

need for development with the conservation and protection of the river system.⁵⁸ Chapter IV of the Agreement outlines the institutional frameworks within the Agreement, such as the structure, rules of procedure, the establishment of various councils, and rules for leadership positions.⁵⁹

The purpose of the Mekong Agreement Procedures is to give effect to some of the previously mentioned commitments made by the Member Countries. The Procedures collectively provide the Member Countries with the necessary data, tools, and information to address their concerns, limit harmful effects, and monitor the Mekong River Basin while planning their development. The core procedures of the Mekong Agreement include:

1. **Information Sharing and Management:** The Procedures for Data and Information Exchange and Sharing (PDIES) sets up a structure for MRC Member Countries to collaborate in sharing and exchanging data related to “water resources, topography, agriculture, navigation, flood management, ecology.”⁶⁰ PDIES supports the commitment to share data and information.
2. **Consultation on infrastructure projects:** The Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation, and Agreement (PNPCA) allows for MRC Member Countries to thoroughly weigh the advantages and disadvantages of any proposed project along the river. If a member country plans to implement a project, it must inform the other countries.⁶¹ PNPCA supports the commitment to notify, prior consultation, and agreement on proposed water uses, and the reasonable and equitable use of the waters of the Mekong River System.

[58] Handbook, 12 <https://www.mrcmekong.org/assets/Publications/95MA-Hb.pdf>

[59] Mekong Agreement, 5-9.

[60] “Procedures for Data and Information Exchange and Sharing,” Mekong River Commission, 2-3, accessed April 26, 2022, <https://www.mrcmekong.org/assets/Publications/policies/Procedures-Data-Info-Exchange-n-Sharing.pdf>.

[61] “Procedures,” Mekong River Commission, accessed April 26, 2022, <https://www.mrcmekong.org/about/mrc/procedures/>.

3. Water use monitoring: The PWUM (Procedures for Water Use Monitoring) is designed to enable effective water management. The PWUM framework recognizes “that reasonable use of water resources is impossible if water uses are not monitored.”⁶² The MRC data portal provides real-time “information on river, flood, water quality, fisheries, environmental health, and drought monitoring and forecasting.”⁶³ PWUM supports the commitment to share data and information.

4. Maintenance of flows: The goal of the Procedures for Maintenance of Flows on the Mainstream (PMFM) is to work together to sustain acceptable water flows for all riparian countries on the Mekong River. The objective is to enhance the various uses of the river while reducing the adverse effects.⁶⁴ PMFM supports the commitment to maintain minimum monthly flows in the mainstream.

5. Water quality: The Procedures for Water Quality (PWQ) ensures that the Mekong River Basin maintains a suitable water quality that promotes sustainable development by safeguarding the riverine ecosystems and communities via river quality monitoring and preparing for emergencies.⁶⁵ PWQ supports the commitment to share data and information and to warn potentially affected Member Countries of emergencies.

The Mekong Agreement provides a comprehensive framework for cooperation among the Member Countries to manage and protect the Mekong River Basin’s resources. Members, to some extent, understand the importance of regional stability and security for their well-being, as well as the economic benefits that can be gained through regional

[62] “Procedures for the Maintenance of Flows on the Mainstream,” Mekong River Commission, 3, accessed April 26, 2022, <https://www.mrcmekong.org/assets/Publications/policies/Procedures-Maintenance-Flows.pdf>.

[63] “MRC Data and Information Services,” Mekong River Commission, accessed April 27, 2022, <https://portal.mrcmekong.org/map-service>.

[64] Mekong River Commission, “Procedures.”

[65] “Procedures for Water Quality,” Mekong River Commission, 3, accessed April 27, 2022, <https://www.mrcmekong.org/assets/Publications/policies/Procedures-for-Water-Quality-council-approved260111.pdf>.

cooperation.⁶⁶ Under the Mekong Agreement, Member Countries have had a platform to address shared challenges related to water resource management, environmental protection, and sustainable development. It has facilitated open communication, information sharing, and joint decision-making processes.⁶⁷ According to Susanne Schmeier and Birgit Vogel in *Riverine Ecosystem Management: Science for Governing Towards a Sustainable Future*, joint river basin management, put into the context of the Mekong River, is a crucial approach for achieving cooperative benefits in water resource management because it helps establish shared visions and objectives among riparian states.⁶⁸ Key water issues are identified and addressed collectively, including potential transboundary impacts and sources of conflict.⁶⁹ Additionally, joint management enables monitoring, data sharing, and the establishment of a transparent platform for all involved states and stakeholders.⁷⁰ Specifically, the Joint Committee of the Mekong Agreement serves as a framework to establish a certain level of trust and cooperation. Through the Joint Committee, the highest decision-making body of the MRC and consisting of representatives from Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam, Member Countries have regular meetings to discuss and address various issues related to the Mekong River's management and development.⁷¹ During these meetings, representatives share data and information on water flow, sedimentation, and other relevant factors to facilitate

[66] Jeffrey W. Jacobs, 2002, "The Mekong River Commission: Transboundary Water Resources Planning and Regional Security," *The Geographical Journal* 168 (4): 360-362, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0016-7398.2002.00061.x>.

[67] Susanne Schmeier and Birgit Vogel, 2018, "Ensuring Long-Term Cooperation Over Transboundary Water Resources Through Joint River Basin Management," In *Riverine Ecosystem Management: Science for Governing Towards a Sustainable Future*, edited by Stefan Schmutz and Jan Sendzimir, 353-354, Aquatic Ecology Series, Cham: Springer International Publishing, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-73250-3_18.

[68] Schmeier and Vogel, "Ensuring Long-Term Cooperation Over Transboundary Water Resources Through Joint River Basin Management," 366.

[69] *Ibid.*

[70] Schmeier and Vogel, "Ensuring Long-Term Cooperation Over Transboundary Water Resources Through Joint River Basin Management," 366.

[71] "About the Mekong River Commission," accessed May 14, 2023, http://archive.iwlearn.net/mrcmekong.org/about_mrc.htm#JC.

informed decision-making.⁷² They also discuss policies and strategies for sustainable water resource management, considering the social, economic, and environmental aspects of the basin.⁷³

One specific example of how the Mekong Agreement has facilitated discussions on shared challenges by utilizing the Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement (PNPCA) and the Joint Committee is the case of the Xayaburi Dam.⁷⁴ The Xayaburi Dam, situated in northwest Laos, adjacent to Thailand's Nan Province, began operations as a hydropower project on the Mekong River in 2019.⁷⁵ Through the consultation process facilitated by the Mekong Agreement, the concerns of Cambodia and Vietnam were taken into consideration before the construction and operation of the dam.⁷⁶ This process allowed for open dialogue and information sharing among the Mekong states and provided a platform for discussing the potential impacts of the dam and exploring alternative options to minimize adverse effects.⁷⁷ The PNPCA and Joint Committee processes within the MRC and established by the Mekong Agreement have allowed Member Countries to have a say in the development projects and activities that may have transboundary

[72] Mekong River Commission, n.d., "MRC Joint Committee Takes Action on Accountability, Water-Usage Monitoring," accessed May 12, 2023. <https://www.mrcmekong.org/news-and-events/news/pr-28042022/>.

[73] Sergio Villamayor-Tomas, Mikayel Avagyan, Marit Firlus, Georg Helbing, and Margarita Kabakova, "Hydropower vs. Fisheries Conservation: A Test of Institutional Design Principles for Common-Pool Resource Management in the Lower Mekong Basin Social-Ecological System," *Ecology and Society* 21.1 (2016), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26270318>.

[74] Mekong River Commission, n.d., "Lower Mekong Countries Take Prior Consultation on Xayaburi Project to Ministerial Level," accessed May 14, 2023, <https://www.mrcmekong.org/news-and-events/news/lower-mekong-countries-take-prior-consultation-on-xayaburi-project-to-ministerial-level/>.

[75] "Xayaburi Dam" n.d., EarthRights International, accessed May 17, 2023, <https://earthrights.org/what-we-do/mega-projects/xayaburi-dam/>.

[76] Mekong River Commission, "Lower Mekong Countries Take Prior Consultation on Xayaburi Project to Ministerial Level."

[77] Mekong River Commission, n.d., "Xayaburi Hydropower Project," accessed May 14, 2023, <https://www.mrcmekong.org/news-and-events/consultations/pnpca-prior-consultations/xayaburi-hydropower-project/>.

implications; this shared decision-making approach ensures that the concerns and interests of all states are taken into account.

By entering into agreements, facilitated or inspired by the Mekong Agreement, and therefore sacrificing some sovereignty, Member Countries aim to enhance trade, investment, and economic growth by tapping into the potential of a larger market and shared resources.⁷⁸ Cambodia and Vietnam, for example, have signed a treaty to enhance navigation and access to the Mekong waterways between the two countries. The Treaty on Waterway Transportation reduces cross-border navigation restrictions and aims to facilitate regional and international trade by streamlining customs and immigration procedures.⁷⁹ The treaty, which MRC helped facilitate, marked a significant step towards improving waterborne transport in the Mekong Region and is expected to generate trade revenue by opening up new opportunities for cargo and passenger transport across borders.⁸⁰ It will also promote river traffic safety, regulate the transportation of dangerous goods, contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions compared to land-based transport, and standardize rules and regulations.⁸¹

The Mekong Agreement is not without its shortcomings. Transboundary river basin management faces several challenges, including differences in national interests, infrastructure projects that neglect transboundary effects, and conflicts over the binding nature of agreements.⁸² These factors hinder effective cooperation and pose obstacles to sustain-

[78] Josefin Gooch, 2005, "The Mekong Agreement In light of International Principles Relating to Sustainable Use of Transboundary Watercourses," Master's thesis, *University of Lund*, 36, 45.

[79] Mekong River Commission, n.d., "Cambodia and Viet Nam Formally Open-up Cross-Border River Trade on the Mekong," accessed May 14, 2023. <https://www.mrc-mekong.org/news-and-events/news/cambodia-and-viet-nam-formally-open-up-cross-border-river-trade-on-the-mekong/>.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Schmeier and Vogel, "Ensuring Long-Term Cooperation Over Transboundary Water Resources Through Joint River Basin Management," 367.

able water resource management across borders.⁸³ Schmeier and Vogel observe that there can be varying perceptions of the outcomes and conclusions from the consultation processes among the involved countries in the Mekong Agreement.⁸⁴ These differences stem from unclear expectations and differing viewpoints, with downstream states viewing these processes as a way to voice their veto, while upstream conditions are wary of interference in their water development activities.⁸⁵

THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHINA'S RELUCTANCY FOR SUSTAINABLE WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Despite the benefits (alongside its shortcomings) that membership in the MRC offers as well as the precedents in international environmental law, China, a vital regional actor, has opted to participate in the MRC only as a dialogue partner rather than becoming a full member.⁸⁶ This decision limits the effectiveness of the MRC in managing the Mekong River Basin, as China plays a significant role in the region's water resources management, as discussed previously, particularly in terms of hydropower development and transboundary water governance. For this reason, the Mekong Agreement has been described as "weak, allowing the Member Countries to interpret it as they like or even just to sideline it,"⁸⁷ There have been major concerns over China's control of some of the region's biggest waterways that have provided irrigation, transport, and life for millennia for much of Southeast Asia.⁸⁸ Many fear that China's ability to control the Mekong's flow will tilt geopolitical control of the region in its favor, and a worst-case scenario, China could "use its dams to weaponize water" as reported by Brahma Chellaney for Project Syndicate, an international media organization that publishes commen-

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid, 366.

[85] Ibid, 366.

[86] Mekong River Commission, "History."

[87] Keskinen, Mehtonen, and Varis, "International water security," 90.

[88] Bruce Einhorn, "A Water Fight Like No Other May Be Brewing Over Asia's Rivers," *Bloomberg*, October 31, 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2016-11-01/a-waterfight-like-no-other-may-be-brewing-over-asia-s-rivers>.

tary and analysis on a variety of global topics.⁸⁹

For example, while the framework of the Mekong Agreement provided the prior consultation process required for all mainstream dams, including the Xayaburi Dam, China's decision to bypass this process as a non-member influenced how the Laotian government sees development on a shared watercourse. Laos "sees no reason why it should hold back on developing a shared river when an upstream country is already doing so," according to Philip Hirsch for the *Asia-Pacific Journal* back in 2011.⁹⁰ The Vietnamese government has also warned that projects like Xayaburi risk regional conflict, and the dam encountered significant pushback from environmentalists and human rights organizations.⁹¹ Following the construction of the dam, the river has exhibited clear blue waters downstream, but clear blue is not a positive sign.⁹² Devoid of essential nutrients and sediments necessary for the sustenance of aquatic life, the dam has had detrimental effects on fisheries, thereby posing challenges to food security in the downstream regions.⁹³ Despite this, Laos' aspirations to continue building dams on the mainstream have not faltered; China and Laos wish the upper Mekong was a national commodity rather than a shared watercourse and crucial, regional resource.⁹⁴ China's lack of full cooperation with the MRC has harmed the effectiveness of the organization by influencing other regional states, like Laos, to operate against the Mekong Agreement. Unlike China, Laos is a member of the MRC and "needs to temper expressions of sovereignty over the river within its borders with an adherence to procedures for prior consultation agreed to for projects with potential transboundary impacts,"

[89] Brahma Chellaney, "Damming the Mekong Basin to Environmental Hell," *Project Syndicate*, August 2, 2019, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-dams-mekong-basin-exacerbate-drought-by-brahma-chellaney-2019-08>.

[90] Philip Hirsch, "China and the cascading geopolitics of Lower Mekong Dams," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 20.2 (May 2011): 2.

[91] EarthRights International, "Xayaburi Dam."

[92] Soukhaphon, Baird, and Hogan, "The Impacts of Hydropower Dams in the Mekong River Basin," 11.

[93] Soukhaphon, Baird, and Hogan, "The Impacts of Hydropower Dams in the Mekong River Basin," 11.

[94] Keskinen, Mehtonen, and Varis, "International water security," 84.

according to Hirsch.⁹⁵

A powerful essay from *The Economist* titled “The Mekong” puts into words the gravity of the situation on the river: “Downriver countries intend to build another 11 large dams on the Mekong, with dozens more planned for its tributaries. In 20 years the Mekong could be dammed from Tibet to just above Phnom Penh... In no other large river basin in the world is the planned rate of growth of hydropower as great.”⁹⁶ As a regional superpower with a historical disinclination towards cooperation, China has constructed at least eleven dams along the mainstream of the river over the course of twenty-six years.⁹⁷ Hundreds more are planned or under construction in both the upper and lower regions.⁹⁸ The rules of international environmental law that are outlined in the Mekong Agreement and around the world have not guided Chinese practice along the river.⁹⁹

Hydropower is extremely valuable to the Lower Mekong countries as a source of energy, income, and foreign investment; energy demand is expected to increase by 6-7% each year in the Lower Mekong Basin.¹⁰⁰ Between 2005 and 2015, electricity generation from Lower Mekong Basin hydropower increased from 9.3 GWh to 32.4 GWh.¹⁰¹ According to the

[95] Hirsch, “China and the cascading geopolitics of Lower Mekong Dams,” 2.

[96] “Requiem for a river: Can one of the world’s great waterways survive its development?” *The Economist*, accessed April 5, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/news/essays/21689225-can-one-world-s-great-waterways-survive-its-development>.

[97] Brian Eyler and Courtney Weatherby, “New Evidence: How China Turned off the Tap on the Mekong River,” *The Stimson Center*, April 13, 2020, <https://stimson.org/2020/new-evidence-how-china-turned-off-the-mekong-tap/>.

[98] Carolyn Cowan, “As Hydropower Dams Quell the Mekong’s Life Force, What Are the Costs?” *Mongabay Environmental News*, March 29, 2023, <https://news.mongabay.com/2023/03/as-hydropower-dams-quell-the-mekongs-life-force-what-are-the-costs/>.

[99] Pichamon Yeophantong, “China’s Lancang Dam Cascade and Transnational Activism in the Mekong Region: Who’s Got the Power?” *Asian Survey* 54.4 (2014): 702, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2014.54.4.700>.

[100] “Hydropower,” Mekong River Commission, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://www.mrcmekong.org/our-work/topics/hydropower/>.

[101] Basin Development Strategy for the Mekong River Basin: 2021 - 2030,” Mekong River Commission, 26, last modified March 4, 2020, <https://www.mrcmekong.org/as->

Mekong River Commission, as of 2019, there are 89 hydropower projects in the lower basin. There are currently two hydropower dams located in Cambodia, with a total installed capacity of 401 MW. In Laos, there are 65 dams with an installed capacity of 8,033 MW, while in Thailand, there are seven dams with an installed capacity of 1,245 MW. Vietnam has 14 dams with a total installed capacity of 2,607 MW.¹⁰² By 2040, hydropower is estimated to generate more than 30,000 MW, and economic gains from hydropower development are expected to rise to as much as 160 billion USD by 2040, according to the Mekong River Commission.¹⁰³ Important economic benefits are being derived in hydropower development, but there exist significant worries about the social implications and the negative impacts of the dams on the natural environment.

China's record impoundment of the basin's water has caused erratic changes to the basin. These include disrupting the natural cycle of the river, which results in the blocking of sediment needed for agriculture. A survey by the Mekong River Commission found that if all of the dams planned for the Mekong network go forward, 97% of the sediment that once flowed to the river's mouth could be blocked by 2040, starving the land of nutrients needed for agriculture.¹⁰⁴ Changes in sediment flow at the coast will have adverse effects, such as a reduction in sediment to support mangroves, the loss of historical Cau Mau tip growth, and minor sediment accumulation in other areas. These shifts will lead to the subaqueous delta becoming steeper, worsening coastal erosion, and requiring additional protective measures.¹⁰⁵

sets/RSF9/Day-2/Draft-BDS-2021-2030-and-SP-2021-2025-5-Mar-2020-for-distribution_clean.pdf.

[102] Mekong River Commission, "Hydropower."

[103] Mekong River Commission, "Basin Development Strategy," 35.

[104] "Modeling the Impacts of Climate Change and Development Infrastructure on Mekong Flow, Sediment Regimes and Water Quality," *Mekong River Commission*, 26, last modified January 2018, <https://www.mrcmekong.org/assets/Publications/Council-Study/Council-study-Reports-discipline/001CS-Modelling-Summary-Vol1-DraftFinal.pdf>.

[105] MRC, "Modeling the Impacts of Climate Change and Development Infrastructure on Mekong Flow, Sediment Regimes and Water Quality," 78.

Despite normal rainfall, changes in flow and reduced siltation are causing saltwater intrusion into the Mekong Delta.¹⁰⁶ Although increased drought (even during wet seasons) and low river flows experienced in the lower basin during 2019-2021 were partially caused by the severe deficiency of rainfall, the dam restrictions imposed during this period played a significant role in further worsening the drought conditions and impeding the wet season flow.¹⁰⁷ Less water in the rainy season produces smaller floodplains with less sediment deposited in them, depleting the once-rich soil and leaving millions unable to grow food on the riverbanks.¹⁰⁸

Hydropower development on the Mekong River will also continue to aggravate food insecurity and poverty by negatively impacting migratory fish patterns. The Jinghong Dam on the Lancang is the lowest on the river system and the closest to northern Thailand. The dam has caused huge fluctuations in river levels and disrupted migratory patterns of fish.¹⁰⁹ Narit Art-Harn, a representative of locals in Thailand, explained that the “extremely low level of water is killing these fish because it is preventing them from entering tributaries to lay eggs in flooded forests and swamps, which means an entire generation of fish will vanish.”¹¹⁰ Like many other environmental issues, the costs of such ecological changes in the basin are placed on the poorest residents.¹¹¹ The catch from the Mekong River is crucial for the livelihoods, nutrition,

[106] The Economist, “If China won’t build fewer dams, it could at least share information.”

[107] Solimini, “Mekong Dam Monitor at One Year: What Have We Learned?”

[108] Chellaney, “Damming the Mekong Basin to Environmental Hell.”

[109] Patrick J. Dugan, Chris Barlow, Angelo A. Agostinho, Eric Baran, Glenn F. Cada, Daqing Chen, Ian G. Cowx, et al., 2010, “Fish Migration, Dams, and Loss of Ecosystem Services in the Mekong Basin,” *Ambio* 39.4: 344–48, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-010-0036-1>.

[110] Pratch Rujivanarom, “Aquatic life faces extinction as upstream dams leave Mekong River dry,” *The Nation: Thailand*, July 19, 2019, <https://www.nationthailand.com/news/30373286>.

[111] Christopher G. Baker, “Dams, Power And Security In The Mekong: A Non-Traditional Security Assessment Of Hydro-Development In The Mekong River Basin,” *S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies*, 2012, 15, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/res-repl7193>.

and food security of millions of people, particularly in the lower basin, where it accounts for 47-80% of total animal protein consumed and has an annual consumption rate of 29-39 kg per capita.¹¹²

The reduction of sediment and nutrients has a significant impact on coastal fisheries. According to modeling projections by the MRC, the impact is expected to decrease total fisheries by approximately 50% and cause a large collapse of those directly supported by it.¹¹³ Aside from the loss of food sources due to decreased migrations of fish, villagers residing along the river have been forced to evacuate.¹¹⁴ The Lower Sesan 2 dam, which is Cambodia's biggest hydroelectric dam with a capacity of 400 megawatts, commenced operations in 2018, providing almost 80% of the power supply for the capital, Phnom Penh.¹¹⁵ However, to make this project possible, 34,000 hectares of forested land were inundated, leading to the displacement of around 2,700 households from seven riverside villages, dealing a severe setback to the customs of the Bunong indigenous people who reside in the forest.¹¹⁶

Communication and transparency between China and other Mekong countries have also been limited. In 2020 China supplied its flood season water level and rainfall data from only two of its stations on the upper Mekong despite efforts by the MRC to acquire dry season data from China.¹¹⁷ China has also been hesitant to make a formal commitment to limit its dam construction or ensure that the countries downstream

[112] Dugan, et. al., "Fish Migration, Dams, and Loss of Ecosystem Services in the Mekong Basin," 345.

[113] MRC, "Modeling the Impacts of Climate Change and Development Infrastructure on Mekong Flow, Sediment Regimes and Water Quality," 77.

[114] Sangeetha Amarthalingam and Say Tola, "Indigenous People Struggle after Being Displaced by Lower Sesan 2 Dam," *The Third Pole* (blog), June 16, 2021, <https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/energy/cambodians-struggle-after-being-displaced-by-lower-sesan-2/>.

[115] Amarthalingam and Say Tola, "Indigenous People Struggle."

[116] Amarthalingam and Say Tola, "Indigenous People Struggle."

[117] Reuters, "Mekong River Groups Urge China to Show Transparency after Dam Report," April 15, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mekong-river-idUSKCN2IX-ILG>.

receive a minimum amount of water.¹¹⁸ By failing to uphold standards in international environmental law—standards that are present within its region—China has caused harm to the Mekong River Basin and its people. The construction of dams without prior regional planning efforts has led to the alteration of the river's flow and sediment transport, which has affected fish migration, aquatic biodiversity, and the livelihoods of communities dependent on the river. Additionally, the lack of consultation and transparency has led to mistrust and tensions between China and the downstream countries, hindering international cooperation and efforts to address the challenges facing the Mekong River Basin.

China's decision not to join the Mekong Agreement can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, China prefers bilateral negotiations with each of the Mekong countries because it allows China to negotiate on a case-by-case basis and potentially gain more leverage over each country individually. By negotiating bilaterally, China can potentially avoid criticism and opposition from other countries in the region.¹¹⁹ China is also hesitant to join the agreement due to the increased transparency, public participation, and obligations in decision-making processes the Mekong Agreement would require, potentially subjecting its actions in the region to greater scrutiny.¹²⁰ The geopolitical tensions in the Mekong region are very present; China views its participation in a binding treaty or legal framework as a threat to its national sovereignty and territorial integrity.¹²¹ Lastly, some experts posit that China views the Me-

[118] The Economist, "If China won't build fewer dams, it could at least share information."

[119] Yunxia Song and John Wong, 2011, "The Limits of Chinese Multilateralism: China's Bilateral Approach to Regional Economic Cooperation in Asia," *Asian Survey* 51.4: 679-702.

[120] Philip Hirsch and Kurt Mørck Jensen, "National Interests and Transboundary Water Governance in the Mekong," May 2006, 95, http://mekongwaterforum.org/sites/default/files/Hirsch_Jensen_2006_national_interests_and_transboundary_water_governance.pdf.

[121] It is important to note that there are many examples of successful multilateral agreements and treaties between and inspired by Southeast Asian countries, including China, and the rest of the world: ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Paris Agreement, and the United Nations Convention on the Law of

kong Agreement as a tool of external influence in the region due to the agreement's emphasis on joint development and ecological protection, similar to existing treaties and conventions on international water law that originated in non-Asian countries, leading to a reluctance to participate. China has a long-standing wariness of foreign interference in the region and sees the Mekong Agreement as potentially impeding its ability to pursue its interests in the Mekong basin.¹²² The unwillingness to cooperate with the Mekong River Commission and join the Mekong Agreement limits the effectiveness of a crucial governance framework that seeks to support sustainable development in the region without sacrificing the ecological health of the river system.

A PATH FORWARD

Despite China's apparent reluctance to participate, there exist various reasons that could motivate China to do so. China's membership would demonstrate its commitment to international norms and principles and promote trust and goodwill with other countries while counterbalancing international concerns about its growing influence in the region. The superpower could then benefit from increased trade, investment, and technical assistance opportunities from other countries and international organizations. The MRC would also provide a platform for China to address its concerns and work collaboratively to ensure that its investments are sustainable and responsible and that countries do not seek to assert their independence at its expense. If China were to become a member, it would enhance the MRC's ability to effectively govern water resources as their membership would encourage greater participation, more effective consultation, increased transparency, and a stronger ability to plan the basin's future.

The Mekong River is facing a pivotal moment. For almost three decades, China has been building dams along the Upper Mekong River and has

the Sea (UNCLOS).

[122] Aun Chhengpor, 2019, "Mekong Region Grows More Important to China-US Relations," *VOA*, June 22, 2019, https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia_mekong-region-grows-more-important-china-us-relations/6170466.html.

plans for dozens more in the entire basin. The MRC has come under increasing criticism over the past decade for its inability to prevent unchecked hydropower development along the Mekong mainstream and tributaries.¹²³ Despite being essential for the economic development of the countries involved, water development projects like the construction of large hydropower dams have had and will continue to have harmful effects on ecosystems and the livelihoods of millions of people. China's lack of membership has significant environmental and social impacts on the region. By examining China's reasons for not becoming a member using the greater context of international environmental law, policymakers and stakeholders can identify potential challenges to cooperation and develop strategies to address these challenges.

The achievement of sustainable development entails the intricate coordination of multiple actors across diverse sectors that utilize the river in a plethora of ways. The international community has emphasized transboundary collaboration and implementing robust regulatory and enforcement mechanisms for ensuring the equitable utilization of shared water resources, which China has repeatedly neglected. There are fewer better words to describe the effects of China's actions than those of Brahma Chellaney from Project Syndicate: "Dams tend to create winners upstream, where people gain greater access to water and hydropower, and losers downstream. In the Mekong region, the losers far outnumber the winners in the short run. In the long run, environmental destruction ensures that there are no winners at all."¹²⁴ Actions that occur on a transboundary river are not siloed events. China's non-membership to the Mekong Agreement and its neglect of international frameworks for shared water resource management has resulted in and will continue to cause, severe environmental, economic, and social problems that will ripple through the entire Mekong River region.

[123] Jorge Sotullo, "The Mekong River: geopolitics over development, hydropower and the environment," study, *Policy Department for External Relations, European Parliament* (November 2019): 51, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/639313/EXPO_STU\(2019\)639313_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/639313/EXPO_STU(2019)639313_EN.pdf).

[124] Chellaney, "Damming the Mekong Basin to Environmental Hell."

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