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HOW DOES EXTERNAL DEBT SERVICING ABILITY AFFECT THE STABILITY OF ELECTORAL AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES?¹

FUR, VIOLA²

“YOU SHOULD NEVER ASK ANYONE FOR ANYTHING. NEVER – AND ESPECIALLY FROM THOSE WHO ARE MORE POWERFUL THAN YOURSELF”

MIKHAIL BULGAKOV



“SOMETIMES I THINK THAT A PARODY OF A DEMOCRACY COULD BE MORE DANGEROUS THAN A BLATANT DICTATORSHIP, BECAUSE IT GIVES PEOPLE AN OPPORTUNITY TO AVOID DOING ANYTHING ABOUT IT”

AUNG SAN SUU KYI

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INTRODUCTION

Of all the places former Gambian President Dawda Jawara had expected to be on the evening of July 22, 1994, the US tank landing ship *La Moure* County bound for Senegal was likely not one of them. Yet that morning he had been ousted in a military coup led by then-Lieutenant Yahya Jammeh, ending Jawara's twenty four years of electoral authoritarian rule.

Of all the things 2016 Gambian presidential candidate Adama Barrow had foreseen saying to the BBC on December 2, 2016, the sentences 'I am very, very, very happy. I'm excited that we won this election' were likely not among them.³ He had run against now-Colonel Yahya Jammeh, who had led The Gambia for twenty two years after his coup. In a "remarkable upset victory," the opposition candidate triumphed.⁴

Electoral authoritarianism is a widespread method of governance that is distinct from both authoritarianism and democracy. Various called 'competitive authoritarianism' or 'hybrid regimes,' these are regimes that rely on legitimation, repression, and co-optation as they combine nominally democratic institutions with authoritarian practices.^{5,6} In essentially all countries, heads of state come to power via competitive elections held under universal suffrage at regular intervals. They win office – and then some win office again, and again, and again. The puzzle of electoral authoritarianism is how this is possible. Why is it that Hun Sen, President of Cambodia, has gotten re-elected five times to date, serving continuously since 1997? Why is it that Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda, has served three seven-year terms to date, ruling the country continuously since 2000? But why is it also that Robert Mugabe, who had ruled Zimbabwe since 1980, was ousted in a coup in 2017?

In an attempt to explain the causes of electoral authoritarian stability,

³ "Gambia's Jammeh Loses to Adama Barrow in Shock Election Result," BBC News, BBC, December 2, 2016, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-38183906

⁴ Sheriff Kora and Momodou N. Darboe, "The Gambia's Electoral Earthquake," *Journal of Democracy*, 28.2 (2017): 147, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0031>

⁵ Johannes Gerschewski, "The Three Pillars of Stability: Legitimation, Repression, and Co-Optation in Autocratic Regimes," *Democratization*, 20.1 (2013): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2013.738860>

⁶ Marc Morjé Howard and Philip G. Roessler, "Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes," *American Journal of Political Science*, 50.2 (2006): 365-366, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3694278>

the literature has looked to explanations rooted in domestic institutions. This is not surprising given that Svobik finds that two-thirds of electoral authoritarian collapses are explained by a coup d'état, meaning it is important to study domestic, intra-elite dynamics.⁷ Models such as that of Boix and Svobik have placed emphasis on the ways in which formal political institutions, such as political parties and legislatures, may lead to greater regime stability.⁸ Power-sharing is characterized by a “moral hazard problem” whereby the electoral authoritarian incumbent seeks more power at the expense of the ruling coalition.⁹ However, elites’ primary weapon, coups, are “imperfect” as the only deterrent to this threat.¹⁰ Therefore, establishing institutions can “alleviate the moral hazard problem.”¹¹ This is because these institutions ensure regular interaction between the incumbent and their allies and foster transparency in decision-making bodies.¹² Therefore, electoral authoritarian stability and collapse are explained by the strength of nominally democratic institutions and the intra-elite interactions they facilitate.

However, electoral authoritarian states’ elites do not exist in a vacuum. Research by Whitehead and others has explored how international actors, such as the US, can influence democratization and regime outcomes.¹³ More recently, the literature on failed democratization, and by extension on electoral authoritarian regimes, has found that the world is experiencing what Nicolas van de Walle calls ‘democracy fatigue,’ whereby international actors since 2000 have not promoted democratization and good governance with the same intensity as in the 1990s.¹⁴ While the mechanism through which these abstract norms affect

⁷ Milan Svobik, „Power-Sharing and Leadership Dynamics in Authoritarian Regimes,” SSRN Electronic Journal (2008): 478, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25548130>

⁸ Carlos Boix and Milan W. Svobik, “The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government: Institutions, Commitment, and Power-Sharing in Dictatorships,” *The Journal of Politics*, 75.2 (April 2013): 301, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381613000029>

⁹ Svobik, “Power-Sharing and Leadership Dynamics in Authoritarian Regimes,” 492.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 492.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 492.

¹² Boix and Svobik, “The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government,” 301.

¹³ See, for example: Laurence Whitehead, *The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas*, 2nd ed (Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Scott Mainwaring and Aníbal S. Pérez Liñán, *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival, and Fall*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁴ Nicolas van de Walle, „Conclusion: democracy fatigue and the ghost of modernization theory,” in *Aid and Authoritarianism in Africa: Development without Democracy*, ed. by Tobias

electoral authoritarian leaders, elites and their populations is not well-established, international factors nonetheless influence domestic agents and therefore regime stability.

Although the literature has examined how general international factors influence regime outcomes, international political economic factors, and their relationship with electoral authoritarian regimes as opposed to democratization, has been largely neglected. Indeed, Svobik briefly posits that an ‘endogenously evolving balance of power’ determines the credibility of a coup threat,¹⁵ but what actually affects the balance of power between the incumbent and the elite? How are we to understand the linkages between elites and the general population in cases when elites are elected party leaders who are, at least nominally, responsive to the population? Domestic agents’ decisions are shaped by the international political economy; while the effects of aid on regime type have been explored,¹⁶ other factors had not been analyzed until recently.¹⁷ Debt, in particular, received some academic attention in the discussions surrounding the Structural Adjustment Programs in the 1980s and 1990s,¹⁸ whereby international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund provided loans to developing countries. Since then, however, it has been academically underexplored.

This article attempts to bridge the gap between debt as an international political economic factor affecting domestic agents’ incentives, and the stability of electoral authoritarian regimes. The article’s argument is as follows. In the first stage, the US interest rate, as set by the Federal Reserve, can rise; alternatively, the commodity index can rise. These shocks are exogenous to the electoral authoritarian state, meaning that the changes occur independently of the state’s actions. In the second stage, the percentage of public and publicly guaranteed (PPG) debt that is denominated in USD will rise; and the percentage of GDP represented by commodity rents, or payments from commodity sales, will also

Hagmann and Filip Reyntjens (Uppsala, Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet; London, Zed Books, 2016).

¹⁵ Svobik, “Power-Sharing and Leadership Dynamics in Authoritarian Regimes,” 492.

¹⁶ See, for example: Tobias Hagmann and Filip Reyntjens, *Aid and Authoritarianism in Africa: Development without Democracy*, (Uppsala, Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet; London, Zed Books, 2016).

¹⁷ Oisín Tansey. *The International Politics of Authoritarian Rule*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016): 23.

¹⁸ See, for example: Thomas Callaghy, “Africa’s Debt Crisis.” *Journal of International Affairs*, 38.1 (1984): 61-79.

rise. These two changes signal a decline in external debt servicing ability. In the third stage, the electoral authoritarian leader will need to change the level of government expenditure to meet the country's debt repayment obligations whilst also trying to maintain the co-optation of elites through rent distribution amidst economic hardship. In the fourth and final stage, in response to this change in government expenditure, elites will perceive potential rent distribution as a signal of incumbent instability or austerity policies that would elicit discontent from elites and the general population. As a result, electoral authoritarian collapse, either elite-led or popular mobilization-induced, will occur.

The empirical section tests this argument and its three steps using quantitative, large-N analysis. The data on electoral authoritarian collapse and the types of collapse comes from the Geddes, Wright and Frantz Autocratic Regimes dataset. The years 1960 – 2010, and the 193 UN member states, are considered in the analysis. The empirical section will also explore heterogeneity within the mechanism, analyzing how different changes in government expenditure are likely to lead to different forms of electoral authoritarian collapse with agency on the part of different sections of the population. In general, electoral authoritarian collapse is predicted by a rise in the percentage of USD-denominated debt, a rise in the percentage of GDP that commodity rents comprise, and a change in government expenditure as a percentage of GDP.

The analysis will be applied to a case study examining The Gambia, a West African country that experienced two instances of electoral authoritarian collapse. First, on July 22, 1994, a staged military coup, linked to a change in government expenditure, signaled the electoral authoritarian incumbent's instability. On December 1, 2016, the electoral authoritarian incumbent of twenty two years was defeated in the presidential elections, largely as a result of the rise in USD-denominated debt and commodity rents as a percentage of GDP due to an exogenous economic shock. This case study will allow for the heterogeneity in the argument to be observed in practice.

In the first section, the theoretical background for the argument and its three steps will be developed. Next, the empirical analysis will be presented, exploring both the model as a whole and the heterogeneity within it. The penultimate section applies the theoretical and empirical analysis to examine a case study of two instances of electoral authoritarian collapse in The Gambia. The final section concludes by linking the analysis to the literature and future

avenues of research.

THEORY

Electoral authoritarian regimes have proven to be remarkably resilient since their emergence in the second half of the 20th century, but international political economic factors as causes of their stability have been largely underexplored by the literature. Yet intuitively, it would make sense that international political economic factors, and specifically debt, matter. A country having some level of debt poses no complications so long as the interest rate is lower than the GDP growth rate, so that governments can make future taxpayers repay any outstanding debt.¹⁹ Sovereign debt, however, deserves particular attention. It is defined as debt issued by a national government that is denominated in a foreign currency.²⁰ The ‘foreign currency’ component is crucial, because it means debt repayment will not be determined exclusively by the debtor country, but by exogenous factors as well. If a country cannot service its sovereign debt, that can cause complications regardless of regime type. Specifically, creditor governments or organizations face increasing incentives to intervene in the debtor country’s domestic affairs, for example by pressuring private lenders to make concessions to debtors.²¹ This occurred, for instance, during the East Asian financial crisis of 1997-8.²²

A decline in debt servicing ability is particularly damning for electoral authoritarians. Incumbency allows the leader access to patronage networks, but in exchange the leader has a reciprocal duty to their patron elites.²³ Therefore, a debt shock, which makes incumbents less able to service their debts, will necessitate changes in levels of government expenditure both towards elites and towards the general population. This endangers the incumbent’s position, because elite mobilization, in the form of a coup or through opposition mobilization during elections, or through popular mobilization and uprisings, can oust the incumbent. Whether that change in government expenditure is the implementation of austerity

¹⁹ Pierre Lemieux, *The Public Debt Problem : a Comprehensive Guide*, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 15

²⁰ Lemieux, *The Public Debt Problem*, 3.

²¹ Vinod K. Aggarwal and Brigitte Granville, “Introduction,” in *Sovereign Debt: Origins, Crises and Restructuring*, edited by Aggarwal and Granville (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2003): 31.

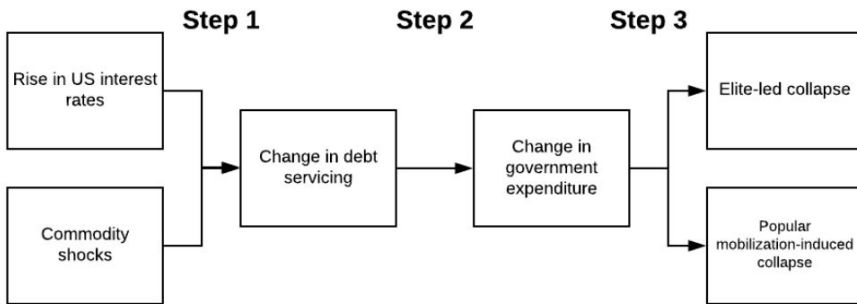
²² Aggarwal and Granville, “Introduction,” 34.

²³ Nic Cheeseman, “African Elections as Vehicles for Change,” *Journal of Democracy*, 21.4 (2010): 145-146, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2010.0019>

policies or an attempt to forestall elite unrest through a temporary increase in government expenditure is a question competing answers have been proposed to, and something that will be investigated below. Changes in debt servicing ability represent a necessary but insufficient condition for electoral authoritarian collapse, and elites can exercise their agency to bring about diverging outcomes. Still, a change in government expenditure can lead to either elite-led or popular mobilization-induced collapse.

In brief, a rise in the US interest rate or a commodity shock represents an exogenous shock to the electoral authoritarian regime. These will worsen the country’s debt servicing ability, which in turn will lead to the electoral authoritarian leader altering the amount of government expenditure. In response to such a policy, electoral authoritarian collapse becomes more likely, either as the result of an elite-led process or a popular mobilization-induced one. Figure 1 illustrates this argument, each step of which is discussed in greater detail below.

Figure 1: The Argument



DEBT SHOCKS

Experiencing a debt shock represents the first step of the argument illustrated on Figure 1. Most governments, democratic or not, have a significant

amount of debt.²⁴ However, much depends on the currency in which a country's debt is denominated; if it is denominated in a foreign currency, such as US dollars, then debt shocks can be exogenous to the debtor country. When a regime experiences a debt shock, however, the government will want to smooth the impact of disturbances. A democratic leader is incentivized to leave tax rates and government spending levels unchanged.²⁵ A nondemocratic leader, however, already uses the provision of private goods to co-opt elites and public goods provision to co-opt the general population, and these two channels of expenditure will be at their disposal to alter when they need to service their debts.^{26, 27}

Still, electoral authoritarians do face challenges in servicing their external debt. In particular, two shocks will be considered that make debt servicing more challenging. The first is a rise in the United States Federal Reserve interest rate, and the second is a commodity shock. Highlighting these two factors is in line with Campello and Zucco's analysis of how commodity price fluctuations and US interest rate changes affect Latin America.²⁸ They contend that these factors will make Latin American democratic countries more likely to implement procyclical fiscal policy²⁹, while this analysis focuses on how a change in US interest rates and commodity prices affects debt servicing in electoral authoritarian states worldwide.

Federal Reserve Interest Rates

Most countries, electoral authoritarian states included, tend not to borrow in their own currency; instead, the US dollar is the most common currency denomination for external debt.³⁰ The Federal Reserve sets the interest rate exogenously to electoral authoritarian countries' debt dynamics. This means that increasing the interest rate of the currency in which a country's debt is denominated

²⁴ Graeme Wheeler, *Sound Practice in Government Debt Management* (The World Bank Group: World Bank Publications, 2004): 6.

²⁵ Wheeler, *Sound Practice*, 80.

²⁶ Jennifer Gandhi, *Political Institutions under Dictatorship*, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 110.

²⁷ Gandhi, *Political Institutions*, 111.

²⁸ Daniela Campello and Cesar Zucco, „Presidential Success and the World Economy,” *The Journal of Politics* 78.2 (2016): 589, <https://doi.org/10.1086/684749>.

²⁹ Daniela Campello, “The Politics of Financial Booms and Crises: Evidence from Latin America,” *Comparative Political Studies*, 47.2 (2014): 268, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414013488539>

³⁰ H. Ito and C.M. Rodriguez “Clamoring for Greenbacks: Explaining the Resurgence of the U.S. Dollar in International Debt,” *International Finance* (2020): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1111/inf.12370>

will lead to an increase in that country's external debt.³¹ For instance, when the Federal Reserve increased its interest rate in 1979, debtor countries were not only able to borrow less, but they also owed larger interests on their pre-existing loans, thereby making them less able to service their debt.³² This credit squeeze affected Latin American and Sub-Saharan African authoritarian states adversely, pushing many to a debt crisis, necessitating them to alter government expenditure rates.³³

Commodity Shocks

Commodity prices constantly fluctuate, leading to commodity shocks, whereby the price of a given commodity changes significantly within a short period of time.³⁴ Specifically, if a country is reliant on exports and the global price of the key exported commodity falls, the extent to which it can service its debt will also decrease.³⁵ Consequently, it might need to increase its debt as a response to the current account deficit. For example, during the global decline in oil prices in 1998, oil exporters like Russia and Indonesia entered a debt crisis.³⁶ Conversely, a global boom in exported commodity prices can give the electoral authoritarian state further revenues to fuel its patronage systems.³⁷ For example, Tansey claims this happened following the global rise in oil prices in the early 1980s, after which the Mexican electoral authoritarian party PRI could increase its expenditure towards elites and the general population.³⁸ Similarly, Weyland argues that electoral authoritarians Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales “entrenched

³¹Sebastian Edwards and Felipe B. Larrain, eds., *Debt, Adjustment and Recovery : Latin America's Prospects for Growth and Development*, (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1989): 58.

³²Fantu Cheru, “Playing Games with African Lives: The G7 Debt Relief Strategy and the Politics of Indifference,” in *Sovereign Debt at the Crossroads: Challenges and Proposals for Resolving the Third World Debt Crisis*, ed. Chris Jochnick and Fraser A. Preston (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006): 38.

³³Cheru, “Playing Games with African Lives,” 38.

³⁴Takatoshi Ito and Andrew Rose, *Commodity Prices and Markets*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011): 1.

³⁵Rabah Arezki, Marc Quintyn, Catherine A. Pattillo, and Min Zhu, eds. *Commodity Price Volatility and Inclusive Growth in Low-Income Countries*. International Monetary Fund (Washington D.C.: IMF, 2012): 22.

³⁶Arezki et al, *Commodity Price Volatility*, 22.

³⁷Kurt Gerhard Weyland, “The Threat from the Populist Left,” *Journal of Democracy*, 24.3 (2013): 28-32, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2013.0045>.

³⁸Tansey, *The International Politics of Authoritarian Rule*, 44.

their rule” due to a commodity boom.³⁹ Therefore, if a commodity exporter experiences a commodity shock such that global commodity prices fall relative to their former values, it will have fewer resources to spend on patronage. Additionally, as it becomes less able to service its rising debt, the electoral authoritarian state will have to change its levels of government expenditure.

CHANGING GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE

A change in government expenditure corresponds to step 2 in Figure 1. Facing a decline in budgets, either as a result of a rise in the Federal Reserve interest rate or a commodity shock, it is intuitively thought that the electoral authoritarian incumbent will need to implement austerity policies. The resource constraint can tighten through two main channels: reducing government spending or reducing private spending, such as through tax rises.⁴⁰ This austerity can be directed both at elites (by cutting back on patronage) or at the general population (through conventional austere economic policy). It is hypothesized that both groups will experience cutbacks in government spending as a result of a decline in debt servicing; there is agency on the part of the electoral authoritarian leader to decide who their austerity policies will target, and to what extent. However, previous research has also suggested that the relationship between austerity and electoral authoritarian collapse is not linear and heterogeneous effects can hold. Gandhi and Przeworski hypothesize that governments can attempt to keep elites on their side following a debt shock by temporarily making greater policy concessions, such as increasing government expenditure.⁴¹ However, this sends a signal of instability to the elites, which can incentivize them to overthrow the incumbent. These seemingly counterintuitive but in reality complementing hypotheses will be explored further.

Before looking at how elites and the general population will be affected by a change in government expenditure, it is important to consider the question of debt default. After all, one could argue, electoral authoritarian incumbents could simply default on their debt. This would curtail the potentially harmful effects of changing the level of government expenditure. However, they typically do not

³⁹ Weyland, “The Threat from the Populist Left,” 32.

⁴⁰ Anthony Barnes Atkinson, *Public Economics in an Age of Austerity*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014): 6.

⁴¹ Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, “Cooperation, Cooptation, and Rebellion Under Dictatorships.” *Economics & Politics*, 18.1 (2006): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0343.2006.00160.x>

pursue this option in order to preserve legitimacy and avoid the potential danger of foreign involvement.

Legitimacy, and the desire for legitimation, are essential for electoral authoritarian states. After the end of the Cold War, some countries instituted multiparty elections as a result of donor conditionality.⁴² Maintaining a democratic, legitimate façade, however thin, is therefore essential for electoral authoritarian regimes. Grauvogel and von Soest argue that authoritarians seek legitimacy across six dimensions: ideology, foundational myth, personalism, international engagement, procedural mechanisms, and performance.⁴³ They are aided in this process by the international community: after the international community began its sometimes uneven efforts to promote democratic norms in the 1990s, this trend changed and international actors no longer promote democracy with the same intensity.⁴⁴ This ‘democratic fatigue’ means that electoral authoritarians can cling to ideological and international legitimacy with greater ease. Nonetheless, economic performance legitimacy remains important to retain. A sovereign debt crisis would lead to a decline in legitimacy, both globally, but more importantly domestically, making the incumbent vulnerable to being overthrown. Instead, it is hypothesized that when a regime is less able to service its sovereign debt, the incumbent will not default on that debt due to a danger of decline in legitimacy.

An additional reason why the incumbent will not default on their debt is that doing so would lead to foreign involvement in their economy, destabilizing the authoritarian regime. Kaplan argues that in response to the Latin American debt crisis, a structural adjustment program was implemented, which in turn diminished political control over the economy.⁴⁵ Specifically, the forced shift to the decentralized bond market from centralized bank lending meant that

⁴² Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright and Erica Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018): 138.

⁴³ Julia Grauvogel and Christian Von Soest, “Claims to Legitimacy Count: Why Sanctions Fail to Instigate Democratization in Authoritarian Regimes,” *European Journal of Political Research*, 53.4 (2014): 638, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12065>

⁴⁴ Tobias Hagmann and Filip Reyntjens, “Introduction: aid and authoritarianism in sub-Saharan Africa after 1990,” in *Aid and Authoritarianism in Africa : Development without Democracy* (London, GBR: Zed Books 2016) 15.

⁴⁵ Stephen B. Kaplan, *Globalization and Austerity Politics in Latin America*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 37.

the exit threat lenders could exert intensified, which in turn imposed economic discipline and responsibility on the countries' governments.⁴⁶ More generally, in response to debt crises the US has led international bailout initiatives that affected countries' domestic economies, such as its interventions in the Mexican economy during the Mexican peso crisis of 1994.⁴⁷ As a result, electoral authoritarian states have attempted to avoid defaulting on their debt, because doing so would lead to structural reform or other forms of economic intervention, both of which would significantly and immediately undermine their rule. Occasionally, it can be inevitable for a country to default on its debt when it experiences an overwhelmingly negative debt shock, as has been the case during the ongoing Crisis in Venezuela (2016 -), but barring a shock of such magnitudes, electoral authoritarian states will avoid defaulting on their debt.

Given that the electoral authoritarian leader faces strong incentives not to default on their debt, they will alter the level of government expenditure, and they will need to make a conscious decision about who to target and in what way. They can either implement austerity policies, or in an attempt to forestall elite unrest, they can temporarily raise government expenditure. Austerity policies, if implemented, can include changes in public goods' provisions, in the amount of funds transferred to elites and other nepotistic linkages. By the nature of electoral authoritarian elites, measuring some changes in government expenditure can be challenging. So instead, it is posited that there is some theoretical threshold beyond which austerity policies, as discussed in the next section, will lead to electoral authoritarian collapse. These policies must represent a substantial decrease in general government expenditure, so that their effects become particularly damning towards the electoral authoritarian incumbent. Geddes, Wright and Frantz contend that there are key patron-client relationships whose integrity is essential to the survival of the regime. Therefore when experiencing a unit size debt shock, one electoral authoritarian regime might collapse but another might survive if it upholds the patron-client relationships essential to the regime's survival.⁴⁸ The empirical implications of this point will be further expounded in the data analysis section.

In certain cases, government expenditure can also temporarily rise in response to a debt shock, as the electoral authoritarian leader attempts to forestall

⁴⁶ Kaplan, *Globalization and Austerity Politics*, 9.

⁴⁷ Aggarwal and Granville, "Introduction," 23.

⁴⁸ Geddes, Wright and Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work*, 187.

elite-led collapse. Gandhi and Przeworski have posited that the two main forms of ‘carrots’ at an electoral authoritarian leader’s disposal are policy concessions and rent distribution.⁴⁹ The latter indicates that the distribution of state resources, as Boix and Svobik’s model also posits, is crucial for a regime to maintain elite support.⁵⁰ Therefore, it is possible that a sharp economic crisis arising due to a decline in debt servicing could actually incentivize electoral authoritarian leaders to increase rent distribution, an anti-austerity policy. Still, in response to this, elites who have access to information about the state of the economy through the transparency of institutions might correctly perceive the instability of the electoral authoritarian leader. This in turn would make them more likely to initiate electoral authoritarian collapse. In other words, the literature identifies that government expenditure plays a key role in shaping electoral authoritarian collapse, but two slightly diverging hypotheses are presented. It is the case either that in response to a decline in debt servicing, the leader will implement traditional austerity policies, or that they will increase rent distribution in an attempt to maintain elites’ support. These two hypotheses need not be mutually exclusive, and instead represent electoral authoritarian leaders’ best responses in different contexts.

In conclusion, government expenditure levels will change in response to a decline in external debt servicing ability, because the alternative, defaulting on the debt, would imminently threaten the survival of the electoral authoritarian incumbent. Instead, they will attempt to implement austerity policies or targeted rent distribution and repay their debt for as long as they can.

ELECTORAL AUTHORITARIAN COLLAPSE

As a result of change in government expenditure, whether that be austerity or selective rent distribution, the hypothesis is that electoral authoritarian states will be at a greater risk of collapse, as step 3 of Figure 1 illustrates. There are two potential channels through which this mechanism can unfold: elite mobilization (top-down collapse) or popular mobilization (bottom-up collapse).

Elite-led Collapse

The electoral authoritarian state is shaped by its elites. ‘Elites’ refers

⁴⁹ Gandhi and Przeworski, “Cooperation, Cooptation, and Rebellion Under Dictatorships,” 1.

⁵⁰ Boix and Svobik, “The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government,” 302-303.

to individuals in positions of power, whether they be in the governing coalition or the opposition, as the membership of such groups often changes over time. Indeed, there is a sense in which elites are the reason electoral authoritarian states exist as a separate entity to dictatorial authoritarian states. There is a consensus among the literature that domestic-level explanations are key in shaping electoral authoritarian longevity.⁵¹ Boix and Svobik's model describing the role of institutions represents this branch of the literature.⁵² Finding that no dictator can rule entirely alone, and that any elites they work with might attempt to depose them, Svobik's *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* argues that institutions attempt to tackle this 'problem of authoritarian power-sharing' with the implementation of institutions.⁵³ Boix and Svobik argue that institutions that constrain leaders, such as political parties and legislatures, can in fact promote authoritarian survival.⁵⁴ This is because institutions structure interactions between the leader and their allies, such that information asymmetry and uncertainty are reduced.⁵⁵ Through regular interactions in deliberative and decision-making bodies, misperceptions about the leader's compliance with the power-sharing arrangements are reduced, and the elite is co-opted.⁵⁶

Not only do institutions such as political parties ensure the stability of the regime, they also allow the elites to be co-opted through patronage.⁵⁷ Institutions allow loyalty to be rewarded through pork and career advancement, which incentivizes elites, including opposition politicians, to not rebel or defect.⁵⁸ This analysis is often applied to the study of Sub-Saharan African countries, with most having instituted elections and nominally democratic institutions after the end of the Cold War, but many still retaining patrimonial elements.⁵⁹ Still, the phenomenon is as universal as electoral authoritarianism, and it is linked to

⁵¹ Tansey, *The International Politics of Authoritarian Rule*, 3.

⁵² Boix and Svobik, "The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government," 300.

⁵³ Milan W. Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 2.

⁵⁴ Boix and Svobik, "The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government," 301.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 26.

⁵⁸ Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 26.

⁵⁹ Linda J. Beck, "Senegal's 'Patrimonial Democrats': Incremental Reform and the Obstacles to the Consolidation of Democracy," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines*, 31.1 (1997): 8.

government expenditure and debt in important ways.

Two principal approaches to this issue have been proposed. Firstly, it has been posited that a substantial decline in government expenditure in the immediate aftermath of a crisis will lead to electoral authoritarian collapse. For instance, Easterly finds that Haiti's debt accumulated largely to finance the government's patronage networks.⁶⁰ Still, when austerity policies are implemented, the government will seek to reduce expenditure to all stakeholders, including the elites. Therefore, when there is a substantial decline in an electoral authoritarian government's ability to service its debt, this will lead to the implementation of austerity policies, which undermine the pork distribution mechanisms embedded in institutions, thereby destabilizing the regime. This is particularly likely to be the case when government expenditure declines substantially and suddenly. Alternatively, if the electoral authoritarian leader struggled to implement austerity policies, for instance due to a more hostile legislature or stronger institutional constraints on changing spending levels, then they may resort to raising rent distribution to the elites to maintain their support amidst the crisis. However, this will send a signal to the elites that the electoral authoritarian leader perceives their position as unstable, which can induce them to oust the leader. While the type of collapse that follows the implementation of austerity policies can either be elite-led or popular mobilization-induced, the type of collapse, if there is a temporary rise in rent distribution, will be exclusively elite-driven.

An elite-led electoral authoritarian collapse can take two forms. Either the regime can collapse as a result of a coup, or as a result of elections due to opposition mobilization.⁶¹ Geddes, Wright and Frantz argue that these two types of mobilization account for 35% and 26% instances of authoritarian collapse, respectively.⁶² The dynamics of these two types of collapse will now be considered in turn.

Coups are the most prevalent forms of authoritarian collapse. Geddes, Wright and Frantz define coups as events that '[oust] political leaders' and are 'carried out by military defectors from the regime'.⁶³ This military component

⁶⁰ William Easterly, "How Did Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Become Heavily Indebted? Reviewing Two Decades of Debt Relief." *World Development*, 30.10 (2002): 1677.

⁶¹ Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work*, 179.

⁶²*Ibid.*

⁶³*Ibid.*, 178.

shows why coups are so prevalent: they require coordinating the fewest individuals, and members of the military have weapons.”⁶⁴ Of course, not all coups succeed, and even where they do, the regime that follows does not always last.⁶⁵ Still, coups remain common, from the 2017 ousting of Mugabe in Zimbabwe and the 2019 ousting of Morales in Bolivia, to the failed coup against Turkey’s Erdogan in 2016 and the successful one against Yemen’s Hadi in 2018.

Alongside coups, cases of successful opposition mobilization are the most common in undermining electoral authoritarian regimes. Howard and Roessler call these instances ‘liberalizing electoral outcomes’ and argue that they will happen when an opposition coalition forms and opposition mobilization occurs, with the death of the authoritarian incumbent contributing to a lesser extent.⁶⁶ What matters, they argue, is the degree to which opposition leaders and civil society groups can coordinate.⁶⁷ Still, this raises the question of why opposition mobilization and coalition-building was possible in some electoral authoritarian regimes over others. Greene and Arriola’s analysis of Mexico and Kenya respectively explain why this happened.

Greene argues that the reason the PRI had been the dominant party in Mexican politics for decades was that by virtue of being the incumbent party, they had a resource advantage.⁶⁸ This meant that they could outspend the opposition during electoral campaigns and co-opt key leaders with patronage goods.⁶⁹ After all, dominant parties can divert public funds for their partisan use, and unlike democracies, electoral authoritarian states, like Mexico for much of the 20th century, lack a professionalized bureaucracy or an electoral management body that would prevent this.⁷⁰ Still, the amount of pork and repression an incumbent can provide depends on their budget; Greene argues that when the PRI faced a debt crisis and needed to privatize much of the economy to avoid bankruptcy, they lost

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁶⁵ Patrick J. McGowan, “African Military Coups D’etat, 1956-2001: Frequency, Trends and Distribution.” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 41.3, (2003): 339, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3876235>.

⁶⁶ Howard and Roessler, “Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes,” 371-372.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 371.

⁶⁸ Kenneth F. Greene. *Why Dominant Parties Lose : Mexico’s Democratization in Comparative Perspective*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 6.

⁶⁹ Greene, *Why Dominant Parties Lose*, 5.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

their control over the politically dominated public sector needed to maintain the electoral authoritarian coercive apparatus, and therefore the PRI lost in the 2000 presidential elections.⁷¹

In a similar line of argument, Arriola examines African multiethnic societies, arguing that the electoral authoritarian incumbent can often hold on to their position through utilizing public resources to buy cross-ethnic endorsements.⁷² The opposition, by contrast, needs to rely on the private sector's funds, but unlike the incumbent, they cannot compensate their potential patronage partners upfront, which makes coalition formation less likely.⁷³ However, when incumbents lose their control over the business sector of the economy, no longer being able to afford the coercive apparatus, the opposition will then be able to sidestep the state's gatekeeping role in finance and challenge the incumbent.⁷⁴ This occurred, for instance, in Kenya in 2002, when the opposition National Rainbow Coalition defeated the incumbent party KANU's candidate.⁷⁵

Elite-led collapse, therefore, can take the form either of a coup, or of successful opposition mobilization. In both cases, the electoral authoritarian's decline in debt servicing ability will prevent them from utilizing pork and repression to maintain control over the state apparatus, as seen either from the need to implement severe austerity policies or the need to increase rent distribution to elites, ultimately leading to an elite-initiated collapse.

Popular Mobilization-induced Collapse

In response to austerity policies, it is not only the elites that can express discontent with, and potentially overthrow, the electoral authoritarian incumbent. Instead, the general population can also mobilize and forcefully remove the electoral authoritarian incumbent. Of course, opposition mobilization in elections, as discussed above, and popular mobilization are linked to an extent, but this section focuses on cases like the Arab Spring, in which popular mobilization and protests directly brought down electoral authoritarians.

⁷¹ Ibid., 8.

⁷² Arriola, Leonardo R, *Multi-Ethnic Coalitions in Africa: Business Financing of Opposition Election Campaigns*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 19.

⁷³ Arriola, *Multi-Ethnic Coalitions in Africa*, 20.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 43-44.

Some protest is usually allowed, according to Lorentzen, for strategic reasons, even within electoral authoritarian regimes, as they allow the incumbent to gauge the extent of discontent and implement tactical repression.⁷⁶ Still, widespread and popular protest can destabilize authoritarian regimes: with protests sweeping across North Africa and the Middle East, electoral authoritarian regimes were overthrown in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011.⁷⁷ This process had strong economic links, with Arab Barometer finding that 63% of Tunisian respondents claimed a weak economy was the primary rationale behind the revolution.⁷⁸ However, Tunisian economic performance was not in fact weak before the revolution; instead, the issue was that ordinary Tunisians were not beneficiaries of this growth due a lack of distribution.⁷⁹ Albertus also highlights the role of distribution in land reform, arguing that some Latin American authoritarians implemented redistributive land reform to undercut the threat of instability from below, thereby acknowledging the potential threat that popular mobilization along economic lines can pose.⁸⁰ Still, Geddes, Wright and Frantz find that popular uprisings account for only a minority (in their dataset, 17%⁸¹) of the instances of authoritarian regime failures. Nonetheless, a decline in external debt servicing is hypothesized to lead to austerity towards the general population, which can lead to discontent, protest, and electoral authoritarian collapse.

In summary, when government expenditure changes in response to a decline in sovereign debt servicing ability, the decline in expenditure both towards the elite and the general population will mean both groups, but especially the former, will be incentivized to challenge the incumbent, leading to electoral authoritarian collapse.

⁷⁶ Peter L. Lorentzen, "Regularizing Rioting: Permitting Public Protest in an Authoritarian Regime," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 8.2 (2013): 128-129, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1561/100.00012051>.

⁷⁷ Mark L. Haas and David W. Lesch. *The Arab Spring : Change and Resistance in the Middle East*, (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 2013): 3.

⁷⁸ Ghanem, Hafez. *The Arab Spring Five Years Later*, (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2016): vol. 1, 46.

⁷⁹ Ghanem, *The Arab Spring Five Years Later*, 46.

⁸⁰ Michael Albertus, *Autocracy and Redistribution: the Politics of Land Reform*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press 2015): 18.

⁸¹ Geddes, Wright and Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work*, 179.

DATA

The theory outlined above is tested in three steps, with each corresponding to one of the steps on Figure 1. The data used includes all 193 sovereign countries recognized by the United Nations as of early 2020, and it covers every country in every year between 1960 and 2010; this is referred to as country-years. The total number of observations in the complete dataset is 11580, and the number of electoral authoritarian country-years is 7672. First, the model will be presented. Next, the three mechanisms indicated on Figure 1 will be discussed in turn. Finally, the heterogeneous effects of the model will be discussed.

THE MODEL

The dependent variable is ‘regime failure.’ This binary variable from Geddes, Wright and Frantz’s 2010 dataset takes on the value 1 if the authoritarian regime collapses in a given country-year, and 0 if it does not.

Figure 2: Number of Electoral Authoritarian Collapses 1960-2010

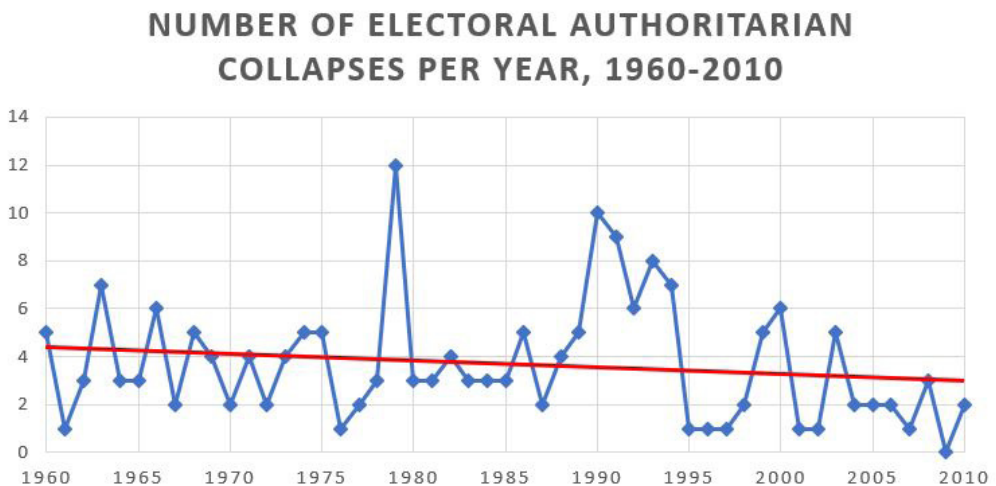


Figure 2 shows how the total annual number of collapses of electoral authoritarian regimes has evolved over time. The graph reveals two interesting points. First, the overall number of electoral authoritarian collapses is in decline,

although not at a significant rate. This is illustrated by the red linear trendline. This change could either be the result of the number of electoral authoritarian regimes declining, or because electoral authoritarian regimes have become more resilient to collapse over time. The data appears to provide evidence for the former: the number of electoral authoritarian country-years in the first half of the sample, 1960-1985, is 2098, while in the second half, from 1985-2010, it is 1720. Still, investigating this question fully would require further study.

The second point to note about the graph is the two noticeable peaks of the data; firstly in 1979, which includes twelve cases of electoral authoritarian collapse, and secondly in the 1990 – 1994 period, which includes an average of seven cases of collapse per year. The latter is largely explained by the end of the Cold War. This is due to the regime failures that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, such as in Bulgaria and Poland. At the same time, the US, UK and France were becoming less likely to protect leaders they had supported only to uphold ‘Western’ regional hegemony over the Soviets. For instance, the 1990 Chadian coup was, in large part, able to succeed because the French stopped supporting the former incumbent, Hissène Habré, which allowed Idriss Déby to take power (and to remain in power as of early 2020). While French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas had the following to say about the Chadian coup, his statement encapsulates the broader geopolitical dynamics of the early 1990s: ‘[t]he times have passed when France would pick governments or would change governments and would maintain others when it so wished’.⁸² Including the observations of collapses in the immediate post-Cold War period may actually deflate the observed relationship, as the cause of their collapse is known to not be the result of debt servicing requirements. Enormous and unprecedented geopolitical changes such as the end of the Cold War notwithstanding, the 1979 spike in electoral authoritarian collapses is of particular interest. In that year, twelve electoral authoritarian regimes collapsed, primarily in Latin America and Africa. This can be explained, in large part, by the 1979 oil crisis. Unsurprisingly, GDP growth rates and government expenditures declined substantially in all but every instance of collapse in 1979. This reinforces the theoretical framework that sharp economic shocks lead to changes in electoral authoritarian government expenditure, which in turn leads to regime collapse. The specific mechanics through which the dependent variable,

⁸² Alan Riding, “Rebels in Control of Chad’s Capital.” *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, December 3, 1990, www.nytimes.com/1990/12/03/world/rebels-in-control-of-chad-s-capital.html

electoral authoritarian regime collapse, is affected by the independent variables will be investigated in this section.

The independent variables, taken from World Bank datasets, are as follows. Two types of shocks may occur that are of interest for the model: a change in the US interest rate, or a change in the commodity index. First, the US interest rate is taken into account through X1, a measure of the percentage change in the interest rate from one year to the next, as set by the Federal Reserve. A change in the interest rate affects debt servicing ability insofar as a country's debt is denominated in USD. Therefore, a second variable X2 denotes the percentage of USD-denominated public and publicly guaranteed (PPG) government debt. The second type of shock, a change in the commodity index, is captured by X3, which denotes the percentage change in the total amount of exports, seasonally adjusted, in current USD. This affects debt servicing ability to the extent that commodity rents contribute to GDP, and this percentage is represented by X4. These two shocks affect the size of the change in government expenditure as a percentage of GDP, which is captured by X5. Correlating with the economic downturn as a result of these shocks, percentage GDP growth is included as X6. The literature also uses control variables for past coups, measured by the binary indicator X7, which takes the value 1 if there was a coup (successful or not) in a given country-year and 0 otherwise; a binary indicator X8 which captures the occurrence of intrastate or interstate war in a given country-year; and an indicator X9 for the size of the country in km².⁸³ The effects of the independent variables are not lagged, because declines in external debt servicing are often short-term, acute crises, often occurring within the same year. The results are presented in Table 1.

Equation 1: The Model

$$Y = X_1\beta_1 + X_2\beta_2 + X_3\beta_3 + X_4\beta_4 + X_5\beta_5 + X_6\beta_6 + X_7\beta_7 + X_8\beta_8 + X_9\beta_9 + u$$

⁸³ See, for instance, Gandhi, *Political Institutions under Dictatorship*, 154, 174.

*Main Results**Table 1: The Model, Main Results*

The standard errors are in brackets. Significance levels: * - $p < 10\%$; ** - $p < 5\%$; *** - $p < 1\%$.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
X_1 : Interest rate change	-0.016 (0.584)		0.003 (0.070)	0.007 (0.011)	0.027 (0.073)
X_2 : Debt %USD	0.006 ** (0.003)		0.011 *** (0.004)	0.011 *** (0.004)	0.014 *** (0.005)
X_3 : Commodity index %change		0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
X_4 : Commodity rents %GDP		-0.028 *** (0.010)	-0.027 ** (0.011)	-0.026 ** (0.011)	-0.030 ** (0.012)
X_5 : Government expenditure change %GDP				0.040 * (0.024)	0.036 (0.028)
X_6 : GDP growth					-0.089 *** (0.016)
X_7 : Past coups					2.306 *** (0.246)
X_8 : Land					0.000 (0.000)

X_{jt} : Intrastate / interstate war					0.290 (0.276)
Number of observations	3788	2192	2192	2192	2192
Intercept	-2.987 *** (0.103)	2.727 *** (0.132)	-3.161 *** (0.214)	-3.186 *** (0.215)	-3.353 *** (0.256)

Debt shocks can affect electoral authoritarian survival through two channels; the US interest rate and the commodity index. First, the coefficient on the percentage change in Federal Reserve interest rates is not statistically significant in and of itself, but intuitively it makes sense that a small change in the interest rate should not cause regime failures worldwide; instead, the US interest rate matters insofar as it influences the percentage of USD in a country's PPG debt profile. The percentage of USD in a country's PPG debt profile, however, is statistically significant at the 1% level. Model 5 in Table 1 shows that a 1% rise in the independent variable increases the likelihood of electoral authoritarian collapse by 1.4%, which is a significant increase. For instance, prior to electoral authoritarian collapse in Ghana in 2000, the percentage of USD-denominated debt rose by 3.5% to 64.0%. In addition to a decline in debt servicing ability through the US interest rate and the USD denomination of debt, the other mechanism through which a shock can affect electoral authoritarian stability is commodity rents. The coefficient on commodity index change is not statistically significant, and similarly to the US interest rate, intuitively it makes sense that commodity shocks only lead to electoral authoritarian collapse insofar as they worsen debt servicing ability. Debt servicing ability will worsen, however, through the change in commodity rents as a percentage of GDP. The coefficient on this variable is statistically significant for all of Models 2-5; in Model 5, which includes all other variables, a 1% decline in the variable makes electoral authoritarian collapse 3.0 % more likely. This is connected to the literature on the resource curse, which argues that an abundance of natural resources will lead to an excessive reliance on commodities and export earnings for government revenues.⁸⁴ This excessive dependence is exacerbated by the high volatility in

⁸⁴ Rabah Arezki, Amadou N R Sy, and Thorvaldur Gylfason, *Beyond the Curse: Policies to*

commodity price fluctuations, and the subsequent financial and macroeconomic volatility.⁸⁵ The vulnerability that this entails for electoral authoritarian countries in particular is demonstrated by the findings of Table 1.

It is challenging to accurately conceptualize the change in government expenditure variable, because, for example, austerity towards the general population can include anything from a decline in staff members at municipal government offices to a change in one of the tiers of a progressive tax system. Capturing austerity towards the elites is perhaps even more challenging, because much of the electoral authoritarian leader's spending directed at their elites takes on intangible forms, such as those noted in Arriola, including, selective privatization deals or a nepotistic deployment of public services.⁸⁶ Therefore, general government expenditure is used as a proxy; in Model 4 it is statistically significant at the 10% level, with a 1% increase in government expenditure as a percentage of GDP making the likelihood of electoral authoritarian collapse rise by 4.0%. For example, prior to Sierra Leone's military coup in 1992, expenditure rose by 2.2%. This is explained by how governments will attempt to raise expenditure temporarily, especially towards the elites, during a crisis to ensure their continued support.⁸⁷ Gandhi and Przeworski discuss the two 'carrots' that the electoral authoritarian leader can offer: policy concessions and rent distribution. The latter shows that government expenditure rates and rents are crucial to the leader's attempt in maintaining support.⁸⁸ Therefore, in Model 4 governments will temporarily raise rent distribution towards elites in response to a debt shock, which will send a signal of incumbent instability to the elites, who will be more likely to oust the electoral authoritarian leader. However, it is important to note that in Model 5, the coefficient on government expenditure changes is not statistically significant, and the heterogeneous effects involved in this will be investigated further.

Of the used control variables, GDP growth is statistically significant, meaning that a decline in GDP growth increases the likelihood of regime failure. Intuitively this makes sense: as posited by the argument, an economic shock and the subsequent decline in debt servicing ability is likely to lead to economic downturn,

Harness the Power of Natural Resources, (Washington D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 2011): 1.

⁸⁵ Arezki, Sy, and Gylfason, *Beyond the Resource Curse*, 1.

⁸⁶ Arriola, *Multi-Ethnic Coalitions in Africa*, 19.

⁸⁷ Gandhi and Przeworski, *Cooperation, Cooptation, and Rebellion*, 1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

which this term captures. The binary indicator ‘past coups’ is also statistically significant: if past coups have occurred, whether successful or not, this will contribute to a track record of what McGowan calls ‘elite political instability.’⁸⁹ However, as Svulik argues, elites generally prefer to avoid coups because they can be potentially costly and entail elite coordination problems.⁹⁰ Therefore, there needs to be a catalyst for the culture of elite political instability to lead to a coup or other forms of elite mobilization against the incumbent; this catalyst can be an economic shock, such as a decline in debt servicing. Finally, while some of the literature posits that land size and intrastate or interstate war might have an effect on regime failure, neither of these coefficients are statistically significant.

In the next section, the three individual causal links (as shown on Figure 1) that underpin the model are explored.

INVESTIGATING THE MECHANISM

Step 1: Debt and Debt Servicing

This step investigates the relationship between a rise in the US interest rate, a rise in the commodity index, and debt servicing ability. Debt servicing ability is measured by two indicators: first, the percentage of USD-denominated public and publicly guaranteed (PPG) government debt, and second, commodity rents as a percentage of GDP.

To understand the dynamics that work through the interest rate, the change in the percentage of debt denominated in USD is treated as the dependent variable and the interest rate as the independent variable. The independent variable is the change in the interest rate and not the interest rate itself because the percentage of USD in a country’s PPG debt profile is determined by absolute, rather than relative, levels of the Federal Reserve rate. The results of the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression are presented in Table 2.

⁸⁹ McGowan, “African Military Coups d’État,” 339.

⁹⁰ Svulik, Power-Sharing and Leadership Dynamics, 481.

Table 2: Step 1, Interest Rate, Results (Number of Observations: 2264)

The standard errors are in brackets. Significance levels: * - $p < 10\%$; ** - $p < 5\%$; *** - $p < 1\%$.

	Estimate
(Intercept)	0.523 *** (0.138)
Interest rate	0.266 *** (0.100)
R ² (adjusted)	0.003

The coefficient on the interest rate is statistically significant, indicating that a rise in the US interest rate will lead to a rise in the percentage of USD in a country's PPG debt profile. Specifically, a 1% increase in the US interest rate leads to a 26.6% increase in the percentage of USD-denominated debt, which indicates that the latter variable will be strongly dependent on US interest rate fluctuations, and that debt servicing ability can vary considerably with changes in the Federal Reserve rate.

Next, to consider the dynamics that work through the commodity index, the change in the percentage of GDP composed of commodity rents is treated as the dependent variable, while the change in the commodity index is the independent variable. The reason both the dependent and the independent variable look at the change in their respective variables instead of overall values is so that the commodity index, which is in millions of current USD, does not become skewed depending on the size of the economy. The OLS regression's results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Step 1, Commodity Index, Results (Number of Observations: 2110)

The standard errors are in brackets. Significance levels: * - $p < 10\%$; ** - $p < 5\%$; *** - $p < 1\%$.

	Estimate
(Intercept)	-0.009 (0.107)

Commodity index change	0.003 *** (0.000)
R ² (adjusted)	0.008

The coefficient on the commodity index change is statistically significant, indicating that if a country exports more in one period than another, the share of the country's GDP represented by commodity rents will rise. This underscores the dangers of a primary commodity export-driven economy. If a country becomes more exposed to the fluctuations of international markets, this will introduce greater uncertainty and instability to the economy, which is particularly debilitating for electoral authoritarians and their elite-coopting patronage networks.

A combination of these two channels, the interest rate and the commodity index, show that if an external shock hits the economy, the country's debt servicing ability will decline. Step 2 investigates the response of the electoral authoritarian leader to this predicament.

Step 2: Debt Servicing and Government Expenditure

The second step from Figure 1 investigates the relationship between debt servicing ability and changes in government expenditure. Debt servicing ability is operationalized as described above. Government expenditure is represented by a variable that indicates what percentage of GDP belongs to government expenditure. Bearing in mind the challenges of capturing the true extent of expenditure changes towards the elite in particular, the results of regressing the change in the percentage of USD-denominated debt and the change in the percentage of GDP that commodity rents comprise on the change in government expenditure as a percentage of GDP are shown in Table 4. The regression is an OLS regression.

Table 4: Step 2, Results (Number of Observations: 2063)

The standard errors are in brackets. Significance levels: * - $p < 10\%$; ** - $p < 5\%$; *** - $p < 1\%$.

	Estimate
(Intercept)	0.1418 ** (0.711)
Change debt %USD	-0.291 ** (0.115)
Change commodity rents %GDP	-0.069 *** (0.158)
R ² (adjusted)	0.011

Table 4 shows that the coefficients on the change in the percentage of USD in a country's PPG debt, and the change in the percentage of commodity rents as a part of GDP, are both statistically significant. The negative coefficient for both variables indicates that if one of the independent variables rises, then the government expenditure level will fall. Specifically, a 1% rise in the percentage of debt denominated in USD will lead to a 29.1% decline in government expenditure, while a similar increase in commodity rents as a percentage of GDP will lower by 6.9%. This confirms that government spending, and the patronage networks it is tied to, are strongly affected by a decline in debt servicing ability either as a result of a change in the currency composition of debt or a change in commodity rents as a percentage of GDP.

Step 3: Government Expenditure and Electoral Authoritarian Collapse

The final step investigates the relationship between government expenditure and the collapse of electoral authoritarian regimes. The dependent variable is the binary variable 'regime failure' which denotes whether authoritarian regimes do indeed collapse or not. This is regressed against the independent variable, the change in government expenditure as a percentage of GDP. The results of the logit regression are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Step 3, Regime Failure with No Restrictions, Results (Number of Observations 3854)

The standard errors are in brackets. Significance levels: * - $p < 10\%$; ** - $p < 5\%$; *** - $p < 1\%$.

	Estimate
(Intercept)	-3.001 *** (0.076)
Government expenditure change %GDP	0.029 (0.198)

The coefficient on the independent variable is not statistically significant, but it is close to the 10% significance threshold with a p-value of 0.145. The estimate is 0.029, and its positive value means that a rise in government expenditure will lead to a higher likelihood of electoral authoritarian collapse. As outlined in the theory section, rent distribution is a key method of maintaining electoral authoritarian control over the leader's elite-dominated patronage networks. When a shock leads to a decline in external debt servicing ability, electoral authoritarian leaders will have an incentive to uphold the integrity of those networks, and they might increase government expenditure to do so. Still, the presence of institutions, such as legislatures, will make it more difficult for the leader to conceal from elites a declining ability to service external debt servicing ability and to address economic difficulties more generally. This, in turn, highlights the vulnerability of the electoral authoritarian leader. The elites will then be incentivized to act on this information, and move to oust the leader. Still, the coefficient is not statistically significant, and the reasons for that divergence are investigated in the following section.

HETEROGENEOUS EFFECTS

The theory section posited that electoral authoritarian collapse could originate from two stakeholders: the elite and the general population. Geddes' dataset contains information that might allow these stakeholders' impact to be disaggregated. Namely, it contains a categorical variable denoting regime failure type, and a categorical variable denoting the amount of violence during a regime

failure. While violence can occur even in cases when an uprising is successfully prevented, quantifying such effects is challenging and outside the scope of this article.⁹¹

The three types of regime failure that happened more than thirty times are military coups (fifty-nine times), elections (fifty-four times), and uprisings (thirty-four times). The reason thirty was chosen as a threshold is because the fourth-most likely cause of collapse, civil war, occurs only fourteen times, which is less than half of the third-most likely cause. Other causes include foreign intervention and state failure. Disaggregating these three main types of regime failure yields interesting insights into the reasons for different types of collapse. The key conceptual framework is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2 - Model Extension Framework

	None or little violence	Significant violence
Elites predominant	Military coup	
Elites + population	Elections	
Population predominant		Uprising

Military Coup

Military coups are widely regarded as an elite-led affair which generally involve few casualties, as indicated by their placement in Figure 2. McGowan highlights that coups are “a change in power from the top,” indicating the centrality of elite interactions in causing military coups.⁹² Similarly, Gutteridge places emphasis on elite interpersonal relations as the primary cause of coups in general, with the military elites being a part of the broader network of elites.⁹³ The number of casualties is generally small because electoral authoritarian regimes by nature concentrate power in the hands of the electoral authoritarian leader and a narrow cohort of allies, which makes targeted military intervention much more likely to succeed in a way that does not disrupt society more broadly.⁹⁴ This relationship is

⁹¹ Janet I. Lewis, “How Does Ethnic Rebellion Start?” *Comparative Political Studies*, 50.10 (2017): 1420, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414016672235>

⁹² McGowan, “African Military Coups d’État,” 342

⁹³ William Gutteridge, “The Military in African Politics - Success or Failure?” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 1.2 (1982): 243.

⁹⁴ Ruth First, *The Barrel of a Gun: Political Power in Africa and the Coup d’État*, (London: Allen

demonstrated below by the OLS regression in Table 6. The independent variable is a binary indicator that takes the value 1 if a regime failure had no casualties, and 0 otherwise. The dependent variable is a binary variable that takes the value 1 if an instance of electoral authoritarian collapse was caused by a military coup, and 0 otherwise.

Table 6: Model Extension, Military Coups and Violence (Number of Observations: 3902)

The standard errors are in brackets. Significance levels: * - $p < 10\%$; ** - $p < 5\%$; *** - $p < 1\%$.

	Estimate
(Intercept)	0.007 *** (0.002)
Regime failure, no casualties	0.343 *** (0.011)

The results of logit regressing the model's key independent variables on the dependent binary variable of 'military coups' are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Model Extension, Military Coups (Number of Observations, 1638)

The standard errors are in brackets. Significance levels: * - $p < 10\%$; ** - $p < 5\%$; *** - $p < 1\%$.

	Estimate
(Intercept)	-4.287 *** (0.218)
Interest rate change	-0.095 (0.143)
Change debt %USD	0.003 (0.035)

Lane, 1970): 4-5.

Commodity index change	0.000 (0.000)
Change commodity rents %GDP	0.034 (0.046)
Government expenditure change %GDP	0.085 *** (0.031)

As Table 7 shows, the coefficient on the change in government expenditure as a percentage of GDP is statistically significant. However, the coefficient is positive, which means that a 1% rise in government expenditure as a percentage of GDP makes electoral authoritarian collapse more likely by 8.5%. For example, government expenditure rose by 5.4% prior to Liberia's military coup in 1980. This suggests the validity of the previously posited hypothesis that, when faced with a shock and a subsequent decline in external debt servicing ability, electoral authoritarian leaders will try to maintain their patronage-fueled networks with the elite. This will entail a rise in government expenditure, as Table 7 shows. Upon seeing this attempt at buying their compliance amidst an economic crisis, elites will be incentivized to oust the leader. Indeed, it is no mistake that this effect is statistically significant for military coups specifically, which Figure 2 indicates are elite-dominated. It is also no surprise that transfers to the elite are crucial in maintaining electoral authoritarian stability. For instance, Tyburski argues that subsidies from state and federal governments have been historically linked to elite transfers and corruption in Mexico.⁹⁵ When faced with a crisis, electoral authoritarian leaders will therefore double down on these networks. This, however, will send a message of incumbent vulnerability to the elite. When combined with the free flow of information about the state of the economy in institutions like the legislature, the elite will likely move to oust the leader through a military coup.

Elections

In the Geddes, Wright and Frantz dataset, elections cause authoritarian regime failure in fifty-four cases, either because the incumbent loses an election, or

⁹⁵Michael D. Tyburski, "The Resource Curse Reversed? Remittances and Corruption in Mexico," *International Studies Quarterly*, 56.2 (2012): 343.

because they do not stand for re-election. An electoral defeat of the incumbent relies on support from both the general population and the elites, and it can vary in the amount of violence it entails, as Figure 2 shows. First, elections provide an outlet for elites and the general population to unite. On the incumbent elites' part, every election necessitates re-confirming the incumbent candidate for head of state as the party's representative. When the incumbent is not seeking reelection, this repeated uncertainty can divide weakly institutionalized parties where personalized politics are significant due to the nature of electoral authoritarianism.⁹⁶ For the opposition elites', every election provides an opportunity to form coalitions that can lead to what Howard and Roessler call 'liberalizing electoral outcomes.'⁹⁷ To the extent that opposition elites can come together and present a united and competent front against the incumbent, their coalition can take votes away from the incumbent by abandoning the "divide and rule" strategy.⁹⁸ Of course, the labels 'incumbent elites' and 'opposition elites' are often not fixed, and people can have incentives to move between the groups in every election. The general population's involvement in elections is crucial as well; after all, it is they who actually cast votes for the incumbent or the opposition. This interaction can be shown through the example of Kenya's electoral authoritarian turnover of 2002, where elite interactions led the former incumbent Kenyatta not to seek reelection and KANU, the incumbent party, to support Moi instead. The opposition, after decades of fragmentation, united to form the National Rainbow Coalition. Civil society and grassroots movements mobilized in support of the coalition, leading to its electoral victory.⁹⁹

The degree of violence involved during a turnover by election varies as well. While Kenya's 2002 election did not involve any casualties, the Sri Lankan election of 1994, which ended 17 years of authoritarian rule by the United National Party, was marred with assassinations and widespread violence.¹⁰⁰ The Geddes, Wright and Frantz dataset places the casualty rate between 26 and 1000. This variation explains why Figure 2 shows 'elections' encompassing both high and low rates of violence.

⁹⁶ Cheeseman, "African Elections, 142.

⁹⁷ Howard and Roessler, "Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes," 371.

⁹⁸ Howard and Roessler, "Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes," 371.

⁹⁹ Howard and Roessler, "Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes," 377-380.

¹⁰⁰ Gamini Keerawalla and Rohan Samarajiva, "Sri Lanka in 1994: A Mandate for Peace," *Asian Survey*, 35.2 (1995): 153-159.

The results of logit regressing the general model's key independent variables on the dependent binary variable of 'elections' are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Model Extension, Elections (Number of Observations: 1638)

The standard errors are in brackets. Significance levels: * - $p < 10\%$; ** - $p < 5\%$; *** - $p < 1\%$.

	Estimate
(Intercept)	-3.879 (0.181)
Interest rate change	0.034 (0.120)
Change debt %USD	0.052 * (0.029)
Commodity index change	0.000 (0.000)
Change commodity rents %GDP	0.067 ** (0.034)
Government expenditure change %GDP	0.029 (0.044)

Table 8 shows that the coefficient on the change in the percentage of PPG debt denominated in USD and the change in the percentage of commodity rents as a percentage of GDP are statistically significant. The former indicates that the likelihood of regime failure rises as more of a country's debt profile becomes denominated in USD, given the change's effect on subsequent policy decisions. The rising debt burden will undercut the legitimacy of the electoral authoritarian leader both in the eyes of the elite and the general population, projecting an inability to tackle the effects of the economic shock. Table 8 therefore shows that a 1% rise in the percentage of PPG debt in USD will increase the likelihood of collapse through elections by 5.2%. The second statistically significant predictor of collapse is the change in commodity rents as a percentage of GDP. A 1% rise in the variable

makes electoral authoritarian collapse in the form of elections 6.7% more likely. This finding points to an additional causal channel through which economic shocks might affect electoral authoritarian collapse. If a country's exports decline relative to GDP, then not only will that incentivize collapse through the channels of government expenditure as discussed thus far, but it will also directly harm people working in the export sector. A rise in commodity rents as a percentage of GDP means that the economy is becoming increasingly dependent on exports, which exposes it to the fluctuations of the global economy.¹⁰¹ This volatility and uncertainty will adversely affect those working in the export sector and their perceptions of the government, which can mobilize anti-incumbent movement. Therefore, electoral authoritarian collapse by elections is best predicted by an increase in the percentage of USD-denominated debt and the rise of commodity rents as a percentage of GDP.

Uprisings

The final method of electoral authoritarian regime failure that accounts for a significant number of cases is uprisings (thirty-four instances). These represent cases in which the general population rises up against the electoral authoritarian incumbent, indicating that agency lies primarily not with the elites but with 'the people.' This type of regime failure usually entails violence, as demonstrated by most countries' experiences during the Arab Spring.¹⁰² This relationship is shown by the OLS regression in Table 9.

Table 9: Model Extension, Uprisings and Violence (Number of Observations: 3902)

The standard errors are in brackets. Significance levels: * - $p < 10\%$; ** - $p < 5\%$; *** - $p < 1\%$.

	Estimate
(Intercept)	0.008 (0.001)
Regime failure, >1000 casualties	0.072 *** (0.019)

¹⁰¹ Campello and Zucco, *Presidential Success and the World Economy*, 590.

¹⁰² Haas and Lesch, *The Arab Spring*, 3.

The results of regressing the model's key independent variables on the dependent binary variable of uprisings are shown in Table 10. It is posited that not every decline in government expenditure will lead to an uprising against electoral authoritarians. Indeed, uprisings usually occur in times of severe crisis. This is because uprisings can occur if the economic shock and the ensuing austerity policies are severe enough that the coordination problem can be overcome by protestors. Therefore, unlike Tables 7 and 8, there is a control for the size of the change in government expenditure. This control is -3.6, which is double the average of negative changes in government expenditure.

Table 10: Model Extension, Uprisings (Number of Observations: 1074)

The standard errors are in brackets. Significance levels: * - $p < 10\%$; ** - $p < 5\%$; *** - $p < 1\%$.

	Estimate
(Intercept)	-4.417 (1.627)
Interest rate change	0.209 (0.586)
Change debt %USD	-0.007 (0.124)
Commodity index change	0.000 (0.001)
Change commodity rents %GDP	-0.055 (0.157)
Government expenditure change %GDP	-0.160 *** (0.109)

Table 10 shows that the coefficient on the change in government expenditure as a percentage of GDP is statistically significant. Unlike the coefficient on the variable in the regression in Table 7, which repeats this regression but for military

coups, the coefficient here is negative. This means that a 1% decline in government expenditure as a percentage of GDP leads to a 16.0% rise in the probability of electoral authoritarian collapse by uprisings. This confirms the main hypothesis posited for the mechanism through which government expenditure and electoral authoritarian regime stability are linked: if austerity policies are implemented, uprisings are more likely to oust the leader. Crucially, this mechanism only holds if the decline in government expenditure is sufficiently large. If it exceeds twice the average of negative changes in government expenditure, austerity policies towards the general population will indeed lead to uprisings. In summary, if social spending policies are drastically scaled back, the ensuing outrage can manifest in the form of an uprising, leading to the failure of the electoral authoritarian regime.

To conclude, the model as shown in Table 1 indicates that an increase in the percentage of debt denominated in USD, an increase in the percentage of GDP composed of commodity rents, and an increase in the percentage of GDP composed of government expenditure will all make electoral authoritarian collapse more likely. Heterogeneous effects can be observed: military coups, which are an elite-driven affair and feature little violence, are best predicted by an increase in the percentage of GDP composed of government expenditure. This is because, following a debt shock, the incumbent will try to temporarily increase the rents distributed to elites in an attempt to forestall action against themselves. Still, the elites will interpret this as a sign of instability and therefore will likely stage a military coup. Elections, by contrast, are best predicted by increases in the percentage of debt denominated in USD and in the percentage of GDP composed of commodity rents; instances of electoral authoritarian collapse by elections feature both elite mobilization and popular mobilization, and can involve varying amounts of violence. Finally, popular uprisings are best predicted by a decline in the government expenditure as a percentage of GDP, given that this change is above the -3.6% threshold. This is significant because it is only substantial austerity policies that will lead to discontent capable of overcoming the general population's collective action problem. Given the nature of popular mobilization, these instances of electoral authoritarian collapse usually feature violence. In sum, exogenous shocks will worsen debt servicing ability, which will lead to a change in government expenditure, in turn leading to different forms of electoral authoritarian collapse.

CASE STUDY

The theoretical and empirical analysis will now be examined through case study. Two instances of electoral authoritarian regime failure in The Gambia will be analyzed. The first one occurred on July 22, 1994, when then-Lieutenant Yahya Jammeh launched a military coup against the former President Jawara. The second occurred in December 2016, when opposition presidential candidate Adama Barrow defeated Jammeh. These two regime failures – a nonviolent military coup, and a mostly nonviolent election – illustrate the theoretical framework discussed thus far in practice.

JULY 22, 1994

The Gambia achieved independence from the UK in 1965, and elections with universal suffrage were put in place. The first presidential election was won by Dawda Kairaba Jawara of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), as were all subsequent elections for the next 24 years.¹⁰³ Elections were always contested by multiple parties; Wiseman and Vidler have argued that The Gambia had 'regular free and (relatively) fair elections' during the 1965-1994 period.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Hughes characterized Jawara's regime as a "functioning democracy."¹⁰⁵ The OAU's Africa Charter on Human and People's Rights, which came into force in 1986, was drawn up in The Gambia.¹⁰⁶ In the decades when much of Western Africa was experiencing frequent military coups, The Gambia was a relatively stable state.¹⁰⁷

The Gambia's primary export during the pre-coup years was, and has remained, the groundnut.¹⁰⁸ The country sought stabilization packages between 1978-85 from the IMF primarily due to a decline in global groundnut prices, with output falling by 40% in 1977-1978.¹⁰⁹ The crisis highlighted how precarious The Gambia's integration in the global economy was, with external debt servicing

¹⁰³ John A. Wiseman and Elizabeth Vidler, "The July 1994 Coup d'État in the Gambia: The End of an Era?" *The Round Table*, 84.333 (1995): 53.

¹⁰⁴ Wiseman and Vidler, "The July 1994 Coup d'État in the Gambia," 58-59.

¹⁰⁵ Arnold Hughes, "Democratisation' under the Military in The Gambia: 1994-2000," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 38.3 (2000): 36.

¹⁰⁶ Wiseman and Vidler, "The July 1994 Coup d'État in the Gambia," 54.

¹⁰⁷ McGowan, "African Military Coups d'État," 339.

¹⁰⁸ David Cooke and Arnold Hughes, "The Politics of Economic Recovery: The Gambia's Experience of Structural Adjustment, 1985-94," *The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 35.1 (1997): 94.

¹⁰⁹ Cooke and Hughes, "The Politics of Economic Recovery," 94.

overtaking groundnut export revenues in 1984-1985.¹¹⁰ Still, the economy did improve in the next few years, due in part to a policy bundle of floating the currency, liberalizing the economy and privatizing state-owned companies. More importantly, the economy benefited from the global upswing in groundnut prices, with the commodity's world price rising by 35% between 1985 and 1989.¹¹¹ This meant that as the 1990s began, the economy had recovered as outstanding debt levels were no longer spiraling, and commodity rents had largely returned to their pre-crisis levels. Government expenditure as a percentage of GDP, however, was low, and in 1994, it fell by 3.8%. Public sector employment had also declined during the 1980s.¹¹² This combination of cautious recovery and austerity had a particularly significant effect on the military.

Following independence, The Gambia's formal army was established in 1982. It was this army whose junior leadership would oust Jawara in 1994, and they did so for two primary reasons: resentment due to government expenditure, and resentment due to personal grievances.¹¹³

Firstly, the changes in government expenditure implemented in the country had negatively affected the military. Many Gambian junior officers resented the quality of their food, accommodation and pay in the years prior to the coup.¹¹⁴ Even more damningly, the payments of allowances for services in the ECOMOG peacekeeping force in Liberia were late, and this further fueled the military's discontent with Jawara's austerity policies.¹¹⁵ In line with the broader theoretical background, there is evidence that the government attempted to respond to these grievances immediately before the coup. They promoted some rank and file troops and gave larger allowances to certain parts of the military, but it was too little too late; a coup was in the making.¹¹⁶ This confirms Gandhi and Przeworski's observation that a temporary increase in rent distribution following a decline in debt servicing signals incumbent instability to the elites, which, as

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 95.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 96, 105.

¹¹² Arnold Hughes and David Perfect, *A Political History of the Gambia, 1816-1994*, (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006): 282.

¹¹³ Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History of the Gambia*, 282.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 282.

¹¹⁵ Wiseman and Vidler, "The July 1994 Coup d'État in the Gambia," 59.

¹¹⁶ Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History of the Gambia*, 283.

Table 7 shows, means that a military coup is likely to oust the incumbent.¹¹⁷

The second reason for the July 1994 coup was resentment due to personal grievances. This point shows that there are individual, idiosyncratic factors at play in any given coup that a general model cannot fully capture. After a formal military was established, sixty-nine officers of the Nigerian Armed Forces Training Group were brought to The Gambia and promoted to senior positions.¹¹⁸ Hughes and Perfect state that “by 1993 Nigerians (...) held all (...) senior positions in the army.”¹¹⁹ Discontent among the Gambian junior officers and their grievances about low pay and poor quality food and accommodation were amplified by their remuneration in contrast to the better-compensated Nigerian senior officers.¹²⁰ Indeed, the trigger for the coup was a similarly idiosyncratic factor: on July 21, 1994, Jammeh’s soldier allies had gone to the airport to pick up Jawara as he returned to The Gambia. Before they could do so, the officers were unexpectedly searched by a Nigerian Colonel, an act considered humiliating and that led to fury among the junior officers. Jammeh would later go on to claim that he had planned the coup that night, from July 21-22, with his fellow discontented lieutenants.¹²¹ Of course, it is hard to quantify the extent to which resentment over Nigerian senior leadership, or over the July 21 incident, contributed to the coup. Still, these personal grievances amplified the pre-existing discontent about changing levels of government expenditure for the military. These changes in expenditure provided the systemic leverage, while personal grievances determined the precise timing of the coup.

On the morning of July 22, 1994, Jammeh and his allies took over the airport, the radio station and the State House.¹²² There was no bloodshed during their coup; Wiseman and Vidler claim that “the take-over on the whole met with little resistance,” with Jawara escaping on a US landing ship.¹²³ Jawara attempted to request American and Senegalese assistance in putting down the coup, but by the end of July 22, it became clear that this would not happen.¹²⁴ The coup was

¹¹⁷ Gandhi and Przeworski, “Cooperation, Cooptation, and Rebellion,” 1.

¹¹⁸ Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History of the Gambia*, 281.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 282.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 286.

¹²² Wiseman and Vidler, “The July 1994 Coup d’État in the Gambia,” 56.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

therefore over; it was a “bloodless”¹²⁵ affair, in which “[t]he Gambian people themselves were little more than onlookers of events in their country.”¹²⁶ Therefore, in line with Figure 2 and Table 7, this elite-led military coup involved no violence, and was largely a result of a rise in government expenditure in an attempt to maintain elite co-optation following an economic shock, which the military correctly perceived as a signal of instability and responded to with a coup.

Interlude

In the years between 1994 and 2016, Yahya Jammeh served as the President of The Gambia. After taking power, he announced that elections would be held in 1996, but in the interim, political violence skyrocketed. Two days before the 1996 elections, the United Democratic Party (UDP), the main opposition party, had over 150 people injured, tortured or killed after one of their campaign rallies.¹²⁷ The UDP’s leader, Ousainou Darboe, sought refuge at the Senegalese High Commission in The Gambian capital of Banjul on the day of the election after receiving death threats from pro-government militants.¹²⁸ Institutions were not free from political influence either. Jammeh modified the constitution to lower the minimum age for presidential candidates from forty to thirty (Jammeh was thirty-one years old at the time),¹²⁹ and the formerly independent electoral commission, PIEC, was infiltrated and districts were gerrymandered.¹³⁰ Unsurprisingly, Jammeh won a supermajority in the election – and in the elections that followed for the next two decades.

Jammeh’s rule was, in some ways, typical of electoral authoritarians. He built schools, hospitals, roads, state-owned radio stations and The Gambia’s first university.¹³¹ He used these projects as opportunities to expand his network of state patronage, consolidating his hegemony by expanding the networks Jawara

¹²⁵ Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History of the Gambia*, 287.

¹²⁶ Wiseman and Vidler, “The July 1994 Coup d’État in the Gambia,” 61.

¹²⁷ Hughes, “‘Democratisation’ under the Military in The Gambia,” 38.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Abdoulaye Saine, “Post-Coup Politics in the Gambia,” *Journal of Democracy*, 13.4 (2002): 168.

had established.¹³² However, even by electoral authoritarian standards, Jammeh's rule was unusually colorful. In 2014, he said that "[w]e will fight these vermins [sic] called homosexuals or gays the same way we are fighting malaria-causing mosquitoes, if not more aggressively."¹³³ While he banned female genital mutilation in 2015, after decades of claiming that the practice formed a part of Gambian culture, his track record as a champion for gender equality becomes questionable as he is currently facing charges for multiple counts of rape. During his tenure, the international community spoke out against his regime. In 2016, he responded that "Ban Ki-moon and Amnesty International can go to hell! Who are they to demand it? What is the problem? It is very common for people to die in detention or during interrogation. No one will tell me what to do in my country!"¹³⁴

DECEMBER 1, 2016

On December 1, 2016, something unexpected happened. Adama Barrow, the UDP presidential candidate, defeated Jammeh, winning 43.3% over the former president's 39.6%.¹³⁵ Turnout was over 70%; Jammeh made a televised concession the following day.¹³⁶ The reasons for this electoral authoritarian turnover are twofold. First, the Gambia's economic situation was such that turnover became possible, both from the elite's and the general population's perspective; second, a combination of strategic blunders from Jammeh and strategic successes by the opposition led to the electoral defeat.

The Gambia had been struggling economically at the beginning of 2016. An IMF Debt Sustainability report stated, on March 5, 2015, that The Gambia had a heavy and risky public debt burden.¹³⁷ Still, it was the April 2016 closure of borders with neighboring Senegal due to a trade dispute, and the following

¹³² Hughes, "Democratisation' under the Military in The Gambia," 48.

¹³³ "Gambia's Jammeh Calls Gays 'Vermin', Says to Fight like Mosquitoes." Reuters, Thomson Reuters, February 18, 2014, www.reuters.com/article/us-gambia-homosexuality/gambias-jammeh-calls-gays-vermin-says-to-fight-like-mosquitoes-idUSBREA1H1S820140218

¹³⁴ "Ban Ki-Moon and Amnesty International Can Go to Hell' Says Gambian President Jammeh." *Blasting News*, May 29, 2016, us.blastingnews.com/world/2016/05/ban-ki-moon-and-amnesty-international-can-go-to-hell-says-gambian-president-jammeh-00943399.html

¹³⁵ Kora and Darboe, "The Gambia's Electoral Earthquake," 147.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 147, 154.

¹³⁷ International Monetary Fund, "The Gambia: Debt Sustainability Analysis," Approved by Roger Nord, Luis Cubeddo, and John Panzer, March 4, 2015, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/dsa/pdf/2015/dsacr15104.pdf>

decline in exports that truly started the crisis. This exogenous shock damaged The Gambia's economy through the channels of debt and commodity rents. Drammeh states that by late 2016, total public debt comprised 100% of GDP in nominal terms.¹³⁸ Given that the percentage of USD in its PPG debt profile was 46% in 2016, increasing from the previous year by a significant 1.3%, the fact that the US interest rate had risen by over 1% in the previous two years was particularly worrying. The other source of economic difficulties was rooted in the country's dependence on commodity exports, and exacerbated by a shock. The Gambia's small and open economy remained vulnerable to external fluctuations of exports. Moreover, with Senegal closing its borders to trade with The Gambia in early 2016, commodity rents plummeted.¹³⁹ This led to a sharp fall in employment among those working in export-oriented industries, and with youth unemployment already high across the country, the crisis deepened even further.¹⁴⁰ These factors led to a decline in debt servicing, meaning that the government ran an even deeper deficit, which limited its capacity to resolve these economic issues.¹⁴¹ In line with Table 8, it is a combination of a rise in the percentage of USD-denominated debt, and a rise in the commodity rents as a percentage of GDP, that predicate electoral authoritarian collapse by elections, and The Gambia's economic crisis confirms this pattern.

While economic changes led to Jammeh's downfall, the fact that Barrow was able to unite an opposition coalition the way he did was rooted in the idiosyncrasies of Jammeh's strategic mistakes, and Barrow's and the opposition's strategic successes. Firstly, Jammeh made strategic blunders, having become too lax about his hegemony. Given his near-complete monopoly on the patronage network created for state resources, he might well have thought he had no reason to fear any opposition candidate at the 2016 election.¹⁴² However, Kora and Darboe highlight three key mistakes he made: first, when people protested an election law he had passed in April 2016, he uncharacteristically ordered a brutal crackdown on the protestors. The leader, Solo Sandeng, was killed, and many more

¹³⁸ Seedy Drammeh, *Perspectives on New Gambia*, (The Gambia: the Centre for Media and Development Research in Africa, 2018): 9.

¹³⁹ Drammeh, *Perspectives on New Gambia*, 10.

¹⁴⁰ Kora and Darboe, "The Gambia's Electoral Earthquake," 149.

¹⁴¹ Drammeh, *Perspectives on New Gambia*, 10.

¹⁴² K

ora and Darboe, "The Gambia's Electoral Earthquake," 149.

were arrested and tortured. This had been an unusually excessive display of violence compared to his previous responses to public protest (it was in the aftermath of this event that Jammeh told Ban Ki-Moon and Amnesty International to ‘go to hell’).¹⁴³ Second, in 2015, Jammeh incited ethnic divisions in The Gambia, a country in which ethnic cleavages are not very politically salient and ethnic intermarriages are common.¹⁴⁴ Jammeh, himself a minority Jola, said that “they” (Ousainou Darboe is a majority Mandinka) could never become president, adding that “they” would be wiped out “like flies.”¹⁴⁵ Third, Jammeh sought to activate another cleavage that is not politically salient; between Muslims, comprising 90% of the population, and Christians, making up most of the remaining 10%. Renaming the country from the Republic of The Gambia to the Islamic Republic of The Gambia in 2015, was a widely disliked policy. Like the attempt to make ethnicity salient, it served to unite the general public against Jammeh.¹⁴⁶

The second idiosyncratic reason for the turnover was Barrow’s and the opposition’s strategic successes. Unlike in previous elections, UDP candidate Barrow was able to forge a coalition of almost all opposition candidates, winning the endorsements of leading politicians and presidential hopefuls like Isatou Touray and Ousainou Darboe.¹⁴⁷ The opposition also capitalized on newly emerging social media sites in The Gambia, primarily WhatsApp, whose chat groups allowed for independent information to spread, and Facebook, whose live videos allowed illiterate and previously disengaged voters to unite.¹⁴⁸ This combination of Jammeh’s mistakes, and Barrow’s and the broader opposition’s strategic successes, is important in explaining the defeat of Jammeh’s government.

The economic crisis, sparked by the closure of the Senegalese border and consequent decline in debt servicing ability, as well as Jammeh’s strategic blunders and the opposition’s successes, explain why on December 1, 2016, Jammeh was voted out of office after twenty-two years. A short crisis followed when, after conceding, Jammeh challenged the results of the election, leading to ECOWAS troops being deployed to the Senegal-Gambia border. Barrow had to be sworn in at the Gambian Embassy in Dakar, Senegal’s capital, but was able to return to The

¹⁴³Ibid.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 150.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Drammeh, *Perspectives on New Gambia*, 15.

¹⁴⁸ Kora and Darboe, “The Gambia’s Electoral Earthquake,” 151.

Gambia on January 26, 2017, as President.¹⁴⁹

SUMMARY

This case study illustrates the mechanism outlined by Figure 1, while investigating intra-country variation through the analysis of two Gambian instances of electoral authoritarian regime collapse. The heterogeneity in the type of collapse is explored by considering a military coup and an election-induced collapse. The coup on July 22, 1994, illustrates that in response to a decline in external debt servicing, the government attempted to temporarily raise rent distribution to maintain elite co-optation, but the junior ranks of the military perceived this as a sign of government instability. When combined with idiosyncratic personal grievances, they decided to launch a coup. The election on December 1, 2016, shows that following the closure of The Gambia's border with Senegal, an exogenous economic shock, the percentage of USD-denominated debt and the percentage of GDP composed of commodity rents rose. When combined with Jammeh's idiosyncratic blunders, the economic and political conditions allowed the opposition elites and the general population to mobilize against him and to end twenty-two years of electoral authoritarian rule at the ballot box.

These two instances of electoral authoritarian regime collapse support the mechanism outlined in Figure 1 in two heterogeneous cases. They also illustrate the myriad of unpredictable variables that affect agents' actions, such as Jammeh's nationality-based resentment of his Nigerian superiors in 1994, and his seemingly nonsensical attempt at politicizing ethnicity and religion in 2016. Despite this variation, the model and its findings, as presented in Table 1, are confirmed by the case study.

CONCLUSION

Given the large number of electoral authoritarian regimes, and their continued persistence over time, it is essential to understand the causes of their stability. Connecting the literature on domestic political institutions with that on the role of international factors, particularly the international political economy, has shown that debt, and debt servicing ability specifically, affects domestic agents'

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 155.

decisions and thereby influences electoral authoritarian stability. A rise in the US interest rate leads to a higher percentage of PPG debt denominated in USD, while a rise in the commodity index increases the percentage of GDP represented by commodity rents. Both of these changes lead to a decline in external debt servicing ability. To respond to this situation, the electoral authoritarian incumbent will attempt to modify the percentage of GDP represented by government expenditure. The way they do so can lead to heterogeneity in the type of electoral authoritarian collapse, with the process being either elite-led or popular mobilization-induced.

This argument contributes to the literature in three main ways. Firstly, it provides clarity about the factors that shape what Svobik called the ‘endogenously evolving balance of power’ between elites and the incumbent. It shows how international political economic factors, specifically external debt servicing, can influence how elites interact in institutions such as a legislature and in political parties. This relates to previous research by Haggard and Kaufman on the link between economics and elite decisions over the types of democratization in Latin America,¹⁵⁰ but expands on it by considering the link between international political economic factors and electoral authoritarian stability worldwide. This connection sheds light on some of the ‘black box’ that is intra-elite dynamics in electoral authoritarian states. Secondly, it links the literature discussing international influences on democratization and democratic regression to electoral authoritarian stability through the lens of economics and debt servicing ability. In an interconnected world, discussions about globalization and international norms are not complete without an understanding of how changes in the Federal Reserve’s interest rate, or a change in the ever-fluctuating commodity index, can affect an electoral authoritarian regime’s stability. Thirdly, the argument provides new analysis on how the electoral authoritarian leader’s decisions about government spending levels can shape elites’ and the general population’s mobilization against the incumbent. This expands on the literature on the political role of the military, and the intra-elite dynamics and rent distribution patterns that are conducive to a coup. It also places emphasis on the role of popular mobilization, both in and of itself and in terms of its effects on elite mobilization, when discussing collapse by popular uprising or by elections. This expands on our understanding of the types of electoral authoritarian collapse, and the agentic decisions that make them more likely to occur.

¹⁵⁰Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman, “The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions,” *Comparative Politics*, 29.3 (1997): 263–283.

Further research could elaborate on this work in three ways. Firstly, time series analysis could be incorporated into the study of global, exogenous economic shocks and their longer-term effect on electoral authoritarian stability. Protracted economic crises might introduce new dynamics and critical junctures into the above analysis, and shape domestic agents' decisions in different ways. Secondly, if data about electoral authoritarian regime collapses were available beyond 2010 and closer to the present day, then an expanded time frame would allow for an analysis of discontinuity rates in electoral authoritarian survival over time. Most notably, the end of the Cold War shifted the global political and economic landscape. Thus, considering the effect debt servicing has on electoral authoritarian stability in, for instance, 1960 – 1990 compared to 1990 – 2020, would shed further light on the way shifting international factors have affected domestic agents' decisions over time. Finally, this argument has considered how external debt servicing affects electoral authoritarian stability. Further research could consider other international political economic factors that affect electoral authoritarian stability, such as trade or financial flows, as this broader field has much academic and policymaking relevance.

Dawda Jawara might have been surprised to be ousted in a military coup on July 22, 1994, and Adama Barrow might have been surprised to win the election on December 1, 2016. Still, for all the unpredictability and idiosyncrasies of electoral authoritarian regimes, hypotheses can be formulated and tested to understand the causes of their stability – and their collapse.

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HYBRID INSURGENCIES AFTER STATE FAILURE: CASE STUDIES OF THE TALIBAN AND MEXICAN CARTELS¹

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INTRODUCTION

“One-and-a-half billion people live in areas affected by fragility, conflict, or large-scale, organized criminal violence, and no low-income fragile or conflict-affected country has yet to achieve a single United Nations Millennium Development Goal (UNMDG). New threats—organized crime and trafficking, civil unrest due to global economic shocks, terrorism—have supplemented continued preoccupations with conventional war between and within countries.”

World Bank, 2011 World Development Report:
Conflict, Security and Development

In the first decades after the fall of the USSR, the field of international relations in the United States was split between hopeful predictions of world peace and bleaker predictions of a “coming anarchy.”⁵ It has since become

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⁵ Haggard, summarizing past work on the decline of US power, noted that the “triumphalism of the immediate Post-Cold War period in the United States has faded,” and that there is a

clear that the pessimists were at least partly correct: failed and failing states are increasingly destabilizing the international system, as the UN Security Council has mentioned international organized crime in about 60% of its resolutions from 2012 to 2017, increasing from about 7% in 2000.⁶

The original pessimists have since been joined by other scholars who identify a rising trend of seeming anarchy connected to international organized crime.⁷ As such, the fields of international relations and comparative politics theory are beginning to take notice of and trying to account for these trends.

But are these trends truly indicative of a state of international anarchy? Certainly, these authors do not refer—and if they do, not exclusively so—to the traditional realist notion of anarchy among states, in which there is no central power governing interstate relations.”⁸ Scholars increasingly refer to a “new” anarchy within rather than between states. Killebrew, for instance, identifies this new anarchy in the rising number of failed states around the world in the twenty-first century.⁹ We find this use of the term questionable in the context

prominent debate within US IR discourse between a “new [realist] pessimism” and a “liberal hopefulness” (Haggard himself favors a third position, liberal pessimism). Meanwhile, other scholars, including Robert Kaplan and Stephen Metz, had already predicted a global rise in instability within states, with Metz even going so far as to associate this with increased insurgent activity—in both cases, another form sort of pessimism. See Stephan Haggard, “Liberal Pessimism: International Relations Theory and the Emerging Powers,” *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 1.1 (2014): 1-3, <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.3>; Robert D. Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War* (New York, NY: Random House, 2000): xi; Steven Metz, “The Future of Insurgency,” report, *Strategic Studies Institute*, US Army War College (December 10, 1993): 24-25, <https://perma.cc/5MYH-C56H>

⁶ Mario Silva, *State Legitimacy and Failure in International Law* (Leiden, NLD: Brill Nijhoff, 2014): 1; “Organized Crime and Its Role in Contemporary Conflict: An Analysis of UN Security Council Resolutions,” report, *Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime* (September 2018), <https://perma.cc/9GZD-BYP2>

⁷ Robert Killebrew, “Criminal Insurgency in the Americas and Beyond,” *Prism* 2.3 (2011): 34-35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26469130>; Ioan Grillo, *El Narco: Inside Mexico's Criminal Insurgency* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press, 2012), loc. 13-15 of 551. See James Cockayne, “Hidden Power: The Strategic Logic of Organized Crime: Sicily, New York and the Caribbean, 1859-1968, and Mexico and the Sahel,” doctoral thesis, King's College London (2015), <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1827521172>

⁸ Moonhawk Kim and Scott Wolford, “Choosing Anarchy: Institutional Alternatives and the Global Order,” *International Theory* 6.1 (2014): 30, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971913000304>; Steven L. Lamy et. al., *Introduction to Global Politics*, 5th ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 81.

⁹ Killebrew, “Criminal Insurgency in the Americas and Beyond,” 35.

of contemporary trends in global insurgency and international crime. Criminal organizations with strong hierarchies and clearly defined leadership, such as the sprawling drug empires based in the Global South, will often finance themselves through illicit activity.¹⁰ However, insofar as these organizations control territory, tax civilian populations under their control, provide basic public services, and attempt to seek legitimacy, they constitute state-like, hierarchical organizations that are equally far from the traditional interstate conception of anarchy. While perhaps appropriate in the heyday of the state as an institution, theories like Kaplan's—based on the simple anarchy-hierarchy divide that Waltz advocated for in 1979—are no longer adequate to describe a world where hundreds of millions live in weak states beset with organized crime and insurgent groups.¹¹

Another way of categorizing rising instability has consisted of theories which group insurgencies into binary categorization schemes, such as *greed* or *grievance*; having either a *political* (state-building/state-weakening) or *criminal* (profit-driven) motivation; and operating either under a paradigm of *commercial* or *ideological* struggle.¹² In trying to simplify and improve upon the difficulties faced by the current state of insurgency theory, we first observed that traditional states of opposition often align roughly with each other: that is, the “greed” label from civil war theory may subsume the “criminal” and “commercial” insurgency concepts, while the “grievance” label could subsume the “political” and “ideological” concepts. But we believe that defining systems of binary oppositions—occasionally growing into larger systems of discrete oppositions—is futile. As we researched this paper, we witnessed again and again how numerous authors either tied themselves into knots trying to fit insurgent groups into a number of discrete categories of anti-state violence, or otherwise simply gloss over the complexity of insurgent groups.¹³

¹⁰Cockayne, “Hidden Power,” 287.

¹¹Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 115.

¹²Derek R. Fitzpatrick, “Greed and Grievance and Drug Cartels: Mexico’s Commercial Insurgency,” report, *School of Advanced Military Studies*, US Army (2017): 5-6, <https://perma.cc/8KJ2-ERZS>; Paul R. Cooper, “Greed and Grievance? Why Did FARC-EP Leadership Become Involved in the Illicit Trades of Coca-Cocaine and Money Laundering?,” master’s thesis, University of Texas at San Antonio (2014): 3-4, <https://search.pro>

¹³Fitzpatrick sees a “false dilemma” between “crime or insurgency” and “greed or grievance,” and proposes a third category—commercial insurgency—to make up for this gap, a theory which he himself seems to admit is a relatively underdeveloped theory. Meanwhile, Kalyvas, in trying to resist “[the difficulties of] merging the study of crime and political violence,” provides the overly complicated formula of “questioning both the “crime as civil war” and “civil war as crime” models and [advocating] a different strategy of cross-fertilization, one based on the micro-dynamics of

However, this simplification alone is insufficient, and rigid, binary-opposition based theories are likewise inadequate to explain a growing number of hard-to-categorize insurgent groups. We suggest instead that insurgent organizations rarely fit into a clear oppositional greed or grievance-based mold, and may frequently make bids for legitimacy and seek profit—regardless of whether they would, at first glance, fall into a single category. To clarify the complicated state of insurgency theory, this paper proposes a new theoretical framework for the phenomenon of state-like in-surgencies in the post-Cold War Global South. We term these organizations “hybrid insurgent groups” because they have qualities which are typically thought to be opposed—that is, having the aforementioned qualities of a greed or grievance or a political criminal motivation, and either operating under a paradigm of commercial or ideological struggle.¹⁴ Accordingly,

civil war research programs.” On the other hand, Kilbrew tries to argue that “crime, terrorism, and [ideological] insurgency differ mainly in scale” in his conclusion, but spends most of his paper noting how distinct groups in Mexico and Colombia morph between those three distinct categories over time. An example of oversimplification can be seen in the US Government Counterinsurgency Guide’s statements: “some insurgent actors will be more interested in financial reward than ideology,” and “the charisma of insurgent leaders can sometimes be more important than ideology in convincing others to join their movement,” which, while inevitably true, are so vague as to fail to provide a good basis for predicting insurgent group behavior. Fitzpatrick, “Greed and Grievance and Drug Cartels,” 8; Kalyvas, “How Civil Wars Help Explain Organized Crime,” 1518; Kilbrew, “Criminal Insurgency in the Americas and Beyond,” 39-40, 41, 49; “US Government Counterinsurgency Guide,” report, *United States Government Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative* (January 2009): 6-7, <https://perma.cc/B8RV-VE64>

¹⁴ To our knowledge, we are not the first to use the term “hybrid insurgency.” Mohamedou uses the idea of a hybrid insurgency to describe the seven layers of identity within ISIS’ self-conception, overall motivations, tactics, and rhetoric. Our definition is different, however, and refers specifically to the binary oppositions noted above, as well as to the relationship of insurgencies to the internationally recognized state in their territory. Insurgencies from one or another end of the spectrum are often said to engage in either state-weakening or competitive state-building. Competitive state-building would imply that the hybrid insurgencies seek to replace as many state structures as possible. On the other hand, state-weakening aims to keep as many state services and simultaneously provide insurgent services for the purposes of making money or supporting legitimacy. In reality, we argue that while some insurgencies may predominantly pursue one strategy or the other, most do a mix of both. See Mohammad-Mahmoud Mohamedou, *A Theory of ISIS: Political Violence and the Transformation of the Global Order* (London, GBR: Pluto Press, 2017): 95, 101. C.f. Fitzpatrick, “Greed and Grievance and Drug Cartels,” 6; Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 3-4; Cockayne, “Hidden Power: The Strategic Logic of Organized Crime: Sicily, New York and the Caribbean, 1859-1968, and Mexico and the Sahel,” 13-14, 31; Fitzpatrick, “Greed and Grievance and Drug Cartels: Mexico’s Commercial

we choose to situate these binary (“either-or”) categorizations within a continuous spectrum (See figure 1).¹⁵ For simplicity, we will refer to the ends of the spectrum as *greed-based* and *grievance-based*.

Figure 1: Grouping Types of Insurgencies on the Spectrum



In order to explain the dynamic nature of insurgent groups in the post-Cold-War era, we present two case studies: the drug cartels of Mexico and the Afghani Taliban.¹⁶ Each of these organizations are violent actors that contest military and political power within their respective states, while operating as mega-enterprises with hundreds of millions of dollars in annual revenue.¹⁷ The case studies are used to examine how hybrid insurgent groups behave and react to state actions in the post-Cold War Global South. These two organizations and their respective behaviors not only demonstrate the characteristics of hybrid

Insurgency,” 5; Metz, “The Future of Insurgency,” 1518-19.

¹⁵ Cockayne's analysis differs from typical approaches to insurgent groups in his use of ideas from business administration to analyze groups on this spectrum. While a novel and useful addition to political science method, we find that this technique fails to adequately explain the ideological features of these groups, necessitating an argument, like ours, based on the idea of a spectrum. We also note that Korf criticizes the “either-or” greed vs. grievance argument of civil war literature, and that Dishman proposes a spectrum for terrorist groups and transnational criminal organizations; however, neither pertain to hybrid insurgencies or insurgency theory, and we add detail to the spectrum that Dishman alludes to. Cockayne, “Hidden Power,” 42-44; Benedikt Korf, “Rethinking the Greed–Grievance Nexus: Property Rights and the Political Economy of War in Sri Lanka,” *Journal of Peace Research* 42.2 (2005): 201-17, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343305050691>; Chris Dishman, “Terrorism, Crime, and Transformation,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 24. 1 (January 2001): 43-58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100118878>.

¹⁶ While these insurgencies also operated during the Cold War, this paper focuses on each case as a contemporary insurgency.

¹⁷ Individual Mexican cartels, including the Sinaloa Cartel, are thought to have billions of dollars in revenue, and the annual revenue of all the Mexican cartels together is thought to be around \$30 billion. On the other hand, the Taliban's annual revenue is estimated to be between \$400 million and \$1.5 billion. “Mexico Cartels: Which Are the Biggest and Most Powerful?,” *BBC News*, October 24, 2019, <https://perma.cc/ZRP6-ZB5A>; Fitzpatrick, “Greed and Grievance and Drug Cartels,” 3; Dawood Azami, “How Does the Taliban Make Money?,” *BBC News*, December 22, 2018, <https://perma.cc/45TT-7JAF>

insurgencies in general, but also illustrate their processes of emergence following the breakdown of state authority.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL TRAJECTORY OF HYBRID INSURGENCIES

To understand how qualities of an insurgency that are often thought to be oppositional can coexist, we first establish a theoretical framework for the developmental process of hybrid insurgencies. Outlining three primary stages, we aim to broadly capture the sociopolitical conditions and environment from which these insurgencies emerge. In the first stage, states lacking resources and legitimacy devolve into a temporally and geographically limited state of “anarchy.” Here, we adopt Hirshleifer’s argument that anarchy is “a system in which participants can seize and defend resources without regulation from above.” In Hirshleifer’s view, anarchy is “not chaos, but rather a spontaneous order,” wherein “each contestant balances between productive exploitation of the current resource base and fighting to acquire or defend resources.”^{18 19} Subsequently, anarchy may dissolve into amorphy, or disappear as the result of the emergence of a new hierarchical structure.^{20 21} Hirshleifer’s framework provides a plausible description of politics within state borders after a state has failed, and before social reorganization has taken place: within failed states lacking a clear center of authority, different actors will struggle to position themselves until a social hierarchy re-emerges. As such, within our model, anarchy refers only to the first stage of the hybrid insurgent group formation process following state failure.

But as Hirshleifer notes, this anarchy does not persist, as anarchy may

¹⁸ Jack Hirshleifer, “Anarchy and its Breakdown,” *Journal of Political Economy* 103.1 (1995): 26, <https://doi.org/10.1086/261974>

¹⁹ We chose Hirshleifer’s articulation of the concept of anarchy over others because of its flexibility: Hirshleifer meant it to apply to situations as diverse as conflict between animals, humans, criminal groups, and states. It is thus logically consistent to talk about anarchy existing in a state after state failure under Hirshleifer’s definition, as it does not rely on the existence of states. This is also an appropriate choice because Hirshleifer is very close to classic “self-help” articulations of anarchy—Waltz agrees with Hirshleifer that anarchy is actually a kind of order, though he does not go on to explore its “breakdown.” *Ibid.*, 26; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 89-91.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26, 48.

²¹ “Amorphy” refers to the “[absence of form in which] resources are not sequestered but consumed on the move.” *Ibid.*, 26.

“break down, to be replaced by another pattern of relationships.”²² We argue that insurgent groups do the same, and that as they emerge out of anarchy in the context of state failure, their persistence and continued activity should be conceptualized as a form of social reorganization, not anarchy. This social reorganization should be understood as a “violent equilibrium,” in which insurgent control over territories seized during the period of anarchy results in overt and violent competition with the state. Our use of the term “violent equilibrium” originates from Viridiana Rios’ study of the ongoing conflict between the Mexican cartels and the state, lasting from the democratization of the 1990s to more recent political developments in 2013. She argues that “homicides [are] caused by traffickers battling to take control of a competitive market and casualties and arrests generated by law enforcement operations against traffickers...interact, causing Mexico to be locked into a ‘self-reinforcing violent equilibrium.’”²³ Although Rios’ thesis provides a good starting point, we choose to define violent equilibrium more broadly as a non-negotiable stalemate between a hybrid insurgent group and the state it challenges.²⁴ In such a stalemate, neither actor is able to completely accomplish its goal—the state is unable to eradicate or suppress the insurgent group, and the insurgent group is unable to force concessions from the state, thereby resulting in extended periods of extreme violence.²⁵

Following this competition-driven rise in violence and general instability, the third stage of our model consists of hybrid insurgencies moving toward the center of the spectrum. That is, organizations motivated by the grievance side of the spectrum experience an incentive to seek legitimacy as an authoritative entity above the populace, while groups motivated by greed increasingly bend their ideals to seek greater profit by engaging in criminal enterprises.

²² *Ibid.*, 26.

²³ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁴ This use of the term “violent equilibrium” also corresponds closely with Metz’ prediction that a rise in insurgent activity would lead to a “spate of stalemates” consisting of coexistence between insurgencies and the state. Metz, “The Future of Insurgency,” 24.

²⁵ The goal of territorial control is a commonality among hybrid insurgencies. Controlling territory for any motivation enables legitimacy, a parallel state structure, and a monopoly on violence. *See* Kalyvas, “How Civil Wars Help Explain Organized Crime,” 1529.

Figure 2: *The Formation of a Violent Equilibrium*

Anarchy: Lack of
Resources & Legitimacy
Break Down Governments

Center of Ideological-
Commerical Spectrum
Hosts **Hybrid** Actors



The analytical core of this paper is thus a reconceptualization of “anarchy” in the context of the challenges posed by hybrid insurgencies to failing states. By focusing on the social reorganization of a political system or state—that is, the emergence of a power struggle between new political actors following the breakdown of anarchy—we are able to apply the greed-versus-grievance argument to insurgency theory. In addition, we seek to criticize binary classifications within the existing literature, arguing that many common concepts should be located along the spectrum we propose, as opposed to existing as discrete concepts.²⁶

DEFINING INSURGENCY

According to the Central Intelligence Agency, “an insurgency is a political-military campaign by nonstate actors who seek to overthrow a government or secede from a country through the use of unconventional—and sometimes conventional—military strategies and tactics.”²⁷ This definition encapsulates most aspects of insurgency. However, we argue that an insurgency may neither seek to overthrow a government nor to secede from a country. Instead, insurgent organizations may aim to establish control over resources or territory, which may (but does not have to) include fundamentally changing, or even becoming, the

²⁶ Paul Collier, “Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44.6 (2000): 839-853, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002700044006008>; Paul Collier, Anke Hoefler, and Måns Söderbom, “On the Duration of Civil War,” *Journal of Peace Research* 41.3 (2004): 253-273, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343304043769>; see Paul Collier and Anke Hoefler, “Justice Seeking and Loot-Seeking in Civil War,” report, *World Bank* (1999), <https://perma.cc/2GJS-DQ7L>

²⁷ Seth G. Jones, “The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency: State Failure and Jihad,” *International Security* 32.4 (2008): 9, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30129790>

state.²⁸ This stands in contrast to seeking secession or control of the government, which typically occurs within the political system. In attempting to achieve these objectives, an insurgency often finds itself creating a parallel, state-like structure.

The scenarios this paper refers to are those of failing states, which are characterized by their failure to provide basic services such as education, healthcare, food, and hygiene to their governed populations. This definition also includes the failure of governments to control crime and enforce laws. When these fundamental needs are not met, increasing grievances against the state mobilize the populace to shift their focus to developing alternative structures. When the public comes to realize that the cost of maintaining the reigning state is greater than the wealth output being generated and distributed to the population, a drastic decrease in state authority and dependency is nearly inevitable. Anarchy, then, may be seen as preferable to a failing state, and the population may act on this sentiment when opportunities to challenge the existing order emerge. If this action turns violent, a failed state's negative externalities could propel further dissatisfaction and deepen the inequities affecting already-disenfranchised communities. These marginalized groups' frustrations fuel the development of hybrid insurgencies that seek to redefine social hierarchy by creating parallel state structures that redirect wealth for their benefit.

The creation and maintenance of these parallel structures serve as a challenge to the legitimacy of the state, which weakens its overall power and degrades its authority. As Kalyvas has noted, there is a clear overlap here with traditional definitions of organized crime, which he describes as "a phenomenon comprising hierarchically organized groups of criminals with the ability to use violence...for acquiring or defining the control of illegal markets in order to extract economic benefits from them."²⁹ The core of this definition is the presence of a

²⁸ Cooper, "Greed and Grievance?," 94.

²⁹ Scholars of recent intrastate conflicts have often struggled to choose between many available macro-conceptual frameworks, often drawing on different disciplines. These various fields exist to address large-scale, organized, intrastate, state-challenging violence, and may include organized crime, historical sociology, comparative politics, and international relations and strategy. While the definitions of these terms are sometimes disputed, we agree with Schutte's assertion that "most civil conflicts in the post-World War II era share a common type of warfare: insurgency." This follows the simple, widely accepted definition of civil war originally offered by Small and Singer (1982), as "any armed conflict that involves (a) military action internal to the metropole, (b) the active participation of the national government, and (c) effective resistance by both sides," and adapted by later scholars to include the stipulation that conflict deaths exceed 1000. It also relies upon Fearon and Laitin's definition of insurgency as "a technology of military conflict characterized by small,

coherent and hierarchical organization operating with a certain degree of stability and continuity.”³⁰ We follow Kalyvas' approach to a large degree, arguing that the interpretation of insurgency as “competitive state-building” should be expanded to include the broader concept of “state-weakening.”³¹

GREED AND GRIEVANCES

In the post-Cold War academic literature on civil wars and insurgencies, many scholars have adopted a binary greed vs grievance classification scheme, which approaches rebellions and non-state actors with an “either-or” attitude, meaning conflicts are motivated by either greed or grievance, but not both.³² Specifically, it contrasts politically or ideologically motivated civil wars with a groundswell of public support (grievance-based), and those that are considered to be more like “private looting, without popular support, where ‘greedy’ [...] bandits compete for who can best tax and exploit a desperate population (greed-based).”³³ Most place non-state actors in binary categories, rather than along a spectrum; for instance, Collier and Hoeffler assert that many violent non-state actors are involved in illegal businesses out of greed³⁴ and that motivations are resource acquisitions,³⁵ while others, such as Cooper and Thoumi, posit that

lightly armed bands practicing guerrilla warfare from rural base areas,” which could be used to accomplish a wide variety of ends. See Sebastian Schutte, “Geography, Outcome, and Casualties: A Unified Model of Insurgency,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59.6 (2015): 1101–1102; Melvin Small and J. David Singer, *Resort to Arms: International and Civil Wars* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1982): 1816–1980, quoted in Nicholas Sambanis, “What Is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48.6 (2004): 816, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002704269355>; James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review* 97.1 (2003): 75, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055403000534>

³⁰ Kalyvas, “How Civil Wars Help Explain Organized Crime,” 1519.

³¹ Daniela Campello, “The Politics of Financial Booms and Crises: Evidence from Latin America,” *Comparative Political Studies*, 47.2 (2014): 268, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414013488539>

³² Korf, “Rethinking the Greed-Grievance Nexus,” 201.

³³ *Ibid.*, 201; Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 3–8.

³⁴ See Collier, “Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity”; Collier and Hoeffler, “Justice Seeking and Loot-Seeking in Civil War.”

³⁵ Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Dominic Rohner. “Beyond Greed and Grievance: Feasibility and Civil War.” *Oxford Economic Papers* 61.1 (2008): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oep/gpn029>; Collier, Hoeffler & Söderbom, “On the Duration of Civil War,” 253–273.

rebellions are fundamentally grievance-based.³⁶

The greed-versus-grievance argument has previously been generalized to insurgency theory. In “The Future of Insurgency,” the foundational theory of commercial insurgency, Metz argued for the emergence of two types of insurgencies following the Cold War: “spiritual” and “commercial.” He characterizes spiritual insurgency as driven by “problems of modernization, the search for meaning, and the pursuit of justice.” By contrast, commercial insurgency is driven “less by the desire for justice than wealth. Its psychological foundation is a warped translation of Western popular culture, which equates wealth, personal meaning, and power.”³⁷ Although Metz’s argument may be accurate, the binary nature of his classification is insufficient in appropriately explaining the phenomenon of hybrid insurgencies. This represents a general pattern: hybrid insurgencies grow more sophisticated over time, and depart from their foundational motivation to have other motivations. Solely maintaining two distinct categories of an insurgency’s motives, as Metz does, ignores the historical and empirical reality of strategies that insurgencies can and often do take, which simultaneously moves them closer to the center of the spectrum and expands their reach. Further, Metz neglects to expand upon how insurgencies become parallel, coexisting pseudo-states and governments—to the extent that he does characterize the duration of insurgencies, he relies upon a simple characterization of violence, stating that, “for many countries of the world, simmering internal war is a permanent condition.”³⁸ This fits well with what Metz terms his “psychological” approach: instead of focusing on the strategies insurgencies can use to change the norms and framings held by the populations they would rule, he focuses on the pre-existing “feelings” of those populations,³⁹ writing:

“The preeminent task of those who would use insurgency as a roadway to power is mobilization of support. It takes a powerful incentive for people to place them-selves in serious danger, whether as active participants in an insurgency or pas-sive supporters. In the

³⁶ Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 36-37, 58-59; Francisco Thoumi, “Competitive Advantages in the Production of Trafficking of Coca-Cocaine and Opium Heroin in Afghanistan and the Andean Countries,” in *Innocent Bystanders: Developing Countries and the War on Drugs*, ed. Philip Keefer and Norman Loayza (Washington DC: World Bank Publications, 2010): 362.

³⁷ Metz, “The Future of Insurgency,” 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-5, 10.

modern world, this incentive is often discontent and frustration born of a failed search for personal meaning. When large numbers of people define personal meaning through psychic fulfillment, the outcome may be spiritual insurgency. When people define personal meaning materially, the outcome may be commercial insurgency.”⁴⁰

On the other hand, Kalyvas argues that this distinction is invalid, because “criminal activities are not a simple sideshow of civil wars, but a key activity of many rebel organizations.”⁴¹ In this context, criminal refers to profit-motivated. He further argues that although rebel organizations with ideological objectives may be primarily motivated by grievances, greed may still be playing a significant role. Similarly, Korf argues that greed and grievance are not absolute categories, but may be causally linked; as such, insurgencies may fit more than one classification at once.⁴² Dishman similarly alludes to the idea of a spectrum of profits and politics for terrorist groups transforming into transnational criminal organizations.⁴³ We believe that an analysis that avoids a questionable attempt to analyze subjective, pre-existing, and essentialized feelings of discontent is a more stable basis for the analysis of insurgency. As such, we agree with Korf and Dishman, and assert that the binary classifications between greed and grievance, spiritual and commercial, and ideological and commercial do not suffice as a framework for analysis of hybrid insurgencies.

PROFIT AND LEGITIMACY

As hybrid insurgencies develop parallel social structures and generate increased levels of violence within states, they become increasingly motivated by the twin desires of profit and legitimacy. Profit provides economic capacity and can itself create political legitimacy, but it can also drive insurgencies toward the greed-based side of the spectrum. Profit is therefore more significant in the initial developmental stages of hybrid insurgencies without resources, an insurgency cannot establish itself as an organization. In the later stages, legitimacy becomes

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴¹ Kalyvas, “How Civil Wars Help Explain Organized Crime,” 1521.

⁴² Korf, “Rethinking the Greed-Grievance Nexus,” 201-202.

⁴³ Dishman, “Terrorism, Crime, and Transformation,” 43-58.

crucial for crafting parallel state structures, as well as controlling more resources and generating more profit to sustain the insurgency. Tilly defines legitimacy as “conforming to an abstract principle by the governed, and that governments monopolize the concentrated means of violence.”⁴⁴ For insurgencies, increased legitimacy allows them to achieve economic gain and political control. Once an insurgency has established a stable source of profit, it can then create structures to help it achieve legitimacy. The authority and societal control available to such a developing insurgency allows it to foster a synergistic relationship between legitimacy and profit, growing its power and allowing it to devote more resources to developing parallel state structures and hierarchies. Both legitimacy and profit move insurgencies along the spectrum: the pursuit of profit allows insurgencies to remain sustainable and cohesive in the short-run, while legitimacy increases organizations’ public presence and authority. Together, legitimacy and profit define the material motives behind hybrid insurgencies’ behavior and determine their state-building and state-weakening strategies.

The Desire for Profit

Profit is one of the primary drivers for any organization’s behavior, whether they are states, non-state actors, businesses, or individuals. Insurgencies are no exception. Although our notion of the profit motivation is similar to the greed argument in civil war literature, it is different insofar as we contend that all insurgencies are motivated by greed to some degree, and that profit-driven behavior not only influences an insurgency’s proximity to the spectrum’s greed-driven end, but prolongs a violent equilibrium.

The need for profit drives insurgencies to generate profit in the most effective ways, preferably outside of state control. This includes illicit businesses which meet these requirements. Thus, many insurgencies depend on criminal activities, such as the drug trade, to finance their insurgency. Insurgencies have a unique opportunity to trade in criminal, unregulated markets, which internationally recognized states generally avoid. As Sullivan argues, involvement in these criminal markets allows for increased capabilities in terms of financial gain, flexibility in action, and political legitimacy.⁴⁵ Considering the illegal

⁴⁴ Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 169-186, quoted in Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 54.

⁴⁵ Sullivan, “Counter-Supply and Counter-Violence Approaches,” 187.

businesses insurgencies often choose as avenues of profit, geography and the markets available often determine the business of choice. In the Global South, many insurgencies are dependent on the drug or arms trades to finance their activities. For instance, the Mexican cartels engage in the heroin and marijuana trades, and the Taliban engages in opium production and trafficking, as well as marijuana taxation.⁴⁶ A state will attempt to maintain control over its territories and to enforce law, which insurgencies challenge through participation in illicit markets. In order to maintain their illicit businesses and the markets that they access, insurgencies must seek control of territories and industries. But as Naylor argues, market-based crimes produce income flows that create a “positive impact on GNP” and simultaneously function as a “parallel market in which relative contraband is available at a higher price than on a legal-but-controlled market.”⁴⁷ By participating in organized criminal activity, insurgencies are able to compel the government to consider them as strong economic contributors (assets) that bring substantial prosperity to the state.⁴⁸ This allows them to rapidly generate profit outside of the state’s control while competing with and delegitimizing the state.

As Berdal and other scholars argue, an insurgency’s pursuit of profit often coincides with socio-political grievances.⁴⁹ We similarly emphasize that insurgencies require a grievance-based motive to pursue their self-interests—making their criminal enterprises not only profit-driven, but ideological as well.

⁴⁶ Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 41; Grillo, “El Narco,” loc. 56 of 556; Gretchen Peters, “Haqqani Network Financing: The Evolution of an Industry,” report, *Combating Terrorism Center*, West Point (July 2012): 45, <https://perma.cc/E3D7-PXFF>; “Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team on Specific Cases of Cooperation between Organized Crime Syndicates and Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities Eligible for Listing under Paragraph 1 of Security Council Resolution 2160 (2014),” report, *United Nations Security Council* (2015): 9, <https://perma.cc/9XWS-YTGE>

⁴⁷ R.T. Naylor, “Towards a General Theory of Profit-Driven Crimes,” *British Journal of Criminology* 43.1 (2003): 86, 90, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/43.1.81>

⁴⁸ Daniel Rosenblum and Maggie Jones, “Did the Taliban’s Opium Eradication Campaign Cause a Decline in HIV Infections in Russia?,” *Substance Use and Misuse* 48.6 (2013): 471, <https://doi.org/10.3109/10826084.2013.778282>; Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 2, 81; Killebrew, “Criminal Insurgency in the Americas and Beyond,” 39.

⁴⁹ Mats Berdal, “Beyond Greed and Grievance—and Not Too Soon,” *Review of International Studies* 31.4 (2005): 691, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210505006698>; Peter Andreas and Joel Wallman, “Illicit Markets and Violence: What Is the Relationship?,” *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 52.3 (2009): 225, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-009-9200-6>

An insurgency may continue to engage in a violent equilibrium by choice. It may be more beneficial, financially and politically, to remain locked in a stalemate with the existing state, perpetuating a violent equilibrium in which neither the state nor the insurgency achieves a monopoly on violence, because the state of a violent equilibrium allows an insurgency to continue its drive for profit. During this process, generating wealth and access to resources allows insurgencies to provide basic services to populations within territories under their control. Wesley, for instance, suggests that providing resources, such as services or protection, can garner insurgencies popular support.⁵⁰ Therefore, as insurgencies provide services typically provided by the state, like education and protection, they garner support from the lacking local population. This support legitimizes their movement, which allows them to further increase their profits through extractive means. Engaging in criminal markets thus allows insurgencies to build state-like structures, which include methods of enforcing the rule of law. In a Weberian framework, these actions can be seen as generating legal-rational authority.^{51 52} This grey area enables an insurgency to remain both politically viable and legitimate, sustaining moral leverage on the state, but to continue operating to continue its revenues of profit. expounded in the data analysis section.

The Desire for Legitimacy

While the desire for profit often leads insurgencies to take legitimizing actions, successful insurgencies must also seek legitimacy as an end in and of itself. Within liberal theory, it is traditionally thought that states are defined by their legitimacy.⁵³ Erman and Möller suggest that “state legitimacy” involves official and lasting recognition by other states as well as non-governmental

⁵⁰ Michael Wesley, “The State of the Art on the Art of State Building,” *Global Governance* 14.3 (2008): 379, <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-01403008>

⁵¹ Bich Thi Ngoc Tran, “The Relationship between State Effectiveness and State Legitimacy: A Quantitative Test,” master’s thesis, Illinois State University (2018): 6, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2067466421>

⁵² Rousseau, Locke and Hobbes posit that the state derives legitimacy through a “social contract” with the population, which grants it a “monopoly on violence.” This entails both enforcement of law or justice, and protection. Wealth, we argue, allows states to perform these services, thus granting it legitimacy. Thus, insurgencies who grant these same services can also derive legitimacy from them. *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵³ Terry Macdonald, “What’s So Special about States? Liberal Legitimacy in a Globalising World,” *Political Studies* 56.3 (2008): 547, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2008.00750.x>.

organizations, intergovernmental organizations, and the people living within a state's territory.⁵⁴ In conclusion, government expenditure levels will change in response to a decline in external debt servicing ability, because the alternative, defaulting on the debt, would imminently threaten the survival of the electoral authoritarian incumbent. Instead, they will attempt to implement austerity policies or targeted rent distribution and repay their debt for as long as they can. Legitimacy, therefore, must be earned, and it allows insurgencies to develop parallel state structures while improving public access to goods and services. States and insurgencies can gain legitimacy through enforcement of justice as determined by the state or insurgency. However, enforcement of justice does not equate to the rule of law; law must be established and clarified before it can be enforced, while justice is more spontaneous and subjective. Often, insurgencies and their offshoots will base their claims to legitimacy from demonstrations of “street justice” or tit-for-tat retributory violence, in attempts to cement their status as authoritative organizations. As profit is generated, insurgencies can create parallel state institutions—including bodies and methods to enforce the law. This capability then furthers their claim to violence and authority, creating legal-rational legitimacy through the enforcement of law and justice.⁵⁵ Cooper asserts that political entities including insurgencies obtain legitimacy from the basis of their projected beliefs, whereupon corresponding actions win them popular support.⁵⁶ As such, possessing greater access to crucial resources and providing protection for civilian populations can also grant legitimacy to insurgencies.⁵⁷

While motivations for obtaining legitimacy can vary between insurgencies, a key factor in determining these motivations is the need to compete for resources, such as weapons, supplies, food, equipment, and territory.⁵⁸ Tilly defines what states do as four primary different activities: state making, war making, protection, and extraction.⁵⁹ Legitimacy allows insurgents to act more like states,

⁵⁴ Eva Erman and Niklas Möller, “Political Legitimacy for Our World: Where Is Political Realism Going?” *Journal of Politics* 80.2 (2018): 526–527, <https://doi.org/10.1086/694548>

⁵⁵ According to Weber (1974), there are three sources of state legitimacy: charisma, tradition, and legal-rational authority. Legal-rational authority refers to “rationality of the rule of law of the state.” Tran, “The Relationship between State Effectiveness and State Legitimacy,” 6.

⁵⁶ Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 5-6.

⁵⁷ John P. Sullivan, “Counter-Supply and Counter-Violence Approaches to Narcotics Trafficking,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 21.1 (2010): 182, 190, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592311003589245>

⁵⁸ Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 10.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

meaning they have more capabilities to eliminate or neutralize enemies inside and outside of their territories (enforcement of domestic laws and territorial integrity), eliminating rivals of clients (economic protection), and acquiring resources for economic gains (resource extraction). Despite ideological insurgencies placing a more apparent emphasis on state-building and legitimacy to become parallel state structures, commercial insurgencies also seek out legitimacy and profit through these four activities and their subsequent economic gains. Establishing legitimacy thus eases access to resources for insurgencies. In turn, community relationships can strengthen loyalty and resource accessibility to insurgencies that can prove beneficial (even more so in rural areas).⁶⁰ These relationships can serve to provide protection; populations often cultivate a “folk perception” that these insurgency groups are “social protectors” against the failing state.⁶¹ In essence, legitimacy allows insurgencies to act more like states. Often, this legitimacy is bought with resources, including provisions of resources and services that are classically state services. For example, in Mexico, the Zetas have placed advertisements in billboards offering “a good salary, food, and attention to your family” or benefits, such as life insurance.”⁶² Increasing legitimacy can also perpetuate increased access to resources, reinforcing the cycle of profit-making and legitimacy-seeking.

APPLYING THE SPECTRUM: TWO CASE STUDIES

This paper will examine two insurgencies—the Taliban and the Mexican drug cartels—as case studies to demonstrate the applicability of our theory. Despite differences in context and circumstance, the methods that these two organizations employ to obtain legitimacy and profit are largely similar. For instance, their involvement with the drug trade establishes massively lucrative industries in their respective states.⁶³ This not only strengthens the state, but also benefits local economies, and suggests that profit can translate into political legitimacy. As insurgencies generate profit and establish wealth, other actors are increasingly pressured to assert their stakes as authority figures, augmenting legitimacy. Specifically, as insurgencies gain power through profit, other actors including military, community and religious leaders, competing intra-insurgency forces and other insurgencies begin to see their authority challenged, resulting in a

⁶⁰ Sullivan, “Counter-Supply and Counter-Violence Approaches,” 182.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁶² Grillo, “El Narco,” loc. 105 of 556.

⁶³ Killebrew, “Criminal Insurgency in the Americas and Beyond,” 39.

competition between the stakeholders to gain favor of the populace. This, in turn, allows insurgencies to be seen as more legitimate. As seen with the cartel-police relations over plaza drug trafficking paths, as well as the competition for funds among the vast number of Taliban militant groups, these insurgencies struggle to maintain a monopoly for resources in an effort to increase their leverage against the state.^{64 65} Additionally, the profit that insurgencies deliver to local economies increases popular support, which further builds legitimacy. Nevertheless, it should be noted that profit can also hinder legitimacy, and insurgencies must navigate this balance carefully.

Settling on a territory allows “insurgencies acting like nation-states” to seek resources “often considered illicit and criminal in origin” as an upper hand against competing actors’ violent pressures.⁶⁶ A group’s evolution as a criminal organization is often marked by their entry into the “global black economy,” which grants it widespread access to and considerable leverage in drug movement, “human trafficking, prostitution, identity theft, arms trading, [and/or] illicit financial transactions.”⁶⁷ This action can de-legitimize an insurgency; after all, a criminal enterprise is a criminal enterprise, and people will treat it as such if it continues to engage in large-scale illicit activities. However, the economic capital it generates allows it to bolster other aspects of its legitimacy. By boosting popular support for its cause, an insurgency can effectively elevate a sophisticated system of recruitment, intelligence, military, and commerce hierarchies from a sub-national to a national or even transnational level, thus bolstering its legitimacy and existence as a parallel state structure.⁶⁸ This provides insight into the importance of profit to building legitimacy.

MEXICO AND THE DRUG CARTELS

In some ways, the history of the cartels begins in the post-colonial period of Mexican history. The state of Sinaloa itself has a “history of unruliness,” stemming mostly from its success in resisting Spanish colonization in the late

⁶⁴ Grillo, “El Narco,” loc. 63 of 556

⁶⁵ Peters, “Haqqani Network Financing: The Evolution of an Industry,” 65.

⁶⁶ Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 53.

⁶⁷ Killebrew, “Criminal Insurgency in the Americas,” 48.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 40, 46, 48.

19th century.⁶⁹ Following Spanish defeat, weak state infrastructures gave way to competing armies controlling agricultural and mining sectors, rising national debt, and political divisions among elites.⁷⁰ The post-colonial period in Mexico (1821-1876) was characterized by social unrest and political instability, which enabled criminal enterprises to thrive. With the rise of populist *caudillo* leaders such as General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, systems of patronage and mutual dependency weakened the state, and resulted in massive losses of territory to the United States.⁷¹ Although subsequent leaders like Benito Juárez and Porfirio Díaz sought to modernize and stabilize the Mexican state, corruption and imperialism undermined many of their efforts. This brief period allowed the infrastructure for criminal economic organizations to emerge in territory currently held by Sinaloa. At the same time, opium poppies were first introduced into the Sinaloan mountain regions, providing the ideal product that would serve to fund an insurgency such as a cartel. With its plentiful market potential, Sinaloans saw opium as a means to pull them “out of wretched poverty” and support rural low-income communities.⁷² After the Mexican Revolution of 1910, state power waned, and criminal organizations were able to flourish in the Sinaloan mountain regions. By the 1970s, the drug industry had become much more profitable as a result of international trade, with an influx of American money making it possible to finance entire neighborhoods and even provide “brand-new pickup trucks [for] unpaved roads.”⁷³ The shift to *narcotraficantes* and international smugglers gave rise to the major cartels in the 1990s, and along with them, influential kingpins like Joaquín Guzmán-Loera and Carillo Fuentes.⁷⁴ Together, these factors created fertile ground for an insurgency financed by the illegal drug trade.

Compared to traditional insurgencies, the Mexican cartels are decentralized, and challenging to characterize—there is no single cartel that controls the drug trade from Mexico to the rest of the world. As such, we focus on the largest cartels for this case study, such as Los Zetas and the Sinaloa Cartel. We chose to analyze the Mexican cartels as a single decentralized insurgency because of the similarity

⁶⁹ The Sinaloans resisted the Spanish Conquistadors more successfully than the Aztecs in the 1500s, and Sinaloa served as a prime location for silver and gun contraband during the War of Independence from Spain (1810-1821). See Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 42, 236 of 363.

⁷⁰ Burton Kirkwood, *History of Mexico* (Westport, WA: Greenwood Publishing, 2000): 90.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 89, 97-99.

⁷² Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 45 of 363.

⁷³ Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 58 of 363.

⁷⁴ Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 58, 78, 93 of 363.

of their tactics and their collaboration, much like we view the Taliban and the Haqqani network as a single insurgency in the next section. Cartels such as Sinaloa are largely characterized by their economic objectives. While many of the cartel members are geographically bound, and often share ethnic roots, their primary objective is not bound by ideology. Instead, they vary by cartel and change over time.⁷⁵ In the present day, Mexican cartels not only gain legitimacy through the traditional illicit drug trade, but also from successfully navigating the drawbacks of involvement in the criminal economy. They also derive much of their legitimacy by threatening national security through excessive and gruesome displays of violence.⁷⁶ Before President Felipe Calderón declared a national war against drugs in 2006, cartels such as Los Zetas and Sinaloa had established themselves as extremely violent paramilitary groups, extorting villagers and dumping bodies in city centers.⁷⁷ In recent years, their methods for violence have become increasingly politicized and selective.^{78 79} These new methods include assassinations of anti-cartel politicians, organized marches against the army, popular demonstrations, and blocking infrastructure to inflict economic damage.⁸⁰ These displays pave the way for them to be known as “a second law” in areas under their control—for example, the La Familia cartel has effectively managed to control the police forces, directing their resources to prosecute non-drug related crimes.⁸¹ This is especially true when they regulate everyday aspects of life, such as healthcare costs, to a greater extent than the government is willing or able to.⁸² While the motives of individual cartels vary, their increasing willingness to engage in politically motivated violence suggests a shift away from profit-oriented to more legitimacy-oriented actions. Constant acts of violence that push the government toward favorable outcomes for the cartels increases their credibility—both to communities under their control and external actors.

Modern scholars of insurgency, such as Lessing, have unnecessarily

⁷⁵ Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 236 of 363.

⁷⁶ Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 233-235 of 363.

⁷⁷ Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 123-124, 128 of 363.

⁷⁸ Kalyvas clarifies that selective violence can be massive in scale. It is thus a matter of selective violence as personalized; it can be public, unnecessary, and sudden. However, it is smaller than indiscriminate violence. See Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 142.

⁷⁹ Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 235 of 363.

⁸⁰ Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 235, 237 of 363.

⁸¹ Kalyvas, “How Civil Wars Help Explain Organized Crime,” 1532-1533.

⁸² Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 118 of 365.

rede-fined insurgency as “state-weakening.”⁸³ As he writes, “whereas rebels fight states, and cartels fight with one another, to *conquer* mutually prized territory and resources, cartels fight states ‘merely’ to *constrain* their behavior and influence policy outcomes.”⁸⁴ However, this argument elides crucial similarities between traditional conceptions of grievance-based insurgencies and greed-based insurgences. Although the cartels do not seek to take over states in their entirety, they have to take on aspects of the state and create parallel state structures in order to pursue their financial aims. For instance, the cartels have repositioned themselves in legitimizing, state-building roles in pursuit of profit. The Zetas, dominant in eastern Mexico, have begun taxing the oil and gas industry while simultaneously extorting industry unions and selling off contraband gas.⁸⁵ This taxation creates a legitimate source of profit, and supplants the state—many citizens of Juarez have argued that since they pay taxes to the cartel, they should not have to pay taxes to the state.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, La Familia has laid claim to and taxed mining and illegal logging industries—industries traditionally controlled by the Mexican state.⁸⁷ More recently, the La Familia cartel has been observed to hand out food aid to families suffering from the economic aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, while other cartels have enforced COVID-19 quarantines.⁸⁸ Additionally, cartels are increasingly beginning to participate in traditional business ventures such as corn farming and cattle rearing, which suggests a growing emphasis on legitimizing profit.⁸⁹ As an example, cartels have emerged as significant players in the avocado trade in Michoacán.⁹⁰ Despite the cartels’ use of illicit and violent methods to gain control, local farmers initially welcomed their involvement due to the services the cartels provided. These services included protection of land and products, with the cartels charging a tax in exchange.⁹¹ Controlling threats to local industries and taking on the roles of law enforcement enables the cartels to replace the state in

⁸³ Kalyvas, “How Civil Wars Help Explain Organized Crime,” 1486.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Grillo, *El Narco*, loc. 237 of 363.

⁸⁶ Ibid, loc. 238 of 363.

⁸⁷ Ibid, loc. 237 of 363.

⁸⁸ Ioan Grillo, “How Mexico’s Drug Cartels Are Profiting From the Pandemic,” opinion, *New York Times*, July 7, 2020, <https://perma.cc/4B4V-P5ZG>

⁸⁹ Ioan Grillo, *Gangster Warlords: Drug Dollars, Killing Fields, and the New Politics of Latin America* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press, 2016), 302.

⁹⁰ Peter O’Dowd and Allison Hagan, “Why Avocados Attract Interest Of Mexican Drug Cartels,” *WBUR*, February 7, 2020, <https://perma.cc/AHH5-27EM>

⁹¹ Ibid.

these respects and potentially gain more dependency as a more reliable source of authority from the populations they serve.

Thus, although scholars such as Lessing have asserted that cartels “do not seek to topple the government and seize formal power” as grievance-motivated actors do, we maintain that cartels should be addressed as both greed *and* grievance-based actors with motivations ranging from the criminal to the political.⁹² Even though cartels do not have an explicit ideology which makes them want to *be* the government themselves, they remain political due to three reasons. First, as Kalyvas argues, “the absence of a formal ideology does not necessarily imply the lack of a group identity.”⁹³ This group identity implies shared grievances and a shared dissatisfaction with the political and economic organization of the existing Mexican state. Second, many cartels provide state-like services, including food, income, benefits, life insurance, and housing.⁹⁴ The demand for services from cartel members and members of the public implies a gap in state services, but more importantly, reflects grievances—whether they are economic, political, or social. As we argue, the provision of state services is an innately political act. Finally, if we consider the Weberian definition of statehood, controlling territory and enforcing justice within is an inherently political act. As Grillo writes, “the Zetas were not thinking like gangsters, but like a paramilitary group controlling territory.”⁹⁵ While the cartels clearly originated as greed-based criminal organizations, these factors strongly suggest that we should consider the cartels as hybrid insurgencies with unique political motivations and grievances.

AFGHANISTAN AND THE TALIBAN

The history of the Taliban is inextricably linked to the Cold War, and the proxy conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States in Afghanistan. During the early 1960s, a mature political system had begun to emerge during the reign of King Mohammed Zahir Shah, with political parties of all ideologies contesting power and influence. However, as Jalali argues, the political system provided a platform for many ideologies, but suppressed more mainstream

⁹² Lessing, “Logics of Violence,” 1488.

⁹³ Kalyvas, “How Civil Wars Help Explain Organized Crime,” 1527.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1528.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1532.

moderate movements, leading to the rise of extremism.⁹⁶ Two of the most influential were the Marxist-Leninist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, and a loose coalition of conservative Islamist parties. In 1973, Sardar Mohammed Daud Khan led a successful coup against the ruling monarchy, and drove conservative forces underground.⁹⁷ But Daud's government did not last long, as the People's Democratic Party—with the aid of the Afghan army—overthrew the Daud regime in the 1978 Saur Revolution. Shortly thereafter, coup leaders set up the Revolutionary Council, now the highest political authority of the newly named Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA).⁹⁸ The new communist government was weak, and by the spring of 1979, un-rest had spread to many of Afghanistan's provinces. As a result, the Soviet Union decided to militarily intervene to prop up the failing communist re-gime. However, Islamism conservatives remained defiant, forming guerrilla units known as the Mujahideen and maintaining a sustained insurgency throughout the 1980s with support from the United States. As a result of sustained pressures and increasing losses, Soviet forces finally withdrew in 1989. As a result, the DRA would collapse three years later.

Two years after the war, the founder of the Taliban, Mohammed Omar began to recruit followers in *madrasas*, or Islamic colleges. Many of the fighters that Omar recruited were former *Mujahideen* fighters with experience from the Soviet conflict.⁹⁹ He was dissatisfied with the non-Islamic nature of the post-communist government, and sought to promote his own fundamentalist ideas of Islamic law.¹⁰⁰ In addition to these ideological motivations, material grievances spurred the Taliban's rise to power, such as the Afghan's state's inability to provide basic state services.^{101 102 103} Ethnic grievances have played a role, as most members of the Taliban are ethnically Pashtun.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁶ Ali Ahmad Jalali, *A Military History of Afghanistan: From the Great Game to the Global War on Terror* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2017): 345.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 347-348

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁹⁹ "The Afghan Taliban: Organizational Overview," *Stanford University*, <https://perma.cc/65R7-9V92>

¹⁰⁰ Shantanie Mariet D'Souza, "Taliban: The Rebels Who Aspire to Be Rulers," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 3.1 (2016): 21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347797015626043>

¹⁰¹ Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency," 8.

¹⁰² Jalali, "A Military History of Afghanistan," 434.

¹⁰³ D'Souza, "Taliban: The Rebels," 21.

¹⁰⁴ Kriti M. Shah, "The Pashtun, the Taliban, and America's Longest War," *Asian Survey* 57.6 (2017): 981, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2017.57.6.981>

Notably, the Taliban rise to power was—in many ways—remarkably peaceful; when dealing with rival militias, they would often send a delegation of clerics to negotiate terms of disarmament and the implementation of Sharia law. If the militias failed to accede to their demands, the Taliban would send a new delegation that included pious locals (often elderly) to negotiate again. They would only resort to violence if both sets of demands were rejected.¹⁰⁵ This legitimizing strategy allowed the Taliban fighters to be seen as committed Islamists while building alliances and support. This strategy paid off—by 1995, the Taliban had over 25,000 fighters, and had taken over twelve provinces.¹⁰⁶ In 1996, they would take over Kabul, the capital, and declare the formation of an Islamic regime.¹⁰⁷ By 1998, the Taliban had gained control of almost all of Afghanistan.¹⁰⁸ Over the next few years, the Taliban regime would establish a government based on Sharia law, and sought to centralize and strengthen bureaucratic structures of control.¹⁰⁹ ¹¹⁰ However, due to their treatment of women, as well as a wide array of documented human rights abuses, the Taliban never achieved significant international recognition, with only three foreign governments conferring legal recognition.¹¹¹ Following the September 11th attack on the Twin Towers in 2001, a coalition led by the United States would invade Afghanistan, toppling the Taliban regime in less than three months.¹¹² But despite their defeat, the Taliban almost immediately began regrouping to re-emerge as an insurgency once again.

The prevailing literature treats the modern Taliban as a predominantly ideo-logical insurgency. For instance, Jones argues that the primary motivations of the Taliban are ideological, and that this ideology has remained remarkably consistent throughout their organization's history.¹¹³ Similarly, Euben

¹⁰⁵ Nasreen Ghufuran, "The Taliban and the Civil War Entanglement," *Asian Survey* 41.3 (2001): 468, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2001.41.3.462>

¹⁰⁶ "The Afghan Taliban," *Stanford University*.

¹⁰⁷ Ghufuran, "The Taliban and the Civil War Entanglement," 472.

¹⁰⁸ D'Souza, "Taliban," 22.

¹⁰⁹ Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Q. Zaman, *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts From Al-Banna to Bin Laden* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009): 409.

¹¹⁰ Ghufuran, "The Taliban and the Civil War Entanglement," 476-477.

¹¹¹ "The Afghan Taliban," *Stanford University*.

¹¹² Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency," 7.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

and Zaman also characterize the Taliban as primarily ideological, rather than economic.¹¹⁴ However, as we argue, economic motivations often further ideological motivations, and vice-versa— it is far too simple to categorize insurgent groups as either greed-based or grievance-based. No insurgency can be purely ideological, as the Taliban regime rose to power, it had to be able to economically sustain itself and its fighters.¹¹⁵ These economic motivations can be seen in the practices of the Haqqani network, one of the most powerful semi-autonomous factions of the Taliban.¹¹⁶ During the early years of the Taliban insurgency, the Haqqani network was able to procure necessary supplies from outside sources, such as the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence agency and the United States.¹¹⁷ However, in the 1990s, sources of outside support began to diminish with the withdrawal of the Soviets, and the Haqqani network began to shift to illicit enterprises to fund their operations, including extortion and drug trafficking.¹¹⁸ Upon the assumption of power by the Taliban, the Haqqani network was absorbed into the Taliban regime in 1996.¹¹⁹ However, the network remained economically and operationally autonomous from the Taliban, even as they generally collaborated on military campaigns and the fulfilment of broader political objectives. This holds true into the present day— as Peters argues, the network has “evolved over type network exhibiting robust relationships with regional political, military and economic circles, and that members of the group have a financial incentive to remain the dealmakers and the enforcers in their area of operations.”¹²⁰ In many ways, the Haqqani network can be seen as one of the funding arms of the Taliban: they have penetrated key business sectors, including import, export, transport, real estate, and construction within Afghanistan and beyond. Many network leaders own partial shares in real estate and front companies.¹²¹ In addition to its engagement with legal businesses, the Haqqani network also participates in the black-market economy. For instance, the network runs a protection racket that targets businesses operating in its zone of influence, ranging from small local shopkeepers to international companies—

¹¹⁴ Euben and Zaman, *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought*, 411.

¹¹⁵ “Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team,” 1.

¹¹⁶ Peters, “Haqqani Network Financing,” i, 24.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15-16, 18.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20-22.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

“effectively selling insurance against itself.”¹²² With the wide reach of the network, even the NATO coalition’s construction projects are not immune to extortion. The Haqqani network also launders money for the Taliban, using gas stations, auto parts dealerships, lum-beryards, and other front businesses to move funds. Robbery and kidnapping are also avenues for revenue, as well as the drug trade—in particular, the network specializes in smuggling precursor chemicals used to process raw opium into heroin.¹²³ More indirectly, the implemented taxes on opium and marijuana production.¹²⁴

Although common Haqqani fighters “appear less motivated by money than by a blend of ideology, honor, revenge and the notion that they are taking part in a historic and grand battle,” the activities of the network belie that notion.¹²⁵ While the Mexican cartels can be described as a hybrid insurgency with greed-based origins that has taken on grievance-based aspects, the Taliban are the opposite. Interestingly enough, this can be seen in Taliban attitudes towards the drug trade—as Swartz argues, “since 2001, the insurgency had decreased their requirements of strict Sharia law because of reliance on the financial backing of drug smugglers.”¹²⁶ Although a traditional paradigm of commercial and ideological insurgency would reject the idea that an “ideological” insurgency can prioritize economic considerations over ideology, our model not only accommodates such a result, but predicts it. This is not simply an ephemeral trend—as a 2015 report prepared for the UN Security Council noted, this involvement in criminal (profit-seeking and illegal) activities has significantly increased in recent years.¹²⁷ As the report argues, “this trend...encourages those within the Taliban movement who have the greatest economic incentive to oppose any meaningful process of reconciliation with the new Government.”¹²⁸ As the Taliban continue to wage war against the Afghan government, we will likely see more and more instances of economic realities coming into conflict with founding ideologies. Of course,

¹²² *Ibid.*, 39.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 40, 44-50, 53-54; Cooper, “Greed and Grievance,” 13.

¹²⁴ “Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team,” 9.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹²⁶ Brandon J. Swartz, “Afghanistan Connection: Heroin Production, Distribution, and Consumption,” Master’s thesis, Michigan Technological University (2011): 20, <https://doi.org/10.37099/mtu.dc.etsd/443>

¹²⁷ “Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team,” 1.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

this is not to say that the Taliban will become a cartel unto itself. As we have noted, like all hybrid insurgencies, the Taliban engage in both profit-seeking and legitimization, with profit-seeking taking precedence over legitimization for insurgencies with greed-based origins, and vice-versa. The Taliban, more than other insurgencies, are distinctly aware of the need for legitimization—they once held power, and they seek to hold it again. As a result, they have proclaimed themselves to be a government-in-exile or shadow government, rather than solely a military opposition, and take actions consistent with that characterization.¹²⁹ In regions under their control, the Taliban collect taxes and provide public services, including healthcare and religious education. Similarly, the Taliban have also established a mobile judicial system based on Sharia law, which has earned a reputation of impartiality within the country.^{130 131 132}

CONCLUSION

From our case studies, we can see that each insurgency occupies a different point on the spectrum of insurgency. Each group may have “opposing” traits and a combination of each of the traits listed, but none can exist at the extreme polar ends of the spectrum. No insurgency is static—over time, their position along the spectrum can change, and sometimes drastically (See figure 3).

Figure 3: Placing the Case Studies on the Spectrum



Overall, modern insurgencies represent a state-weakening and state-building phenomenon within the international system, posing vast challenges for political integration and the mitigation of internecine violence. Understanding these

¹²⁹ Antonio Giustozzi, “Hearts, Minds, and the Barrel of a Gun,” *Prism* 3.2 (2012): 71, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26469730>

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹³² Peters, “Haqqani Network Financing,” 22.

“hybrid” insurgencies means moving beyond simple, binary understandings, and acknowledging the wide array of motivations along the spectrum of insurgency.

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BETWEEN INTEGRATION AND ISOLATION: THE SOCIAL PENDULUM OF NARVA, ESTONIA¹

BUSHWELLER, COLIN²

INTRODUCTION³

Considered Europe's most "Eastern" city, Narva is in the Ida-Viru region of Northeastern Estonia, situated along the nation's border with the Russian Federation. Estonia's third largest municipality, with a population of roughly 56,000, Narva's residents have historically lived on the margins of Estonian society: culturally, linguistically, politically, and socially.

Visitors are often struck by the large-scale Soviet apartment complexes right at Narva's entrance, which contrast starkly with the modern and old-town style of architecture found in Estonia's other large cities. Wary of the city's overwhelming Russian community, other Estonians dissociate from this border city. Similarly, many of Narva's residents sense this lack of belonging. This mutual dissociation establishes a national and social divide in the country.

Approximately 90 percent of Narva's population speaks Russian as their native language, with a vast majority of the city's inhabitants possessing inadequate levels of Estonian language. Local media is almost entirely in Russian. Kremlin-sponsored channels, such as RT (formerly Russia Today) and Sputnik, are also broadcasted in Narva, with many of its residents serving as loyal viewers of these notoriously biased, propaganda-filled channels. It is a rare occurrence to hear (and

¹ The bulk of the following article is a chapter from the author's honors thesis, titled "Integrated or Isolated: Exploring the Social Bidirectionality of Ethnic Russians in Estonia and Latvia." As such, this article has been adapted and adjusted from the thesis so that it functions as a standalone analysis. The methodology and results obtained are part of the larger study associated with the thesis.

² A recent graduate of the University of Vermont, Colin Bushweller's area of research specializes in the Baltic region's post-Soviet society. His research analyzes the complications surrounding language use, citizenship, and social belonging for the region's ethnic Russian minority.

³ This work is licensed under CC BY 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

use) Estonian on the streets, as well.

Overall, Narva is a remnant of Estonia's historical relationship with the Soviet Union. Furthermore, it holds an air of unease for ethnic Estonians, who view its historical Soviet ties as a barrier to the nation's westernization. Estonia is westernizing, shedding its Soviet past and integrating into Western Europe. Narva may be a roadblock to Estonians' desired integration. Estonia must therefore reckon with the fact that its third-largest city operates in a different cultural and linguistic world, sharing little to no commonality with much of Estonian society.

Narva was wiped of its Estonian past after Soviet and Nazi bombings during World War II. Its post-war urban reconstruction modeled the layout of Soviet cities. Block apartment complexes were built to house a soon-to-be influx of Russian industrial workers, ridding the city of its once vibrant Estonian heritage, which was significantly different from the monotonous, Soviet culture that replaced it. The uranium factory was revamped to support the Soviet Union's nuclear project. And over time, a Russian identity emerged in Narva, with many even opposing Estonian independence in the early 1990s.⁴ Since then, it is difficult to discern whether or not much has changed in regards to Narva's connection to the Estonian state, as the city shares more similarities with its Soviet bellwethers than modern Estonian society.⁵

However, there has been a recent focus on Narva's development, as Estonian politicians and citizens aim to integrate the isolated population. This component of social bidirectionality for Narva—the presence of new initiatives and information to better incorporate it into Estonian society, which contrast with the ongoing social issues regarding its isolation—was identified in a media content analysis from one half of my thesis research.

Bidirectionality refers to the movement of a concept in two usually opposite directions; in this case, social bidirectionality relates to the co-existence that Narva experiences with integration and isolation in Estonian society. This

⁴ Lisa Fein, "Symbolic Boundaries and National Borders: The Construction of an Estonian Russian Identity," *Nationalities Papers* 33.3 (2005): 339, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990500193196>

⁵ David Trimbach and Shannon O'Lear, "Russians in Estonia: Is Narva the Next Crimea?" *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 56.5 (2015): 493-498, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2015.1110040>; Marika Kirch and Aksel Kirch, "Ethnic relations: Estonians and non-Estonians," *Nationalities Papers* 23.1 (1995): 43-59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905999508408348>

part of my thesis research examined 108 articles over twelve months from three leading Estonian news outlets. For the purpose of this paper, I draw on the results from these Estonian outlets, whose reporting and content mirror dominant discourse in Estonian society, as a way to create an image of Narva's struggles and developments.

This paper will examine Narva's bidirectional positionality in Estonia, analyzing how this ethnic enclave impacts the overall image and lifestyle of the minority Russian population Estonia, and specifically for Narva's ethnic Russian residents. Drawing on Estonian samples from the study that discussed Narva, this paper will follow a discursive structure to analyze the social and ideological implications of media discourse in Estonia. This paper incorporates samples from the text to better understand this border city and its pendulum structure, as it maneuvers between both isolative and integrative qualities. The aim of this analysis is to demonstrate that though Narva continues to struggle with its image and place in Estonian society, due to historically ingrained linguistic and cultural traditions, it is undertaking development opportunities and investment projects to bridge its divide from Estonia.

This paper contains a historical contextualization of Narva, an explanation of its methodology, and two main sections: one analyzing the city's isolative qualities, and then another discussing its integrative qualities. The final section will discuss Narva's future in Estonian society.

SOVIET OCCUPATION AND THE LOSS OF ESTONIAN CULTURE IN NARVA

One of the USSR's main objectives was to instate an ethnic Russian majority presence in all of its republics and phase out non-Slavic ethnicities and cultures. To accomplish this, the Soviet Union initiated mass deportations of non-Slavic ethnic groups, such as Estonians, to gulags and other uninhabitable parts of Russia shortly after the country's illegal annexation in 1940 and throughout the decade.⁶ The target groups of these deportations included "members of the national elite, their families, and 'unreformed' criminals, and prostitutes."⁷

⁶ "Key Moments in the History of Estonia," *Demokratizatsiya* 11.4 (2003): 636-637; Heinrichs Strods and Matthew Kott, "The File on Operation 'Priboi': A Re-Assessment of the Mass Deportations of 1949," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 33.1 (2002): 1-5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629770100000191>

⁷ Olaf Mertelsmann and Aigi Rahi-Tamm, "Soviet Mass Violence in Estonia Revisited," *Journal*

Tens of thousands of Estonians were deported throughout this first decade of occupation, eliminating a large portion of the native population and significantly weakening its demographic balance. The most destructive deportations were those that took place in 1941 and 1949. Thousands of executions occurred throughout this period, as well, in order to root out political dissidents that Soviet authorities deemed threats to the government. Others were also forcefully placed into the Soviet military. In 1949 under “Operation Priboi,” for example, roughly 21,000 Estonians were seized and deported to Siberia—many dying on the journey—with deportees ranging from newborns to the elderly. In total from this decade, approximately 47,000 were arrested for political reasons, 35,000 were deported, and 34,000 were forced into the Red Army to spend several months in labor camps, during which one third perished.⁸ This act of Soviet brutality resulted in a drastic decline of population for Estonia, and it also introduced new levels of fear, panic, and terror for ethnic Estonians. These deportations and the dramatic effect they left on the nation were the Soviet Union’s systematic, methodical process of national obliteration and cultural destruction for Estonia.⁹

Thousands of political executions and small-scale deportations occurred throughout this period, as well, so there exist only approximate estimates on the number of Estonians who lost their lives as a result of these policies. The government-sanctioned deportations were discontinued when the USSR entered its de-Stalinization period in 1956.

To make up for the population loss and ensure Slavic dominance, Soviet authorities transferred thousands of ethnic Russians into Estonia, rendering the city’s demographics entirely Russian. Many settled around the Ida-Viru region, located in northeastern Estonia near the Russian border and home to Narva. The Soviets and Nazis bombed this region in the 1944 Battle of Narva, when both sides fought for control of this strategically-located border city. These bombings demolished nearly the entire infrastructure and old-town baroque architecture of the region, especially in Narva. Instead of rebuilding the cultural infrastructure, the USSR forbade Estonians from returning to the Ida-Viru area, and proceeded to demolish the entire city. This made room for the construction of Soviet-style

of Genocide Research 11.2-3 (2009): 310, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520903119001>

⁸ Aigi Rahi-Tamm, “Human Losses,” in *The White Book: Losses Inflicted on the Estonian Nation by Occupation Regimes*, ed. Vello Salo (Tallinn: Estonian Encyclopaedia Publishers, 2005): 38-39.

⁹ Strods and Kott, “The File on Operation ‘Priboi,’” 18; Mertelsmann and Rahi-Tamm, “Soviet Mass Violence in Estonia Revisited,” 308-309.

apartments for the uranium factory workers, since Ida-Viru was an industrial epicenter for the USSR's nuclear program.¹⁰ The Soviet Union's distrust in ethnic Estonians prevented them from living or working in this region at large.

Once Estonia gained its independence in 1990, Narva was left in a peculiar place. Geographically located in Estonia, but culturally and linguistically connected to Russia, the municipal population felt disconnected and resisted Estonian independence—they demanded autonomy. Many identified not as Estonians, but as Russians residing in the Estonian Soviet Republic.¹¹

Despite these demands, Narva remained part of Estonia because of border agreements made between Estonian and Russian government officials. With this came a number of integrational challenges as the Estonian government reformed a variety of citizenship and naturalization policies in the 1990s. The naturalization process in Estonia was especially challenging for ethnic Russians, since the exam required an advanced knowledge of the very complex Estonian language, as well as Estonian history and culture. Sometimes there was a required oath of allegiance, too. Factors such as these, compounded with an inability for some to fully accept the dissolution of the USSR, deterred ethnic Russians from becoming citizens.¹²

Instead of becoming citizens or moving back to Russia, many ethnic Russians obtained gray passports signifying that they were stateless citizens. Though permitted to reside in Estonia, gray passport holders are excluded from voting in national elections and from engaging in certain types of employment, including law enforcement, public service positions, lawyers, notaries, and

¹⁰ For Narva's role as the industrial epicenter for the USSR's nuclear program, where "most of this secret research was carried out," see E. Lippmaa and E. Maremäe, "The Beginnings of Uranium Production in Estonia," *Oil Shale* 20.2 (Tallinn, Estonia: Estonian Academy Publishers, 2003): 167-168; Gunter Faure and Teresa Mensing, *The Estonians; The Long Road to Independence*, (London, UK: Lulu.com, 2012): 304.

¹¹ Fein, "Symbolic Boundaries and National Borders: The Construction of an Estonian Russian Identity," 339.

¹² Richard Mole, "State- and Nation-Building: the Politics of Identity," in *The Baltic States from the Soviet Union to the European Union: Identity, Discourse and Power in the Post-Communist Transition of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania* (London, UK: Routledge, 2012): 87-92, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203121498>; Ammon Cheskin and Angela Kachuyevski, "The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Post-Soviet Space: Language, Politics and Identity," *Europe-Asia Studies* 71.1 (2019): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1080/096668136.2018.1529467>; David Cameron and Mitchell Orenstein, "Post-Soviet Authoritarianism: The Influence of Russia in Its Near Abroad," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 28.1 (2012): 25, <https://doi.org/10.2747/1060-586x.28.1.1>

pharmacists. They also cannot be members of a political party nor can they stand for a seat in parliament. The restrictions around the gray passport has initiated an identity crisis for many ethnic Russians related to their stateless status. This has impeded their sense of Estonian national identity, owing to the restrictiveness and civic exclusion they experience, and it has consequently placed them in an ambiguous position in society as they navigate the complexity of finding belonging in a nation of which, in the official sense, they are not a member or citizen.¹³ To this day, Estonia—with a population of 1.3 million, where 25 percent of which is ethnically Russian—has over 71,000 stateless citizens.¹⁴ The vast majority of those stateless citizens are ethnically Russian and many of whom reside in Narva.¹⁵ Ethnic Russians' unwillingness to obtain Estonian citizenship has previously been seen as a sign of disrespect among ethnic Estonians. This has then furthered cultural and ethnic tension, since citizenship has evolved as a dividing social factor in post-Soviet Estonia.

METHODOLOGY

This article employs a discursive approach to media content analysis as the methodological structure for examining, exploring, and understanding the social positionality of Narva, Estonia. Because the study will analyze national news reports, it uses content analysis, an interpretive approach, to examine how the content of a communication source, such as a media outlet, reflects the political issues and public discourse found in a country, and then what that content signals about society itself. Overall, content analysis employs the “interpretation of the content of text and data through the systematic classification process of coding” to identify recurring social themes or patterns.¹⁶ Introduced in the early 20th century, media content analysis was initially used as a method to study and investigate propaganda. Over the past several decades, its application and usage has extended into other analytic and academic realms. It is a specialized subset of content analysis,

¹³ Tacita Vero, “The Strange Case of the Alien Passport,” *Roads and Kingdoms*, March 12, 2017, <https://perma.cc/YMM3-99XN>

¹⁴ “Population by Ethnic Nationality,” *Estonian Statistics*, June 9, 2020, <https://perma.cc/QQ7J-K33X>; “Stateless Population in Estonia,” *Estonian Statistics*, 2020, <http://andmebaas.stat.ee/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=RV0222U#>

¹⁵ “Number of Stateless Residents in Estonia Drops by over 2,200 in 2018,” *Eesti Rahvusringhääling [ERR]*, January 3, 2019, <https://perma.cc/E544-2GMD>

¹⁶ Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon, “Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis,” *Qualitative Health Research* 15.9 (2005): 1278, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1049732305276687>

whose results produce a two-fold impact, allowing researchers to comprehensively evaluate communicative messages and also offer strategic insights through the tracking of thematic trends.¹⁷

The purpose of content analysis is to describe the characteristics of a designated source's material and to offer a qualitative depiction of society, as created by a set of themes and categories.¹⁸ These organized ideas or stories then provide meaning and understanding of certain events and experiences, which thereby offer glimpses into deeper facets of society. News media picks up on these trends and uses them to organize its own content. As a result, news media often reflects the pre-existing discursive frameworks in society.¹⁹ Examining the social frameworks of Narva's integration and isolation through the media will reveal how the city functions in contemporary Estonian society. It will also help to explain how two starkly different phenomena—integration and isolation—can coexist in one municipality.

The Estonian results in this paper are part of a larger study, which applies media content analysis to understand the social bidirectionality of ethnic Russians in both Estonia and Latvia. This article's results—a subset of the larger findings—center around the national news discourse about Narva, Estonia. Because this article is only examining Estonia, the methodological component for Latvia has been left out in this description.

On a structural level, this study followed a qualitative selection process to gather 36 articles from three national outlets in Estonia. This selection process considered the specific features and social factors that were discussed in the samples, ensuring that the samples do not contain generic reporting (i.e. weather, city events, etc.) that is not useful to the study. Chosen from the outlets' politics, society, and culture sections, the study's articles²⁰ contain content representative of the discourse in each country's economic, social, cultural, and political environments, and therefore relevant to the content analysis.

¹⁷ J. R. Macnamara, "Media Content Analysis: Its Uses, Benefits and Best Practice Methodology," *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal* 6.1 (2005): 21.

¹⁸ "Content Analysis," *Columbia Public Health*, <https://perma.cc/UF7J-32B5>

¹⁹ Catherine Happer and Greg Philo, "The Role of the Media in the Construction of Public Belief and Social Change," *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 1.1 (2013): 322, <https://doi.org/10.5964/jsp.1.1.1.96>; J.R. Macnamara, "Media Content Analysis," 21.

²⁰ All articles used in the study are cited and available at the end of the document.

Table 1: Overview and Characterization of Selected Media Outlets

Estonian Outlets			
	ERR	POSTIMEES	DELFI ESTONIA
Language of Samples	English	Russian	Russian
Reason for Selection	<i>ERR</i> offers a unique governmental perspective, and provides Estonian reporting in English for global readers	<i>Postimees</i> is considered the country's oldest newspaper, and it is Estonia's second-most popular Russian language news portal, reporting on all things related to the nation's Russian community	As a regional outlet in the Baltics, <i>Delfi Estonia</i> is the most popular news source for the country's ethnic Russian population, providing news relating to society, politics, culture, Narva, and more.
Number of Samples	36	36	36
Ownership	Estonian Government	Eesti Meedia Group	Ekspress Grupp
Website	news.err.ee	rus.postimees.ee	rus.delfi.ee

ERR translates and republishes content from Estonian into English, so all ERR samples are in the English language, offering insight into Estonian reporting. The other Postimees and Delfi Estonia samples are in the Russian language, offering insight into the social discourse and contemporary struggles faced by the Russian community. In total, there are 108 samples for Estonia.

The timeline for article selection was the 12-month period between February 1, 2019 and January 31, 2020. Three articles were gathered per month for each outlet to create a detailed reflection of Estonian society throughout the entire year, and establish a representative image of the identified themes. As such, no one theme or concept dominated the study, but rather, many appeared and evolved within the timeframe.

This 12-month timeline was selected for two reasons: 1) Estonian elections occurred during it, which are a reliable catalyst for bringing voter concerns to the forefront of media and stimulating broader discussions about their implications for citizens and society; and 2) This year, 2019, was the thirty-year anniversary of the Baltic Way—a regional protest that helped initiate the Baltic nations' independence from the USSR. This was therefore an illustrative period in evaluating how ethnic

Russians (and Narva) reckon with their transition from the majority to the minority.

Once all the articles were gathered, they were coded according to their thematic representations.²¹ The coding method analyzed the samples’ positions on the isolation and integration of Narva and the city’s ethnic Russian community. The coding also highlighted the most commonly covered themes from each outlet.

Furthermore, I attached at least one theme or concept—such as “language” or “citizenship and identity”—per article, and then up to three for those articles covering several issues. The limit of three was to ensure that the results were succinct enough to show which themes were most present and which appeared the lowest, while still offering a varied set of results. Articles generally contained two themes within the text. The coding process and concept determination was tripartite: First, I familiarized myself with the collected samples and their positions in social discourse. Second, I coded each article based on the themes presented. Finally, I verified the coding itself (i.e. rechecked all labeled codes) to ensure that the designated themes are represented throughout the text.

Table 2: Overview of Dominant Themes Presented in the Content Analysis

Estonian Outlets		
ERR	POSTIMEES	DELFI ESTONIA
Narva's Internal Challenges: <div style="text-align: right;">20%</div>	Language Use <div style="text-align: right;">20%</div>	Russian "Otherness" <div style="text-align: right;">17%</div>
Language Use: <div style="text-align: right;">18%</div>	Development of Narva <div style="text-align: right;">18%</div>	Education <div style="text-align: right;">17%</div>
Investment and Development in Narva: <div style="text-align: right;">14%</div>	Education <div style="text-align: right;">14%</div>	Ethnic Politics <div style="text-align: right;">14%</div>

²¹ For further information on this approach, see Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Los Angeles, California: SAGE, 2013).

Lingering Soviet Tensions w/ Russia 14%	Ethnic Politics 12%	Citizenship and Identity 13%
Ethnic Politics 10%	Narva's Internal Challenges 12%	Development of Narva 12%
Education 10%	Citizenship and Identity 9%	Language Use 10%
Citizenship and Identity 8%	Russian "Otherness" 8%	Narva's Internal Challenges 8%
Inter-Ethnic Relations 4%	Inter-Ethnic Relations 5%	Inter-Ethnic Relations 6%
Russophobia 2%	Estonian-Russian Border 2%	Russophobia 3%
<i>Samples Indicating Integration: 42%</i>	<i>Samples Indicating Integration: 47%</i>	<i>Samples Indicating Integration: 33%</i>
<i>Samples Indicating Isolation: 58%</i>	<i>Samples Indicating Isolation: 53%</i>	<i>Samples Indicating Isolation: 67%</i>

After my qualitative analysis, I moved on to generating quantitative statistics for each outlet's nine dominant themes. These statistics demonstrate which struggles and contentions are most prevalent for Estonia's ethnic Russian communities. The results are organized into the table above—with each media outlet containing its own section and set of statistics. The results highlight the back-and-forth nature of Narva's ethnic struggles and economic development, which is the foundation for this paper. The themes dealing directly with Narva are bolded above, but it is important to note that many themes overlap with one other, such as language use, border issues, education, and lingering Soviet tensions. Because of this multiplicity, Narva has a notable place in Estonian society, and it is an interesting municipality to explore. Additionally, I read each selected article holistically to determine if its content aligned with integration or isolation. Each article was categorized as either having more isolative or integrative qualities, which is shown at the bottom of the table from above.

When addressing the articles, I will list acronyms for the news outlet

it came from (for example, “E” for ERR or “DE” for Delfi Estonia), and the sample’s number from a list at the end of this document (i.e. Sample E-23, referencing article 23 from the ERR list). In my list, I have organized all articles chronologically and by news outlets.

There are some previous studies analyzing the themes and realms of social discourse in the Baltic region.²² However, these existing studies mainly focused on one or two media outlets and used smaller sample sizes over a shorter duration of time. Such studies also used different data sources like political speeches or essays. Furthermore, existing research neglects to explore the bidirectionality of Narva—a society that is simultaneously integrated and isolated. This article aims to address this research gap, analyzing the ways in which integrative and isolative bidirectionality impacts and defines Narva.

NARVA'S ISOLATIVE FEATURES: MUNICIPAL STRUGGLES HINDERING THE CITY'S INTEGRATION

As a result of its overwhelming ethnic Russian demographics, many of Narva’s residents, and especially those with gray passports or whose parents have gray passports, feel alienated. This alienation hinders their integration and engenders social disengagement from the rest of Estonia. They possess feelings of inferiority as they lack the capability to engage in Estonian society in meaningful, material ways, which consequently results in low self-esteem levels for the municipality.²³

These feelings of second-class citizenship are often reinforced by Estonia’s far-right politicians, like Mart Helme from the Conservative People’s Party of Estonia (EKRE), who has stated that Estonians only want one thing from the

²² Krēķis, Jānis, “Collective Memory as a Resource in Russian Information Warfare against Latvia,” *Žurnalistikos Tyrimai* 8 (2015): 92-115, <https://doi.org/10.15388/zt/jr.2015.8.8844>; Maria Golubeva, “Different History, Different Citizenship? Competing Narratives and Diverging Civil Enculturation in Majority and Minority Schools in Estonia and Latvia,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 41.3 (2010): 315-329, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2010.498190>; Veronika Kalmus, “Is Interethnic Integration Possible in Estonia?: Ethno-Political Discourse of Two Ethnic Groups,” *Discourse & Society* 14.6 (2003): 667-697, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F09579265030146001>

²³ Maaris Raudsepp, “Ethnic Self-Esteem and Intergroup Attitudes Among the Estonian Majority and the non-Estonian Minority,” *Studies of Transition States and Societies* 1.1 (2009): 41-45.

Russians living in their country—“to leave them alone.”²⁴

*Table 3: Demographic Breakdown of Narva's Residents as of January 2020²⁵
(Source: Sample DE-35)*

Narva's Demographic Composition

According to Ethnicity	According to Citizenship	According to Native Language
Russian 83.3%	Russian 36%	Russian 89.3%
Estonian 3.6%	Estonian 48.5%	Estonian 1.8%
Ukrainian 2.4%	Ukrainian 0.5%	Ukrainian 1.3%
Belarusian 1.8%	Stateless 13.6%	Belarusian 0.2%
Other 8.9%	Other 1.4%	Other 7.4%

Narva's struggles cover a wide array of issues, from a declining population, a corrupt political system, and increased discrimination due to their Soviet history. These isolative features separate Narva from Estonian society. By extension, these features detach the nation's Russian community from Estonian society, as well. These isolative features then develop Narva's reputation as a true “Russian” city whose society and ideals differ from Estonia's. The breakdown of its ethnic composition reinforces this: 83.3 percent of its residents consider themselves Russian, and more than half do not even possess Estonian citizenship, as demonstrated in the table above. Only 3.6 percent consider themselves Estonian, and then less than two percent speak it as their primary language.

Nearly all of its residents speak Russian as their native language, as indicated in the table above, and they also lack advanced Estonian language skills

²⁴ Aili Vahtla, ed. “Russian Cultural Autonomy on the Other Side of Narva River, says Helme,” *ERR*, October 2, 2018, <https://perma.cc/4H9N-GU65>

²⁵ The “Other” categories include, but are not limited to, Latvians, Lithuanians, Finns, Tatars, and Poles.

when compared with the rest of the country, since the lingua franca of the city is overwhelmingly Russian. This linguistic divide is perpetuated in younger generations since Narva's school system lacks resources to teach Estonian. Currently, Estonian law requires 60 percent of instruction in minority language schools to be in Estonian, and 40 percent may be conducted in Russian. Narva's minority language schools often fail to meet this requirement, because the city's teachers lack the Estonian proficiency to effectively teach it, subjecting many students to a poor level of Estonian instruction. The majority of its teachers are older, and their Estonian language skills are not as strong.

Narva schools, unfortunately, also cannot recruit younger Russian teachers who speak Estonian proficiently. In fact, a report from Estonia's National Audit Office in August 2019 found that Ida-Viru lacks qualified Estonian-language teachers. This shortage hinders the community's ability to linguistically integrate with the rest of Estonia.²⁶ As such, the burden is placed on the parents and students to learn Estonian, since the city's school system is incapable.

Additionally, due to the high presence of ethnic Russians, many Narva residents hold differing views of USSR occupation from their Estonian counterparts.²⁷ This difference in opinion is evidenced by Narva residents' view of May 9th, also known as "Victory Day,"²⁸ which honors and pays tribute to the Soviet Union's 1945 victory over Nazi Germany. While celebrations for this date have remained popular in Narva, May 9th is a day of national mourning for the rest of Estonia. Though to Russians this day represents liberation, the titular population views it as a mere re-occupation of their homeland, since it began the second wave of brutality perpetuated by the Soviet regime on the nation's non-Slavic population. As such, Narva's staunch celebration of it separates the city from much of Estonia, and detracts from the city's Estonian integration.

²⁶ Aili Vahtla, ed., "Audit Office: Estonian Language Training for Adults Poorly Organized," *ERR*, August 28, 2019, <https://perma.cc/NNW4-CWTY>

²⁷ Andrey Makarychev and Alexander Yatsyk, *Borders in the Baltic Sea Region: Suturing the Ruptures* (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd, 2017): 139-140, <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-352-00014-6>.

²⁸ Monuments also represent a key figure in understanding Narva's stark difference, when compared with other cities, in interpreting Estonian history. To the residents of Narva, Soviet monuments and statues are an important part of their history, and therefore ought to remain unaltered. See Siobhan Kattago, "Commemorating Liberation and Occupation: War Memorials Along the Road to Narva," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 39.4 (2008): 431-449, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629770802461225>

In Estonia, there also exists a tension around any and all memorabilia related to the Soviet Union, such as the USSR's flag. For Estonians, this Soviet memorabilia brings back difficult memories of occupation; for Russians, however, this memorabilia merely celebrates the perceived strength and glory of the USSR, for which many elder Russians still hold respect. Prior to the country's ban on Soviet flags in the early 2000s, many residents of Narva would showcase them in parades or outside their houses on Victory Day. Now, however, if individuals do this—and some still do—then they face a fine (Sample P-10).²⁹ Additionally, Narva's own city council members—such as Larissa Olenina, who has been investigated for corruption multiple times—have organized May 9th celebrations (Samples E-10 & DE-10), likely for political benefit. If politicians in Narva can appeal to the public on these ideals, they are viewed as protectors of the city's history, traditions, and values, which are often demeaned by other Estonians.

Narva also suffers from a declining population, which threatens its social and economic future (Samples E-35, P-16, P-34, P-36, DE-35). With a population of 82,979 by 1992, Narva had a stable source of professional opportunities under the Soviet regime, owing to the presence of a number of government and industrial positions, such as with the Kreenholm Manufacturing Company, which employed many of the city's residents.³⁰ However, in a post-Soviet Estonia, where industrial work is not as prevalent, Narva has a population of 56,000, and, according to sample DE-35, the population is set to decrease in the years to come, as Narva struggles to attract new residents due to low wages, weak infrastructure, high crime rates, and corrupt politicians. The region's proximity to Russia, especially in light of the Russian invasion into Ukraine in 2014, further renders it undesirable to many.

Sample P-34, titled “Residents Leave Ida-Virumaa: Over the Past Year, the Population has Declined by 5,000,” notes that Ida-Viru's population decline rate doubled in 2019, with Narva's population decreasing by nearly 2,500 residents that year. Narva's housing units have a capacity of 80,000 individuals, many of which currently remain vacant or abandoned. This vacancy signifies a city that is declining, aging, and unable to sustain itself.

²⁹ Some residents responded to the ban on Soviet flags by displaying a red flag on Victory Day, but without the hammer and sickle, according to sample P-10. Though clearly a representation of Soviet glorification, the Estonian state cannot fine these individuals, since the flag is not overtly Soviet, even if the flag owners intend for it to appear so.

³⁰ “Narva in Figures,” dataset, *City of Narva*, 2009, <https://perma.cc/BV6A-B9MF.pdf>

The diminishing population has alarmed city officials, who view the loss of workers and residents as barriers to the city's development and maintenance. Sample E-35 reported on the city government's population concerns, and claimed "societal attitudes" are a primary factor in individuals' departure. In this sample, Narva's then-mayor, Aleksei Jevgrafov, a Centre party member elected in April 2019,³¹ offered solutions for mitigating the dwindling population:

Of course [the population decline] is unfortunate, and sad news, but we will pay attention to it and give people the opportunities [to think] that living in Narva would be cool. There are parks, recreational facilities, concert programs, and we work closely with industrial parks and we meet investors all the time who are willing to come to Narva and set up factories here. Only then will Narva make money and be able to channel the revenue it collects from people into its development. We need to look at how life in Narva is changing, where more people are living today and this depends on where we contribute more financially. We need to pay more attention to keeping the population at 55,000 people.

Narva's demographic problem is further complicated by its declining birth rates and large elderly population, who are retired and rely heavily on pensions. Therefore, it is imperative that the Estonian government work on programs to incentivize childbirth and retain younger populations. If individuals are encouraged to start a family with reduced costs of raising a child, they may be more likely to stay in Narva, which is currently Estonia's poorest city. Currently, however, these programs have not been fully developed, and so Narva does not have an adequate system to encourage people to stay and start a family in the city.

Another priority of Narva's officials is attracting younger individuals to combat the population decline. This can be achieved by advertising desirable professional opportunities in Narva. However, this is difficult to accomplish due

³¹ Mayor Jevgrafov was ultimately removed from his position in November 2020 as a result of a no-confidence vote that the city council brought against him. The vote of no-confidence was initiated because of two reasons: Jevgrafov's work on Narva's proposals submitted for the EU's fair transition plan and his inability as mayor to establish normal relations between Narva and the Estonian state. See "Mayor of Narva loses vote of no confidence," *ERR*, November 11, 2020, <https://perma.cc/JS7A-HZLE>

to a lack of employment opportunities. Younger individuals may then be more likely to leave Narva if they speak some Estonian, given the abundance of opportunities that exist outside of this Russian municipality, such as in Tallinn or Tartu.³² The quality of life and the pay is higher in these cities, and the rates of crime and drug abuse are lower, making it attractive and preferable to live elsewhere.

Narva possesses the lowest income per capita in the country. In Narva, the average monthly income is approximately 925 euros, according to sample E-14, compared to Estonia's average of 1,300 euros. National unemployment has been decreasing in recent years, as Estonia further integrates with the EU economy and new professional opportunities emerge for its citizens. However, this has not been the case for Narva, where unemployment continues to rise. Unemployment in Narva's region rests at 12.4 percent, whereas the country average is 5.1 percent.³³ Narva continues to rely on blue-collar work, such as the textile, clothing, transport, metalworking, furniture, and shale oil industries.³⁴ Residents of Narva are largely unable to find work outside of these blue-collar sectors. With the nation's decision to also move toward a more environmentally-friendly energy system away from shale oil mining, which employs a number of the city's residents, the rate of municipal unemployment may increase significantly.³⁵

Power plant lay-offs in mid-2019, for example, weakened the city's already fragile economy (Samples E-15 & DE-13). Enefit Energy Production, a subsidiary of state-owned Eesti Energia, announced lay-offs of roughly 500 employees, caused by Estonia's transition out of oil shale in its power production. This raised concern in the Narva community in laid-off workers' ability to retrain for a new profession. These laid-off employees will likely encounter challenges trying to find similar work, as other companies make similar cuts to prepare for the nation's energy pivot. A shock to the workers, the trade union, and the locals, the country's transition from oil shale benefits Estonia as a whole, but weakens Narva, forcing

³² However, for those young ethnic Russian residents of Narva, who do not speak Estonian well, then their only option is to remain in Narva. Unfortunately, this is the case for many, especially if their parents do not teach them Estonian at a young age.

³³ "Why Narva?" *Narva 2024: Narva for European Capital of Culture 2024*, 2019, <https://narva2024.ee/en/why-narva>.

³⁴ "Narva in Figures," *City of Narva*; "Why Narva?" *Narva 2024*, 2019, <https://narva2024.ee/en/why-narva>;

David Trimbach, "Sense of Place in Narva: How Do Narva's Residents Feel and Think about Their City?" *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, October 31, 2019, <https://perma.cc/GXJ7-WFQ4>

³⁵ Weyland, "The Threat from the Populist Left," 32.

it to branch out more from its crude-reliant, Soviet past and adapt to Estonian economic arrangements.

Evgeny Dmitriev, a heating engineer and one of the many laid-off employees expressed his concerns of finding another job:

Thoughts and expectations, of course, are only negative. Life plans are crumbling. Many of us at one time were taking loans for cars, apartments. So, what is next? We worked almost all our lives at the station in a particular specialty. Where do we go? Where do we go for our families, children, especially since we can only do what we learned? I have no other specialty. It is impossible to find another job today in Narva and a salary at the level of NE.

Yet, while some in Narva do still have employment, this job security is not guaranteed. Another employee named Ronan communicated his fears:

I really hope that they will not cut me. It's even scary to imagine if this happens. I have two children, we still pay leasing. It seems that all this is done on purpose to permanently kill any production in Narva. They refer to cheap Russian electricity, but it was necessary to anticipate this in advance. Behind each laid-off worker are families, children, taxes in the end.³⁶

These examples further isolate and mar the image of Narva as a city with a precarious financial state. In response, residents leave to seek work elsewhere, causing brain drain. On the contrary, older individuals and pensioners move to Narva for lower costs of living and a quieter environment (Sample P-36). These migration trends regress the preexisting imbalanced age demographics, increases the number of financially dependent residents, and hinders Narva's local development with low consumption by pensioners living on tight budgets. With this influx of older residents, Narva is unable to develop a more young, lively, and active community—a municipal cultural trait that is oftentimes prioritized by those moving to a different city.

³⁶ These two quotes from Dmitriev and Ronan come from sample DE-13.

Additionally, a growing number of gray passport holders—who have been residing outside of Estonia in recent years—are returning to Narva. This return could be viewed as a positive trend for Narva's economy. More people, even if elderly, means at least a bit more participation in the local market, which results in a stronger, more robust economy and a more appealing city to move to. However, on another level, the return of gray passport holders harms Narva's social integration more than it promotes economic well-being. This is because Estonians across Estonia are wary of these gray passport holders' symbolic connections to the USSR. Narva then becomes a safe haven for ethnic Russians who never chose to naturalize.

As a result, it is challenging for city officials to portray Narva as a desirable, worthwhile location to move to. Crime also stains the city's reputation. Narva possesses the highest crime rate per capita in all of Estonia.³⁷ Similarly, the violence rate has increased nearly three-fold in the city since 2017, overwhelming city officials and local law enforcement.³⁸

Starting in the early 2000s, Estonia, as a country, has also suffered from an extensive fentanyl epidemic. Entering from the Russian border with Narva, this synthetic opioid found its way into the Estonian drug market in 2003 and it quickly replaced heroin for the drug of choice. As a result of its widespread use, Estonia had the highest mortality rate from drug overdoses in Europe from 2007 to 2017.³⁹ Owing to the interconnection between opioid abuse and contracting HIV/AIDS, this Baltic country has additionally struggled in recent years with containing the collateral health damage to its citizens that has come with the opioid epidemic.⁴⁰ The HIV/AIDS outbreak has been especially prevalent in Narva, which is where the epidemic initially began in 2001.⁴¹ To this day, Narva has the highest

³⁷ "Estonia 2019 Crime & Safety Report," *US Department of State Overseas Security Advisory Council* [OSAC], April 1, 2019, <https://perma.cc/LQ9C-9EM7>

³⁸ "Police Commented on the Surge in Killings in Narva," *Viru Prospekt*, June 26, 2019, <https://perma.cc/42YV-M3ZP>

³⁹ Anneli Uuskula, Don Des Jarlais, and Sigrid Vorobjov, "The Fentanyl Epidemic in Estonia: Opportunities for a Comprehensive Public Health Response," *The Lancet*, December 2019, <https://perma.cc/ZE5J-T85E>

⁴⁰ Isabelle Giraudon, Federica Mathis, Dagmar Hedrich, Julian Vicente, and André Noor, "Drug-Related Deaths and Mortality in Europe," *European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction*, July 2019, 17, <https://perma.cc/ZP8A-67T5>

⁴¹ Kaja-Triin Laisaar, Radko Avi, Jack DeHovitz, and Anneli Uuskula, "Estonia at the Threshold of the Fourth Decade of the AIDS Era in Europe," *AIDS Research and Human Retroviruses* 27.8 (2011): 841-851, <https://doi.org/10.1089/aid.2010.0223>

proportion of HIV-positive individuals in Estonia.⁴²

Narva's high levels of crime, compounded by the nation's fentanyl outbreak, have gripped the city's younger population in the past two decades. Juvenile delinquency poses a significant and immediate challenge for Narva. With a lack of social programs and activities to occupy their time, they engage in criminal activities. And for the vast majority of exclusively Russian-speaking youth, childhood in Narva has been marked by several obstacles: high rates of unemployment, low incomes, and high rates of violence.⁴³ Estonia's former Minister of Justice, Urmas Reinsalu, noted in late 2018 that: "[Narva's youth] need to be dealt with even before the prosecutor's office, court or other law enforcement agencies become involved. As preventive work, young people must be given activities and shown the direction of how to grow into a law-abiding citizen."⁴⁴ These efforts could include increasing education and extracurricular activities, in addition to fostering deeper connections between young people and the state, so that they have greater access to alternative and positive ways to occupy their time.

Drug-related crimes are not the only ones plaguing the city. Narva also suffers from varying forms of crime—both violent and non-violent—often found in other cities around Europe. In addition to the higher rates of crime, however, the actual brutality of criminal incidents committed in this border city serves as another factor worrying ethnic Estonians, who have access to online reports about the higher crime rates in Narva, and whose content reinforces their aversion to and apprehension of the city. Recent crimes in Narva and the Ida-Viru region from the past year include: elder abuse, domestic violence, and hit-and-runs. Local news sources have also reported on the appearances of corpses around the city, parents physically abusing their young children, armed robberies, and various stabbings.⁴⁵ On a national level, high crime rates in Narva

⁴² Kristjan Kallaste ed., "Statistics: Increased Numbers of Women and Heterosexuals Diagnosed with HIV," *ERR*, June 11, 2020, <https://perma.cc/LAJ9-3B4J>

⁴³ Nelli Kalikova, Aljona Kurbatova, and Ave Talu, "Estonia Children and Adolescents Involved in Drug Use and Trafficking: A Rapid Assessment," *International Labour Organization: International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour [IPEC]*, June 2002, 11, <https://perma.cc/7RDG-6ZGR>

⁴⁴ "Reinsalu: To Help Young People, Social Programs Must Also Be Made Available in Ida-Virumaa," *Delfi Estonia*, September 8, 2018, <https://perma.cc/HWB4-3TB6>

⁴⁵ The crime section for this portal is named "112." This is the website's link: <https://prospekt.ee>.

bolster Estonia's criminal stereotypes against Russian communities at-large.

In sum, not only do Narva's residents grapple with the struggles of identity formation and a dwindling economy—they must also deal with the city's high rates of opioid use, specifically fentanyl. For ethnic Russians, this drug abuse and its subsequent increase in crime rates further stigmatize and isolate Narva from Estonian society, contributing to its reputation as a “problem-ridden industrial town.”⁴⁶

Political corruption is another municipal issue degrading Narva's image. Its city councilors were linked to corruption scandals in 2018 and 2019 (Samples E-2, E-6, E-12). Law enforcement has achieved some success in sanctioning Narva's municipal government and political parties, according to sample E-2, but has been unable to achieve lasting results.

Arrested and convicted in 2019, city councilor Aleksei Voronov's corruption scandal subjected Narva to scrutiny. Voronov violated several public procurement procedures by accepting bribes of at least 60,000 euros. Additionally, a vote of no-confidence in March 2019 led to the dismissal of former Narva mayor Tarmo Tammiste of the Centre Party (Sample E-8). An investigation then also began in April 2019 as a result of allegations of counterfeited election documents related to the process of conducting the no-confidence vote against Tammiste.⁴⁷ Moreover, at the urging of Estonia's Centre party Prime Minister, eight members of Narva's city council resigned in early 2019 to mitigate political damage, after Narva's prosecutor's office presented suspicions that they had violated the city's anti-corruption laws related to bribes in their political positions (Sample E-2).

The national Centre party, commonly supported by Estonia's ethnic Russians, has declined in popularity in Narva due to the party's corruption, internal conflicts, failure to affect tangible social and municipal change, and the lack of socially conservative principles. Although Russians have more recently become discontented with the party, Centre's links to Putin's United Russia party has provoked long-standing ethnic Estonian distrust in its ability to promote Estonian interests.

Narva's region had only a 24 percent voter turnout for its previous EU elections, according to sample E-12, and then it had the country's lowest voter

⁴⁶ Airi-Alina Allaste and Mikko Lagerspetz, “Drugs and Doublethink in a Marginalised Community,” *Critical Criminology* 13 (2005): 267, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-005-3184-z>

⁴⁷ Aleksei Voronov was the city councillor who started the no-confidence processions against the mayor, according to sample E-8.

turnout by over ten percent in the parliamentary elections.⁴⁸ Described as “depressingly low,” with a weak turnout from young and middle-aged voters, this figure is nearly ten percent lower than previous years, such as 2011 and 2014, indicating that voters in Narva are losing interest in their political system (Sample DE-4).⁴⁹ In sample E-12, Jana Toom, a leading Centre politician, cited corruption as a reason for low voter turnout in Ida-Viru in national and EU elections. “There is a certain disappointment among the people,” Toom stated, “and there is this negativity in connection with the corruption scandal in Narva.”

In Sample DE-4, Narva journalist Roman Vikulov noted political disengagement as another difference between Narva and Estonia. He writes:

Ida-Virumaa is further and further removed from the state, the more the state does to involve the Northeast in the life of the republic, the more opposition it provokes. If the residents of the county demonstrate their indifference to politics, then let them not whine when politics is indifferent to them. Ida-Virumaa is still not Estonia because they do not teach Estonian in schools. Russophobes have deprived the Russians of hope for a better life [...] If we proceed from the fact that Ida-Virumaa voters are still not indifferent, indifferent to politics and the fate of the state, and to admit that the decision not to vote was a difficult, long-suffering, responsible choice for many, we have to admit that there were many reasons for the inhabitants of the Northeast to leave their votes to themselves.

Political participation is regressed as a result of this indifference and detachment, and this isolated framework also renders corruption and political misbehavior endemic and recurrent, as Narva’s residents are disillusioned from resolving the system. With a political system that appears forever entrenched in corruptive politics, Narva’s citizens also likely lack faith that any politicians

⁴⁸ “Voter Turnout Statistics,” dataset, *Valimised*, March 5, 2019, <https://perma.cc/CP2Z-RQR7>

⁴⁹ The voter turnout for Estonia’s 2019 parliamentary elections was 48.2 percent in Ida-Viru, whereas the national average was 63.7 percent. Harju county, located about 40 kilometers outside of Tallinn, had the highest voter turnout with 69.8 percent. See “Voter Turnout Statistics,” *Valimised*.

can fundamentally affect change, so they do not view voting as a truly effective means to enact social change in their city. Since in many ways Narva operates autonomously, local corruption proliferates as it is politically and socially confined to municipal borders, unchecked by national enforcement. Therefore, politicians can more easily take advantage of the city's isolation and its lack of structural connection with the rest of the country.

Overall, Narva finds itself in a uniquely challenging position in Estonian society. With declining demographics, linguistic disconnect, a lack of worthwhile employment opportunities, ongoing crime, and an ineffective political system, the city experiences several layers of municipal struggles that isolate it from the rest of Estonia. In turn, this complicates the status of the city in Estonia and presents it with an array of social, political, and linguistic complexities that it must handle in the years to come, in order to find a deeper place in the national society.

NARVA'S INTEGRATIVE FEATURES: DEVELOPMENT, INVESTMENT, AND INCREASED NATIONAL ATTENTION

Though many view Narva as an isolated city, struggling economically and politically, the content analysis revealed some contradictions against Narva's complete isolation. At the very least, the city's status extends beyond its isolative features. Estonian political leaders are attempting to reduce isolation by developing the city's infrastructure and social programs. In doing this, officials also want to reframe Narva as a desirable location for tourists, young professionals, and other potential residents, establishing a sustainable, self-sufficient economy and a more civil society.

As referenced in the content analysis, these reforms represent another perspective of Narva, reflecting the city's bidirectionality. While many news samples indicate Narva's internal struggles with Estonian incorporation, there are numerous news samples also indicating otherwise. The latter samples highlighted Narva's efforts to offer cheaper and more accessible Estonian language programs, develop infrastructure and promote political engagement with Narva. The successful implementation of these efforts could boost the morale of Narva's residents, and integrate them with Estonian society.

Narva applied to be the EU's Capital of Culture for 2024, for guidance and funding in tourism and migration promotion. The EU's annual Capital of Culture initiative invigorates the cultural and social structures of a lesser-known European city. It organizes events with a strong pan-European dimension while

simultaneously spurring internal development and interest in the city. Moreover, this initiative provides several millions of euros in funding and aims to impart a long-term positive impact on the selected city's culture, society and urban development (Sample DE-20).

Narva's application was ultimately unsuccessful, but the application process served the city well, as Narva officials outlined potential improvements to its infrastructure and economy.⁵⁰ Labeled "the thesis on the development of the city" by Narva's then-mayor, he argues in sample P-21 that the city should adopt some of the development plans outlined in its application, but "rethink" the alternative funding sources. With Narva's residents' desire for improved infrastructure, there is hope that this application will spur municipal development in the coming years (Sample E-1).

In addition to its bid for Cultural Capital, Narva announced several internal development and investment projects in 2019, aiming to revitalize infrastructure and tourism. For instance, Estonian developing company Varesaar LLP is leading the renovation of an old complex of cotton warehouses into a new tourist attraction called "The World of Textiles," exhibiting Narva's history of textiles manufacturing. Describing the soon-to-be exposition, sample P-32 notes:

In the now empty cotton warehouses, an interesting and exciting world will appear in the future, the interactive external and internal exposition of which will tell about the history of Kreenholm and other topics related to textiles. The whole family, from toddlers to grandparents, are guaranteed vivid and informative impressions of their visit to the complex.

As of early 2020, Narva implemented a civic initiative program that funds residents' municipal development proposals (Sample P-35). In order to participate, residents complete a paper or electronic questionnaire to propose

⁵⁰That being said, Ivan Sergeev, the head of Narva's bid for the 2024 Capital of Culture, alleged that the competition's officials did not truly believe Narva could accomplish everything the city claimed it would, if selected. According to sample P-21: "The members of the competition committee carefully watched the news from Narva and simply doubted that the city authorities would do what was promised in the Narva application for the 'Cultural Capital.'"

their project to a filter committee, which will review each submission to ensure its compliance with the program. Once reviewed, the city's residents vote online for those submitted projects they most prefer. Winning proposals will be implemented by the author of the proposal and the board. This collaboration between the proposal author and local administration is crucial to the program's success. This civic initiative program, common in other Estonian cities, provides Narva with 200,000 euros to fund these projects. For comparison, the program budget for Tartu, which is larger than Narva, is about 150,000 euros; in Viljandi and Rapla, it is 30,000 euros; and in Tapa, it is 20,000 euros. Narva's allotment of funds signals the potential and willingness of the state to invest in the city, while including the input and ideas of its citizens.

Furthermore, in late July 2019, an outdoor development project was announced: the extension of the walkway trail along the Narva River by one kilometer (Sample P-18). This attraction, popular among locals, is in its third stage of construction now, with complete construction of the walkway extension expected to take two to three years. The 1.9 million euros for this stage of the project come from the Cross-Border Cooperation Program of Estonia and Russia, which is largely funded by the EU.

Besides the walkway extension, Narva began a three-year, seven million euro project in early 2020 to preserve pre-USSR vestiges and modernize infrastructure of its historic town hall building. The town hall building is, unfortunately, just one of three buildings in the city's Old Town that survived the 1944 Battle of Narva—when Red Air Force aerial bombardment and destruction by retreating German forces destroyed 98 percent of the city's buildings. According to samples P-7 and E-33, much of the town hall building's interior will be rebuilt to include a tourist center, tea rooms, a restaurant, and a souvenir shop. While these additions will modernize the town hall, the building's post-war remnants, like its famous wooden staircase and authentic cellars, will be preserved. The refurbishment of the town hall building is part of a larger goal to revitalize the Old Town district, which city officials hope will attract entrepreneurs and businesses who can ultimately contribute to the city's development.

Tourism has additionally been increasing in Narva's region as the city embarks on infrastructure development, with a six percent increase in tourism in 2019 (Sample E-27). As more people come to Narva to visit, the city experiences more and more economic engagement. In increasing tourism, Narva also has the opportunity to showcase all the city has to offer to travelers, in a bid to encourage

more people to move to Narva permanently.

The bulk of citizens visiting in 2019, however, were citizens of the Russian Federation. Though this is beneficial for Narva on an economic level, it does not aid very much on a social level. The reason being: Estonians are then likely to view Narva as not only a Russian residential city, but also a vacation spot for citizens of Russia, who flock to Narva and Narva-Jõesuu (the nearby beach town) to get a dose of Europe—but without leaving the linguistic and cultural comforts of Russia.

As it continues to develop, the Estonian government has supported the formation of Narva’s “Estonian Language House,” where residents can practice and learn the language for free (Samples DE-25, E-19, E-23, E-25, P-25, P-26). The Estonian Language House was created by The Integration Foundation, a Narva-based organization that seeks to integrate Russians into Estonia. The foundation works nationally, offering free online language courses and forming language houses in Russian-dominated cities. Described as “an important cooperation partner in promoting global Estonianness” by Riina Solman, Estonia’s Population Minister, the Integration Foundation has generated substantial interest in Estonian culture, offering language cafes, tandem studies, and culture clubs. Falling under the command of both the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Education, the foundation aims to establish Estonian national unity, deconstructing the country’s ethnic tensions to promote national integration (Samples E-19 & E-25). In sample DE-25, Estonia’s Minister of Culture Tõnis Lukas describes the linguistic opportunities afforded by the language house:

A prerequisite for cultural integration is language proficiency. The Narva House of Estonian is a stronghold for teaching Estonian and other important work of the Ministry of Culture [...] A cultural space and language environment is created [here] that are conducive to language practice. The creation of such an environment is especially important in Narva, where the Estonian language [is not spoken] so often. The Integration Foundation has done a very valuable job; therefore, the government has allocated an additional two million euros to the Ministry of Culture for teaching Estonian to adults in 2020. Thanks to this, next year a large number of people will be able to learn our native language

for free in this new house.

While many in Narva view government-mandated programs to learn Estonian as coercive and antagonistic, the Language House has been effective in offering voluntary instruction and promoting the genuine integration of Narva's ethnic Russian community. In offering the Language House as a public space, Narva's residents feel more comfortable attending and practicing at their own pace. As their language skills improve, Russian Estonians feel more comfortable using the language in public spheres of society, such as in stores and restaurants.

Simultaneously, Estonian teachers at the language house are interested in improving their Russian, with which many in Narva can help. This reciprocal learning style reinforces the linguistic community of the language house, and portrays it as a public space in which all language learners are welcome.

While The Language House accepts all learners, it is marketed to the younger generations. Narva has begun youth-based initiatives, with the goal of integrating the community and allowing younger populations to learn Estonian early on. Sample DE-18 highlights the establishment of a free, language-learning summer camp, where younger school students work in small groups on various tasks and activities for two weeks under the guidance of an Estonian-speaking teacher.

Another program, the Noored Kooli ("Youth to School") city camp, brings together 300 young Narva students for two weeks to study the Estonian language, develop communication and self-management skills, and engage in their Estonian projects. The participants put on sketches, compose Estonian-language newspapers, develop recipe books, create board games, organize art exhibitions, and create homemade films.

Kaye Metsla, the head of the board for the camp, described the benefits for both students and camp counselors:

For Narva schoolchildren, two weeks in a city camp is without a doubt a useful pastime: there they will make new friends, develop their projects, and along the way they will also learn Estonian. But for the newly-educated Noored Kooli teachers who are guiding children and young people, this will be a good test before the start of the school year, allowing them to develop their pedagogical and leadership skills.

Therefore, the benefits of this camp are two-fold. The students will improve their language skills from the immersive environment, while also developing connections and friendships along the way that will promote the further use of Estonian, since language was the initial force that connected them together. Then for the educators, this camp offers a unique chance to hone their teaching skills, so that they can grow more comfortable communicating the many concepts and nuances of the Estonian language to their pupils. It functions as a very concentrated and valuable precursor to (and preparation for) the school year.

In addition to these linguistic developments, Narva has also been receiving an increase in attention from Estonian president Kersti Kaljulaid, who assumed office in October 2016. Kaljulaid. An ethnic Estonian herself, President Kaljulaid has criticized the ethnic divide that many Estonian and Russian politicians have perpetuated. She has made it a focus of her presidency to not only better integrate the country's Russian minority, but specifically the Russian minority in Narva. The president has previously claimed she understands Estonia's Russian minority well, and that she is offended when she hears individuals claim this minority group is a "threat" to Estonian security (Sample D-8).

Her affinity for Narva is demonstrated through several samples, highlighting her goals for Narva's development and the integration of its Russian community (Samples P-24, E-33, E-26, and E-1). She relocated her office to Narva for parts of the fall of 2018, for example, to increase her understanding of the city's contemporary society. Prior to working in Narva for these various periods in the fall, the president had previously stated that: "Working here, it's possible to meet plenty of great people, and of course the area will get more attention, which will help to break through some of the stereotypes some people still have about Narva."⁵¹

Sample E-1, referring to Narva's identity as "more than Russian or Estonian," included comments from Narva College information technology professor Dr. Yar Muhammad, who noted the increasing state attention to Narva, as politicians from various parties and high-profile personalities visit the border city. These public figures interact with locals to understand the city's problems and work towards solutions. Speaking about the president's visits to Narva, Dr.

⁵¹ Dario Cavegn, "President Kersti Kaljulaid Starting First Work Week in Narva on Tuesday," *ERR*, August 28, 2018, <https://perma.cc/ED6L-RL6W>

Muhammad said:

She gave special attention to Narva, and visited many times in the last couple of months, even staying a couple of weeks, and she visited many different places, had meetings with many officials, participated in local events, and even met with local people to help understand the reality, concerns and problems as seen on the ground.

President Kaljulaid has also revisited Narva several times since her trips in 2018, as she focuses on establishing more ways to integrate the city's economy. Sample P-24, titled "Estonian President will come to Narva to discuss innovation and development of Ida-Virumaa," reported on Kaljulaid's meetings in Narva with local businesses about the city's "entrepreneur week." This free program provides "beginning entrepreneurs and for those who are just thinking of starting their own business" with relevant training, excursions, market insight, and practical business strategies.

To better understand the Narva community and its needs, the president also engages with the local community in her visits. For example, sample E-26 highlighted some of these engagements:

On Thursday, she will meet students from the Kiviõli 1 school and present them with a civic education class. She will also visit the Reinar Hallik Basketball School, based at the Iisaku upper secondary school, followed by the LAD day care center for children with disabilities, and the recently-opened Estonian Language House (Eesti Keele Maja). In the evening, she is set to address the state defense teachers' seminar, according to a press release from the president's office. On Friday, the president attends the opening of the OBJEKT creative incubator in Narva, which opens its doors at the Narva Culture and Business Center. She will share her thoughts on innovation and the development of Ida-Viru County with Narva mayor Aleksei Jevgrafov and Allan Kaldoja, founder of the on Linda 2 cultural and entrepreneurship center.

Renewing her commitment to the city's cultural integration, President

Kaljulaid has ventured to Narva to commemorate Estonian memorial days, visit local power plants, discuss plans for its Capital of Culture application, address stationed troops, and engage in NATO-related dialogues. Amid the coronavirus pandemic, she also took part in online discussions with the Narva community. For example, she delivered a virtual social studies lesson to Narva's high school graduates.

These visits have resonated with the border city's people, who have noticed her genuine interest and efforts to develop the city in meaningful, inclusive ways. Over the course of her visits, President Kaljulaid bonds with the community, so that they better identify themselves with the Estonian state. In Sample E-1, Head of the Integration Fund Irene Käosaar cited an instance of the President's connection with Narva. Listening to two older Russian women on the street after the presidential motorcade drove by, during one of Kaljulaid's visits, she overheard one say to another: "Did you see? That was our president going home." That simple statement represents something significant (Sample E-1). In Narva, where Russians lack a strong relationship with the state and its political figures, it spoke volumes to the Integration Foundation's leader, Irene Käosaar, to hear an older Russian individual possess such a potent connection.

CONCLUSION: NARVA AS A SOCIAL PENDULUM

While its infrastructure struggles and its Russian population feels isolated, Narva is undertaking increased efforts to revitalize its community, and find a place in Estonian society for its Russian minority. This raises the question: What does Narva's future hold?

Narva's residents have a very strong "sense of place." This phenomenon, the "sense of place," reflects the people-place relationships in society, and how or why people "depend on, attach to, identify with, and attribute meaning to place, including countries, cities, or even neighborhoods." In Narva, 84 percent of respondents in a survey examining municipal attachments expressed an attachment to the city.⁵² Considering residents' attachment to the city and the recent increase in development projects, Narva is likely to integrate with Estonia. As infrastructure projects continue to develop and modernize the city, Narva

⁵²David Trimbach, "Understanding Narva & Identity: Local Reflections from Narva's Russian-Speakers," *Baltic Worlds* 9.1-2 (2016): 4-12, <https://perma.cc/5VZE-QZF8>; Trimbach, "Sense of Place in Narva."

will assume a new reputation as a desirable location. Under these new projects, Narva's Old Town will be revitalized; outdoor attractions have been extended; abandoned factories are slowly being reinvigorated as cultural hotspots; and historic architecture will be preserved. The city's developed infrastructure will draw attention from Estonian businesses and entrepreneurs, redefining conceptions of Narva's economic status.

This urban development will likely generate economic opportunities for the city's residents, who currently suffer from wages significantly lower than the rest of Estonia, high rates of unemployment, and poverty. Moreover, the current downsizing of the Narva's power plants exacerbate residents' financial troubles, impacting other social factors, such as the city's low birth rate and decreasing population. An increase in professional opportunities would provide Narva with a necessary economic boost, allowing the residents financial security and access to improved infrastructure. With increased financial security, Narva's residents would feel a more pronounced sense of unity with Estonia, thereby possessing greater means of societal and economic engagement.

While language disparity persists as a significant barrier in Narva's integration, Estonia's efforts to linguistically integrate the Russian community with the rest of Estonia show signs of greater linguistic cohesion in Estonia. Narva's Russian residents could find greater cultural connection and participation in Estonian society. To Estonians, speaking the national language is a sign of respect, who also value and appreciate ethnic Russians' use of the national language, even if only at intermediate levels.

Similarly, public and state attention, and specifically from Estonian President Kaljulaid, is likely to increase the Narva community's affiliation with the Estonian state, signaling the city's value to Estonia. The President's municipal efforts demonstrate to residents her commitment to improving their quality of life and providing social tools to foster integration with Estonia while continuing to respect Russian culture. This produces conducive integration, rather than perceived coerced assimilation.

Nevertheless, these efforts—whether improving infrastructure, creating more jobs, or learning more Estonian—result in incremental change. The city's integration will be an evolving process that will not come quickly nor easily. Given the long process of integration, Narva's isolation appears unchanged in many ways. The burden of integration is on Narva's Russian community to collectively counter their own city's social, political, and linguistic problems. Narva's residents

are socially passive, and collective action may be a challenge, especially as Narva continues to lose younger, Estonian-proficient residents to cities like Tartu or Tallinn for educational and professional purposes.

Three frailties of the city—political misbehavior, crime, and language deficiency—continue to distance Narva from the rest of Estonia. Compared to recognizably integrative progresses, resolutions of these deep-seated isolating problems will only appear in later years, with the implementation and success of various municipal initiatives, civic programs, and communal efforts. Until then, however, Narva retains its image as a city struggling with crime, a weak political system, and a declining population that lacks Estonian proficiency and shares more cultural similarities and historical values with the Russian Federation. And since Narva's residents possess low voting participation rates, their fraught political system will hold for the foreseeable future, until the city's voters seize their political agency, reckon the failures of their politicians and the Centre party, and replace them with impactful, legitimate ones.

Though Narva's ethnic Russians are responsible for organizing Narva's economic, socio-political, and linguistic development, the Estonian state and ethnic Estonians must undo the stigmatization of Narva, its minority community, and its historical connections to the USSR. This can be accomplished through a continuance of its recent social and economic strategies, which have focused on ways to bring the country's Eastern city into Estonia's increasingly Western society. Ethnic Russians outside of Narva arguably have a responsibility to advocate for the border city and support its development, too, as Narva still bears a Russian heritage. This advocacy would be most effective if done on a micro-level, with ethnic Russians focusing on how each individual—in conversations and discussions alike—can play a part in positively portraying the city and communicating its uniqueness in Estonia. In improving Narva's status and position in Estonian society, ethnic Russians living outside of this border city then improve the status and image of the minority community itself all over the nation.

As such, Narva embodies social bidirectionality in many ways. From its present isolated status to its indications of an integrated future, Narva will oscillate on this social pendulum for years to come, as this border city and its Russian minority community uncover their place in Estonian society.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: ERR Samples

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Appendix B: Postimees Samples

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Appendix C: Delfi Estonia Samples

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 28. “Survey results: almost half of RusDelfi readers want back to the USSR.” *Delfi Estonia*, November 18, 2019. <https://rus.delfi.ee/daily/estonia/rezultaty-oprosas-pochti-polovina-chitatelej-rusdelfi-hotyat-nazad-v-sssr?id=88098947>

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30. “Kristina Kallas: if you bring Russian and Estonian children in one school, there will be problems.” *Delfi Estonia*, November 30, 2019. <https://rus.delfi.ee/daily/estonia/kristina-kallas-esli-svesti-russkih-i-estonskih-detej-v-odnoj-shkole-budut-problemy?id=88231499>
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35. “Estonian citizens make up less than half the population of Narva.” *Delfi Estonia*, January 21, 2020. <https://rus.delfi.ee/daily/estonia/grazhdane-estonii-sostavlyayut-menshe-poloviny-naseleniya-narvy?id=88709835>
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THE WOMEN WANT THE FALL OF THE (GENDERED) REGIME: IN WHAT WAYS ARE SYRIAN WOMEN CHALLENGING STATE FEMINISM THROUGH AN ONLINE FEMINIST COUNTERPUBLIC?¹

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ABSTRACT⁴

The post-2011 breakdown of state media authority in Syria exposed a multi-layered terrain of competing counter-discourses, in which citizen journalists were positioned as narrators of events on the ground.⁵ Conceptualized in this paper as Emerging Syrian Media (ESM), the rapid pluralization of Syria's media landscape has irrevocably transformed how citizens engage with the discourse disseminated by the al-Assad regime.⁶ However, this phenomenon has not been examined through

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⁴ Abbreviations: ESM – Emerging Syrian Media; SANA – Syrian Arab News Agency

⁵ Yazan Badran, "The Uprising and Syria's Reconstituted Collective Memory," *Open Democracy*, September 22, 2014, <https://perma.cc/DD8J-X3VS>; Yazan Badran and Kevin Smets, "Heterogeneity in Alternative Media Spheres: Oppositional Media and the Framing of Sectarianism in the Syrian Conflict," *International Journal of Communication* 12 (2018): 4232, <https://perma.cc/8LK5-HLKJ>; Enrico De Angelis, "Rethinking Syrian Media," *Open Democracy*, September 22, 2014, <https://perma.cc/45AU-N3Y4>

⁶ Rima Marrouch, "Syria's Post-Uprising Media Outlets: Challenges and Opportunities in Syrian

a gender-based approach. Employing a feminist post-structuralist perspective and utilizing subaltern counterpublic theory, this paper examines whether the opening-up of a virtual space has enabled the creation of an online feminist counterpublic, through which Syrian women are able to challenge the dominant representations of gender within the Syrian state feminism discourse.⁷ A Critical Discourse Analysis of texts produced by two state-affiliated media outlets reveals the intrinsically patriarchal nature of Syrian state feminism, while a narrative analysis of seven interviews with women participating in Emerging Syrian Media explores the ways in which such a discourse is being challenged. Through their performance of ‘active narrator’ identities, production of anti-regime discourses, and participation in women’s discussion groups, all seven women expressed an ability to counter the gender discourse of the regime. The occurrence of such challenges within confined spheres of activity results in the theorizing of a specifically ‘inward-oriented’ online feminist counterpublic within the ESM online space, whereby alternative discourses on gender can be both established and enacted.⁸

INTRODUCTION

A gendered approach to examining the substantial shift that has occurred in the Syrian media landscape since the 2011 uprising against President Bashar al-Assad remains significantly under-theorized. Resulting from growing scepticism in the accuracy of government-run news outlets, a media vacuum emerged within Syria, in which ordinary citizens took to the online ‘streets’ to broadcast their stories of the conflict. This research explores the phenomenon of ‘Emerging Syrian Media’ (ESM), the blossoming of predominantly citizen-run, small-scale, independent news outlets within Syria’s online space.⁹ While scholarly attention has thus far been primarily focused on the credibility, technological, and sectarian debates surrounding ESM, this paper aims to highlight the gendered

Radio Startups.” University of Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2014): 9. <https://perma.cc/FX47-RFH9>

⁷ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text* 26.25 (1990): 56-80, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466240>.

⁸ Florian Toepfl and Eunike Piwoni, “Targeting Dominant Publics: How Counter-Public Commenters Align Their Efforts with Mainstream News,” *New Media and Society* 20.5 (2018): 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817712085>.

⁹ Marrouch, “Syria’s Post-Uprising Media,” 9.

nature of both ESM, and ‘mainstream’ Syrian media.¹⁰ Employing a feminist post-structuralist perspective and utilizing the literature surrounding digital subaltern counterpublics, this research analyzes how the unique virtual space of ESM has engendered an online feminist counterpublic. The research will be guided primarily by the subaltern counterpublic theory of Nancy Fraser. Within such theorizing, groups that have historically been excluded from the public sphere congregate within parallel discursive spaces, which facilitate the (re)production of counter discourses and identities to those established in the public sphere.¹¹ This paper will examine the ways in which Syrian women are able to utilize ESM as a discursive space to challenge dominant gender representations constructed within the discourse of Syrian state feminism.

Syrian State Feminism

Globally, gendered imagery has long been employed in the construction of nationality and citizenship across a variety of country-specific contexts.¹² In the late 20th Century, state feminism emerged as a developmental project in which women’s empowerment was co-opted by a number of states in an attempt to forward national agendas.¹³ Particularly in post-colonial contexts, the symbol of the ‘modern woman’ as “unveiled, educated and emancipated” has been developed in several nation-building projects to symbolise the rejection of a colonial past and the promise of independence.¹⁴ In the Syrian case, a similar format has been largely reproduced. This paper approaches Syrian state feminism as a mediated discourse,

¹⁰ Marc Lynch, Deen Freelon and Sean Aday, “Syria’s Socially Mediated Civil War, Peaceworks No. 91,” *United States Institute of Peace [ISIP]* (2014): 10. <https://perma.cc/AYK7-N7TZ>; Badran, “The Uprising and Syria’s Reconstituted”; Antoun Issa, “Syria’s New Media Landscape: Independent Media Born Out of War: MEI Policy Paper 2016-9,” *Middle East Institute [MEI]* (2016), <https://perma.cc/8Y3D-SRM7>; Kari Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti Mervi, “The Media Work of Syrian Diaspora Activists: Brokering Between the Protest and Mainstream Media,” *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013), <https://perma.cc/GYG6-HDKB>.

¹¹ Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 67.

¹² Silke Wenk, “Gendered Representations of the Nation’s Past and Future,” in *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann and Catherine Hall (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 63-81.

¹³ Karima Omar, “National Symbolism in Construction of Gender: Transformed Symbols in Post-Conflict States,” *Seton Hall’s Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* 5.1 (2004): 49-50, <https://perma.cc/Z748-2BWF>

¹⁴ Sara Lei Sparre, “Educated Women in Syria: Servants of the State, or Nurturers of the Family?” *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 17.1 (2008): 16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10669920701862468>

through which symbolic imagery of the ‘liberated woman’ has been utilised by the al-Assad regime as a means of maintaining both legitimacy and authority.

Assuming power in 1963, the Syrian Ba’ath Party has worked to fashion a state feminism discourse in which the symbolic ‘emancipated woman’ is positioned as a devoted servant of the state.¹⁵ Women’s bodies have simultaneously represented both the ‘progressive modernity’ of the regime and the virtuous obedience required by the authoritarian state.¹⁶ Through the adoption of a gender-equal constitution and a public rejection of what it terms the ‘feudal, tribal and patriarchal’ values associated with traditional Islamic institutions, the Ba’athist regime has constructed its image as a ‘modernizing’ force with regard to women’s rights.¹⁷

Notably, the regime has relied on state-run media to disseminate a discourse celebrating the ‘progressive secularism’ of the president and the subsequent ‘emancipation’ of Syrian women.¹⁸ This has been exemplified through the regime’s use of high-profile females as role models, most notably First Lady Asma al-Assad and current Political and Media Advisor Bouthaina Shaaban, who are portrayed as the epitome of the ‘modern Syrian woman.’¹⁹ As university graduates with a secular and cosmopolitan fashion sense, they symbolize the ability of the regime to uphold a ‘progressive’ stance on women’s issues while dismissing ‘conservative’ religious values.²⁰

Noticeable within this discourse is the co-construction of women as loyal devotees of the Syrian state. This is particularly evident in the use of familial tropes throughout regime-run media, whereby the depiction of women as both

¹⁵ Sparre, “Educated Women in Syria,” 16.

¹⁶ Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric and Symbols in Contemporary Syria: with a new preface* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015): 61-65, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226345536.001.0001>.

¹⁷ Annika Rabo, “Gender, State and Civil Society in Jordan and Syria,” in *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models*, eds. Chris Hann and Elizabeth Dunn (Oxon: Routledge, 1996): 158.; Sparre, “Educated Women in Syria,” 7; Nawal Yaziji, “Civil Society and the Gender Issue,” in *Knowledge Programme Civil Society in West Asia: Syrian Voices from Pre-Revolution Syria: Civil Society Against All Odds*, ed. Salam Kawakibi (The Hague: Hivos, 2013): 51. <https://perma.cc/4S9K-9VAL>

¹⁸ Edith Szanto, “Depicting Victims, Heroines, and Pawns in the Syrian Uprising,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 12.3 (2016): 312-13, <https://doi.org/10.1215/15525864-3637532>

¹⁹ Szanto, “Depicting Victims,” 311.

²⁰ Lina Khatib, *Image Politics in the Middle East: The Role of the Visual in Political Struggle* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2013): 199; Szanto, “Depicting Victims,” 311.

‘mothers of Syria’ and ‘obedient daughters of the Ba’athist regime’ carry undertones of filial piety and obedience.²¹ Similar representations of womanly patriotic virtue have been noted both in the Syrian state education curriculum taught in public schools and the regime-manufactured videos of female singers and fighters.²² While the complexities and implications of such depictions will be explored in greater detail throughout the analytical section of this paper, it is crucial to establish an initial picture of Syrian state feminism as a discourse that intricately interweaves the interests of women with those of the state.²³ Henceforth, the discourse will be viewed as one that has co-opted imagery associated with the women’s ‘liberation’ and female patriotic obedience in an attempt to maintain and reinforce its own legitimacy and authority.

Syrian Media

Before 2011, Syrian media under the Ba’ath Party was predominantly characterized as a system of “authoritarian populism,”²⁴ in which independent outlets were banned and all news, official reports and social commentary were circulated by government-run news agencies.²⁵ Heavily-censored newspapers were restricted from publishing potentially destabilizing ‘taboo’ subjects, resulting in a media environment in which the Syrian government had total control over public discourse.²⁶ As such, the overwhelming narrative disseminated during this period was constructed upon the supposed-merits of the Ba’athist regime and the Syrian Republic as a whole.²⁷ While the Damascus Spring of 2001, in which

²¹ Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*, 27, 63.

²² Lama Rageh, “How Women Are Depicted in the Syrian Curricula,” *SyriaUntold*, August 22, 2019, <https://perma.cc/EM5H-3H69>; Szanto, “Depicting Victims,” 307.

²³ Totah, “The Memory Keeper,” 11.

²⁴ Samer Nassif, *Syria: Hot Spots in Global Politics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018): 38.

²⁵ Akram al-Bunni, “Syria’s Crisis of Expression,” *Arab Insight* 2.1 (2008): 100, <https://perma.cc/G3C7-GF3U>; Lorenzo Trombetta and Caterina Pinto, “Syria,” *Media Landscapes: Expert Analyses of the State of Media*, <https://perma.cc/P3WC-TUP5>

²⁶ Ayham al-Hussein, Layla Abyad, Rand Sabbagh, and Raheb Alwany, *Peace Journalism or War Journalism? Role and Impact of Alternative Media Groups on the Syrian Conflict* (Istanbul: Badael Foundation, 2016): 13; Badran, “The Uprising and Syria’s Reconstituted”; Amjad Baiazy, “Syria’s Cyber Wars,” *Media Policy* (2012): 2. <https://perma.cc/62VU-57UM>

²⁷ Judith Pies and Philip Madanat, “Media Accountability Practices Online in Syria: An Indicator for Changing Perceptions of Journalism, mediaACT Working Paper No. 10/2011,” (University of Tampere, Finland: Journalism Research and Development Centre, 2011): 5. <https://perma.cc/Y28N-3BA8>

reformist policies and the awakening of civil society resulted in calls for greater media liberalisation,²⁸ provided a brief period of optimism, this strategy was soon replaced with policies of journalistic censorship, Internet restrictions and social media bans.²⁹ Despite this, many areas of Syrian civil society remained inspired by the Damascus Spring and were committed to subverting state media institutions.³⁰ Partly achieved through the use of web proxies, the number of Syrian Internet users grew from 30,000 to 3.9 million between 2000 and 2010.³¹

On the eve of the uprising in February 2011, governmental bans on Facebook and YouTube were lifted, enabling a virtual space for Syrians to express dissatisfaction with the status quo.³² The collapse of state media authority resulted in the establishment of a more “open media culture”³³ in which ordinary citizens were, for the first time, able to partake in the production of a coherent counter-discourse. Individuals used online platforms to document their experiences of the Syrian protests in an attempt to challenge the narrative of the regime.³⁴ This post-2011 pluralist digital media space; encompassing a variety of small-scale, independent online media outlets, as well as a broad spectrum of citizen journalists, will be termed in this paper as ‘Emerging Syrian Media’ (ESM). A 2016 study of ESM outlets in Northern Syria revealed that most employ between 10 and 20 staff members who consider themselves either ‘activists’ or ‘citizen journalists’.³⁵ The majority are concerned with reporting on ‘civil and local

²⁸ Al-Bunni, “Syria’s Crisis of Expression,” 105; Najib Ghadbian, “The New Asad: Dynamics of Continuity and Change in Syria,” *Middle East Journal* 55.4 (2001): 636-638, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4329687>; Trombetta and Pinto, “Syria, Media Landscapes: Expert Analyses of the State of Media.”

²⁹ Al-Hussein, Abyad, Sabbagh, and Alwany, “Peace Journalism,” 14.

³⁰ Christa Salamandra and Leif Stenberg, *Syria from Reform to Revolt, Volume 2: Culture, Society and Religion* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2015): 6-7.

³¹ Baiazy, “Syria’s Cyber Wars,” 11.

³² Baiazy, “Syria’s Cyber Wars,” 12; Lorenzo Trombetta, “Altering Courses in Unknown Waters: Interaction between traditional and new media during the first months of the Syrian uprising,” *Global Media Journal* 2.1 (2012): 4, <https://perma.cc/8DYF-JX4Z>

³³ Issa, “Syria’s New Media Landscape,” 5.

³⁴ Al-Hussein, Abyad, Sabbagh, and Alwany, “Peace Journalism,” 15; Badran, “The Uprising and Syria’s Reconstituted Collective Memory”; Badran and Smets, “Heterogeneity in Alternative Media Spheres,” 4232; De Angelis, “Rethinking Syrian Media”; Lynch, Freelon and Aday, “Syria’s Socially Mediated,” 7.

³⁵ Al-Hussein, Abyad, Sabbagh, and Alwany, “Peace Journalism,” 15, 19; De Angelis, “Rethinking Syrian Media.”

society affairs,' and consider the Internet, particularly social media sites, to be their most popular communication tool.³⁶ The fragmented nature of the Syrian conflict, however, has led to large geographic, technological and ideological variation, making a strict categorization of media outlets a challenging task.³⁷ While financial sustainability remains one of the principal obstacles facing ESM outlets,³⁸ there has been a noticeable trend towards greater professionalisation following the establishment of several NGO-funded training programs.³⁹ Many, such as ASML/Syria and the Syrian Female Journalists Network, have been instrumental in offering specific projects for women working within ESM.

Through an application of subaltern counterpublic theory to the Syrian media landscape, this research aims to explore the ways in which Syrian women participating in ESM are situated within an online feminist counterpublic. While Syrian state feminism will be understood as the dominant gendered public discourse, it will be investigated whether the flourishing of ESM outlets has provided a space in which women are able to challenge such dominant constructions of gender. The focus of this research rests upon the lived experiences of Syrian women participating in ESM, collected through a series of seven interviews that occurred between January and May 2020, with the approval of the university ethics committee. Following such guidelines, the names and personal details of all the women participating in this research have been removed from this paper. An analysis of these lived experiences will be situated within a wider discussion of Syrian state feminism, as disseminated through regime-run media. Such an approach will result in a conceptualization of the Syrian media landscape as a gendered terrain, consisting of multiple competing publics attempting to influence the dominant narrative of the al-Assad regime.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Performative Subject

Ontologically grounded in post-structuralist theory, this research will be guided by the anti-essentialist conceptualisation of the subject as a performative

³⁶ Ibid., 20-21.

³⁷ Trombetta and Pinto, "Syria, Media Landscapes: Expert Analyses of the State of Media."

³⁸ Al-Hussein, Abyad, Sabbagh, and Alwany, "Peace Journalism," 19.

³⁹ Issa, "Syria's New Media Landscape," 20; Trombetta and Pinto, "Syria, Media Landscapes: Expert Analyses of the State of Media."

entity; informed both by a Foucauldian understanding of language as a productive tool in the formulation of discourses and the theory of performativity as forwarded by Judith Butler.⁴⁰ Accordingly, analytical focus will be placed upon the relationship between micro “linguistic processes and strategies” and macro systems of ‘discourse’ in which social knowledge is produced, meaning is ascribed, and subject identities are enacted.⁴¹

Recognizing the productive power of language will be crucial to a critical deconstruction of the Syrian state feminism discourse. A focus on the functioning of micro-level linguistics will highlight the strategies employed by regime-run media to continually reproduce dominant understandings of gender. Removing essentialist notions of subject identity will also enable an exploration of how the female subject assumes meaning within this gendered discourse. Ultimately, such a post-structural analysis will reveal how women working within ESM are able to challenge such subjectivities through their own processes of linguistic self-representation and the performance of counter-identities.

Discursive practices can be broadly understood as social phenomena, through which dominant understandings of ‘reality’ are constructed.⁴² Linguistic and symbolic processes such as conversation, writing and representational practices work to produce social ‘texts’ which constitute discourse.⁴³ Through a constant process of reformulation, hegemonic ‘ideologies’ emerge within discourses such as those surrounding gender, race and class.⁴⁴ The unchallenged and ‘natural’ status of these ideologies then determines what is deemed acceptable knowledge and behavior within society.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2006); David Howarth, *Discourse* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000): 82.

⁴¹ Stewart Clegg, *Frameworks of Power* (London: SAGE Publications, 1989): 151, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446279267>; Tim Dant, *Knowledge, Ideology and Discourse: A Sociological Perspective* (London: Routledge, 1991): 153; Anna De Fina, Deborah Schiffrin and Michael Bamberg, “Introduction,” in *Discourse and Identity*, edited by Anna De Fina, Deborah Schiffrin, and Michael Bamberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511584459.001>; Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Post-Structuralist Theory*, Second ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1997): 21.

⁴² Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” in *Discourse as Social Interaction*, ed. Teun A. Van Dijk (London: SAGE, 1997): 258.

⁴³ Clegg, *Frameworks of Power*, 151; Fairclough and Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” 258.

⁴⁴ Weedon, *Feminist Practice*, 34.

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: 1*, trans. Robert Hurley

Conceptualizing a world constituted through discourse refutes the positivist assumption that a subject has a pre-given or 'natural' identity. Instead, subjects acquire meaning through micro-level linguistic practices and are defined by their subsequent positionality within a discourse.⁴⁶ Within post-structuralist theory, this conceptualization of identity as a relational process, whereby a subject assumes meaning through their positioning within a particular discursive space, can be broadly defined as 'subjectivity.'

In her theorizing on gender identity, Butler contests the notion of a fixed subject essence, arguing instead that the gendered body comes into existence through the "performance" of an identity within the wider discourse on gender.⁴⁷ Butler defines performativity as a continuous process of symbolic self-representation, whereby identity is constructed through a "stylised repetition of acts,"⁴⁸ demonstrating that subjects simultaneously enact, and are a product of, the discourses within which they are situated.⁴⁹

This conceptualisation of subject identity will be utilised throughout this paper in conjunction with Nancy Fraser's theorising on subaltern counterpublics.⁵⁰ While both scholars approach subjectivity from differing theoretical standpoints,⁵¹ this paper argues that by adopting a middle ground approach,⁵² it is possible and indeed advantageous, to reconcile the anti-essentialist post-structuralism of Judith Butler with the more emancipatory elements of Nancy Fraser's critical theory. While both scholars broadly conceptualize subject identity as discursively constructed, Fraser challenges Butler's focus on the overly-abstracted individual and dismissal of

(London: Penguin Books, 1998): 5-7; Howarth, *Discourse*, 76-7; Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, "Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory and Methodology," in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 2nd edition. eds. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (London: SAGE Publications, 2009): 8.

⁴⁶ Bethan Benwell and Elizabeth Stokoe, *Discourse and Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006): 8; Clegg, *Frameworks of Power*, 151.

⁴⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 191.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 2.

⁵⁰ Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere."

⁵¹ Judith Butler, "Merely Cultural," *Social Text* 52/53 (1997) <https://doi.org/10.2307/466744>; Nancy Fraser, "Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler," *Social Text* 52/53 (1997) <https://doi.org/10.2307/466745>

⁵² Nancy Fraser, "False Antitheses," in *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (New York: Routledge, 1995): 71.

collective identities as inherently oppressive categories.⁵³ Instead, Fraser considers a ‘weaker’ post-structural subjectivity, whereby identity is (re)produced through processes of social interaction and discursive contestation.⁵⁴ This position demonstrates both the analytical utility and emancipatory potential of collective identities such as ‘women’. Fraser argues that in order for the term ‘women’ to hold analytical value, it is crucial to recognise the specific sociohistorical context and maintain an anti-essentialist standpoint. If understood within this framework, such collective identities hold the potential to recognize individual difference *and* support the conceptualization of identity as a performative and discursively-constructed act.⁵⁵ This paper will be guided by such a nuanced approach, which appreciates the analytical value of ‘women’ while retaining the performative elements of post-structuralist identity formation.

Online Feminist Counterpublics

To determine whether the ESM phenomenon can accurately be characterised as constituting space for an online feminist counterpublic, this research will utilise the literature surrounding subaltern counterpublics,⁵⁶ emerging from a critique of Habermas’ conceptualisation of the public sphere. Rather than acknowledging the public sphere as an open discursive arena⁵⁷ encouraging “rational public debate,”⁵⁸ this paper will consider it as an exclusionary and hierarchical space serving to silence the voices of marginalised groups.⁵⁹ Fraser argues that such exclusion encourages the alignment of subaltern groups into counterpublics. These are spaces where hegemonic discourses can be challenged and alternative identities, which oppose dominant representations

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵⁴ Estelle Ferrarese, “Nancy Fraser and the Theory of Participatory Parity,” *Books and Ideas*, 2015. <https://perma.cc/C2B5-HHD3>

⁵⁵ Fraser, “False Antitheses,” 70.

⁵⁶ Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere”; Ann Travers, “Parallel Subaltern Feminist Counterpublics in Cyberspace,” *Sociological Perspectives* 46. 2 (2003): 223-237, <https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2003.46.2.223>

⁵⁷ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989).

⁵⁸ Nick Crossley and John M. Roberts, *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 2.

⁵⁹ Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 59-60.

found in the public sphere, can be constructed.⁶⁰ The positioning of subaltern counterpublics as oppositional yet parallel to the public sphere invites the theorizing of multiple temporally and spatially co-existing publics,⁶¹ an ontology that will be employed throughout this research.

The proliferation of computer-mediated communication has resulted in a wealth of literature regarding the channels through which ordinary citizens are able to disseminate discourses, curate content and partake in self-representation online.⁶² In his discussion on the identity of Dutch-Moroccan youth, Leurs⁶³ demonstrates how the digital infrastructure of online forums and social media platforms allows for the creation of non-mainstream cyberspaces, in which subaltern groups are able to perform oppositional group identities and counter hegemonic narratives. Employing the term “space invaders,”⁶⁴ it is explored how formerly-marginalized voices are able to inhabit areas of online space and project into the wider digital public sphere, as well as facilitating the establishment of “forums for resistance.”⁶⁵ The constant evolution of social media platforms as “identity workshops”⁶⁶ has provided considerable impetus for empirical investigation. Eckert and Chadha recount how Muslim bloggers in Germany were able to engage in positive self-representation online in response to the dominant process of ‘othering’ that occurred in the public sphere.⁶⁷ It is evident that the “networked publics” of the Internet era offer increasing virtual space for the creation of multiple co-existing digital communities.⁶⁸ Such infrastructure supports the argumentation that Fraser’s

⁶⁰ Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 67; Einar Thorsen and Chindu Sreedharan, “#EndMaleGuardianship: Women’s Rights, Social Media and the Arab Public Sphere,” *New Media and Society* 21.5 (2019): 1125, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818821376>

⁶¹ Travers, “Parallel Subaltern Feminist Counterpublics,” 229-30.

⁶² Larry J. Diamond, “Liberation Technology,” *Journal of Democracy* 21.3 (2010): 70, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.0.0190>; Stine Eckert and Kalyani Chadha, “Muslim Bloggers in Germany: An Emerging Counter-Public,” *Media, Culture and Society* 35.8 (2013) <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443713501930>; Bruce Etling, John Kelly, Robert Faris, and John Palfrey, “Mapping the Arabic Blogosphere: Politics and Dissent Online,” *New Media and Society* 12.8 (2010): 1225-1243, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810385096>

⁶³ Koen Leurs, *Digital Passages: Migrant Youth 2.0: Diaspora, Gender and Youth Cultural Intersections* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015): <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789089646408>.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁶⁶ Amy Bruckman, “Identity Workshop: Emergent Social and Psychological Phenomena in Text-Based Virtual Reality,” *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*, dissertation (1992).

⁶⁷ Eckert and Chadha, “Muslim Bloggers in Germany,” 931.

⁶⁸ Bryce J. Renninger, “Where I Can Speak My Mind’: Networked Counterpublics in a

notion of subaltern counterpublic(s) can successfully be translated to the online sphere.⁶⁹

Viewed from a feminist perspective, digital subaltern counterpublics provide parallel discursive arenas in which hegemonic patriarchal social relations can be challenged, alongside the construction and performance of oppositional gender identities.⁷⁰ Much literature has highlighted the impact of online feminist counterpublics in disputing stereotypical gendered assumptions in traditional media through the construction of visible self-representations, while widening the scope for participation in a variety of country-specific contexts.⁷¹ Investigating the work of female ‘cyberactivists’ during the Arab Spring, Radsch and Khamis note the importance of digital infrastructure in creating communities of contestation, whereby stereotypical depictions of gender presented in traditional media were challenged and the relationship between ‘public’ and ‘private’ was reformulated.⁷² Through their dual character as places of both identity construction and discursive contestation, online feminist counterpublics thus hold great potential as both safe and emancipatory spaces.⁷³

The Syrian Context: Provincializing Europe

A final, yet crucial, consideration is the question as to whether the model of online feminist counterpublics can be accurately theorised within the Syrian context. Indeed, the Habermasian notion of the public sphere, which forms the

Polymedia Environment,” *New Media and Society* 17.9 (2015): 1513-4, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814530095>

⁶⁹ Nathaniel Poor, “Mechanisms of an Online Public Sphere: The Website Slashdot,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 10.2 (2005): <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2005.tb00241.x>.

⁷⁰ Travers, “Parallel Subaltern Feminist Counterpublics,” 232-233; Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002): 118-119, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-14-1-49>.

⁷¹ Nanjala Nyabola, *Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics: How the Internet Era is Transforming Politics in Kenya* (London: Zed Books, 2018): 138-9; Thorsen and Sreedharan, “#EndMaleGuardianship,” 1125.

⁷² Courtney C. Radsch and Sahar Khamis, “In Their Own Voice: Technologically Mediated Empowerment and Transformation Among Young Arab Women,” *Feminist Media Studies* 13.5 (2013): 881-883, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2013.838378>

⁷³ Loubna H. Skalli, “Communicating Gender in the Public Sphere: Women and Information Technologies in the MENA Region,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 2.2 (2006): 37-9, <https://doi.org/10.2979/mew.2006.2.2.35>

very roots of theorising about subaltern counterpublics, has received considerable criticism for its Eurocentric bias.⁷⁴ Habermas' focus on the bourgeois public of 18th Century Europe as the initial impetus for the emergence of a rational discursive sphere places significant emphasis upon "an ideal abstracted from early modern and modern Western experience."⁷⁵ As such, concerns about the applicability of the model to a 'non-Western' context with differing sociohistorical conditions, merit considerable interrogation.

This research will utilize the postcolonial work of Dipesh Chakrabarty⁷⁶ concerning the 'Provincializing of Europe' to demonstrate how subaltern counterpublic theory can be translated to the contemporary Syrian context. Chakrabarty notes how concepts bound up with 'political modernity,' including that of the public sphere, are laden with traditions and histories originating in Western Europe.⁷⁷ Through focusing on a *translational* rather than *transitional* process of modernity, Chakrabarty rejects Western historicism and demonstrates how such Eurocentric concepts can be "renewed from and for the margins"⁷⁸ through recognizing a diverse range of sociohistorical systems of organization. He thus contests the notion of a singular, universal, and aspirational modernity, replacing it with an appreciation for the ways in which concepts such as the public sphere can be *translated* into a variety of non-European contexts.⁷⁹

The translational process involves recognizing that public spheres are essentially contested and "negotiated practices"⁸⁰ that need not be tied to specific institutional arrangements or empirical criteria. This results in the theorising of a

⁷⁴ Shelton A. Gunaratne, "Public Sphere and Communicative Rationality: Interrogating Habermas's Eurocentrism," *Journalism and Communication Monographs* 8.2 (2006): <https://doi.org/10.1177/152263790600800201>

⁷⁵ Philip C. Huang, "'Public Sphere'/'Civil Society' in China? The Third Realm Between State and Society," *Modern China* 19.2 (1993): 216–240, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009770049301900207>

⁷⁶ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷⁹ Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe*, 46.; Gunaratne, "Public Sphere and Communicative Rationality," 100.

⁸⁰ Adrian Rauchfleisch, "The Public Sphere as an Essentially Contested Concept: A Co-Citation Analysis of the Last 20 Years of Public Sphere Research," *Communication and the Public* 2.1 (2017) <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057047317691054>; James Tully, "On the Global Multiplicity of Public Sphere: The Democratic Transformation of the Public Sphere?" in *Beyond Habermas: Democracy, Knowledge and the Public Sphere*, eds. Christian Emden and David R. Midgley (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013): 171, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt9qczk9.12>.

‘general public sphere’ premised upon the ordinary discursive interaction that occurs amongst individuals.⁸¹ The reduction of the public sphere to this basic framework of deliberative contestation leads to its appropriate translation into multitudinous forms; local and global, unofficial and institutionalised, physical and digital, and indeed Western and non-Western.⁸² Conceptualising the public sphere as simply an arena for critical conversation, shaped specifically by the very institutional context within which it finds itself, invites the application of counterpublic theory to the Syrian media landscape.

While public discourse has historically been monopolized by the regime, the existence of multiple publics as sites for discursive interaction separate from the state have long bubbled below the surface of official public discourse.⁸³ Fear of arrest and imprisonment, however, ensured that only ‘safe’ apolitical topics were discussed in such spheres, with any government criticism heavily disguised within ‘harmless’ artistic and cultural production.⁸⁴ The uprising of 2011 provided the impetus for the emergence of fully-fledged critical counterpublics within the Syrian media landscape in the form of ESM outlets. Established amid the uprising with the aim of “advancing critical perspectives”⁸⁵ and “promoting the peaceful resistance,”⁸⁶ these platforms have transferred the subtly critical conversations previously held amongst Syrian individuals to a consolidated and professional sphere. This research focuses upon the ways in which such counterpublic activity has presented a challenge to the al-Assad regime’s narrative of Syrian state feminism.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Informed by post-structuralist scholarship, this research considers reality as constructed through a series of competing discourses, in which dominant systems of societal structure and organization are normalised.⁸⁷ This research

⁸¹ Tully, “On the Global Multiplicity of the Public Sphere,” 175.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 170.

⁸³ Salamandra and Stenberg, *Syria from Reform to Revolt*, 6-7.

⁸⁴ Miriam Cooke, *Dissident Syria: Making Oppositional Arts Official*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007): <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822390565>; Interview with Rima, the founder of an online photo-sharing project. Interviewed, February 24, 2020, Whatsapp call.

⁸⁵ “About,” *SyriaUntold*, <https://perma.cc/V8UE-P3ZA>

⁸⁶ “About Us,” *Enab Baladi*, <https://perma.cc/GU3E-87MT>

⁸⁷ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (Harlow:

is concerned with the dominant representation of gender found within Syrian state feminism, as disseminated by regime-run media. While an analysis of gender representations within this discourse will form the contextual background for this research, the central focus will be placed upon the lived experiences of women participating in the ESM phenomenon and the ways in which they are challenging such representations through an online feminist counterpublic. An investigation into lived experiences was conducted through a series of semi-structured ‘active’ interviews in order to place maximum emphasis on the voices of the participants.⁸⁸

A qualitative interpretivist methodology was adopted both in the decoding of ‘texts’ produced by Syrian state media, as well as the implementation and analysis of interviews. Within post-structuralist ontology, there exists no objective or empirical reality, only the subjective reading of discursive practices. Hence, an interpretivist methodology was employed to study and deconstruct the meaning that arises from individual ‘texts’ and lived experiences. It is crucial to acknowledge that such a research design can be criticized for its subjectivity. Taking this into consideration, this research will adopt a self-reflexive approach throughout and recognise how individual positionality and experience will affect the reading of ‘texts’ and interview responses.⁸⁹

Critical Discourse Analysis of Syrian State Feminism

A focus on the ideological nature of language resulted in a Critical Discourse Analysis being chosen as the most appropriate means of deconstructing and interpreting meaning from state media ‘texts’ in terms of their gendered structure, language and imagery.⁹⁰ Critical Discourse Analysis can be best understood not as a singular analytical method, but rather an area of study which aims to uncover the way in which dominant discourses are constituted and sustained

Addison Wesley Longman Ltd, 1995): 23; Ruth E. Page, David Barton, Johann Unger, Michele and Zappavigna, *Researching Language and Social Media, A Student Guide* (London: Routledge, 2014): 81, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315771786>; Teun A. Van Dijk, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” *The Handbook of Critical Discourse Analysis* 2nd edition, eds. Deborah Tannen, Heidi E. Hamilton and Deborah Schiffrin (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2015): <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118584194.ch22>.

⁸⁸ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* 2nd Edition (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2007): 20; David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, 2nd Edition (London: SAGE Publications, 2005): 154.

⁸⁹ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 21.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

through micro-level linguistic practices.⁹¹ In order to investigate the ways in which gender is represented within the state feminism discourse, two sites of discursive construction will be analysed: the ‘Her’ segment of the *Syria Times* e-newspaper and the ‘Culture and Arts’ section of the *Syrian Arab News Agency’s* (SANA) online platform. Both outlets are English-language news distributors with close links to the Syrian regime. *Syria Times* is published by the Al-Wehda Establishment for Press, Printing, Publishing and Distribution and affiliated to the Ministry of Information, while the *Syrian Arab News Agency* is the official news outlet for the al-Assad government.⁹² They will therefore feature texts that have been constructed, produced, distributed and approved by the regime and thus provide the most accurate depiction of state feminism as enacted through the Syrian state media apparatus. A focus on the ‘Her’ and ‘Culture and Arts’ segments was chosen because they are the sites where representations of gender are most frequently deployed and include stories consciously aimed at a female readership. They are therefore the most likely to be interpreted by a female audience and work to inform self-representations and subjectivities within the discourse. While other sections such as ‘News,’ ‘Society,’ and ‘Economy’ are also sites where gendered imagery is produced and consumed, these were not selected for analysis within this paper. Though the content of these sections may also be interpreted by a female audience in a variety of ways, the articles in these sections appeared to place gender in secondary focus and were not consciously designed for female readers. This research chose to solely focus on the sites where representations of gender appeared the *most* and where they were deliberately constructed for a female audience. Placing emphasis on these sections helps elucidate the techniques and strategies utilised by the regime in the dissemination of a targeted gendered discourse. To include a more comprehensive picture of gendered imagery within Syrian state media was beyond the scope of this paper, but is encouraged in further research.

Articles published between January and April 2020 will be analyzed and coded thematically to identify repeated linguistic constructions and representations of gender. A ‘three-dimensional’ framework, will guide the method behind this analysis, through linking micro-linguistic constructions to macro structures of

⁹¹ Dant, *Knowledge, Ideology and Discourse*, 153; De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg, “Introduction,” 1.

⁹² “About Us,” *Syria Times*, <https://perma.cc/X2VH-HYBE>

patriarchal power.⁹³ First, the *textual dimension* of the document will be analyzed, involving an examination of ideologically-loaded semiotic and rhetorical strategies such as extended metaphors, objectification, pronoun usage and stereotyping.⁹⁴ Second, an exploration of the *discursive practice dimension* will involve situating these linguistic practices within the discourse of state feminism to analyze the ways in which they create and convey meaning to audiences. Finally, an account of the *social practice dimension* will reflect upon the wider social context and the subject positionings that result from the dissemination of such a discourse. This indexical framework, focusing on how linguistic choices work to situate subjects within discourse, will enable a thorough reading of the gender constructions within Syrian state feminism that pays appropriate attention to crucial contextual factors.⁹⁵

Active Interviews

Against this backdrop I will situate the lived experiences of seven Syrian women, documenting their participation in ESM and their views on gender representation within Syrian media. Participants were selected based on their online reporting of the Syrian conflict, either through an ESM outlet or personal social media account. Initial contact was established via email or direct message on social media, predominantly Twitter. The sample selection was chosen to reflect women working across a broad spectrum of media, ranging from informal blogs to more established outlets such as radio and print organizations. It is crucial to note, however, that the women included in this study were those with a vocal online presence, as they were most accessible for an interview. This research is therefore limited to an analysis of women who are active participants in the ESM phenomenon and as such, solely reflects the experiences of those with Internet access, a degree of media experience and the financial means to partake in online reporting. The relatively privileged position of these participants will affect how they describe their experiences working in ESM and will thus influence how this paper conceptualizes the emancipatory potential of this online space. The exclusion of those with a 'quieter' or less-established voice from the sample is an important limitation that should be addressed in future research.

Sampling was originally focused on Syrian female journalists. However during interviews it became clear that several women did not self-identify as

⁹³ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 5th Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016): 540.

⁹⁴ Benwell and Stokoe, *Discourse and Identity*, 114-115.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

journalists, and thus the scope of interview participation was widened to include those identifying as online activists. Snowball sampling was used to ensure trust between interviewer and interviewee, maintain security and privacy, as well as to allow access to hard to reach populations.⁹⁶ Three interviewees acted as gatekeepers, putting me in contact with journalists and activists they believed would be interested in participating in the research. Due to a large number of respondents wishing to remain anonymous, pseudonyms have been used throughout the analysis, with personal narratives removed.

Interviews were conducted over Skype, Whatsapp and GoogleMeet. Interviewees were asked before the call whether they consented to it being recorded, as this encouraged a natural flow of conversation and ensured an objective and durable record.⁹⁷ Arising out of concerns for personal or familial security, however, several respondents asked for calls not to be recorded. Accordingly, notes were taken instead to document these interviews. The geographical location of participants was varied – three speaking from inside Syria and four working for ESM outlets from Western Europe. All interviewees were English-language speakers, which appeared to be relatively common upon sampling ESM platforms.

Semi-structured interviews were utilized, focusing on three areas of inquiry: the background of the participant, their views on the representation of gender within Syrian media, and their experience participating in the ESM online space. An open-ended, semi-structured format was used in order to allow participants to express their experiences and interpretations as fully as possible, while also providing a degree of comparability amongst responses.⁹⁸

The purpose of the interviews was to investigate how Syrian women felt they were able to challenge dominant representations of gender through participating in an online feminist counterpublic. There was therefore a particular interest in how participants both viewed and represented themselves within the gendered discourse. A ‘methodology for listening’ was employed while conducting and analyzing the interviews in order to better understand the

⁹⁶ Fabiola Baltar and Igansi Brunet, “Social Research 2.0: Virtual Snowball Sampling Method Using Facebook,” *Internet Research* 22.1 (2012): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1108/10662241211199960>

⁹⁷ Jerry Wellington and Marcin Szczerbinski, *Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (London: Continuum, 2007): 61.

⁹⁸ David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research* 2nd Edition (London: SAGE Publications, 2005), 167; Wellington and Szczerbinski, *Research Methods*, 61.

worldview of participants and explore the narratives of self-representation present in responses.⁹⁹ Such an approach to interviewing has often been utilized in feminist and subaltern research to study voices and experiences that may previously have been ignored or misrepresented.¹⁰⁰ Through conducting a narrative analysis of the experiences presented by women participating in ESM, it will be possible to identify both how they perform their identity, as explained by Judith Butler, and view their positionality within a gendered discourse. This will enable an analysis of whether dominant representations of gender are being challenged by an online feminist counterpublic and the ways in which such challenges occur.

GENDER REPRESENTATIONS IN SYRIAN STATE MEDIA

A coded thematic analysis of 14 articles from the Syria Times and five from the Syrian Arab News Agency reveals the intrinsically patriarchal nature of the Ba'athist state feminism discourse. While attempting to position themselves as champions of the 'modern Syrian woman', a critical analysis of state-run media exposes how the regime has constructed a *patriarchal* discourse, where the female subject only assumes meaning within simplistic narratives of servitude.¹⁰¹ This section will explore the two most frequently reproduced female subjectivities within the texts: those of 'women-as-mothers' and 'women-as-makers'. Their prominence indicates that they are the tropes most utilized by the regime in the construction of female subjectivities and are therefore most likely to accurately reflect representations of gender within the Syrian state feminism discourse. Moreover, the continued repetition of these representations within state media suggests that they are the most likely to be interpreted by the target audience and thus work to inform self-representations. Through deconstructing each subjectivity, this research will examine how both have contributed to the positioning of women within a wider 'narrative of giving' that forms the basis of the regime's gender discourse.

Women-as-Mothers

⁹⁹ Barry Glassner and Julia Loughlin, *Drugs in Adolescent Worlds*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987): 16-40, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-18809-3>

¹⁰⁰ Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, 167; Mary Maynard, "Methods, Practice and Epistemology: The Debate About Feminism and Research," in *Social Research Methods: A Reader*, edited by Clive Seale (London: Routledge, 2004): 466.

¹⁰¹ Noted by six women interviewed.

“Like many other steadfast Syrian women, the wife of martyr Ali As’ad expressed her only wish, which is to be strong and patient enough to continue bringing up her children” - Hamda Mustafa, Syria Times.¹⁰²

The positioning of women within familial narratives has long been a rhetorical device utilized by the Syrian regime in the construction of a state feminism discourse built upon obedience and filial piety.¹⁰³ In the sampled texts from SANA and the Syria Times, women were positioned within patriarchal familial settings – situated exclusively in relation to their husbands and sons – on 15 occasions in the period of analysis. The use of male-oriented labelling, whereby the female subject only assumes meaning through their positioning as “the wife of...”¹⁰⁴ or “the mother of...”¹⁰⁵ a male family member, works to construct ‘the woman’ as a subordinate identity, establishing them as a secondary focus within the text. A notable example concerns a woman interviewed by the Syria Times, whose account of being held hostage by ISIS is obscured by the events of her husband’s death on the battlefield, which provides her with “a source of pride, hope, strength and steadfastness.”¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the construction of a narrative in which women only ‘come into being’ as a result of the actions of their male relatives is a recurrent theme within the texts. This is particularly evident in the linguistic framing of women’s experiences in the passive voice, with several accounts claiming that a husband or son’s heroism “has strengthened [them]”¹⁰⁷ or “turned [them] into a creative woman.”¹⁰⁸ The construction of such a narrative, in which the woman is granted agency only within reference to male family members, provides little room for a female subjectivity beyond the patriarchal family.

In her work surrounding the rhetoric used by the Syrian state, Lisa

¹⁰² Mustafa, “Syrian Women Show Unique Steadfastness,” *Syria Times*, March 10, 2020, <https://perma.cc/F3J3-2EQZ>

¹⁰³ Szanto, “Depicting Victims,” 18; Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*, 32.

¹⁰⁴ Mustafa, “Syrian Women Show Unique Steadfastness.”

¹⁰⁵ Rawaa Ghanam, “Syrian Women Recount Stories of Their Kidnapping by ISIS Terrorists,” *Syria Times*, March 15, 2020, <https://perma.cc/7PQB-AW4K>

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Mustafa, “Syrian Women Show Unique Steadfastness.”

¹⁰⁸ Rawaa Ghanam, “Rural Women Empowerment One of Priorities of Syrian Government Development Programs,” *Syria Times*, February 9, 2020, <https://perma.cc/82PC-B3S8>

Wedeen notes how the extension of such gendered narratives has historically been employed by the al-Assad regime in the construction of a patriarchal national family, with the president situated as the “ultimate father.”¹⁰⁹ An analysis of the Syria Times and SANA reveals the continuation of this ‘national family’ discourse within state-run media. The visual representation of the subservient female subject in relation to the presidential father figure is most striking in the images chosen to accompany articles. Demonstrated in Figures 1 and 2, the watchful ‘president-as-patriarch’ is depicted as an omnipresent paternal force, physically positioned as ‘head of the family’ above the women photographed.

Figure 1: Image showing ‘Business Women Committee Exhibition’ in Syria Times Article: “Supporting Women’s Activity: Exhibition for Women Empowerment.”¹¹⁰



¹⁰⁹ Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*, 27.

¹¹⁰ Amal Farhat, “Supporting Women’s Activity: Exhibition for Women Empowerment,” *Syria Times*, March 10, 2020, <https://perma.cc/Z6AH-G6RD>

Figure 2: Image showing an ‘Event Marking International Women’s Day’ in Syria Times Article: “Syrian Women Recount Stories of Their Kidnapping by ISIS Terrorists.”¹¹¹



Moreover, the representation of women as mothers of martyrs is a gendered trope used extensively throughout SANA and the Syria Times, contributing to a wider narrative of female giving and servitude. Interviews with bereaved women whose sons have been “martyred”¹¹² and “sacrificed to defend the Syrian people”¹¹³ work to tie the subjectivity of motherhood to patriotic service, as it becomes a woman’s role and duty to provide sons for the protection of the Syrian state.¹¹⁴ This is further reinforced by the tone of ‘wilful sacrifice’ with which the interviews are framed. Figure 3 depicts a woman who spoke “proudly” of her son’s military service, while recalling how Syrian women have gladly “taught their sons how to love their homeland and how to defend it tirelessly.”¹¹⁵ Through the construction of a discourse in which women both *produce* and are *protected by* their sons who die on the battlefield, women become synonymous with the Syrian state and are thus further embedded within a patriotic narrative of giving and servitude.

¹¹¹ Ghanam, “Syrian Women Recount Stories.”

¹¹² Mustafa, “Syrian Women Show Unique Steadfastness.”

¹¹³ Ruaa Al-Jazaeri, “A Book By a Martyr’s Mother Documents story of al-Kindi Garrison Heroes,” *Syrian Arab News Agency*, February 9, 2020, <https://perma.cc/3GAH-6S6E>

¹¹⁴ Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*, 60.

¹¹⁵ Mustafa, “Syrian Women Show Unique Steadfastness.”

Figure 3: Image Depicting The Mother Of Two Martyrs, in Syria Times Article: “Syrian Women Show Unique Steadfastness Despite Deep Wounds.”¹¹⁶



Women-as-Makers

“My participation at the permanent marketing centre has given me hope again to produce something useful for my country” - Rawaa Ghanam, Syria Times.¹¹⁷

The Syrian state feminism discourse has historically used women’s bodies as dual signifiers: simultaneously representing the ‘modernity’ of the Ba’ath Party and the dutiful obedience required by the authoritarian state.¹¹⁸ Such dual portrayal can be best illustrated by the regime’s depiction of women as *muwazzafin*, or public sector employees.¹¹⁹ These women are shown as both ‘emancipated’ through their role in the Syrian workforce, and ‘obedient’ through their service to the state. The trope of the female *muwazzafin* is a discursive strategy deployed throughout the sampled texts from SANA and the Syria Times, in which women are frequently portrayed in state-mandated workplaces and depicted according to their productive capabilities. Through repeated references to a woman’s role in “building

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ghanam, “Rural Women Empowerment.”

¹¹⁸ Totah, “The Memory Keeper,” 3; Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*.

¹¹⁹ Sparre, “Educated Women in Syria,” 8.

her country”¹²⁰ and “serving the homeland,”¹²¹ the female subject assumes a patriotic and dutiful essence, whose very agency is derived from partaking in productive work for the country. Within such a discourse, women are granted little autonomy beyond the boundaries of state-run employment programmes and are positioned in a relationship of dependence to the state. This is further reinforced by the passive language used, where women are depicted as being “given”¹²² and “provided”¹²³ with opportunities for productive employment.

While female workers are depicted in a variety of professional settings such as union work, architecture and the arts, they are repeatedly positioned in deference to the Syrian state and shown only to work within the limits of state-mandated regulations.¹²⁴ Thus, while the ‘women-as-makers’ discourse appears to empower a heterogeneous group of modern women through their situation within the Syrian workforce, a critical examination reveals their constructed positionality as a homogenous group of dutiful actors, assuming agency only through processes of giving and servitude.

In sum, a Critical Discourse Analysis of texts produced by SANA and the Syria Times revealed the dissemination of a homogenizing and patriarchal ‘state feminism’ discourse, in which the female subject is constructed as a largely passive actor within an overarching narrative of giving and state servitude. Whether depicted as ‘mothers’ or ‘makers’, women’s bodies are repeatedly positioned in subordinate relation to the overbearing al-Assad regime, symbolizing the patriotic devotion required by the wider Syrian citizenry, or ‘family’. Acknowledging the context of ongoing conflict within Syria helps elucidate this shift towards favoring existing narratives of obedience and sacrifice within the discourse.

EXPERIENCING THE ONLINE FEMINIST COUNTERPUBLIC

A narrative analysis of seven interviews with women participating in

¹²⁰ Farhat, “Supporting Women’s Activity.”

¹²¹ Haifaa Mafalani, “On International Women’s Day..Syrian Women in Trade Unions Have Proved Dedication, Diligence, High Sense of Responsibility,” *Syria Times*, March 8, 2020, <https://perma.cc/LM7G-MQZV>

¹²² Ghanam, “Rural Women Empowerment.”

¹²³ Mafalani, “On International Women’s Day.”

¹²⁴ Farhat, “Supporting Women’s Activity”; Hybah Sleman and Ruaa al-Jazaeri, “Syrian Woman...Victory Icon’ Festival Starts Activities,” *Syrian Arab News Agency*, March 11, 2020, <https://perma.cc/9XZD-UDBG>; Mafalani, “On International Women’s Day.”

ESM investigated whether the flourishing of online alternative media post-2011 has provided a space for Syrian women to challenge dominant constructions of gender in state-run media. This section will be grouped according to recurrent topics that emerged over the course of conversations in order to build a picture of ESM that reflects the themes deemed most significant by participants. After situating women within ESM more broadly, the analysis will focus on how the interviewees have been able to utilise these online platforms to construct counter-hegemonic identities and challenge gender stereotypes. Rather than providing a generalized and optimistic account of women's digital activity, this analysis will remain conscious of the range of lived experiences when considering how a diverse group of women work within this virtual landscape. Taking into account the various limitations and challenges raised by participants, this section will end by theorizing an 'inward-oriented'¹²⁵ online feminist counterpublic within the ESM online space.

Situating Women Within ESM

All of the interviewees discussed the increased opportunities for women to participate in media production following the Syrian uprising and development of ESM in 2011. When relaying their own experiences partaking in journalism or online activism, three women actively positioned themselves within narratives about the frenzied journalistic activity constituting the early days of the Syrian uprising. Using the pronoun 'we' to refer to the group of citizen journalists that formed the initial impetus for ESM, it was clear that these women saw themselves as situated within the wider phenomenon of independent reporting that was taking shape across the media landscape. Rima, a former student of journalism who established an online photo-sharing project in 2012, recounted how:

At the beginning, everyone was reporting on Facebook. We were the news kind of. When everyone was in Syria, it became a space where everyone gave their opinions.¹²⁶

Similarly, when asked to share her thoughts about the impact of alternative news outlets on the Syrian media landscape, Naima, a freelance journalist working

¹²⁵ Toepfl and Piwoni, "Targeting Dominant Publics," 2014.

¹²⁶ Interview with Rima, the founder of an online photo-sharing project. Interviewed, February 24, 2020, Whatsapp call.

in Damascus, situated herself firmly within this narrative:

It has given a voice to new journalists and young journalists to work and say that ‘we are here, and we are working, and we are reporting’.¹²⁷

The use of group labelling in these accounts, whereby participants self-defined as a ‘we’ amongst the larger group of Syrians working within ESM, demonstrates how the interviewees, as female journalists, felt they had been able to infiltrate the wider collective of independent, online reporting within Syria. By situating themselves *within* ESM narratives, each of these participants confirmed opportunities for participation and illustrated a level of inclusion within the phenomenon.

A recurrent theme that surfaced when discussing opportunities for women in ESM was the expansion of ‘space’ for women’s voices to be heard. Indeed, four participants explicitly mentioned there was “more space” to tell their stories as a result of the increasingly pluralized media environment. In the counterpublic scholarship of Koen Leurs, the idea of ‘space *invaders*’ is used to signify how formerly-marginalised voices are able to occupy and establish critical forums within digital environments.¹²⁸ The multi-layered infrastructure of the Internet allows for such an ‘invasion’ of space, as the proliferation of virtual channels for communication enables a plurality of voices to be heard simultaneously.¹²⁹ This is certainly evident within ESM, where several women’s blogs on platforms such as Syria Stories, Ayny Aynak¹³⁰ and SyriaUntold have emerged, intending to incorporate formerly silenced voices and expand space for “issues that receive little attention in mainstream media.”¹³¹ Beyond the blogosphere, digital radio sites such as Rozana and Radio Souriat have provided “a platform to women in

¹²⁷ Interview with Naima, a freelance journalist for independent media outlets. Interviewed, April 10, 2020, Whatsapp call.

¹²⁸ Leurs, *Digital Passages*, 104.

¹²⁹ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009): 383, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444319514>

¹³⁰ A blog that brings together written, audio and visual reports and contributions by Syrian women.

¹³¹ “Ayny Aynak: A New Blogging Platform For And By Syrian Women,” ASML/Syria, <https://perma.cc/Y3SC-NW3V>

Syria to make their voices heard.”¹³² This indicates the multiplicity of virtual arenas that have been established within ESM to enable the infiltration of digital space by women’s voices.

While all the interviewees acknowledged increased opportunities for female journalists, several were wary of over-emphasising the significance of women’s participation. When discussing the effect that ESM has had on women’s ability to enter journalism, Rima adopted a sceptical tone:

From what I see and what I discuss with friends, yes it’s opened a door. But I can barely name two or three names. It’s pure luck that they were some point, somewhere. There was nothing planned, there was no goal...it’s pure coincidence.¹³³

Rima’s mention of “pure luck” to describe how women enter the ESM workforce indicates her view that it is predominantly an opportunistic occurrence. Within this narrative, the inclusion of women’s voices within ESM seems to be a positive side effect of its pluralist nature, rather than a concerted effort to raise the profile of formerly marginalized voices. Thus, instead of being *provided* greater discursive space within ESM, women must work vigorously to craft their own critical forums in order to have their voices heard. Moreover, Rima’s admission that she can “barely name two or three names” highlights that female journalists may struggle to experience the same level of success or recognition as their male counterparts within ESM. This was an outlook shared by many of the women interviewed. Fatima, the co-founder of a successful online radio station, shared her continued experiences of gender-based discrimination within the wider workforce:

The Newsroom leaders, managers and executive boards are still male-dominated despite more female journalists. When I go to conferences, I have less opportunities because I am a woman.¹³⁴

Such insight reveals the heavy gender bias dictating the distribution of

¹³² “Radio, Feminism and Syria,” *Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom* (WILPF), <https://perma.cc/VT2H-T8QJ>

¹³³ Rima, February 24, 2020.

¹³⁴ Interview with Fatima, co-founder of an online independent radio platform. Interviewed, January 31, 2020, Whatsapp call.

employees amongst ESM outlets. A study of alternative media in Northern Syria shows how men continue to dominate high-level positions, predominantly due to numerous security concerns affecting primarily female journalists.¹³⁵ This was corroborated by all the women interviewed, many of whom claimed that threats to their safety existed while working both on and offline, by virtue of being a woman in a male-dominated environment. Kadajah, the co-founder of an association for Syrian female journalists, explained how her new safety training program aimed to improve the “digital, physical and psycho-social safety of women journalists.”¹³⁶ Security concerns for female journalists, she clarified, was one of the primary barriers preventing women from accessing high-level positions within new media outlets.

Situating women’s voices within the critical space of ESM thus requires a nuanced and measured approach. While the pluralization of media has certainly ‘opened the door’ for female journalists to enter online space, it appears the door remains only slightly ajar. What’s more, when observing the distribution of gendered bodies amongst the top levels of ESM outlets, it is evident that such opportunities remain out of reach to the majority of women.

Countering The Passive Woman: Performing The Active Narrator

Exploring the role of communication technologies in the Syrian uprising, Billie Jeanne Brownlee notes how digital tools have enabled women to perform active roles through their narration of events on the ground.¹³⁷ Through producing their own online counter-discourse, Syrian women have articulated identities as “complex protagonists rather than caricatured onlookers”¹³⁸ of the conflict. This was certainly reflected in the accounts given by the interviewees when talking about their motivations and roles within ESM. Through their

¹³⁵ Al-Hussein, Abyad, Sabbagh, and Alwany, “Peace Journalism,” 17.

¹³⁶ Interview with Kadajah, the co-founder of a programme connecting and training Syrian female journalists. Interviewed, April 12, 2020, GoogleMeet call.

¹³⁷ Billie Jeanne Brownlee, “Revolutionary Damascene Roses: Women and the Media in the Syrian Conflict,” *Arab Women and the Media in Changing Landscapes*, eds. Elena Maestri and Annemarie Profanter (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 231, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62794-6_13

¹³⁸ Karel Asha, “Mothers at Home and Activists on The Street? The Role of Women in the Syrian Revolution of 2011-2012,” *The McGill International Review* 2.30 (2013): 52, <https://perma.cc/6QSH-57BE>

active involvement in story-telling, all women expressed the ability to perform an oppositional identity to that of the ‘passive woman’ disseminated by state-run media.

Of the women interviewed, five had been involved in founding their own online platforms since 2011, which had granted them a large degree of agency in curating and disseminating an independent narrative of events. When asked about their motivations for taking part in independent journalism, the theme of ‘narration’ emerged on several occasions, alongside a feeling of responsibility to “tell what happened”¹³⁹ in Syria. This sentiment is revealed in the following comments given by Naima, the freelance journalist, and Aliye, an active blogger and social media reporter:

Naima: I have some kind of role to tell what happened, I felt I needed to tell stories. For me, journalism is the best way to do it, to make sure the stories are reaching people.¹⁴⁰

Aliye: I feel a responsibility to try to communicate, and try to ease some of the misunderstandings and things like that. To act kind of as a bridge...between what’s happening on the ground in Syria and its representation outside.¹⁴¹

By expressing their sense of duty to communicate events on the ground, both women positioned themselves as active mediators of information, with an ability to transfer critical knowledge and vital insight to their readership. In contrast to the female subjectivity constructed by regime-run media, whereby women are frequently situated as *passive* bystanders to events, the women interviewed expressed their capacity to perform *active* identities within ESM. Through assuming roles as narrative curators, all seven women noted how their experiences within ESM had granted them a greater ability to contribute to the discourse, while positioning them as informed and influential ‘protagonists’ within the reporting of the conflict.

¹³⁹ Referenced in interviews with both Naima and Lubna, a freelance journalist for independent media outlets. Interviewed, April 9, 2020, Whatsapp call.

¹⁴⁰ Naima, April 10, 2020.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Aliye, a blogger, social media reporter and author. Interviewed, January 26, 2020, Skype call.

This represents a significant challenge to the gendered subject positioning found within Syrian state-feminism and illustrates a key feature of digital counterpublic activity.

A prominent characteristic of the ‘active narrator’ identity, practiced to some extent by all the women interviewed, was the desire to empower others by “giv[ing] the civilians a voice.”¹⁴² Four participants explicitly referenced the promotion of citizen voices as one of the main motivations behind their journalism. By *giving* civilians a voice, rather than *being given* a voice themselves, the women working within ESM actively work to resist, and indeed overturn, their passive positionality within the gender discourse of the regime. Moreover, through their brokerage of citizen’s stories, independent female journalists have been instrumental in communicating counter-narratives to those produced by the Syrian state. By positioning themselves as ‘truth-tellers’ in opposition to regime-run media, each of the women interviewed evidenced their ability to carve out a different relationship to the state as that constructed within Syrian state feminism. Rejecting a state feminism discourse that utilizes the symbolism of ‘the obedient woman’ to engender a subservient and devoted citizenry, women working within ESM have thus been able to construct an oppositional gendered subjectivity that instead works to *undermine* the authority of the al-Assad regime.

Through the performance of an ‘active narrator’ identity within the ESM phenomenon, all the interviewees demonstrated an ability to challenge the construction of the ‘passive woman’ within the Syrian state-feminism discourse. The verbalization of a responsibility to project silenced voices and defy the narrative of the state exemplified their capacity to partake in oppositional self-presentations online, whereby the female voice is established as a critical force and not simply an obedient mouthpiece for the regime.

Women’s Discussion Groups: Talking To Yourself?

Crucial to the functioning of subaltern counterpublics is the existence of alternative discursive arenas in which the hegemonic discourses of the public sphere can be challenged.¹⁴³ All of the interviewees noted the presence of such communities within the ESM phenomenon, whereby critical conversations about gender and women’s issues could take place.

¹⁴² Fatima, January 31, 2020.

¹⁴³ Fraser, “Rethinking the Ppublic Sphere”; Travers, “Parallel Subaltern Feminist Counterpublics.”

Kadijah and Aliye, who are both involved in community-building projects online, noted how the social media platforms of ESM outlets had been effective in connecting the diasporic Syrian population and establishing cross-boundary forums for conversation. Rima, who uses Facebook and Instagram for her online photo project, remarked on the capacity of social media sites to offer virtual space for “group[s] of people who think the same”¹⁴⁴ to congregate and share their views. When asked about the existence of *gendered* forums for discussion, both Kadijah and Fatima referenced the efficacy of ‘closed Facebook groups’ in facilitating critiques of the regime’s gender discourse, through their nature as secure virtual spaces:

Kadijah: We’ve had a Facebook group from the beginning, a closed one, a secret one. It’s only for members and it’s the only way where we can communicate.¹⁴⁵

Fatima: We’ve established a digital community for women, using Facebook within Syria. We have a Facebook and a Whatsapp group. People can meet online and take part in conversations. The focus of these groups is the ‘taboos’ surrounding women.¹⁴⁶

The language of “taboos” in Fatima’s account is particularly notable given that this is the vocabulary most commonly used to describe the list of subjects deemed threatening to the al-Assad regime.¹⁴⁷ By employing this term, her comments about women’s discussion groups assume subversive undertones, implying a challenge to the dominant constructions of gender found within the state-feminism discourse. When asked about the existence of such oppositional tendencies, Fatima responded:

Yes, we are working to challenge the representation of women... both sides [of the conflict] use women a lot, particularly the regime, as a form of propaganda.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Rima, February 24, 2020.

¹⁴⁵ Kadijah, April 12, 2020.

¹⁴⁶ Fatima, January 31, 2020.

¹⁴⁷ Baiazy, “Syria’s Cyber Wars,” 2.

¹⁴⁸ Fatima, January 31, 2020.

The use of women's bodies as a "tool" in the construction of legitimacy for the regime was something noted by all the women interviewed. Indeed, it was the homogenizing nature of this discourse, in which the female subject is depicted as either 'a modern supporter of the regime' or 'a victim,' that the interviewees aimed to challenge through their participation in women's discussion groups.¹⁴⁹ Through connecting a plurality of women's voices, the social media platforms of ESM outlets have made space for a diversity of female subjectivities to emerge and develop. Iman, who works for an independent radio platform, spoke about its 'anti-stereotyping project' launched in 2017, which aimed to display a variety of women's life experiences within their social media groups:

Right now we're delivering a project to show the many issues affecting women from different perspectives, using the voices of women in society. We have around 40,000 Facebook followers who are very engaged...we try to encourage them to reflect and give their opinions about what they saw and read.¹⁵⁰

Analyzing the utility of virtual discursive communities in countering hegemonic gender norms, Radsch and Khamis demonstrate how the creation of online spaces, where a diversity of female subjectivities can be displayed, works to break down certain 'truths' about the appropriate performance of a gender identity.¹⁵¹ Through the acknowledgement of a plurality of life experiences and perspectives, these forums operate according to "different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying."¹⁵² This enables critical conversations where counter-hegemonic identities and alternative 'ways of being' are encouraged to take place. Within the women's discussion groups of ESM, Aliye, Kadijah and Iman all noted how the exchange of differing life experiences, knowledge and opportunities helped to facilitate conversations about previously 'off-limits' topics, such as sexual violence against women and LGBTQ+ issues. Moreover, all of the women interviewed agreed that the emergence of a dialogue

¹⁴⁹ Two tropes commonly cited in conversations, when interviewees were asked to give their thoughts on gender representation in regime-run media.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Iman, an employee at an independent radio platform focusing on women's rights. Interviewed, April 15, 2020, Whatsapp call.

¹⁵¹ Radsch and Khamis, "In Their Own Voice."

¹⁵² Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 56.

which included “women from all walks of life”¹⁵³ helped challenge the reductive discourse on gender disseminated by the regime.

When asked about the wider impact of this pluralized dialogue, however, Naima stressed that the ability to open up critical conversations to the broader public remained limited to specific issues and careful timing. Drawing upon her experience as a freelancer for outlets that do not ‘specialize’ in the promotion of women’s issues, Naima recounted how many of her colleagues shut down conversations about gender in favor of reporting on more ‘important’ topics such as the economy and military. This was certainly a view shared by Kadijah and Iman, who both agreed that critical discussions about gender most often took place within closed circles or “bubbles” of like-minded activists.¹⁵⁴ The existence of gendered echo-chambers within the ESM phenomenon became apparent from conversations with all seven women interviewed, many of whom expressed concern about the wider impact of their work. Most aptly summarised in the words of Naima:

The audience is always the same. The people who follow these websites are always the same circles and you feel you are talking to yourself.¹⁵⁵

The isolated impact of such critical conversations within ‘secret’ groups and ‘gender-specific’ platforms highlights the ‘inward-oriented’ nature of feminist counterpublic activity within the ESM online space. While still contesting the hegemonic discourses of the public sphere, the primary function of inward-oriented counterpublics is not necessarily to *reconstruct* mainstream discourses, but rather to provide “safe, secluded communicative spaces”¹⁵⁶ for the configuration of new identities and agendas. The women interviewed all outlined the capacity of closed social media groups to act as “identity-workshops,” whereby a range of female subjectivities could be simultaneously enacted and reproduced.¹⁵⁷ This, in turn, presented a conscious challenge to the homogenizing discourse of Syrian state feminism. Yet the ability of such challenges to infiltrate the wider discursive

¹⁵³ Aliye, January 26, 2020.

¹⁵⁴ Kadijah, April 12, 2020.

¹⁵⁵ Naima, April 10, 2020.

¹⁵⁶ Toepfl and Piwoni, “Targeting Dominant Publics,” 2014.

¹⁵⁷ Bruckman, “Identity Workshop.”

community remains somewhat limited, as ‘gender and women’s issues’ continue to be disregarded by many ESM outlets. Ultimately, while the development of ESM as a pluralized online space has generated room for virtual discursive arenas in which gender ‘taboos’ can be challenged; these appear to exist as ‘inward-oriented’ challenges, occurring largely within confined spheres of activity.

Discussion

The conversations that took place with Syrian women participating in ESM revealed a complex digital terrain of competing counter-discourses; a landscape which was by no means easy to navigate for those situated within it. Although presented with greater opportunities to partake in online journalism and activism since 2011, every interviewee stressed the continued security threats and gender discrimination faced by female journalists working in a male-dominated media environment. Despite this, the phenomenon of ESM has certainly engendered space for an online feminist counterpublic to emerge and manifest in a multitude of ways. All the women interviewed expressed an ability to perform oppositional identities to those constructed in state-run media, both through their positioning as ‘active narrators’ of the conflict and their production of anti-regime discourses. Furthermore, all noted the existence of virtual discursive arenas in the form of ESM social media groups, in which ‘taboos’ could be broken and a plurality of gendered subjectivities could be imagined and enacted. Yet, what became apparent over the course of conversations was the relative isolation of such critical discussions within the wider ESM phenomenon. It is therefore most accurate to conceptualize an ‘inward-oriented’ online feminist counterpublic, in which the communicators of counter-hegemonic gendered dialogues remain, for the time being, deliberating amongst themselves.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The opening-up of online space that occurred alongside physical protests against the al-Assad regime irrevocably transformed the Syrian media landscape, exposing a digital environment of multiple counter-discourses aimed at challenging the hegemony of the Syrian state.¹⁵⁸ Until this point, however, little had been said about the gendered implications of this phenomenon.

¹⁵⁸ Al-Hussein, Abyad, Sabbagh, and Alwany, “Peace Journalism,” 15; Lynch, Freelon and Aday, “Syria’s Socially Mediated Civil War,” 7.

Through an application of subaltern counterpublic theory to the Syrian media landscape, this paper set out to investigate whether the virtual space of ESM had engendered an online feminist counterpublic, within which Syrian women are able to challenge dominant gender representations within the state feminism discourse. The discussions within this paper have found the Syrian media landscape to be a multi-layered and gendered terrain, in which the ESM phenomenon has provided new space for an ‘inward-oriented’ feminist counterpublic to emerge. It is essential to note, however, that the theorizing of such counterpublic activity resulted from discussions with women who already have active voices within ESM. These women generally have the socio-economic stability to produce online content and have received some degree of media training. There are many voices that remain silenced due to financial, social and personal constraints; most particularly those who do not have electricity, stable accommodations, computer literacy or live in an environment where it is acceptable for a woman to report online. Moreover, continued fears for personal and familial safety both within and outside Syria suppress the voices of many would-be activists.

This paper first employed a Critical Discourse Analysis to deconstruct representations of gender produced and disseminated by *SANA* and the *Syria Times*. Such an analysis exposed Syrian state feminism as a patriarchal discourse, in which the female subject is depicted as a passive and homogenous actor within a wider ‘narrative of giving.’ In this way, imagery of ‘the woman’ is used to serve as an exemplar of obedience and devotion to the wider Syrian citizenry.¹⁵⁹ A narrative analysis of conversations with seven Syrian women participating in ESM then demonstrated the existence of an online feminist counterpublic, whereby representations of the ‘passive’ and ‘devoted’ woman could be challenged. Through their performance of ‘active narrator’ identities, production of anti-regime narratives, and participation in women’s discussion groups, all the interviewees remarked how the opening-up of online space had enabled the configuration of alternative gendered ways-of-being. The sheltered positioning of such challenges resulted in the final conceptualization of an ‘inward-oriented’ feminist counterpublic within the ESM virtual space.

Despite being contained within gender-specific echo chambers and reaching a somewhat circular audience, the implications of such counterpublic activity remain significant. The creation of safe online spaces that encourage the contestation of gender norms and deliberation of ‘taboo’ subjects has considerable

¹⁵⁹ Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*.

emancipatory capacity. Moreover, the connection of like-minded voices within women's discussion groups holds potential to act as inspiration for future collective action, through which calls for a more inclusive civil society could be articulated. It should be stressed, however, that the aim of this research was not to make generalizable claims about the emancipatory potential of women's online presence in Syria, but rather to explore in detail how individual women experience ESM. As previously stated, this paper focuses its analysis on those women who have been able to project their voices online due to opportunities arising from Internet access, media experience and sufficient financial stability. As such, a significant portion of Syrian women still do not stand to benefit from the development of the ESM phenomenon. Thus, these conclusions should not be used to inform overly-simplified or optimistic judgements about women as a whole in Syrian media and society, but instead function as the impetus for further investigation. The constant evolution of the Syrian media landscape provides continued relevance to such studies.

Conceptualizing an online feminist counterpublic within the virtual space of ESM invites the application of subaltern counterpublic theory to a variety of contexts. Broadening the definition of the public sphere has demonstrated the possibility of theorizing multiple counterpublic formations. The institutional arrangements of these may be neither directly comparable nor uniformly successful.

Particularly in the Syrian context, when considering the possibility of a post-conflict settlement, it is crucial to reflect upon the role that marginalized voices can play in challenging hegemonic discourses. This further reiterates the importance of employing a gendered approach to studying Syrian media. Listening to the voices of women who are working to challenge the discourses of the al-Assad regime is vital to gaining a better understanding of how subaltern groups can more generally navigate the complexities of confronting the authoritarian state. A linguistic analysis of state-run media revealed a shift in the regime's discourse towards privileging narratives of patriotic obedience in the context of ongoing conflict. Monitoring the impact of ESM as a counter-hegemonic space will therefore become increasingly relevant as civil society groups continue to resist and undermine this oppressive discourse. At the end of our conversations, many of the interviewees were keen to discuss their role in shaping Syria's future, although for all the women this represented significant

uncertainty. Contemplating the lasting impact of both ESM and her involvement in feminist counterpublic activity, Naima reflected: “2011 broke a lot of things, including the media. It’s now impossible to go back.”¹⁶⁰

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWS WITH SYRIAN WOMEN WORKING IN ESM

Aliye. 2020. *Interview with Aliye, a social media reporter and author*. [Skype Call]. Interviewed by the author. January 1, 2020.

Fatima. 2020. *Interview with Fatima, co-founder of an online independent radio station*. [Whatsapp Call]. Interviewed by the author. January 31, 2020.

Iman. 2020. *Interview with Iman, employee at an independent radio platform focusing on women’s rights*. [Whatsapp Call]. Interviewed by the author. April 15, 2020.

Kadijah. 2020. *Interview with Kadijah, the co-founder of a programme connecting and training Syrian female journalists*. [GoogleMeet Call]. Interviewed by the author. April 12, 2020.

Lubna. 2020. *Interview with Lubna, a freelance journalist for independent media*. [Whatsapp Call]. Interviewed by the author. April 9, 2020.

Naima. 2020. *Interview with Naima, freelance journalist for local media*. [Whatsapp Call]. Interviewed by the author. April 10, 2020.

Rima. 2020. *Interview with Rima, founder of an online photo-sharing project*. [Whatsapp Call]. Interviewed by the author. February 24, 2020.

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ETHICS DECLARATION

Title: The Women Want The Fall Of The (Gendered) Regime: In What Ways Are Syrian Women Challenging State Feminism Through An Online Feminist Counter-Public?

Methodology: Semi-structured interviews/social media observation

Ethical Considerations:

- Pseudonyms used and identifying narratives omitted from interview data
- All data stored in a password-protected and encrypted document
- Informed consent of participants secured before commencing with interviews

'I declare that the research contain herein was granted approval by the Ethics Working Group on the 9/12/2019.'

