CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

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Foreword

From the President & Editor-in-Chief

By Anika Bajpai and Asha Patt

Dear Readers,

The Cornell Diplomat was founded in August 2018 as a magazine dedicated to sharing student perspectives on global challenges. Since its founding, we have brought together talented writers, editors and artists to explore different angles, places, and positions not highlighted in mainstream discourse. Our past issues have considered such subjects as regime stability, the politicization of gender, the geopolitics of resources, and the influence of borders in *Regime (In)Stability*, *The Gender Issue*, *Rethinking Resources*, and *Borders*.

Our fifth issue, *Civil Disobedience*, explores the nuances of popular political movements. In a year marked by sickness and instability, we've watched our peers at home and across the world take to the streets to demand change. From the people of Belarus protesting their government to the brave actions of Bobi Wine and his supporters in Uganda to the international racial justice movement, grass-roots efforts to shift the status quo are erupting across the globe. Our goal is not merely to report on these movements, but to answer the larger questions surrounding civil disobedience: what determines the short-term and long-term success of movements? How do technology and social media change popular participation in protests? What role do international actors play in domestic conflict? And, how has the COVID-19 pandemic changed civil disobedience?

These are not easy questions to answer. This is precisely why we chose to explore them in this semester's issue. Despite not being able to meet in person, our second, and, hopefully, last, semester on Zoom has been a remarkable achievement thanks to the dedication of our members. Our founders left us large shoes to fill, and we have worked hard to seamlessly transition to a new generation of leadership. The Diplomat has been an invaluable addition to our life at Cornell, and we hope to share that experience with other students in the coming years. We could not be more proud of our staff's work this semester, and we are thrilled to publish our fifth issue: *Civil Disobedience*. We hope you enjoy!

Anika Bajpai and Asha Patt

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Cracks Begin to Show in:

American Complicity in Ethiopia's Violent Repression

By John Ashbrook

Summer 2020

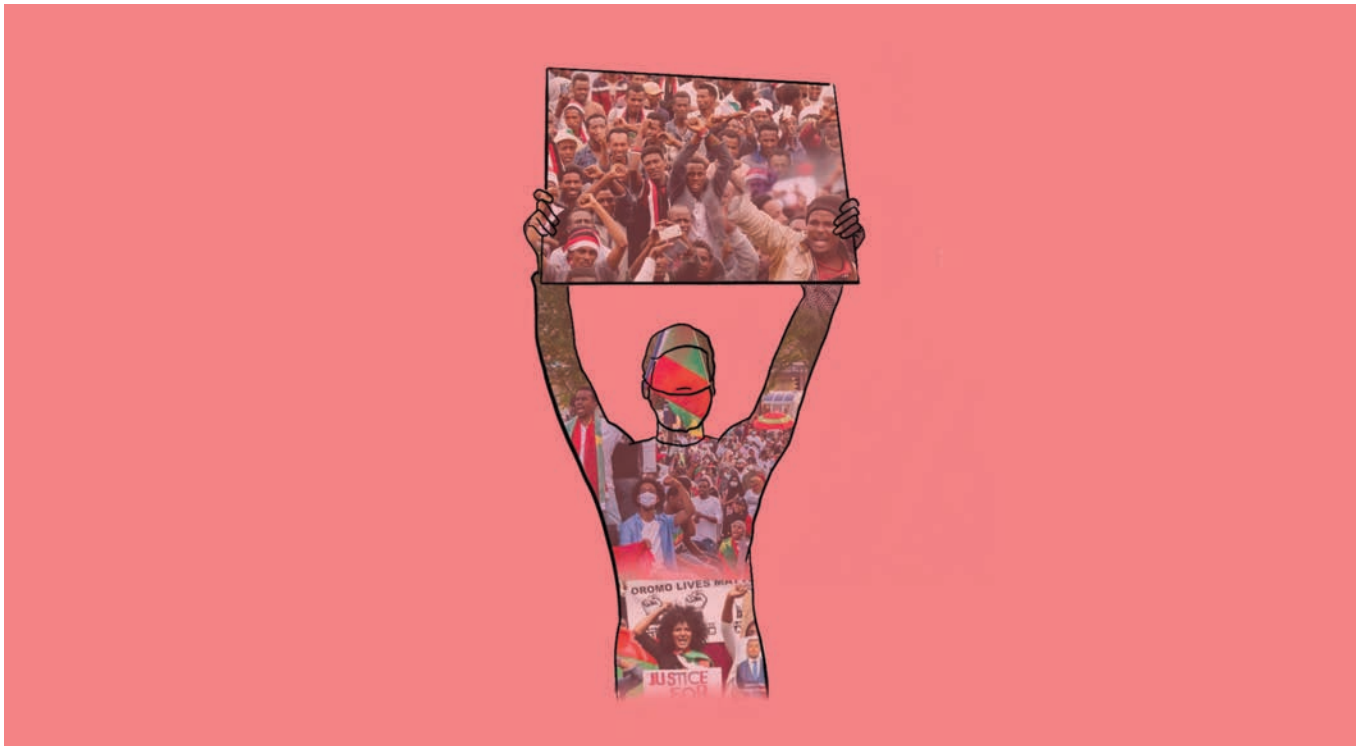
During the summer of 2020, demonstrations turned violent in Ethiopia. Protests were originally staged to denounce the murder of musician Hachalu Hundessa, an outspoken advocate for the country's Oromo minority. However, ethnic tensions soon spiralled out of control in several major cities, leading to the deaths of hundreds, many at the hands of police and security forces. The government's handling of this affair drew international attention for possible human rights violations and has precipitated further demonstrations against the increasingly controversial regime. In spite of this, both the EU and the US continue to support the Ethiopian government, which they have long relied on to help prosecute counterterrorism operations in the Horn of Africa. As demonstrators take to the streets against an increasingly belligerent police and military, American dollars continue to enable a leadership that has eroded democratic processes and worsened ethnic relationships crucial to the country's survival. With the eyes of the world turned to Ethiopian civil disobedience being carried out domestically and abroad, the question of US complicity in Ethiopia's illiberal tilt is becoming difficult to ignore.

"With the eyes of the world turned to Ethiopian civil disobedience being carried out domestically and abroad, the question of US complicity in Ethiopia's illiberal tilt is becoming difficult to ignore."

A Troubled History

It would be impossible to address the unrest in Ethiopia without first discussing the country's recent political history and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's rise to power. Following the Ethiopian Civil War, which saw a coalition led by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) overthrow the brutal communist regime of Lt. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991, the Northern Tigray region came to dominate politics in Ethiopia. The TPLF's dominance gave Ethiopia's Tigrayan minority disproportionate control over the country's government and military. This change fomented ethnic tensions despite efforts to reconcile the country's ethnic divisions in the 1994 constitution, which gave nominal autonomy to regional ethnic governments. The country's 2005 general elections, which were demonstrably fraudulent, marked a definitive end to this policy's success and prompted protesters supporting non-Tigrayan opposition parties to practice civil disobedience in the face of government bans on public assembly.[1] In response to these protests, police massacred 193 people and arrested over 60,000, including the leadership of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy, one of the country's most significant opposition parties.[2]

While the Tigrayan-led government's use of violence and shady election practices prolonged its preeminence in Ethiopian politics momentarily, ethnic tensions would soon grow out of control once again. Between 2014 and 2018, the nation's Oromo minority began a nonviolent resistance movement in response to government plans for forced land acquisition.[3] Infused in these protests were decades of resentment at Tigrayan political primacy and oppression suffered by Oromian and Amhara people. Widespread civil disobedience from 2014 to 2016 led to the arrests of tens of thousands of protestors and saw over 800 civilians killed by police throughout a plethora of violent clashes, as police frequently fired live rounds into crowds of peaceful protesters.[4] In the wake of the protests in the Oromia and Amhara regions, then Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned, precipitating a competition among the ruling party's four factions for the top spot. Abiy Ahmed, who had served as a member of parliament representing the Oromo Democratic Party, quickly became one of the most popular politicians among the Oromo and Amhara ethnic groups, propelling him to the office of Prime Minister of Ethiopia in early 2018.



By Oscar Martinez

Ahmed's Arrival

Ahmed's rule started off full of hope. The new Prime Minister promised political reform that would promote cohesion amongst the country's historically divided ethno-regional factions. His time in office began with an end to the country's state of emergency, increased privatization of the economy, and a negotiated resolution with Eritrea that ended the long standing civil conflict between the two countries.[5] For these efforts, Ahmed was decorated with a flurry of awards, including a nomination for a 2019 Chatham House Award, being named the 2018 African Leader of the Year by African Leadership Magazine, and a Nobel Peace Prize in 2019.[6] However, despite this early optimism, the reality of his time in office has seldom met expectations.

After releasing a cohort of journalists from jail in 2018, the country resumed the practice of jailing journalists in mid 2019, often holding them on questionable "anti-terrorism" charges.[7] Moreover, the actions that Ahmed has taken to liberalize the country's media, such as allowing more non-state-owned publications to reach the public, have inadvertently served to stoke ethnic tensions, as many of these publications preach sectarianism.[8] Additionally, NGO's have expressed concern over Ahmed's implementation of state-wide internet shutdowns to combat dissent and unrest, a tool frequently employed by past regimes.[9] Ahmed's calls for unity across ethnic groups now stand in stark contrast to his political actions, which include dismantling the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the previously dominant political coalition headed by the Tigrayan military.[10] Ahmed has replaced this coalition with a new party, the Prosperity Party, which excludes the Tigrayan TPLF, who disapprove of many of his reforms.[11] Many of Ahmed's illiberal, anti-press tactics have thus served to deepen the ethnic divides that he promised to bridge, further polarizing both politics and the media along racial lines.

Descent into Violence

Thus, we arrive at the most recent spat of civil disobedience that gripped the country in 2020. The catalyst for these protests was the murder of singer Hachalu Hundessa, who had become a political symbol during the Oromo protest movement and gained popularity through writing songs demanding civil rights for the Oromo ethnic minority. Oromo Ethiopians have long been excluded from political power under the previous Tigrayan-dominated and Amhara-dominated regimes. After Hundessa was gunned down, already boiling ethnic tensions exploded once more as Oromo people took to the streets in cities across central Ethiopia to mourn Hundessa's death and demand justice. Violent actors used this moment to exact revenge on other ethnic groups, burning down businesses, targeting churches associated with certain ethnicities, and murdering dozens.[12]

While initially peaceful demonstrations in Ethiopia quickly turned violent, the Oromo-Ethiopian diaspora participated in peaceful demonstrations using conventional civil disobedience tactics in their respective countries. Ethiopians in the US (particularly Minnesota), France and England, all came out in droves to protest Hundessa's killing and existing human rights practices in Ethiopia. An example of the peaceful nature of these protests took place in Aurora, Colorado, where the substantial Oromo refugee community blocked traffic in a classic display of civil disobedience.[13]

Back in Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed's response to the unrest drew shocking parallels to tactics used by previous regimes. The state's security forces employed extremely violent tactics, including firing live ammunition to dissuade protesters, leading to the deaths of 76 people. Reports about the behavior of the police found that "security forces employed disproportionate force in their attempt to restore order. . . and as a result, passersby, bystanders, young people, elderly people [stepped] in to mediate, and even police officers lost their lives from gunshot wounds despite having no participation in the unrest."[14] This response was eerily similar to the previous government's approach to the 2005 election protests, when similar levels of lethal force were also used against protesters.

In addition to the excessively violent tactics used by security forces, Ahmed also completely shut down Ethiopia's internet for nearly the entire month of July,cutting Ethiopians off from news sources beyond Ethiopia's state-controlled television channels. [15] At the same time, Ahmed's violent crackdown on the protests were marked by large-scale arrests, with as many as 10,000 people, including opposition leaders, being thrown in jail without charges.[16] In a matter of months, Ahmed went from receiving a Nobel Peace Prize to jailing political opponents and cutting off communications systems.

America's Shadows

The action's of Abiy Ahmed's government represent a clear continuation of the illiberal policies of Ethiopia's recent past. Internet shutdowns, mass arrests, and deadly crackdowns on demonstrators have all been staples of Ethiopian politics since 1991. However, the gunfire that has time and time again silenced ethnic minorities and political opposition parties throughout Ethiopia's history is often met by silence from the west.

Despite its horrific human rights record, Ethiopia has not been subject to any UN sanctions, exception a brief arms embargo during its war with Eritrea.[17] Likewise, the US has never imposed sanctions on the country, settling instead for relatively soft public statements encouraging improvements in the country's human rights practices.[18] In 2007, the House of Representatives passed the Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act, which sought to impose sanctions on Ethiopia over human rights abuses. However, this bill never made it to the Senate floor due to opposition from the Bush Administration.[19]

The US and Ethiopia have enjoyed a particularly close relationship, especially since 9/11. US aid to Ethiopia has rapidly increased from a mere 150 million dollars in 2001 to over 1 billion in 2020.[20] Given American concerns over Somalia's role as a base of operation for groups like Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab, Ethiopia, a relatively secular and stable state, quickly became an American ally in the War on Terror. Ethiopia has been more than happy to assist in America's posturing against Somalia, with whom they have engaged in sporadic conflicts since the 1940s– repeatedly occupying southern parts of the country through military force.[21] Ethiopia has thus been able to leverage the Global War on Terror and massive amounts of US aid to not only benefit its own geostrategic interests in combating pan-Somalism, but also to shield itself from repercussions for domestic human rights abuses.

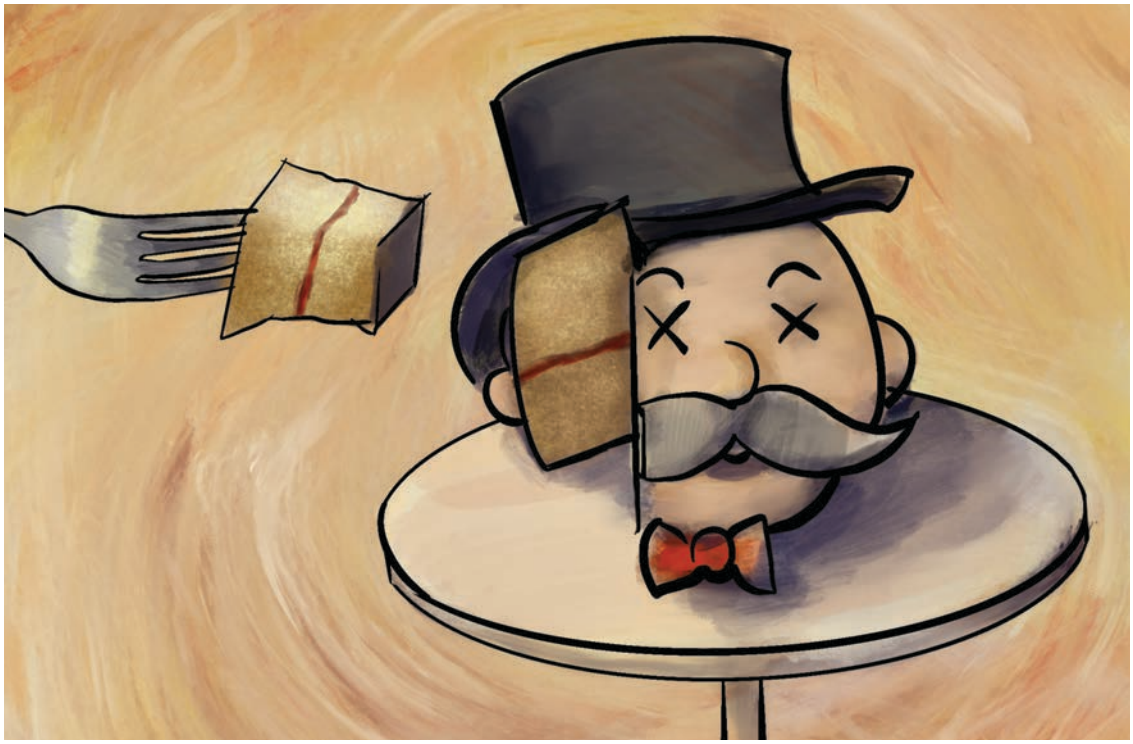
Conclusion

Successful civil disobedience in Ethiopia faces many challenges, among them long-standing ethnic hostilities and practices of brutal repression ingrained in the doctrine of the political class. The unwillingness of the US to hold Ethiopian leaders accountable for their actions, whether it be through the UN or through the State Department, should not be included in this list. However, despite twenty years of civil disobedience movements both at home and abroad, egregious human rights violations, and fraudulent elections, Ethiopia's role in the War on Terror and its position as a facilitator in efforts to combat violent extremists across the border in Somalia have shielded the country from international pressure. As the Biden Administration takes office and seeks to shift national security policy away from the War on Terror, it should take care to consider how two decades of foreign policy guided by counterterrorism strategy have profoundly affected the US's relationships with illiberal regimes and the implications of those relationships for their citizens. Ethiopia is certainly worthy of reevaluation.

A "Vested" Interest:

The Discontent Populist & the Protesting Elite

By Ben Goldstein



By Talia Fishman

In his 1932 Doctrine of Fascism, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini injected a sense of "common man" egalitarian fury into the burgeoning Italian Fascist movement, asserting that "If the Bourgeoisie believe that they have found us in their lightning-conductors, they are mistaken. We must go towards the people. . . we will fight both technical and spiritual rear-guardism."[1] The popular fury against the social, cultural, and intellectual elite that guided much of twentieth century politics appears to be nearly as old as societal stratification itself, with medieval England's Peasants' Revolt, the Third Estate-driven French Revolution, and the Revolutions of 1848 serving as long-standing precedents for backlash against the perceived privileged classes.

Historically, the target of popular resentment was—at least somewhat—well-defined. Whether the enmity was directed towards Renaissance Italian nobiltà, English lords, or New England's "Boston Brahmins," there was usually a clear demarcation between the perceived dominant class, and the resentful, disobedient, often radical "popular class." The former was defensive of their influence and skeptical of change, while the latter focused on eliminating the destabilizing power deficit that many of them believed to be responsible for their day-to-day hardships.

Nevertheless, as the world shifts from a system of hereditary privilege to one in which social divisions are primarily drawn along the lines of material wealth, a "new elite" is emerging: kings, nobles, and aristocrats are out, and tech magnates, media moguls, and Hollywood stars are in. While it may have been unfathomable to expect the elites of yesteryear to support popular, and occasionally destructive, calls for radical social or political change, their current counterparts have endorsed and often taken part in theoretically elite-skeptic movements concerning climate change and systemic racism. Movements that are, ironically at times, perpetuated by the highest levels of government, media, and industry. Nevertheless, the bulk of both the "liberal" and "conservative" elites in the United States and Europe continue to, often quietly, oppose popular movements—such as the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States or the Yellow Vest movement in France—that more directly attack their privilege. Today's somewhat progressive dominant class has more in common with privilege elites of the past than proletarian campaigners for change. While resistance intuitively appears straightforward from those who identify (or are commonly identified) as "conservative," purportedly liberal societal elites who take pride in their political orientation manifest their resistance to popular urges in curious ways.

Although a class of conservative "old guard" elites remains potent and influential, the shift in elite politics has become undeniable. In 2012, Democrats eclipsed Republicans as the preferred political party of America's high-earners ($220,000+ per year).[2] In Britain, the epithet "Hampstead Socialist" (named after a wealthy London enclave known for a progressive social culture) has been used to describe supporters of Tony Blair's "New Labour" shift away from populist leftism within the Labour Party, as well as the wealthier, more urban constituency of Britons who voted to remain in the European Union.[3] Likewise, in France, high income was a predictor of voting for President (and former investment banker) Emmanuel Macron's socially liberal La Republique En Marche party, while the poor were more likely to support Marine Le Pen's right-wing National Rally.[4] On a similar note, consider climate activist Greta Thunberg's invitation to the World Economic Forum summit at Davos (a gathering of the world's richest and most powerful), the plethora of investment bank and Silicon Valley firm logos dotting LGBTQ+ pride parades throughout the world, or Hollywood's well-known liberal slant (80% of Hollywood political contributions in 2016 went to Democrats). They serve as evidence for the existence, if not dominance, of socially liberal culture among the twenty-first century West's most culturally and economically influential.[5]

This reality is nowhere more apparent than in the recent movements for climate justice. After the series of mass demonstrations against human-caused climate change with over 7 million participants across all seven continents in the Climate Strike of 2019, Amazon multi-billionaire Jeff Bezos unveiled an ambitious plan to curb climate change. Shortly after came Bill Gates's "Master Plan" and the formation of the "Creo Group," a secretive consortium of the ultra-wealthy with the objective of directing global cash flows in a sustainable direction.[6]

Much like its warm reception in Silicon Valley, the movement has garnered a similarly welcoming reaction within the financial services sector. BlackRock, a major financial services firm, has capitalized on this movement by selling "sustainable investing" products to consumers, while Goldman Sachs has hatched their "2030 Sustainable Finance Commitment" as a means of directing clients' investments to "accelerate climate transition and advance inclusive growth."[7] Indeed, industry has not merely flaunted its support for climate action: it has infiltrated the movement to its very core. Approximately a decade ago, Bill McKibben, the founder of 350.org and perhaps America's most well-known climate activist, and John Podesta, President Obama's climate policy coordinator, met with billionaires Tom Steyer and Michael Bloomberg at Steyer's 1,800 acre Northern Californian ranch. What stemmed from this motley gathering grew into a concerted effort to lobby Congressional Democrats on the issue of climate change, one that has influenced the interpretation of climate science in controversial and empirically flawed ways.[8] The undeniable connection between climate activism and the white-collar industry, to some degree, removes the uncomfortable issue of class from popular discourse surrounding climate.

While it is the case that the elite corporate world plays a tremendous role in contributing to climate change, with Amazon alone responsible for as much carbon emission as the entire nation of Norway, much of the elite class that could theoretically stand to lose from decisive action on climate justice has embraced the movement with open arms.[9] Ironically, those who are likely to gain from climate action often oppose it. A Yale report on climate change denial among the European far-right found a commonly shared belief that climate change movements are "driven by a liberal cosmopolitan agenda, that they harm the little man."[10] Of course, this could not be further from the truth; climate change itself is a significant driver of economic inequality.[11] Nevertheless, the popular sentiment of climate justice as an "elite movement"—and among some circles, a "liberal elite movement"—lingers nonetheless. This remains true despite high-profile proposals ranging from the Green New Deal to the climate-linked wealth tax targeting the rich, with only a handful of climate and engineering-focused magnates standing to benefit commercially from reforms.

"Nevertheless, the popular sentiment of climate justice as an 'elite movement'—and among some circles, a 'liberal elite movement'—lingers nonetheless."

Why is this? Why do those with resources support a movement from which they stand to lose, and why do those who stand to gain from it often reject this movement in a show of anti-elitism? Perhaps this can be explored through an examination of a movement that does not have such cordial ties to the elite class as the climate change movement does: the French Yellow Vests.

In 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron's administration decided to raise diesel prices by 20%, exacerbating an increasingly dire cost of living situation. The decision was widely interpreted as unfair to France's car-dependent rural working class. Beyond the peripheries of major cities, the nation had been suffering from festering unemployment, poor economic growth, and a sense that citi-

zens' futures and wellbeing had been abandoned by the Parisian gentry—this decision, to many, confirmed that notion. In the eyes of critics, a more just policy would have been to tax and sanction corporations for their environmental degradation, rather than penalize those relegated by financial necessity to exurban transit deserts.[12]

Subsequently, on November 17, 2018, over 200,000 people spontaneously, and, more notably, without centralized leadership, took to the streets of French cities. Donning the yellow vests that motorists are required to carry, masses of citizens brought demands ranging from increased governmental transparency and a more egalitarian system of taxation and service allocation, to calls for direct democracy and Macron's resignation. In time, the movement grew more disruptive as infuriated casseurs (rioters) took to looting shops, vandalizing Paris's iconic Arc de Triomphe, and injuring thousands, prompting a Paris arrondissement mayor to describe the situation as a "state of insurrection."[13] Interestingly, the predominantly working class protesters had little discernible ideological unity, with activists belonging to both far-left and far-right groups, bringing together approximately 70% of the population in approval before destructive radicalism began to hamper the protest's public image.[14] Interestingly, the movement shunned political affiliation and did not style itself as an attempt at reform through partisan politics. Raising the French minimum wage, introducing a "solidarity" wealth tax, and reversing austerity-borne welfare cutbacks—usually left-wing policies—were broadly supported by Yellow Vests from across the political spectrum. Communist flags and anti-capitalist chants have pervaded the movement.[15] On the other hand, factions of the protesters have also called for an end to gay marriage, a military government, and anti-immigration policies, while some have even professed outright Holocaust denial.[16] Without a well-defined message, the sole uniting thread among the protesters has been a collective disdain for Macron, the brutality his authorities employed in attempting to quell the chaos, and the supposedly out-of-touch elite urbanite class he represents.

Unlike the Climate Strike and ensuing protests, the Yellow Vests have not hesitated to confront the economic elites head-on. BlackRock, the aforementioned finance firm interested in "sustainable investing" products, was directly targeted by Yellow Vests who stormed and vandalized its Paris headquarters over its putative ties to President Macron's erosion of the French welfare state.[17] Rather than meeting for a tame discussion at Tom Steyer's sprawling ranch, activists made sure to unleash rage upon upscale department stores and tourist sites, going as far as to force an evacuation of Paris's posh Grands Magasins luxury shopping district.[18] Inferrably, the movement has gotten limited sympathy from the magnate-mainstream media-movie star crowd. The movement's remarkable dearth of artist endorsements stands in stark contrast to the celebrities who had opened their homes to refugees fleeing hardship abroad, only to retreat into willful blindness upon witnessing French citizens experiencing it at home.[19] While other movements tiptoe around skepticism of elites, this very skepticism seems to be the only thing binding the Yellow Vests together, much to the elites' chagrin. As prominent climate change activists have offered billionaires, neoliberal politicians, and major corporations a seat at the table, the Yellow Vests have put them on the menu.

Needless to say, one would be hard-pressed to find a tycoon with a "master plan" to overthrow a centrist, corporatist establishment, or a media mogul interested in dismantling corporate presses (another Yellow Vest aim). It makes sense that even those with both influence and a genuine sense of noblesse oblige would prefer causes that strive to improve quality of life without directly targeting them as responsible for societal ailments, even when they very much are.

This Western elite preference for "non-threatening" social activism raises some interesting philosophical questions. For one, if climate change protesters relentlessly hounded corporate wealth generation and capitalism as the largest contributors to global warming in a unifying chorus, while the Yellow Vests discarded their resentment for the wealthy and powerful and instead focused on lower taxes and better living conditions, would BlackRock and Bezos don their vests and shun the Climate Strike? If movements for racial justice were to more explicitly target capitalism as a contributing factor to racial inequality, would corporations be slower to embrace them? The inconsistencies in liberal elite participation of social movements may suggest that their support has less to do with the theoretical requirements necessary to achieve certain end goals, and more to do with the perceived threat posed by the movements' organizers, geographies, arbitrary emphases, and factions of support.

It is without question that the modern day upper class has, as a whole, taken on more socially progressive positions than their predecessors. Attempts to discern what those with power support and what they do not are often tricky and riddled with contradictions and idiosyncrasies, but a common theme nonetheless shines through the murkiness: a movement's methods and emphases are ultimately better predictors of elite backing than ideology is. Indeed, protests that take direct, deliberate, and aggressive action against those in power that tend not to curry favor within influential circles. It is also worth mentioning that right-wing elite politics remains at least as prevalent as its liberal and left-wing counterpart, with major political donations (in the US, at least) relatively even between parties, though this faction tends to shun from fiery protest in favor of a more subdued lobbying strategy. How "elite progressivism" will evolve as inequality grows and progressive parties embrace an increasingly post-material agenda remains to be seen, though we should not expect iSocialism to emerge as Apple's latest product anytime soon.

Stopping the Slide:
The Tenuous Forces Upholding Democracy
By Lia Sokol

By Oscar Martinez

Introduction

In the early hours of February 1st, 2021, as the nation slept, Myanmar's military staged a coup against the country's fragile democratic government. The takeover was announced via broadcast on an army-run television station, followed closely by a military declaration of a one-year state of emergency.[1] Following a decade of relatively steady democratization, Myanmar rapidly plunged into a tense and deadly turmoil. The details of the military's goals remain ambiguous, but one facet of their agenda is clear: destroy any hope of an enduring democracy. This democratic hope had been carefully nurtured for years by former dissident leader and advocate, Aung San Suu Kyi, and sustained by her millions of supporters across the nation.[2] Now, as Suu Kyi's proponents take to the streets, bravely facing violent clashes and military crackdowns, the question stands of what these protests signal for the future of the country and its potential to democratize.

In situations like Myanmar, international media coverage tends to focus on protest movements themselves, drawing the public eye to violent clashes between opposing sides. However, public interest often wanes before the extended effects of these events are clear. Although the media rarely examines the long-term results of protests, the true success of a protest movement hinges not on the protest itself but rather on what happens afterward.[3] As the world looks to Myanmar and other pro-democracy movements across the globe, past examples of civil disobedience indicate factors that tend to produce lasting success: a shared identity among dissidents and their successful organization in government.

Democratic (De)-Consolidation

Myanmar is not alone. Indeed, much of the twenty-first century has been marked by democratic backsliding, a process defined by the decline of democracy and a shift towards autocratic leadership.[4] From Asia to Europe to Africa and from tenuous democracies like Myanmar to long-established ones like the United States, this backsliding has emerged as a far-reaching phenomenon. The steady downturn of democracy has come as a surprise to political scientists and third-party observers given that the final decades of the twentieth century were characterized by the opposite: a global wave of democratization, wherein more than 60 countries shifted from authoritarian rule to some form of democracy. This period was accordingly called democratic consolidation, and there was a widespread belief among experts that once a country democratized, it was likely to stay that way.[5] Nevertheless, the recent, unexpected rise in autocratization has proven that this is not the case.

This democratic backsliding has not come without a fight. Indeed, the last several years have been marked by civil disobedience against autocracy and pro-democracy movements in countries like Russia, Turkey, Brazil, and Poland. Between the spring of 2020 and the spring of 2021, 68 countries experienced mass protest movements, many of them violent; it has been a tumultuous time of unrest compounded by a global pandemic and widespread economic and social strain.[6] As the world looks towards its future, understanding the relationship between a protest's short-term outcome to its enduring success is crucial to evaluating whether the effects of current pro-democracy movements may endure. How dissidents react when violence is over and carry their movement beyond the protests will determine whether or not they are able to succeed in the long term. In exploring this issue, a natural comparative case arises in the Arab Spring, one of the more recent cross-national pro-democracy movements that uprooted much of the Arab world. In 2010, protests broke out in Egypt and Tunisia just months apart, but a decade later, their outcomes could not be more different: the former presents a case of a movement that lacked structure and whose victory was surprising yet short-lived; the latter, a protest that has managed to reform the nation's political structures. What did Tunisian revolutionaries accomplish that Egyptian ones did not, and what can dissidents in other nations, like Myanmar, learn from these differences?

"Between the spring of 2020 and the spring of 2021, 68 countries experienced mass protest movements, many of them violent; it has been a tumultuous time of unrest compounded by a global pandemic and widespread economic and social strain."

Egypt

In 2011, unrest shook Egypt's Tahrir Square. Mounting discontent as a result of political repression, corruption, and police brutality, among other issues, exploded in mass protests, deposing the 30-year, autocratic President Hosni Mubarak.[7] After Mubarak stepped down, Egypt was full of celebration, excitement, and hope for the future.[8] In 2011, immediately following the Tahrir Square movement, politics, the arts, innovation, and entrepreneurship flourished as the country opened up to democratic ideals. The widespread anticipation for an improved socio-political climate following Mubarak's removal persisted. Yet, in June 2013, the military retook power; just as quickly as the country had started to liberalize, the period of growing democracy was over, and Egypt returned to its status as a military state.

The difficulty in retaining a democratic structure is not unusual for a country that has experienced rapid political transition, and it is often the reason why newly democratized countries quickly revert into non-democratic regimes.[9] Although the reasons for Egypt's backslide into autocracy are multifaceted, the challenge of creating unity and structure among activists during the post-protest years ultimately proved detrimental to the movement's longstanding success. Faced with a country full of potential but lacking in foundational political structure, activists were left with almost too much to do. Mubarak left a power vacuum, and the need for political, social, and economic change exacerbated the tense aftermath of the revolution. It was a period of excitement but also volatility and confusion, and the ongoing clashes between protestors and their opposition prevented the creation of a unified pro-democracy coalition.[10]

In the immediate aftermath of Mubarak's downfall, opposition leaders failed to develop united political strategies that could steer the transition in a consistent direction. Though more than 190 parties registered for the 2011 elections, the vast majority of civic activists did not shift into the political realm. As a result, the protest movement lost popular support, and the motivation that had fueled the initial protests waned. Tensions grew between politicians and activists, and the protest movement lost support among the general population.[11] A lack of unification between opposition movements allowed the military to once again take charge.

The monumental nature of the Egyptian revolution and the courage displayed by protestors cannot be underestimated. However, the lack of political unity between activists and politicians following the initial movement caused an erosion in democratic support, leading to the country's decline into autocracy.

Tunisia

Little more than a month before the Egyptian revolution began, protests erupted in nearby Tunisia. Fueled by similar concerns of social inequality and a lack of political freedom, the protests were spurred by the self-immolation of a young street vendor on December 17, 2010.[12] Demonstrations and riots quickly spread across the country in a movement now termed the Jasmine Revolution. In January 2011, this culminated in the ousting of Zine

al-Abidine Ben Ali, the country's longtime autocratic president. The Tunisian revolution was the impetus for the Arab Spring uprisings in countries such as Egypt, Yemen, Libya, and Syria, and a decade later, it is widely regarded as the only successful one of these movements.[13] Although it still faces political and economic challenges, Tunisia remains the sole country to make a peaceful democratic transition after the Arab Spring protests began.

As with the failure of the Egyptian revolution, the reasons for Tunisia's relative success are multifaceted. However, a key factor that contributed to the Jasmine Revolution's lasting legacy was the political unity between protestors both during and after the revolution. The movement was a sustained mass protest that cut across classes and geographical barriers, giving it significant leverage and force via collective action. This mobilization came as a result of widespread opposition and distrust of Ben Ali–particularly by secular opposition leaders and the regime's narrow base of supporters—which provided the necessary elements to fuel the protests.[14]

The movement's lasting impact was further entrenched in the months following the initial revolution, as activists and politicians were able to work together in spite of their differences. The Ennahda Movement, which defined itself as a Muslim democratic party, was the plurality winner of the 2011 elections and established a governing constituent Assembly. Although secularist and Islamist members of the assembly held starkly different views on issues from women's rights to the governing system, these divides did not entirely halt the assembly's work. Both sides made concessions on certain issues and built bridges without retreating or exiting the political sphere, which is often characteristic of activists in comparable circumstances. This has been the key to the Tunisian movement's enduring success: the capacity for compromise and activists' determination to enter government and work through differences with their counterparts. Even when they did not achieve their goals directly, their ability to retain a space in government was crucial to the prevailing nature of the movement.

Conclusion

As the world faces a turbulent period rife with social and political discord, the global forces upholding democracy are under strain. Myanmar is far from the only country faced with the question of what will follow; this period presents a risk to long-standing democracies as well as newly democratized nations. Thus, understanding what it is that makes a protest movement successful is more important than ever, and past comparisons provide a window into the key elements of enduring resistance. By examining parallels and differences between movements, it is clear that unification between political leaders and opposition activists is key. Indeed, some of the most successful post-protest pathways come when activists shift into political leadership, an aspect that was lacking in the Egyptian revolution. In years to come, as civil disobedience continues to mold and shift societies across the world, understanding the individual elements of protest can generate an understanding of which movements will endure and which may not.

Foreign Determination & Self Support:

The Fate of Independence Movements & Their States

By Collin Mattis

Introduction:

Over 90% of countries celebrate an independence day of some form, engendering the most visible demonstrated patriotism of the year.[1] Prompted by the popularization and codification of self-determination and colonial autonomy after World War II, a renewed wave of decolonization movements in the mid-twentieth century led much of Africa and Asia to break colonial ties in a bid for individual sovereignty, producing today's quotidian reality of patriotism. In the process the world's politically geography was radically transformed, with its total number of states increasing from 50 states to 200.[2] Yet despite the sense of renewal brought on by the outburst of post-war independence movements, authoritarian regimes simply replaced the old colonial regimes and sluggish development continues to plague these nations.

While few colonies exist today, a number of separatist movements, primarily in Europe, continue to attract broad bases of support. Indeed, in spite of their significant degrees of autonomy, regions like Scotland and Catalonia continue to host some of the most prominent separatist movements. These have resulted in close referendums within the last decade, producing results with only slim margins of defeat.[3] Likewise in Africa, several regionalist movements have spurred violence, with the recent example of the self-declared Federal Republic of Ambazonia splitting off from Cameroon.[4] Though the demand for independence has not ceased since the time of decolonization, the rate of success certainly has, with the number of new nations appearing having slowed down significantly since the breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the 1990s.[5]

What then, beyond the innate desire from the people to seek a state of their own, determines whether a movement is able to generate enough momentum to achieve independence, and what factors are at play when observing how successfully a state is able to emerge from this independence? Despite the complex web of factors involved in independence movements, such as popular support, economic resources, and geography, a few key variables stand out as being consistently impactful. Though not representative of all, an analysis of two of the globe's youngest nations demonstrates the decisive role international factors, namely foreign support, play in their independence movements, while the internal features of the movement—such as leadership, corruption, and economic management of resources—have the biggest long-term impact on the government and economy of these new states.

South Sudan:

After years of foreign rule and violent conflict, South Sudan finally earned its independence in 2011, becoming the youngest country on Earth. Yet despite this revolutionary success, the nation continues to hold one of the lowest standards of living—with a Human Development Index of 0.433—burdened by rebel groups, mass displacement, and famine.[6] Prior to Sudanese independence from the British Empire in 1956, South Sudan was already alienated by the colonial government, who catered to the already commercialized "Arab" north; such policies restricted southern development to forestall the "African" portion of the colony from acquiring political power. The imbalance-induced internal tension at last materialized in 1955 with the Anyanya Insurgency, and after a long civil war, the south was granted regional autonomy by the central government, codified by the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement. This victory was achieved via military support from Ethiopia, Uganda, and Israel with a coup d'etat that weakened the central government. The insurgency had achieved little progress before acquiring these military allies and would have struggled to ever earn a seat at the negotiating table if not for the coup rearranging the central government.[7] This demonstrates that prior to independence, the early movements towards greater autonomy were reliant on external factors, such as foreign military support and unstable regional politics.

The autonomy, however, came to an abrupt end when, in 1983, President Jaafar Nimeri declared Sudan an Islamic state and stripped the south of its autonomy, provoking a second Civil War, now between the government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). The outcome was once again heavily influenced by international actors. Initially, the SPLM was supported by Ethiopia, then led by a Soviet-backed regime. This prompted the Americans to ally with Nimeri's regime against the SPLM, and consequently Ethiopia and the Soviet sphere. When Ethiopia's government was overthrown and the Soviet regime dissolved in 1991, their support for the SPLM too ended, all while the Khartoum government began supporting international terrorism. In conjunction with this geopolitical shift, lobbying efforts that long accused the Sudanese central government of engaging in slave raids led Washington to offer the SPLM humanitarian and security assistance, all while new regional allies also began to side with the SPLM. Owing to this new geopolitical shift, the Sudanese government was forced into negotiations and the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, offering a referendum to the

South Sudanese at the end of a six-year interim period.[8] In the end, more powerful and self-interested foreign actors such as the United States became the decisive forces in determining the outcome of the South Sudanese independence movement within the broader Cold War context.

The new nation's honeymoon period did not last long. Unlike the nation's road to independence that was largely aided by foreign support, South Sudan's descent into violence and stagnation can be more directly attributed to the internal actions taken by the SPLM and the government it formed. The predominant blame for these failures lies with the poor leadership of the SPLM. Being Dinka-dominated and exclusionary towards the Nuers and Shilluks, the SPLM was unable to unite the different ethnicities of South Sudan, culminating in an absent national South Sudanese identity. Moreover, the young nation's government did little to provide essential services that would have built their legitimacy, instead fully relying on international donors to provide aid. At the same time, the inaugural president of South Sudan, Salva Kiir, a leader within the SPLM during the Civil War and the first South Sudanese president, was directly responsible for many of South Sudan's failures. He was autocratic, ethnically exclusive, and built deep patronage networks that alienated all opposition. His rivalry with Vice President Riek Machar and the Nuers he represented culminated in the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO) to split off from the SPLM, and for seven ensuing years a brutal Civil War raged on.[9] Throughout the course of the conflict, attempts made by the US, the UN Security Council, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development to mediate the conflict were consistently ineffective due to a lack of incentive for both parties to comply with their terms.[10] Despite peace agreements mediated by regional powers leading to the creation of a new unitary government, reports of violence continue to mount, demonstrating the internal destruction caused by this crisis.[11] The SPLM and its leadership allowed all of the corruption, rivalries, and inequalities that defined it to inhibit their ability to make effective decisions for their country. While state formation is an arduous process in and of itself, further complicated by ethnic diversity, absence of foreign aid, and lack of development within South Sudan, the incredibly ineffective and autocratic leadership only accelerated the nation's collapse into civil war.[12] This demonstrates how the internal factors and leadership that define an independence movement play a more defining role in determining the success of the state after independence, rather than the achievement of independence itself.

"In the end, more powerful and self-interested foreign actors such as the United States became the decisive forces in determining the outcome of the South Sudanese independence movement within the broader Cold War context."

While South Sudan's economic failures can be attributed to a number of historical factors, including undeveloped infrastructure and a massive pool of uneducated labor, the legacy of the brutal conflict that led to the nation's independence encouraged its leaders to make poor economic decisions that prevented potential recovery. One of the greatest economic obstacles for the young country was an extreme overreliance on oil, which accounted for 98% of the new government's revenue.[13] Yet in spite of the need for change, SPLM elites continued many of the same practices of former Sudanese ruling elites, stealing large amounts of oil revenues and leaving the heavily populated rural areas of the country neglected. Additionally, the new border between Sudan and South Sudan remained in a static dispute over key oil regions that had been incorporated into northern Sudan back in the 1970s through gerrymandering, sustaining a rift that led South Sudanese officials to invest oil revenues into the military rather than their faltering economy, despite there being value in cooperation.[14] Indeed, South Sudan produces three-fourths of the oil between the two countries, while Sudan's export pipeline was critical for successful trade for both countries. Out of frustration with the proposed cost to utilize the export pipeline, South Sudan shut down their entire production of oil in order to bargain for a better price, leaving the country bankrupt.[15] Such internal management decisions only further devastated the economic situation within the nascent state, ones made out of spite for Sudan rather than to promote the well-being of the economy, perpetuating the conflict-mentality of the independence movement and the war that preceded it.

East Timor:

In 2002, East Timor declared independence from Indonesia, after hundreds of years of colonization and domination by foreign powers. Similar to South Sudan, the young country struggled with an oil-reliant, lagging economy and a diverse population, but unlike South Sudan, it has managed to offer a stable and democratic government for its people to rely upon. While East Timor's path to independence was also aided by foreign actors, the country's long-term success was a result of stronger internal leadership and resource management. The nation first achieved freedom after a military coup in Lisbon

By Oscar Martinez

overthrew the Portuguese government in 1974, allowing the Marxist Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin) to capitalize and seize control during the resulting power vacuum. However, within days, the then vastly superior Indonesian National Armed Forces (ABRI) invaded and annexed the infant state. Viewing the organization's leftist ideology as a dangerous threat, by 1979, the occupying Indonesian government had captured every Fretilin base and less than 5% of their original forces survived, subsisting only through guerilla tactics and civilian intelligence. The resulting Indonesian occupation was economically exploitative and corrupt, creating a resentful populace. Wary of the growing presence of communism in Southeast Asia, the United States simply reaffirmed their support for Suharto's Indonesia and their occupation of East Timor.[16] With a strong occupying force supported by the United States and Australia, who feared a potential independent, Communist East Timor, the independence movement's hopes for success were slim. Despite the population's overwhelming desire for independence and an organization ready to lead them, the lack of either regional or international support prevented them from generating any momentum.

An aspect of Indonesia's occupation that had a particularly prominent impact was their Pancasila state philosophy, which among other things, promoted religious toleration to ease ethnic tensions.[17] This official religious attitude and the colonial imprint of Portuguese Catholicism resulted in a population that was 90% Catholic by 1990, offering East Timor a distinct identity from the Muslim-majority Indonesia while eliciting support from the Catholic Church. Pope John Paul II's 1989 visit to Dili, the capital of East Timor, reinvigorated the population and sparked a wave of civil disobedience that reached its climax with the 1991 Santa Cruz massacre. The deaths of 270 peaceful protestors at the hands of the ABRI were broadcasted across the world, inspiring international civil society organizations to pressure their governments to support independence, particularly in Portugal, Australia, and Indonesia. This coincided with the end of the Cold War and Indonesia losing relevance in the American fight against Communism in Southeast Asia. After visiting East Timor in 1993, the US ambassador to Indonesia reported extreme human rights violations, and the US began conditioning its military aid to Jakarta on its human rights performance, while some European nations cut aid altogether. With mounting international pressure and East Timor's economic downturn, Indonesia finally agreed to a popular consultation on the question of East Timor in 1999, stipulating either autonomy or full independence as the two choices. With 78.5% of the Timorese rejecting autonomy, pro-Jakarta militias responded violently, murdering and removing people from their homes while also engaging in scorched earth tactics, violence that was only put to rest by a UN Security Council peacekeeping force.[18] At last, East Timor earned its official independence in 2002, yet the new country was essentially forced to start from scratch as a result of the massacre.[19] In the end, tracing the timeline of East Timor's independence from Portugal to its freedom from Indonesia offers a rather strong connection between international support and prospects for independence. Before receiving the Catholic Church and the US government's support, East Timor's only concrete movements for independence were conducted by guerrilla fighters, echoing the experience of South Sudan. Only after this shift in foreign support did the East Timorese get their shot at freedom, once again demonstrating how, in order to be fully successful, independence movements are dependent on foreign actors whose decision-making may only be partially influenced by their actions.

Although independence was achieved with foreign support, East Timor was only able to restabilize after the cat-

astrophic attacks owing to the effective internal leadership established by the resistance groups that fought for independence in the first place. The hierarchies within these paramilitary groups consisted of secret leaders who worked across villages, with many of them holding customary genealogical roles. This allowed for a strong sense of cohesion and accountability between the people and leaders. The creation of the Timorese National Resistance Council (CNRT) consolidated these groups and allowed for a legitimated structure of future governance, nurturing many of the current political elites. While there were several impactful leaders who emerged from the CNRT to compete for power within the new government, future Prime Minister and President, Xanana Gusmao, enjoyed the greatest public support through his charisma and background within the resistance. Though some have argued his political domination and tactics were somewhat authoritarian, he continued to advocate for democratic principles and effectively unified the new country.[20] In comparison to the leadership established by President Kiir's government in South Sudan, East Timor's leadership was able to define a national identity, build public legitimacy, and create stability within the traumatized nation, illustrating the decisive importance of domestic leadership post-independence. This demonstrates how internal factors within an independence movement, such as leadership and structural hierarchies, can make a decisive difference to ensure the health of a nation after independence.

After the devastation of the post-referendum attacks, East Timor's only hope for any economic stability lay within their considerable offshore oil deposits. Much like South Sudan, the nation was at tremendous risk of faltering to the resource curse, with 97% of government revenues coming from oil. Unlike South Sudan, however, the government did not allow the burdens and tensions leftover from their battle for independence to hamper their economic management. Several donors, including the World Bank, IMF, and foreign experts, assisted in drafting legislation and establishing the best practices, accountability, and transparency within the oil sector. While the economy remains largely undiversified, it has remained stable and has been able to outpace other Southeast Asian countries due to increasing oil revenues and increased public expenditure.[21] While East Timor's economic management remains in the rudimentary stages, decisions to prioritize stability and economic optimization allowed for a greater degree of economic development than in South Sudan. Even after suffering horrible violence following independence, the government moved on from these scars and was able to stabilize their economy due to effective internal management.

Analysis and Implications

An analysis of the young nations of South Sudan and East Timor's path to independence and the quality of statehood enjoyed by each of them post-independence suggests that whether or not they gained independence owed in large part to broader geopolitical forces at play, while subsequent state formation hinged upon internal decision-makers. Surely, however, this general finding is not nearly as rigid in practice as it is described here. In Sudan, regardless of whether or not regional and foreign actors wanted the south to be independent is irrelevant without the South Sudanese people and those that led the SDLM taking the fight to the central government in the first place. And while the leaders of the SDLM offered themselves little favors, they were tasked with an extraordinarily difficult set of circumstances to build a nation within, and their failure could certainly be blamed on weak foreign intervention and support. Similarly, in East Timor, for all of the religious, economic, and Cold War geopolitics that eventually coalesced into the international pressure necessary for independence, none of it would have come to fruition without the relentless battle waged by the Fretilin insurgents. Having a more cohesive internal structure filled with charismatic leaders has offered East Timor an optimistic path forward, though one could certainly argue that pre-established factors presented a more favorable set of circumstances for the nation to work with.

In the end, the purpose of this case study is not to make overgeneralized, all purpose conclusions about the factors that lead to independence and the prosperity of resulting nations. Rather, the patterns it discovers partially suggests an uncomfortable reality about the current state of self-determination and nation building: the people within a nation or region can rarely determine if they are to be a part of an independent country, but more often than not, a select group of powerful foreign actors do. Additionally, young nations with underdeveloped institutions and economies are not offered nearly enough foreign support or mediation needed to ensure they are able to progress and find stability. What we are left with is a system of foreign determination followed by self-reliance, in which specific powerful actors select which nations are worthy of independence and then leave them to sink or swim with minimal support. This directly contradicts many of the stated goals set by the United Nations: namely self-determination and international support. Self-determination has thus been manipulated to contain a dangerous conditional requirement: not only must a majority of the region determine that they want independence, but they must also convince certain segments of the international community that it is advantageous for them to make it so. While this has, to an extent, always been a reality, it is especially true today given the increased power held by the international order. The effectiveness of foreign aid has been in question for some time now, though it is also clear that an alternative method of international state-building guidance is critical. At the very least, the nations that helped play a role in a country's achieved independence should feel a stronger sense of obligation to ensure that that new state is able to succeed.

Protests & Pandemics:

COVID-19 & Civil Disobedience in Russia & India

By Michael Dekhtyar

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated rising trends of civil disobedience in many countries. While much of life as we know has been paused or almost completely changed, people around the world have spent the past year pushing back against sluggish economic growth, human rights violations, and authoritarian laws and regimes. For countries like Russia and India, civil disobedience has been transformed from a symptom of a deteriorating domestic situation into a nationwide controversy. Peaceful protest movements built on long-standing grievances and demands have been greatly impacted by the onset of COVID-19, whether through increased public discontent with economic inequalities and seemingly out-of-touch governments or through outrage over perceived overreach in government authority. No phenomena better exemplify these impacts than the pro-Navalny movement in Russia and the farmers' protests in India.

Russia

In pre-pandemic Russia, popular discontent with the government had been brewing for years. Slow economic growth following a global collapse in oil prices combined with the high economic and political costs of the conflict in Ukraine (which provoked a devastating round of sanctions from Western countries) remain major sources of displeasure among the general public.[1] While the Russian economy has rapidly expanded and liberalized in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, with a dramatic rise in wages for the burgeoning middle class, economic inequality continues to plague the country's poor and middle class. A 2020 study showed that 83.8 percent of the Russian population believe that income inequality is harmful to the nation and to themselves, while 69.6 percent of Russians feel similarly regarding unequal access to medical care.[2] Inequality torments the Russian public's consciousness in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic—despite the country's economic gains from international financial integration and economic globalization.

The onset of COVID-19 in Russia has exacerbated widespread economic inequality and set the stage for future instances of civilian protests. According to the World Bank, Russia's national unemployment rate skyrocketed to 6.3 percent at the outset of the pandemic—the highest level in eight years—and the three enormous sectors of manufacturing, construction, and retail and hospitality services lost half a million jobs in total.[3] Poverty also increased to a national rate of 13.2 percent in the second quarter of 2020. On a global level, inequality rose dramatically as a result of COVID-19, with billionaires increasing their total wealth by around $10.2 trillion while 150 million additional people were driven into poverty.[4] In Russia, a country with the most billionaires per capita in the world, such a drastic increase in economic inequality will likely lead to further social unrest and widespread civil disobedience in the coming years if it is left unaddressed by the national government.[5]

"The onset of COVID-19 in Russia has exacerbated widespread economic inequality and set the stage for future instances of civilian protests."

The COVID-19 pandemic poured fuel into the tinder pile that is Russian domestic politics, but the spark that finally lit the blaze proved to be the plight of Alexei Navalny. Navalny, a Russian lawyer and activist, has become the leading political figure in the opposition movement against President Vladimir Putin.[6] Navalny accuses the government of widespread corruption and illegal practices, and lobbies Western governments to halt the spread of Russian oligarchs' "dirty money" internationally.[7] While the government previously ignored the grassroots political support that Navalny achieved during the early years of his activism, Putin and his allies now see him as an active threat to the status quo. Navalny has endured constant harassment by the Russian courts and police (which he says are mere extensions of the national government's campaign against him), along with multiple physical and chemical attacks on his person.[8] Most recently, he has survived a seemingly state-sanctioned assassination attempt with Novichok, a deadly chemical agent often used by Russian intelligence operatives.[9] Yet even the multiple attempts on his life have seemingly given Navalny a stronger platform; public support for his campaign surged after his near-fatal poisoning by

Russian government agents in October, and his subsequent political persecution by the Russian government only gave him more visibility and traction with the populace at large. Navalny is currently imprisoned, charged with parole violations from a previous sentence—a claim he disputes. After embarking on a three-week hunger strike to protest the Russian government and his unjust political persecution, Navalny's health rapidly deteriorated and he was transferred to a prison hospital by the authorities in response to domestic and international calls for proper medical treatment.[10]

The ramifications of Alexei Navalny's political persecution have been enormous for the Russian government and police. Over the past few months, thousands of Russians across the country have turned out in droves to peacefully protest his mistreatment and imprisonment. Police have arrested over 1,700 protestors rallying in support of his campaign, though this has barely hindered the thousands more that have turned out in the streets of Moscow, St. Petersburg, and dozens of other cities across Russia.[11] It's clear to the world—and Vladimir Putin—that Navalny and his supporters in Russia will not go away quickly or quietly. Although the catalyst for the rapid rise in civil disobedience was Navalny's imprisonment and persecution, the protestors have found common cause on a number of other issues: corruption in the government and in the police, kleptocratic corporate control of whole industries by wealthy oligarchs, an increasingly tense situation on the Ukrainian border, and increasing economic inequality as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic.[12]

Economic inequality among Russians is a core issue of Navalny's overall campaign. A video released just weeks ago by his staffers showed drone footage of what seemed to be a massive, opulent palace on the Black Sea used by Putin as a vacation home, complete with a casino, vineyard, ice hockey rink, and a roughly $1 billion price tag. The video immediately went viral in Russia, contributing to the long list of demands and grievances currently uniting many protestors on city streets. The outrage over the footage only intensified after Navalny's campaign reported that the palace was gifted directly to Putin by wealthy oligarchs in the oil and gas sector and is currently owned and guarded by members of Russia's federal security forces. As long as such visible, tangible symbols of Russia's vast inequalities persist and propagate, the broader frustration with the country's economic situation and social system will not subside as long as the painful impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and recession is broadly felt—something Navalny and his supporters seem to fully understand.[13]

By Talia Fishman

India

In India's case, civil disobedience remains an integral part of the country's political system, persisting since the country's colonial history. Mahatma Gandhi, one of the most revered advocates for peace in modern history, grounded his early 20th century campaign for Indian independence from the British Empire on the principles of civil disobedience, inspiring modern protest campaigns in the region. The past few months saw enormous national protests flood the capital of New Delhi, blockading roads and populating the streets with protestors, many of whom were farmers. The protests were sparked by the government's passage of three "farm bills" late last year, which have the potential to lower food prices, loosen regulations on harvest markets, and end many governmental protections from private competitors.[14] Outraged by the rapid passage of the bills, which were predicted to result in severe price downturns and exclusion from wholesale food markets, dozens of Indian farmer unions have banded together in opposition to the legislation.[15] Unions, activists, and 16 different opposition parties have placed enormous public pressure on the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership to either repeal or greatly alter the bills to better protect India's farmers. The public battle over the farm bills reached India's Supreme Court, which in January temporarily suspended the contentious laws in an effort to restore stability and avert further social unrest. Modi's govern-

ment subsequently offered to delay implementation of the laws by 12 to 18 months in an attempt to resolve the protests via negotiation but its offer was rejected out of hand as too little and far too late, with the protesting farmers seeking the full repeal of the three laws.[16]

Regardless of these small victories, the protests have continued unabated, even as India undergoes a horrific second surge in COVID-19 cases and deaths. As of April 22, India reported the highest rate of daily infections in the world to date, recording 314,835 new cases in the past 24 hours.[17] COVID-19 may have exacerbated the growth and intensity of India's civil disobedience movements rather than slowing them, at least in the protests' initial months. Farmers' union leaders and activists claim that the government is merely using the virus as an excuse to prevent or disrupt planned protests in major urban areas in order to weaken the movement's momentum without accepting the protesters' demands.[18] This is a powerful narrative—even if it may not be completely accurate—and may well serve as an effective rallying cry to whip up support among the general Indian public for more activism in the coming months. However, the COVID-19 surge is a recent phenomenon, and based on the latest trends in cases and deaths, the situation will only get worse. Whether the protestors will be discouraged by the nationwide second wave of the pandemic or co-opt newly introduced public health measures as a political measure remains to be seen.

What's Next?

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an outsized impact on civil disobedience and peaceful protest movements across the world. In Russia, long-standing economic inequality and corruption, the brutal social and human cost of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the sudden shock of Alexei Navalny's political persecution have prompted thousands of people to protest in the streets of Moscow, demanding reform, democratization, and transparency in the national government. In India, concerns over a devastating surge of COVID-19 have clashed with the demands of a massive protest movement of activists and unions aiming to avert a possible economic disaster for the country's farming sector.

How the governments of Russia and India handle the drastic rise in civil disobedience and social unrest among their populations will reveal the true priorities, interests, and allegiances of each country's political systems. Russian and Indian governments have two choices: to work with their citizens to resolve their grievances, or to violently suppress the protests through state-sanctioned force, potentially setting the stage for even more unrest in the future. Let's hope they make the best choice.

Navigating Networks:
How Social Media Facilitates Political Participation

By Gayatri Somaiya

Until social media became a popular tool for organizing protests in the 21st century, movements were, by necessity, largely organized by word of mouth. Since the rise of social media, however, online platforms have demonstrated that they have the power to attract millions of followers in a matter of seconds. By broadcasting emotional videos through media platforms and retweeting important information, people can raise awareness and garner public support for important causes more quickly than ever before. Social media has also allowed social movements to cross geographic borders and gain followers from different regions and countries. Although, on the surface, it appears that social media has given rise to a new, more successful era of protests, scholars have raised concerns about the potential ineffectiveness and unsustainability of modern-day protests and suggest that protest movements have lost the community and leadership that made early protests like the 1950's Civil Rights Movement more effective and enduring. While the use of social media in protest movements is associated with less traditional organizational structures, an increased likelihood of performative activism, and fewer connections between members, social media has actually enabled these protest movements to embrace these changes to create significant, positive, lasting change.

"Their shared bonds motivated them to sacrifice their time, energy, and safety to participate in sit-ins."

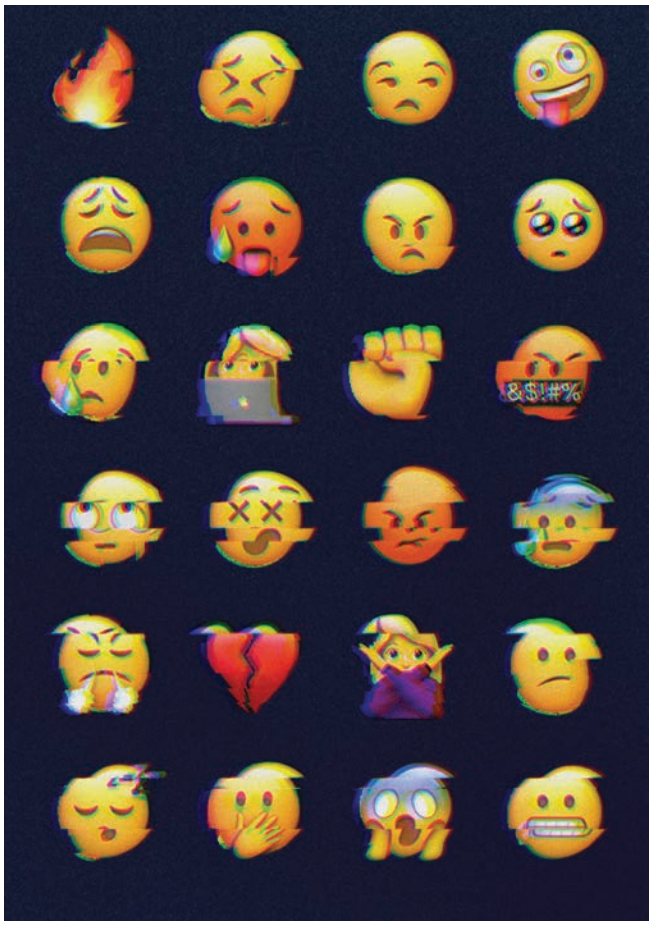
For a protest movement to be successful, connections between its members are critically important. Malcolm Gladwell suggests that the long-term effectiveness of a social movement in creating policy change depends on an "individual's connection to the social movement."[1] Social psychologists argue that identification with a group is a strong predictor of collective action participation, so protestors are more likely to continue to be followers of a movement if they know someone else who is involved. Consequently, if an individual is familiar with another individual in a protest movement, they are more likely to identify with the group and participate in the group's activities. For instance, during the 1950s Civil Rights Movement, individuals participated in sit-ins with other members of the movement who they already knew from college, work, or other activities: their shared bonds motivated them to sacrifice their time, energy, and safety to participate in sit-ins. As Satell writes, "the strength of a movement is not large crowds, but small groups," as smaller groups are more likely to have a stronger collective identity than more diluted movements where people are less familiar with each other.[2] Many previously successful movements, which largely took place without the use of social media, relied on strong community ties to facilitate the organization and execution of major events and protests. For example, while the opposition movement in East Germany that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall may have seemed spontaneous to observers, it actually consisted of several hundred groups, each with only a dozen members, who had personal connections with each other.[3] At that time, only thirteen percent of East Germans had a phone, so to know about the protests, an individual likely had to know someone else who was planning to attend. If an individual knew more people that were critical of the regime, known as "critical friends," they were more likely to attend protests.[4] Both the Civil Rights and German opposition movements highlight how strong connections between protestors are crucial to the effectiveness of a protest movement because groups rely on familiarity between members to draw more people into the movement for longer periods of time.

While social media may weaken the connections between members of a protest movement by eliminating opportunities for strong interpersonal connections to bolster the movement's effectiveness, new research suggests that these new, weaker connections have some advantages. Gladwell explains that while the fact social media networks can be built around weak ties—personal contacts that people only occasionally correspond with—the "peripheral members," connected by these ties can actually be helpful for the sustainability of these protest movements.[5] These weak ties are exemplified in the case of Facebook, which often acts as a tool for managing acquaintances. While one might associate these weak ties with trends like performative activism, a "form of activism used to increase

one's social capital or political gain rather than genuine support towards a movement or its causes," as a result of social media's ability to deliver information in bite-size chunks, allowing protest movement participants to overstate their involvement in a cause, there is evidence to suggest that the existence of "peripheral members" can, on the whole, benefit protest movements.[6] A study done by Barbara et al. demonstrates that, while committed protestors make up the heart of the movement, the success of a movement also depends on the ability of core members to successfully engage with peripheral members whose larger manpower can disseminate information efficiently.[7] When the researchers of the study analyzed the Twitter activity of the Gezi Park protests in Turkey in 2013, they found that while peripheral members of the movement were less active on a per-capita basis, their relatively greater size allowed them to distribute an equal volume of information to their core member counterparts.[8] This shows that the peripheral members, even if they are less committed than core members, can still aid protest movements.

In addition, although social media can make it more difficult for individuals in a protest movement to foster strong relationships with each other, in other cases, it can also facilitate these relationships, thereby expanding participation in movements. Information received through social media can seem more impactful because it reaches individuals through virtual networks that they have chosen to join. In addition, the information coming through social media channels has already been pre-validated—*liked, shared, retweeted*– by other members of the virtual community.[9] Therefore, the individuals who send those messages also become "pre-validated" members of each other's communities. This phenomenon can result in members of a protest movement forming stronger bonds without face-to-face interactions. Social media channels can also make it clearer about what their contacts are actually doing. An experiment involving 61 million Facebook users showed that "people were more likely to vote in the 2010 US Congressional Election if they learned through Facebook that one or more of their close friends had voted."[10] Through social media channels, it is easier to get information about what their followers or their friends are doing, which can further influence their participation in these movements.

Additionally, while social media can result in an absence of hierarchically organized protests, further research suggests that the decentralized nature of most modern-day protests has benefits that can outweigh the potential negatives. Social media creates "networks," which, unlike hierarchies, do not have any centralized leadership. These networks contrast with the traditional organizational structure of older protest movements, which typically have clear hierarchical organizations with defined leadership who channel the protests towards a single goal.[11] A notable protest that relied on principles of hierarchical organization was The Montgomery Bus Boycott, which lasted more than a year and required the participation of tens of thousands of members. The Boycott had to have "military precision," which was only possible because the organizers ensured that the division of labor was well planned enough for everything to run smoothly and predictably.[12] While it is true that protests with traditional, hierarchical organizations, such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, owe much their success to their centralized structures, the diffuse nature of social media protests can also be beneficial. David Faris, a political science scholar, suggests that the horizontal nature of social media networks makes it more difficult for governments to crack down on protestors, which enables protestors to give out vital information to people on the ground.[13] During the Egyptian protests demanding the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak, social media networks undermined authoritarian media control because the government was unable to track the millions of tweets, hashtags, Facebook messages that



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"These networks contrast with the traditional organizational structure of older protest movements, which typically have clear hierarchical organizations with defined leadership who channel the protests towards a single goal"

were criticizing the Egyptian regime fast enough.[14] Additionally, social media can deliver information that is not traditionally covered by mainstream media sources, as illustrated by the importance of social media in broadcasting the 2009 Moldovan protests.[15] These protests were not covered by the mainstream media in Moldova, but were broadcasted by Twitter users in Moldova who disseminated information about mass demonstrations so that more people were able to join the protests.[16] Both the Moldovan and Egyptian protests highlight how the horizontal structures of social media are an important tool for broadcasting information quickly and preventing authoritarian governments from easily cracking down on decentralized protests. Another example of how social media is used to deliver vital information is seen in the Gezi Protests in Turkey. Its most viewed Facebook page was liked 643,951 times during a three month period, and there is some evidence that Twitter is used for logistical purposes.[17] There were 30 million tweets mentioning the most salient hashtags in the first month of the protest, out of which half a million were geo-located, giving real time information about where the protests were occurring.[18]

While the transition from more traditional forms of protest to digital mediums seems to have some negative implications, the benefits of social media outweigh these issues. Social media attracts a larger base of supporters and more effectively distributes vital information. Even with social media threatening traditional organizational hierarchies, protest movements seem to evolve into a core set of protestors and peripheral members. These dedicated core protestors have a more hierarchical organization and defined leadership that is crucial for protests to be sustainable, and are supported by a larger network of more horizontally organized participants. Since the transition to digital activism is still ongoing, the long-term impacts of protests will determine whether the overall result of social media activism is positive.

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