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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

To state the obvious, we are living in unprecedented times. Not in my life, not in my parents' lives, not even in my grandparents' lives has the country experienced an upheaval that has been both so total and so protracted. With the explosion of the coronavirus, hundreds of thousands have died globally, unemployment has soared, and social life has been upended.

Despite all of the chaos, we are proud to publish this semester's edition of CIAR. To me, the process was a reminder of both the difficulties the virus and quarantine create as well as the small silver linings we can find. This publication is incredibly rewarding, even more than usual, because we, as a group, battled new technological and logistical challenges to create a truly substantial piece of work. In this issue, Elena Ortiz evaluates the impacts of public policy promoting gender equality in Rwanda on gender perceptions, Ashley Ehasz studies the recent Colombian reconciliation process' impact on former female FARC combatants, Ishan Sharma applies neo-colonialist theory to China's export of surveillance technology, and Xiaoli Jin analyzes political parties' use of Twitter during India's recent parliamentary elections. I am incredibly proud of the work that authors and editors of CIAR have accomplished this semester and I believe that the final product is, without exaggeration, the best we have ever produced.

CIAR does not organize the issues by theme—we simply pick the best submissions we receive—but, if we did ascribe one, I think this semester's would be "unexpected complexity." Our pieces, though different in scope and in topic all demonstrate that, whether in public policy, international treaties, or even social media, there is more than what meets the eye and that multiple conflicting ramifications can be borne from the same root cause. Our cover, showing the Himalayas visible in the distance from Pathankot, India applies that lesson to the issue of our day. Quarantine slowed the city enough that the usual pollution completely dissipated, revealing the landscape on the horizon. In the midst of all the death and despair around us, such small wonders are worth holding on to. Even coronavirus has its marginal silver linings.

This process has been one of those. The effort that everyone involved in the journal has put forth is both incredible and humbling. I am honored, now more than ever, to have served on CIAR's editorial board the past three years and, as my time of active involvement in the publication draws to a close, so too does one of the most meaningful chapters of my life. I hope you enjoy this issue as much as I do.



Jack Carlos Mindich  
Editor-in-Chief

# THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF HIGH-LEVEL GENDER EQUALITY: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENDERED LAWS AND PERCEPTIONS IN RWANDA<sup>1</sup>

ELENA ORTIZ<sup>2</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

As part of its reconstruction process following the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, Rwanda introduced several laws and policies protecting gender equality, which contradicted traditional patriarchal norms. This study focuses on the relationship between institutional gender reform and local perceptions. Specifically, it explores the extent to which perceptions of gender have caught up to legal changes and identifies where the greatest gaps exist across political, social, and economic spheres. Data collection occurred in two parts: quantitatively, a multiple-choice survey was distributed to 76 Rwandan adults investigating their perceptions of gender in political, social, and economic contexts. Qualitatively, structured interviews were conducted with three Rwandan gender experts in order to supplement and better explain survey findings. Both quantitative and qualitative results indicated that the greatest gaps between gender-related laws and perceptions exist at the social level, with the smallest in economic contexts. Analysis also revealed that overall, level of education was associated with more congruity between gendered laws and perceptions, while both sex and age were independent of responses. Based on these findings, this study provides recommendations for aligning gendered laws and perceptions.

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<sup>1</sup> This work is licensed under CC BY 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

<sup>2</sup> Elena Ortiz is a junior at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service, where she is pursuing a major in International Politics and Security Studies with a minor in Diplomatic Studies. She currently works at the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security and spent the fall of 2019 in Rwanda, where the research for this paper was conducted.

## INTRODUCTION

After the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, Rwanda embarked on a reconstruction process that completely renovated the country's social, political, and economic institutions. Rwanda's project of post-conflict development focused not only on physical infrastructure, but also on rebuilding a national identity after polarized ethnicities drove Rwanda into civil war and ultimately, to genocide. A strong emphasis on gender equality was incorporated into Rwanda's long-term reconstruction vision, standing in stark contrast to the highly patriarchal society that dominated Rwanda before the genocide. Goals for gender equality and women's empowerment across state-level institutions represent a tremendous leap forward. For example, Rwanda leads the world in women's representation in government, with 61 percent of the lower house of parliament being female and the highest women's employment rate in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>3</sup>

Instituted during Rwanda's reconstruction process, provisions safeguarding gender equality are enshrined in the country's formal legal code. In 2003, Rwanda ratified a new constitution (revised again in 2015) guaranteeing gender equality and equal protection before the law. The law also instituted proactive measures by mandating a 30 percent quota of female representation in government and gender mainstreaming throughout all state institutions.<sup>4</sup> Several laws passed since the 2003 constitution have furthered the agenda of legal gender equality. For example, organic laws 22/1999, 08/2005, and 43/2013 gave women equal rights to inheritance, land ownership, and co-ownership of joint property shared with their husbands.<sup>5</sup> Other post-genocide laws concerning women's rights include equal pay, the prohibition of workplace harassment, protection and punishment for gender-based violence, gender-sensitive budgeting across the public sector, and paid maternity leave.

<sup>3</sup> Jeni Klugman et al., "Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20: Tracking Sustainable Peace Through Inclusion, Justice, and Security For Women" (report, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security and Peace Research Institute Oslo, Washington DC, 2019), 60, <https://www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=12117>

<sup>4</sup> Gender mainstreaming refers to the conscious consideration of how policies affect different genders, and ensures that these different impacts are taken into account during the policy-creation process. For details on the quota law, see Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda of 2003 Revised in 2015, Official Gazette of the Republic of Rwanda [O.G.] Special, December 24, 2015, 1-158 (Rwanda), art. 75 and 80.

<sup>5</sup> Pamela Abbott, Roger Mugisha, and Roger Sapsford, "Women, Land and Empowerment in Rwanda," *Journal of International Development* 30.6 (2018): 1007. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3370>

In 1999, the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development was reorganized and launched, and the 2003 constitution established the Gender Monitoring Office to oversee institutional compliance with gender mainstreaming and standards, further reinforcing state-level efforts towards gender equality.<sup>6</sup>

## RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

Women's legal possession of rights does not necessarily equate to the ability to exercise them. Although gender equality in Rwanda underwent dramatic legal reforms after the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, the extent to which perceptions around gender have evolved is less clear. It is thus important to measure the consistencies or inconsistencies that exist between gendered laws and perceptions because visions for full gender equality cannot be realized without congruity between the two. Although Rwanda has made remarkable progress with respect to gender equality at the institutional level, gaps within norms and perceptions of gender roles endure, raising questions of where and on what scale these incongruities exist.

Thus, this study aims to achieve the following two objectives:

1. To explore the extent to which legal provisions protecting gender equality in Rwanda are consistent with Rwandan perceptions of gender.
2. To identify key political, social, and economic areas where gaps exist between legal provisions and Rwandan perceptions of gender equality.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Falling under the domain of sociology, this study specifically focuses on gender, social institutions, and their relationship to the law. Data was gathered in two parts: the first was quantitative and collected through a survey given to a random sample of seventy-six Rwandan adults. The survey, originally written in English and then translated into Kinyarwanda, comprised sixteen survey questions (fifteen questions, one of which had two parts, for a total of sixteen), each corresponding to a specific law in Rwanda's legal code.<sup>7</sup> Questions were written as statements, to which respondents answered by selecting one of

<sup>6</sup> Jennie E. Burnet, "Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda," *African Affairs* 107.428 (2008): 367. <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adn024>

<sup>7</sup> For a full list of survey questions, possible answers, and corresponding laws, please see appendix 2.

five possible answers. Nine questions were on a Likert scale, and informants checked one of the following boxes for each question: “strongly agree,” “agree,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “disagree”, or “strongly disagree.” The remaining four questions provided five multiple choice answers for different ranges of time. All questions on a Likert scale were formatted so that agreement indicated the most congruity with the law, while disagreement indicated the least. All questions with possible answers as ranges of time included one answer option that reflected exactly the law. Thus, survey answers helped identify where gaps exist between legal provisions and perceptions; questions with more agreement indicated smaller gaps between laws and perceptions, while questions with more disagreement identified greater gaps.

In order to identify specific areas where gaps exist between legal provisions and Rwandan perceptions of gender equality, survey questions were categorized as either political, social, or economic.

The second part of data collection was qualitative and took the form of structured interviews with 3 gender experts in Rwanda. The purpose of these interviews was to gain complementary insight into the social dynamics of gender in Rwanda. While survey results identified where gaps exist, interviews with experts helped explain why they may exist where they do. All experts gave permission for their identities to be published in this study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Social and Gender Norms*

Gender norms are a type of social norm and are exceptionally resilient. Patriarchal values can be embedded within fundamental social structures and relegate women to inferior and less powerful positions in society compared to men. Gender norms are often taught at the family level and reproduced generationally, potentially perpetuating and deepening patriarchal values across all levels of society. Patriarchal structures can also enable violence against women.<sup>8</sup>

The process of transitioning to new gender norms is not linear; new and old can co-exist and overlap, while segments of the population progress at different rates than others. Muñoz Boudet et al. find that the most powerful

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<sup>8</sup> Melinda R. York, *Gender Attitudes and Violence Against Women* (El Paso, TX: LFB Scholarly Pub, 2011), 15.



accelerating agent in normalizing gender equality is education for girls, which expands opportunities for social mobility and economic empowerment.<sup>9</sup>

### *Gender in Pre-genocide Rwanda*

Pre-genocide Rwanda was defined by strong patriarchal norms and institutions, confining women to inferior societal positions both privately and publicly. At the household level, a strong gendered division of labor was starkly visible, with women commonly working informally within the domestic sphere to take care of children, cook, and clean while men adopted the traditional breadwinner role. Rwandan women often married at a young age, inhibiting their full access to education.<sup>10</sup> Testimonies from a study conducted by Kagaba reveal that husbands beating their wives was not uncommon, and that it was a practice nobody questioned, reflecting strong male authority.<sup>11</sup> The threat of violence paired with strong norms of male power deterred women from challenging their husbands' decisions, leaving little latitude for personal agency in the home.<sup>12</sup>

Norms of patriarchal dominance were reinforced by laws marginalizing women. Legally, women had no claim to inherit property and lacked the right to seek paid employment or open a bank account without the permission of their husbands.<sup>13</sup> In cases where women did work formal paying jobs, it was common for their husbands to control their income.<sup>14</sup> The 1992 family code formally recognized men as the heads of Rwandan households, reinforcing patriarchal power within family units and in greater society.<sup>15</sup>

Politically, women represented just 5 percent of the top branch of the MRNDD (National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development),

<sup>9</sup> Ana María M. Boudet et al., *On Norms and Agency: Conversations about Gender Equality with Women and Men in 20 Countries* (Washington DC: World Bank Publications, 2013), 211. <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-0-8213-9862-3>

<sup>10</sup> Lisa A. Doan, "Rwandan Women and the 1994 Genocide: The Effect on Their Social and Political Roles" (Master's thesis, Georgetown University, 2010), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Mediatrix Kagaba, "Women's Experiences of Gender Equality Laws in Rural Rwanda: The Case of Kamonyi District," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 9.4 (2015): 581, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2015.1112934>

<sup>12</sup> Sara E. Brown, *Gender and the Genocide in Rwanda: Women as Rescuers and Perpetrators* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 33. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315173078>

<sup>13</sup> Marie E. Berry, "When 'Bright Futures' Fade: Paradoxes of Women's Empowerment in Rwanda," *Signs* 41.1 (2015): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1086/681899>

<sup>14</sup> Burnet, "Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance," 384.

<sup>15</sup> Sara E. Brown, "Reshaping Gender Norms in Post-Genocide Rwanda," *Genocide Studies International* 10.2 (2016): 233, <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/656644>

the Hutu-led ruling party of Rwanda during the years leading up to genocide. The party also actively repressed women's rights movements, which were perceived as threats to the country's patriarchal society and non-democratic leadership.<sup>16</sup>

As the foregoing examples illustrate, pre-genocide Rwanda was steeped in patriarchal norms, attitudes, and institutions. From both the top and bottom levels of society, men enjoyed privileged positions of power that limited women's access to power and agency.

### *The Effect of Conflict on Gender: The Case of Rwanda*

Intrastate conflict disrupts traditional systems and erodes preexisting social institutions. In the case of Rwanda, several factors contributed to the successful integration of gender equality into legal and constitutional frameworks. Firstly, women had been prominently involved in the armed struggle of the RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front), the rebel force that ultimately liberated Rwanda from the Hutu extremists and ended the genocide in 1994.<sup>17</sup> The RPF was formed out of mostly Tutsi exiles based in Uganda and led by current Rwandan President Paul Kagame. The RPF had a history of supporting Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NMR) in Uganda, and adopted much of their gender mainstreaming model which incorporated women into high-level cabinet, ministerial, and other decision-making positions.<sup>18</sup> After RPF victory in 1994, Rwandan women were appointed as ministers, justices, and cabinet members.<sup>19</sup> This state-level endorsement of women in leadership roles allowed for greater attention to gender in institutional reforms. Secondly, the genocide killed a disproportionate number of men, skewing Rwanda's population to 70% female in mid-1994.<sup>20</sup> While many husbands were either killed or imprisoned, women often became the heads of households,<sup>21</sup> reflecting a family and community-level shift in authority. This shift away from traditional gender roles also anticipated institutional changes as the relatively larger female population was better positioned to advocate for their rights and needs during

<sup>16</sup> Brown, *Gender and the Genocide in Rwanda*, 32.

<sup>17</sup> Burnet, "Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance," 367.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Myriam Gervais, Eliane Ubalijoro, and Euthalie Nyirabega, "Girlhood in a Post-Conflict Situation: The Case of Rwanda." *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 79 (2009): 15, [www.jstor.org/stable/27868943](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27868943)

<sup>21</sup> Burnet, "Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance," 384.

the reform process. Under pre-genocide patriarchal structures, “women were discouraged from voicing their opinions.”<sup>22</sup> Thirdly, and in conjunction with women’s new roles, the post-genocide period saw a spike in action from local women’s organizations.<sup>23</sup> Originally, these organizations were formed by female survivors and widows in order to provide collective support and aid during community-level reconstruction processes, but these cooperatives also advocated strongly for the consideration of gender within the development of new legal frameworks, a process made easier by the existing set of female RPF leadership in government. For example, local women’s organizations collaborated closely with policymakers to pass the 1999 inheritance law granting women full rights to enter contracts, employment, open a bank account, and own property without the permission of their husbands.<sup>24</sup> Conjoined efforts such as that created space for women’s organizations to advocate for women’s rights during the constitutional development process of the early 2000s.

Brown concludes that “Rwanda would not have achieved such an impressive paradigm shift in so short a time without the breakdown of gender roles that occurred during the genocide.”<sup>25</sup> However, these shifts in gender dynamics were products of necessity, a large absence of men, and post-conflict situational instability that challenged the entire state system of Rwanda. They were not caused by organic changes in grassroots values and beliefs, foreshadowing the existence of gaps between institutionally led reform towards equality and perceptions of gender roles.

### *The Relationship between Laws and Norms in Rwanda*

While, on one hand, women obtained greater agency in post-conflict Rwanda, a number of limitations interfered with the full realization of gender equality at top and bottom levels. *Transformative potential* measures the capacity to access and exercise existing rights and is reportedly low in many sectors of Rwandan society.<sup>26</sup> These incongruities are consistent with Muñoz Boudet et al.’s observations that contexts change much faster than corresponding norms,

<sup>22</sup> Petra Debusscher and An Ansoms, “Gender Equality Policies in Rwanda: Public Relations or Real Transformations?” *Development and Change* 44.5 (2013): 1114, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12052>

<sup>23</sup> Burnet, “Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance,” 368.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 376-377.

<sup>25</sup> Brown, “Reshaping Gender Norms,” 243.

<sup>26</sup> Debusscher and Ansoms, “Gender Equality Policies in Rwanda,” 1112.

inhibiting full transformative potential.<sup>27</sup> As Abbott and Sapsford state, “deeply embedded cultural values and practices that continued to construct women as ‘naturally’ inferior,” presenting paralyzing barriers to the implementation of gender equality laws.<sup>28</sup> A study by Wallace, Haepfer, & Abbott on attitudes towards gender roles in Rwanda found that older men harbored the most resistance to gender equality and overwhelmingly believed, for example, that men were better suited for positions of political leadership, access to education, and economic responsibility.<sup>29</sup> Men are more likely to view gender equality as a zero-sum game or attack against their traditional power, thus posing greater resistance and corroborating the findings of Wallace, Haepfer, and Abbott.<sup>30</sup> Some men, as Kagaba finds, have even harmfully retaliated against gendered changes in society through refusing to speak to their wives and inflicting other forms of psychological abuse.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to enduring patriarchal perceptions, Debusscher & Ansoms identify five categorical trends that threaten a fully transformative gender equality policy in Rwanda.<sup>32</sup> The first is the dominance of an underlying economic rationale behind gender equality: as articulated through Rwanda’s Vision 2020 and National Gender Policy, equality is encouraged as a means to maximizing economic output and productivity; its emphasis is extrinsic as opposed to intrinsically valuing equality as a human right. Secondly, national policies neglect ‘invisible labor’ that is disproportionately dominated by women in the areas of agriculture and childcare. The third, fourth, and fifth trends criticize the macro-level operationalization of gender equality reform and limited options for civilians to participate in decision-making.

Despite advances in women’s legal protections and rights, assessments of implementation are mixed and ridden with gaps, generating conflicting images of gender equality. Legal rights and female political participation are necessary, but insufficient in fully realizing transformative potential; they do not eliminate

<sup>27</sup> Muñoz Boudet et al., *On Norms and Agency*, 211.

<sup>28</sup> Abbott, Mugisha, and Sapsford, “Women, Land and Empowerment in Rwanda,” 1017.

<sup>29</sup> Claire Wallace, Christian Haepfer, and Pamela Abbott, “Women in Rwandan Politics and Society,” *International Journal of Sociology* 38.4 (2008): 117-119, <https://doi.org/10.2753/IJS0020-7659380406>

<sup>30</sup> Kagaba, “Women’s Experiences of Gender Equality Laws,” 575.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 576.

<sup>32</sup> Debusscher and Ansoms, “Gender Equality Policies in Rwanda,” 4-5.

the masculine regime, norms, and structures that produce gender equality.<sup>33</sup>

Research finds that structurally equalizing gender must begin with youth and is particularly effective when integrated into education frameworks.<sup>34</sup>

### *Expected Findings*

Based on literature describing norms, gender, and the social climate in Rwanda, expected findings include the existence of significant gaps between gendered laws and perceptions. Discrepancies are expected to be particularly wide within the social dimension, given previous evidence found of enduring patriarchal power within the home and the dominant macro-level, economic focus of gendered reform.<sup>35</sup> Sex, age, and level of education are also expected to influence perceptions; greatest opposition to gender equality is expected to come from older men, based on Wallace, Haerpfer, and Abbott's findings, while perceptions from individuals with higher levels of education are expected to more closely reflect the law, based on research from Boudet et al.<sup>36</sup>

## PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

### *Demographic Summary of Survey Respondents*

Survey data came from 76 Rwandan adults with diverse backgrounds. Men and women were represented in roughly equal proportions, with 40 male respondents slightly outnumbering 36 female respondents.<sup>37</sup> Participants' ages ranged from 25 to 63 years, with the majority being concentrated around 25 to 44 years. Education ranged from no formal education at all through advanced university degrees. However, the vast majority of participants had completed some higher education. Table 1 summarizes demographic information collected from respondents.

<sup>33</sup> Berry, "When 'Bright Futures' Fade," 4.

<sup>34</sup> Pranita Achyut et al., "Building Support for Gender Equality among Young Adolescents in School: Findings from Mumbai, India" (report, International Center for Research on Women, CORO for Literacy, and TISS, New Delhi, India, 2011), 10, <https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/GEMS-Building-Support-for-Gender-Equality-Adolescents.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> See Abbott, Mugisha, and Sapsford, "Women, Land and Empowerment in Rwanda"; Boudet et al., *On Norms and Agency*; Kagaba, "Women's Experiences"; Debusscher and Ansoms, "Gender Equality Policies," 1119-1121.

<sup>36</sup> Wallace, Haerpfer, and Abbott, "Women in Rwandan Politics and Society," 123; Muñoz Boudet et al., *On Norms and Agency*, 211.

<sup>37</sup> For a full summary of survey data, please see Appendix 1.

Table 1: Demographic Summary of Survey Respondents by Sex, Age, and Education<sup>38</sup>

Total respondents = 76					
Breakdown by sex		Breakdown by age		Breakdown by education	
Sex	Percentage of total respondents	Age range	Percentage of total respondents	Level of education	Percentage of total respondents
Male	52.63	25 - 34	44.74	Have had primary school education or less	3.95
Female	47.37	35 - 44	31.58	Have had secondary school education	14.47
Total	100	45 - 54	19.74	Have obtained or are in the process of obtaining a Bachelors or Masters degree	81.58
		55 - 64	3.95	Total	100
		Total	100		

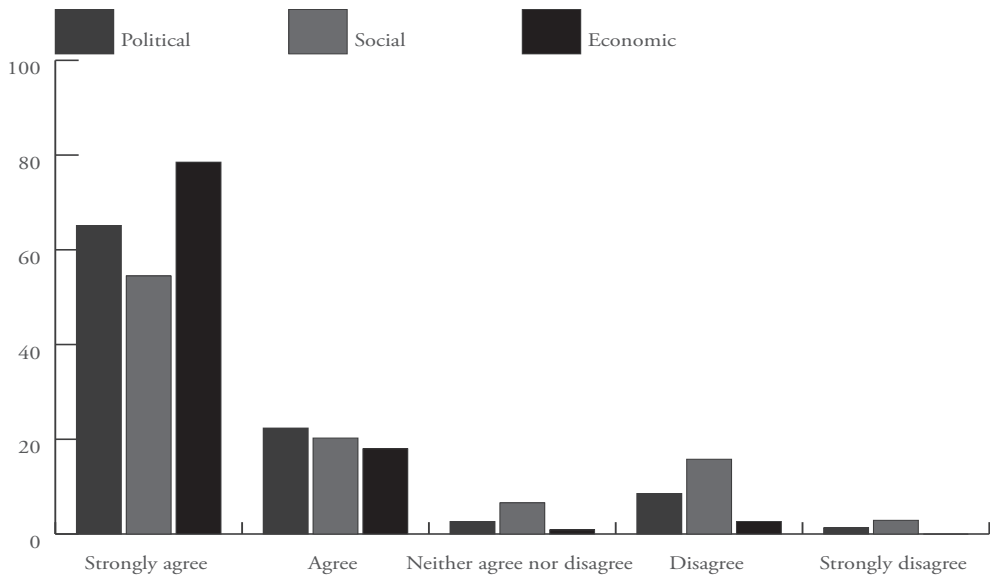
*Trends in Political, Social, and Economic Perceptions of Gender*

When broken down by politically, socially, and economically categorized survey questions, economic statements drew the most agreement among respondents on average, reflecting strong congruity between Rwandan perceptions and laws, while social questions drew the least.<sup>39</sup> Figure 1 shows the percent distribution of Likert answers across categories, found by summing the total number of answers for each option on the scale of agreement.

<sup>38</sup> Demographic data on ethnicity was not collected because it is inappropriate and insensitive to ask. As part of Rwanda’s state reconstruction efforts, a singular Rwandan identity has replaced Hutu and Tutsi tribal identities.

<sup>39</sup> Please see the section titled “Research Methodology” for further details on survey design.

Figure 1: Percent Distribution of Answers for Likert Scale Survey Questions



In all three categories, the most common answer was “strongly agree,” with at least half of responses indicating alignment between laws and perceptions of gender in Rwanda. Economically categorized questions yielded most agreement on average, with more than 96 percent of answers being either “strongly agree” or “agree” and less than 3 percent of answers reflecting disagreement. Politically grouped questions received an average of about 88 percent agreement or strong agreement, while about three quarters of socially oriented questions reflected agreement.

The generally consistent agreement seen in economic survey responses reflects Rwanda’s approach to gender equality reform, which has been mostly macroscopic and economically motivated. As outlined in Rwanda’s National Gender Policy and Vision 2020, gender equality policies are motivated by a strong underlying economic rationale, justifying reform based on productive potential. This way of framing gender equality could explain survey results and the strong support for gender equality in service of national economic benefits which increase the wellbeing of everyone in society.

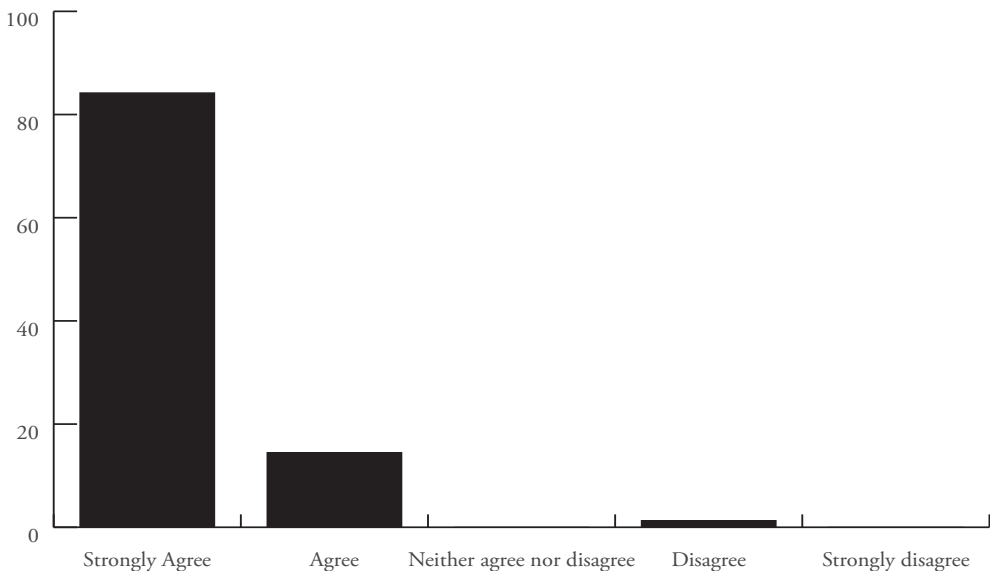
On the other hand, the lack of state-led emphasis on gender equality within the home could explain why gaps between gender-related laws and

perceptions within the social sphere were far greater. This is also consistent with the economically focused national framework for gender equality, suggesting that top-down efforts have not been sufficient in fundamentally dismantling patriarchal norms at their roots within households and communities. Deeper analysis of politically, socially, and economically driven survey data is further explored in the following subsections.

### *Analysis of Political Data*

Overall, data from political survey questions and interviews suggest that political perceptions of gender are mostly aligned with Rwandan law, but not completely; gaps were significantly wider for some questions than for others. However, the individual question with the most agreement came from this category; more than 98 percent of total respondents agreed that “men and women should equally participate in official conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and reconciliation processes.” Figure 2 shows the distribution of answers for this question.

Figure 2: Percent Distribution of Answers to Question 3: *“Men and women should equally participate in official conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and reconciliation processes”*

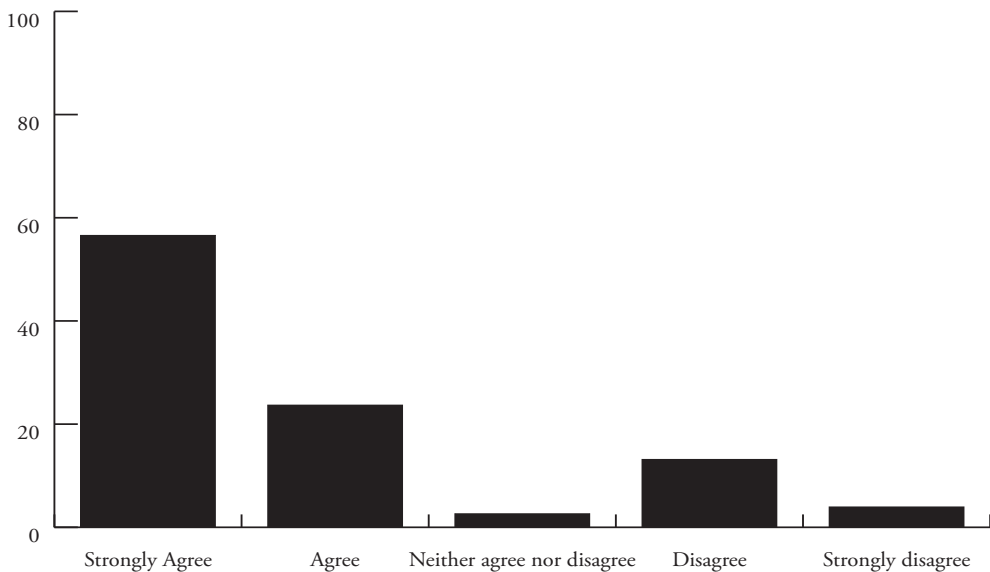




Strong support for gender equality in peacebuilding efforts also reflects the dominating narrative that gender equality is important for macroscopic development and prosperity. During the period immediately after the genocide, women represented the majority of Rwandans and pioneered early peacebuilding efforts. Data from this question reflect strong acceptance of gender parity in peacebuilding initiatives 25 years after circumstances forged greater inclusion in these processes.

Although strong support is evident for female participation in post-conflict peace processes, relatively high resistance was exhibited toward the 30 percent quota of female representation in government. Overall, nearly 1 in 5 respondents disagreed with the 30 percent quota. Figure 3 shows the distribution of responses to the statement, “women should occupy at least 30% of decision-making positions in government, including in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate.”

Figure 3: Percent Distribution of Answers to Question 2: “*Women should occupy at least 30% of decision-making positions in government, including in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate*”



Although agreement still outweighs disagreement towards the 30 percent quota, disagreement here is much higher than it is towards women in peacebuilding

initiatives, as shown in Figure 2. Interestingly, twelve respondents agreed that women should participate in peacebuilding initiatives in equal proportions to men but disagreed that women should represent at least 30 percent of parliamentary seats. Interview insights from Ninette Umurerwa, an expert in both legal and gender affairs in Rwanda, highlight that people are generally more resistant towards women in positions of power as the status of those positions increases, offering one possible explanation for why more respondents supported female representation in peacebuilding processes than in parliament.<sup>40</sup>

Umurerwa also noted that women still hesitate to run for office due to traditional patriarchal norms that discourage women from assuming positions of power.<sup>41</sup> Iyakaremye adds that the gender quota is enforced by the government because it is relatively low-cost and is emblematic of Rwanda's top-level narrative of gender equality and female empowerment, but doesn't necessarily reflect changed norms concerning women in power.<sup>42</sup> Relatively high resistance was also seen towards equal suffrage, with nearly 1 in 5 respondents disagreeing that men and women should be able to equally vote for government representatives. This disparity with the law is also likely derived from social roots that dissociate women from important decision-making. As seen in the cases of women's parliamentary representation and voting powers, social norms penetrate the political sphere. The next section will more thoroughly examine data collected on perceptions of gender within social contexts, which are least congruent with the law.

### *Analysis of Social Data*

Responses to social survey questions yielded the most disagreement of all three categories. The three questions within this group demonstrating the greatest discrepancies between laws and perceptions were all focused around marital relationships; specifically concerning a husband's ability to determine his wife's access to employment and the principal of marital rape.

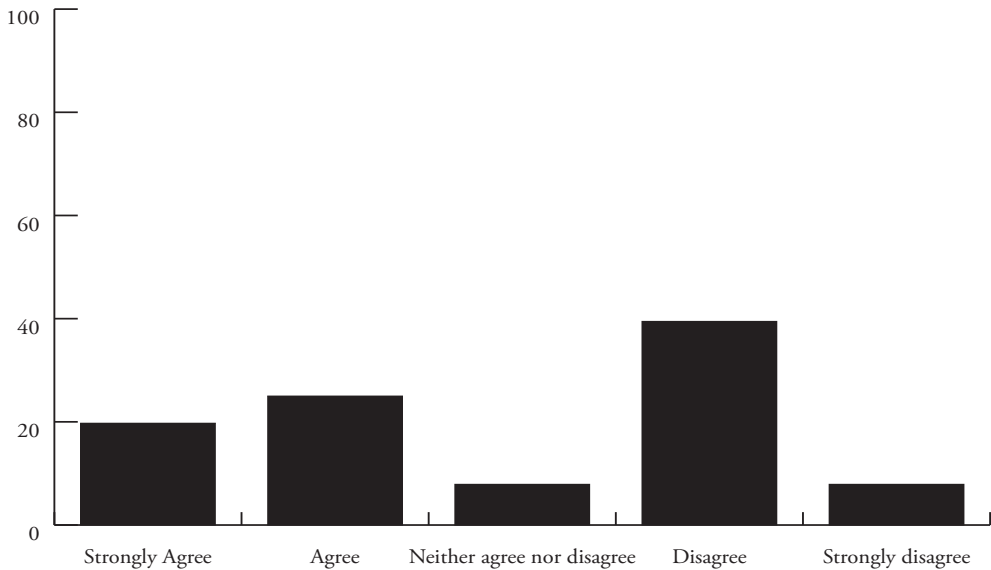
As shown in Figure 4, nearly half of total respondents disagreed with the statement that husbands should not be able to determine their wife's access to employment, indicating that they believed husbands are entitled to that decision.

<sup>40</sup> Ninette Umurerwa, interview by the author, Kigali, Rwanda, November 21, 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Arlette Iyakaremye, interview by the author, Kigali, Rwanda, November 21, 2019.

Figure 4: Percent Distribution of Answers to Question 10: *“Husbands should not be able to determine their wives’ access to employment.”*

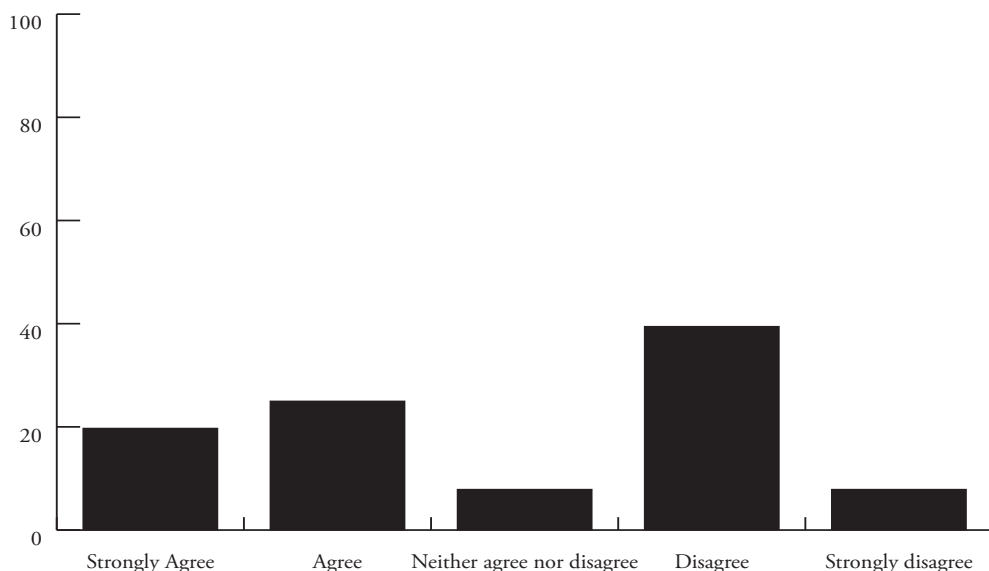


Responses shown in Figure 4 reflect an uneven power dynamic between husbands and wives that favors male authority. Male dominance within the home also characterized pre-genocide Rwanda, exhibiting the continuity of patriarchal norms within marital relationships from the pre-genocide era. Despite high-level reform since the genocide, data collected from question 10 exposes one area where gendered perceptions have not made significant progress and large gaps between norms and laws endure. Iyakaremye noted that men still mainly decide how money is allocated and spent and make the majority of household decisions.<sup>43</sup>

Marital rape reinforces the persistence of strong patriarchal norms within the family unit. As figure 5 shows, disagreement was relatively high towards the notion that marital rape should be a matter of legal concern; less than half of responses indicated agreement while nearly 36 percent of respondents answered with “disagree” or “strongly disagree.”

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

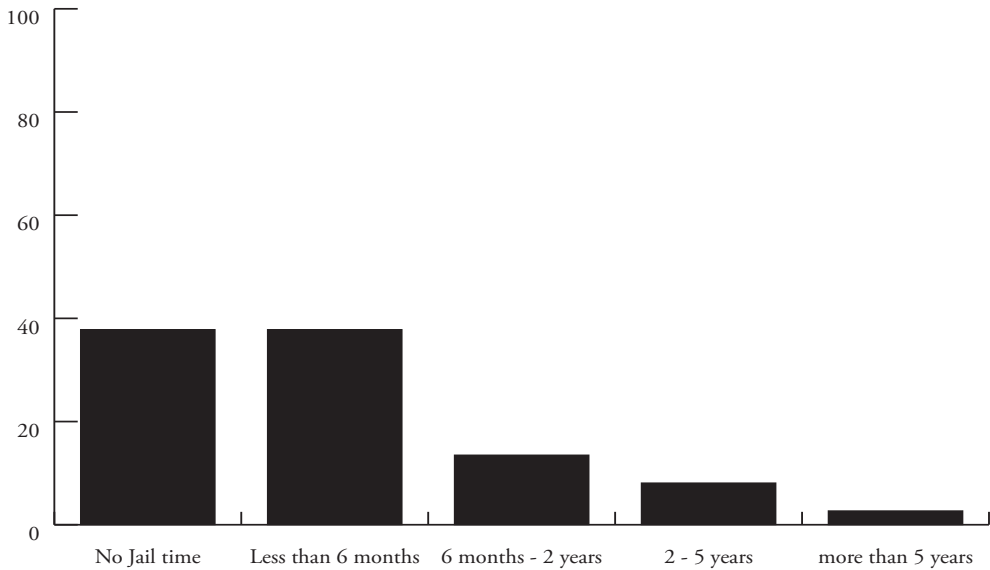
Figure 5: Percent Distribution of Answers to Question 6: *“Having sex with your spouse without their consent should be legally forbidden.”*



Even among respondents who agreed that marital rape should be a legal concern, opinions on appropriate punishment for perpetrators were significantly less extreme than the law, which mandates that marital rapists can face between 6 months and 2 years in prison.<sup>44</sup> Of the 37 respondents who agreed that marital rape should be legally forbidden, about three quarters indicated that they thought perpetrators should receive either less than 6 months in prison or no jail time at all. Figure 6 shows the full distribution of what respondents (only those who agreed that marital rape was a legal crime) perceived to be just punishments for marital rape.

<sup>44</sup> Law no. 59/2008 of 10/09/2008 on Prevention and Punishment of Gender-Based Violence, O.G. 14, April 6, 2009, 81-105 (Rwanda).

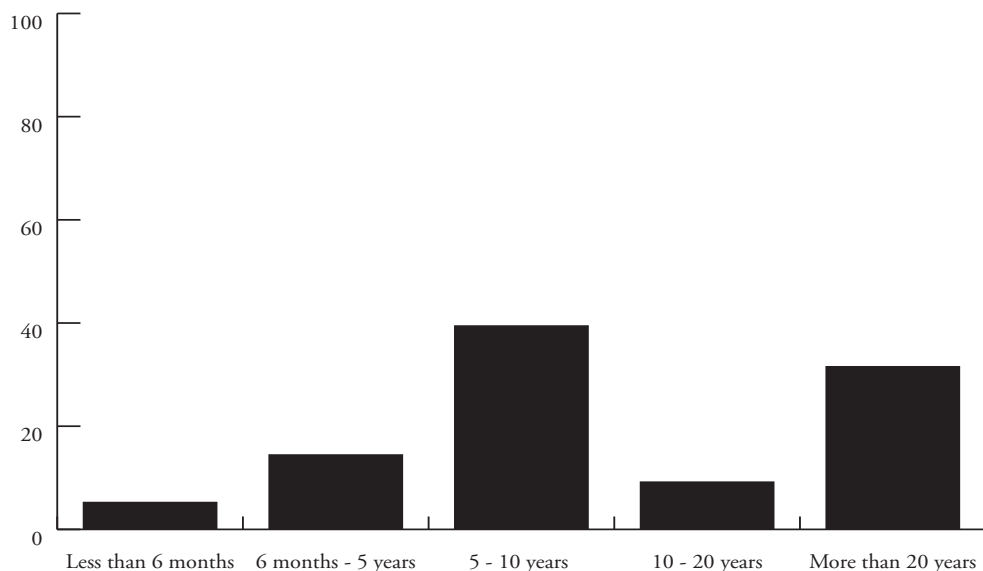
Figure 6: Percent Distribution of Answers to Question 6A: *“If you selected “strongly agree” or “agree” to statement 6, how long should they (perpetrators of marital rape) go to jail for?”*



Note: According to Rwandan law, the designated punishment for marital rape is between 6 months and 2 years.

Less than 15 percent of responses in Figure 6 were on par with the law, exposing a large gap between legal provisions and perceptions. Over 88 percent of participants either disagreed that marital rape should be legally forbidden or believed perpetrators should be punished through a sentence less extreme than the law. While general perceptions of marital rape far underestimated the law, survey responses indicated much more serious attitudes toward general rape. The full distribution of perceptions on just prison sentences for perpetrators of rape is shown below in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Percent Distribution of Answers to Question 8: “*How long should perpetrators of rape be imprisoned for?*”



Note: According to Rwandan law, the designated punishment for rape is between 10 and 20 years.

Although the most common perception of just punishment for rape was 5 – 10 years in prison, an amount less than what the law mandates, about 41 percent of respondents supported a sentence as severe or more severe than the law. Comparing perceptions of general rape to marital rape is particularly interesting. Relative to the 88 percent of respondents whose perceptions on marital rape far underestimated the law, the much higher support for severe prison punishment for rape suggests that the two forms of sexual violence are thought of differently. Marital rape is either not considered rape, or it is somehow perceived as significantly less problematic than when rape occurs outside the home. Iyakaremye clarified this discrepancy by commenting on the fact that the concept of marital rape is not widely accepted as wrongdoing, and that women are taught before marriage that they should never refuse sex from their husbands.<sup>45</sup> This reiterates the enduring patriarchal climate within the home,

<sup>45</sup> Iyakaremye, interview.

with men assuming decision-making power and greater control over marital relations. According to Rutayisire, the 2009 Gender-Based Violence law, in which the punishment for marital rape is stated, “threatened the manhood” of many Rwandan men, reflecting a culture of “negative masculinity” that is particularly powerful within the home.<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, survey answers for both questions on rape were not significantly correlated with respondents’ age, sex, or level of education, suggesting that these cultural norms are so deeply engrained in the cultural conscience of Rwanda that they cut across demographics.<sup>47</sup>

Survey results indicate that the issue of land and gender is far more aligned with Rwandan law. Specifically, 91 percent of respondents agree that women should be able to own and manage their own land regardless of marital status, while approximately 95 percent of answers indicated agreement with equal land inheritance for sons and daughters. However, information gathered from Iyakaremye, Umurerwa, and Rutayisire emphasized that incongruities between laws and perceptions around land are some of the most visible. Rutayisire highlighted that there is a problem of awareness around the 1999 land law, which outlines equal ownership and inheritance rights for men and women.<sup>48</sup> Thus, many Rwandans still operate according to traditional norms of male ownership and management of land because they are not properly informed about changed laws. Umurerwa adds that, in her professional experience with legal disputes, the most common spousal conflicts arise from land.<sup>49</sup> She emphasized that the land law faces a huge implementation gap because of cultural norms endorsing male authority and decision-making power. According to Umurerwa, issues of land management “create a dilemma for women between their rights and their marriage.”<sup>50</sup> In other words, women often fear challenging their husbands’ authority regarding land, even if they have a legal right to, because it may jeopardize her marriage and relationship with her family. This dilemma highlights a critical barrier to the transformative power of women’s land rights; although the law formally protects these rights, the ability to exercise them is hindered by enduring patriarchal norms that endorse male authority within the home.

As seen in the cases of household decision-making, marital rape, and

<sup>46</sup> Fidele Rutayisire, interview by the author, Kigali, Rwanda, November 26, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Found using the Chi Squared test for independence. Demographic analysis is further explored under the section titled “Relationships between Demographics and Perceptions of Gender” on page 30.

<sup>48</sup> Rutayisire, interview.

<sup>49</sup> Umurerwa, interview.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

matters of land, large gaps exist at the family and community levels between perceptions of gender and gender equality in the law. The location of these gaps within the social dimension corroborates a key criticism of Rwanda's approach to reform: it has been too driven toward macro-level objectives around productivity and growth but has not focused on dismantling the fundamental norms of patriarchal power at their core. The extrinsically motivated narrative and justification for gender equality has glossed over negative masculinity and patriarchal power embedded deeply within Rwandan social norms, offering one potential explanation for why gaps between laws and perceptions are widest at the social level.

### *Analysis of Economic Data*

Economically categorized survey questions received by far the most overall agreement; 96 percent of all answers to economic questions were either "strongly agree" or "agree," highlighting particularly strong alignment between laws and perceptions for this group. For example, more than 97 percent of respondents agreed that men and women should be paid equally for the same work. Further, 95 percent agreed that women on maternity leave should be compensated in benefits equal to their normal salary while nearly 90 percent believed the length of maternity leave should be either as long as or longer than what the law mandates, which is 3 months of paid leave.<sup>51</sup> Figure 8a and 8b show the distribution of agreement for paid maternity leave and opinions on duration of maternity leave.

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<sup>51</sup> A survey question on paternity leave was not included because Rwanda's legal code mentions only maternity leave explicitly.



Figure 8a: Percent Distribution of Answers to Question 14: *“Maternity leave for women should be paid in benefits equal to their normal salary.”*

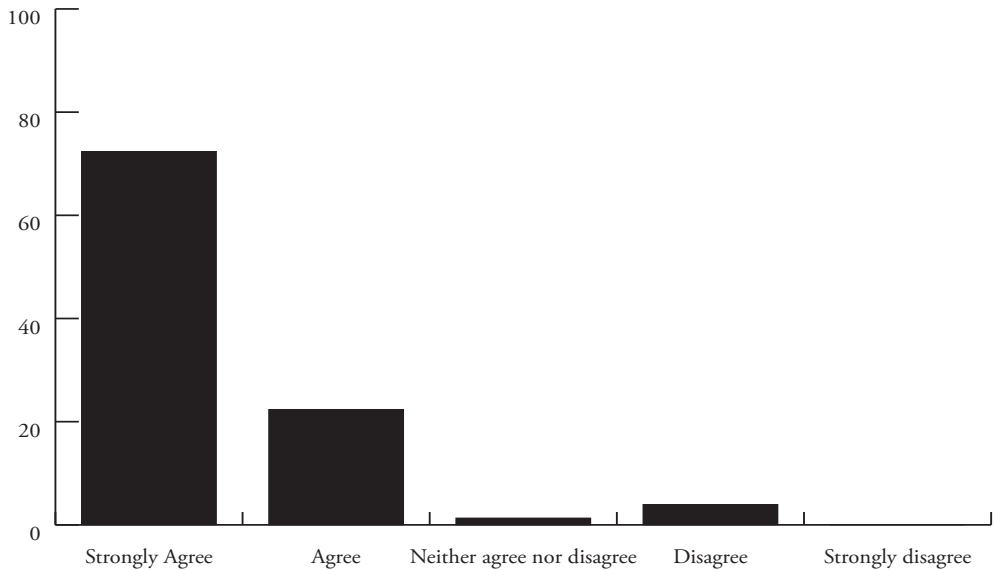
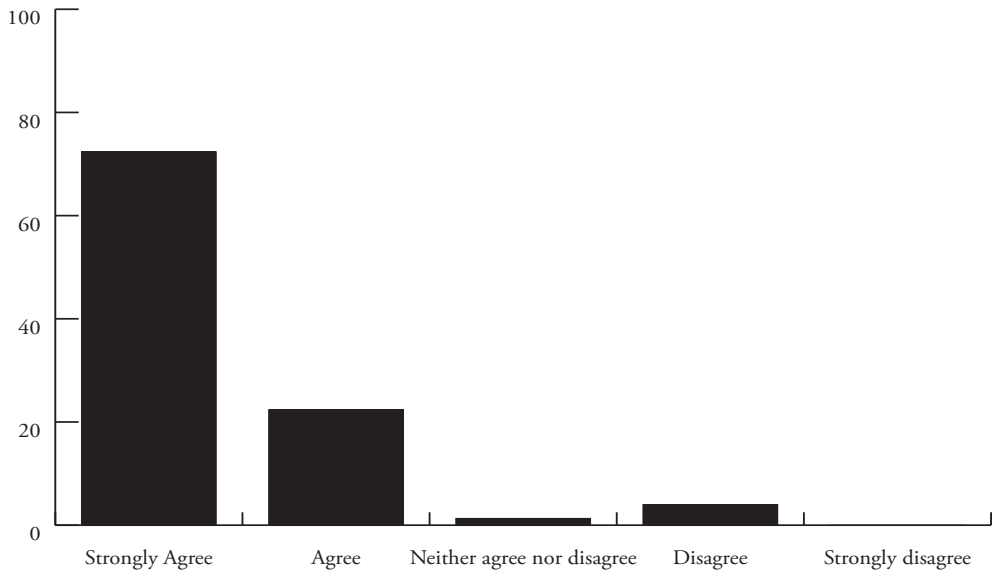


Figure 8b: Percent Distribution of Answers to Question 13: *“How long should women receive for maternity leave?”*

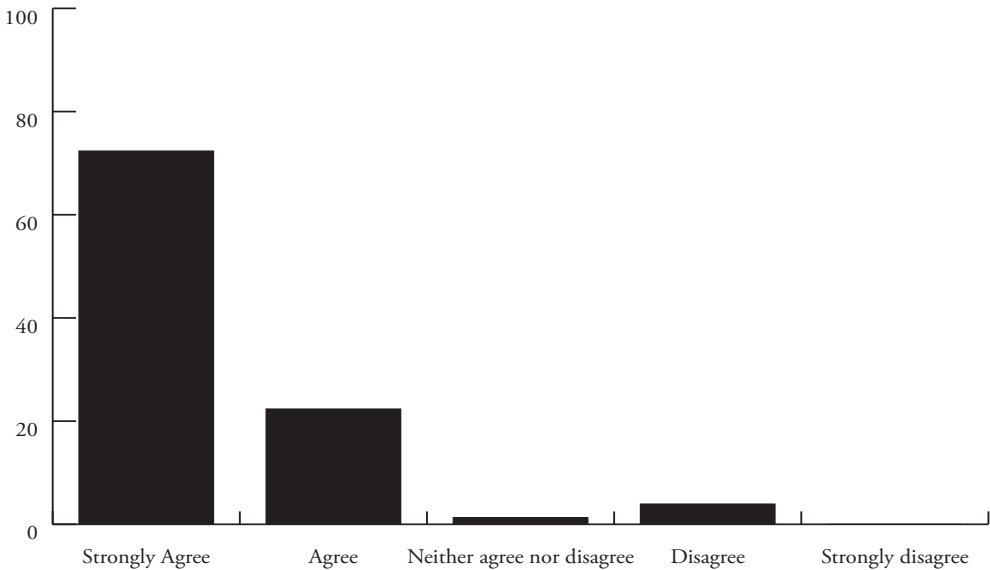


Note: According to Rwandan law, the designated length for maternity leave is 3 months.

Agreement for paid maternity leave and chosen length of leave were independent of respondents' age, sex, and level of education, suggesting that strong support for paid maternity leave is universal.

The vast majority of respondents also agreed that gender equality is important for the sustainable socio-economic development of everyone in society, with only about 1 percent disagreeing. Data for this question are particularly important because they shed light on overall survey trends between political, social, and economic questions on perceptions of gender. The distribution for this question on gender equality and national development is shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Percent Distribution of Answers to Question 15: *“Gender equality is important for sustainable socio-economic development for everyone in society.”*



As has been previously emphasized, Rwanda's framework for gender equality reform in the law has been driven mostly by national growth and productivity-related objectives. Responses to question 15 epitomize the core of this framework, and show strong, universal support for this nationally propagated rationale.

*Relationships between Demographic Information and Perceptions of Gender*

Interestingly, demographic information collected from survey informants was mostly independent of answers. Determined by the chi-squared statistical test for independence, the variation of agreement and disagreement across survey responses overall was independent of respondents' sex or age. The one exception was level of education; the chi-squared test concluded that informants with more education were more likely to agree or strongly agree to survey questions overall, suggesting that an association exists between higher levels of education and agreement with gender equitable laws. This corroborates the literature on changing social norms, which generally finds that individuals with more education are more exposed to diverse ideas and thus more open-minded about non-traditional norms.<sup>52</sup>

However, when considering questions within the political, social, and economic categories, level of education was independent of agreement or disagreement. This shows that, although education overall is associated with greater congruence to Rwandan law around gender equality, it is not necessarily the case within each of the three categories. More specifically, education was completely independent of responses to the most disagreed-with questions concerning perceptions around marital rape, punishment for marital or general rape, and the power that husbands have to determine their wives' access to employment. Within the political, social, and economical survey questions, both age and sex were also independent of responses.

For statements with the most agreement, such as those about equal participation in peacebuilding mechanisms and the importance of gender equality for national development, neither sex nor age nor education were associated with agreement or disagreement.

What these trends show is that overall, patterns of agreement and disagreement cut across various demographics in Rwandan society. The gaps between gendered laws and perceptions seem to be wide in some areas, such as those concerning marital relationships, regardless of demographic background. This implies that certain cultural values are deeply embedded within a resilient cultural schema, and thus are not easily affected by variations in sex, age, and education. Rwanda's approach to gender equality, which has been branded according to the economic objectives equality can produce, reinforces this. The national framework

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<sup>52</sup> Muñoz Boudet et al., *On Norms and Agency*, 211; Achyut et al., "Building Support for Gender Equality Among Young Adolescents in School."

of reform has focused far less at dismantling the fundamental patriarchal power structures that exist at the root of Rwandan society within homes and families. Thus, while perceptions have clearly evolved within economic and some political contexts, social norms have not caught up to the same extent.

## CONCLUSIONS

Evidence from quantitative and qualitative data suggests asymmetric progress on the alignment between gendered laws in Rwanda and local perceptions of gender. Perceptions demonstrated the most similarity to the law economically, the second most similarity politically, and the least similarity socially.

Expected findings for this study were partially borne out in the data. As predicted, gaps were widest within the social dimension, corroborating the criticism that the approach to gender reform was too focused on economic objectives and failed to dismantle patriarchal perceptions at their root, within family and communal spaces. However, although level of education was associated with greater congruity between laws and perceptions, respondents' sex and age were independent of answers, presenting findings different than expected. Inferred reasoning for this, as previously explored, is also tied closely to the macroscopic and economically tied motivation for gendered reform, that is criticized for neglecting structures of patriarchal powers within grassroots-level, social spaces.

### *Recommendations for Closing Gaps between Gendered Laws and Perceptions*

Insights from both literature and interviews reveals that closing gaps between gendered laws and perceptions, particularly within the social sphere, requires a multidimensional approach. Realizing the transformative potential of equal rights demands systematic renovations; both top and bottom-level, formal and informal mechanisms must be activated to change collective beliefs at local levels and dismantle entire social structures that endorse patriarchal power. Thus, a number of recommendations arise: First, raising awareness of existing laws protecting gender equality is a prerequisite for attitude change. Citizens, particularly women, must be aware of the rights they have in order to exercise them.<sup>53</sup> Second, men must be engaged in the journey toward equality. They must play an active role in advocating for change and bringing women forward. When

<sup>53</sup> Rutayisire, interview.

men are engaged, they are less likely to feel that gender equality jeopardizes their power or produces loss for them.<sup>54</sup> Dialogue is an especially important mechanism in this process, as it brings members of the community together to openly talk about rights and injustices. Third, the Rwandan government should invest heavily in quality childcare so that “women have the freedom to do what men are doing.”<sup>55</sup> Greater access to economic participation, often hindered by traditional childcare duties, would help change norms about stereotyped gender roles and empower women to pursue fully their professional ambitions. Fourth, investments need to be made in rural Rwandan women in the form of skills training and adult education.<sup>56</sup> Farming is an industry heavily dominated by women, that often traps women in cycles of poverty. Thus, empowerment efforts need to reach all communities to ensure a symmetrical and equal rise, instead of just benefitting an urban elite.

## APPENDICES

### *Appendix 1: Survey Results*

Table 2a: Percent Distribution of Answers for Likert Scale Survey Questions

Question Number	Statement	Category	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Total (%)
1	All adult men and women should be able to vote for government representatives.	Political	56.58	18.42	6.58	17.11	1.32	100.0
2	Women should occupy at least 30% of decision-making positions in government, including in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate.	Political	56.58	23.68	2.63	13.16	3.95	100.00
3	Men and women should equally participate in official conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and reconciliation processes.	Political	84.21	14.47	0.00	1.32	0.00	100.00

<sup>54</sup> Iyakaremye, interview; Umurerwa, interview.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

4	National institutions, such as the Gender Monitoring Office and National Women's Council, are important and should exist to monitor and advocate for gender equality.	Political	63.16	32.89	1.32	2.63	0.00	100.00
5	Boys and girls should be given access to a basic, 9-year education.	Social	88.16	9.21	1.32	1.32	0.00	100.00
6	Having sex with your spouse without their consent should be legally forbidden.	Social	22.37	23.68	18.42	30.26	5.26	100.00
7	Adult women should be able to manage their own land, regardless of marital status.	Social	64.47	26.32	3.95	3.95	1.32	100.00
9	Daughters and sons should be able to inherit land equally.	Social	77.63	17.11	1.32	3.95	0.00	100.00
10	Husbands should not be able to determine their wives' access to employment	Social	19.74	25.00	7.89	39.47	7.89	100.00
12	Men and women should get paid equally for the same work.	Economic	88.16	9.21	0.00	2.63	0.00	100.00
14	Maternity leave for women should be paid in benefits equal to their normal salary.	Economic	72.37	22.37	1.32	3.95	0.00	100.00
15	Gender equality is important for sustainable socio-economic development for everyone in society.	Economic	75.00	22.37	1.32	1.32	0.00	100.00

Table 2b: Percent Distribution of Answers for Survey Questions with Time Range Options

Question Number	Question	Category	No jail time (%)	Less than 6 months (%)	6 months - 2 years (%)	2 - 5 years (%)	More than 5 years (%)	Total (%)
6A	If you selected "strongly agree" or "agree" to statement 6, how long should they go to jail for? (If you didn't answer with "strongly agree" or "agree," leave this question blank).	Social	37.84	37.84	13.51	8.11	2.70	100.00
8								
	Question	Category	Less than 6 months (%)	6 months - 5 years (%)	5 - 10 years (%)	10 - 20 years (%)	More than 20 years (%)	Total (%)
	How long should perpetrators of rape be imprisoned for?	Social	5.26	14.47	39.47	9.21	31.58	100.00
11	Question	Category	No jail time (%)	Less than 6 months (%)	6 months - 2 years (%)	2 - 5 years (%)	More than 5 years (%)	Total (%)
	How long should perpetrators of workplace sexual harassment be imprisoned for?	Economic	1.32	5.26	14.47	28.95	50.00	100.00
13								
	Question	Category	No time (%)	1 month or less (%)	2 months (%)	3 months (%)	More than 3 months (%)	Total (%)
	How long should women receive for maternity leave?	Economic	0.00	6.58	5.26	48.68	39.47	100.00

### *Appendix 2: Survey Questions and Corresponding Laws*

The survey used in data collection contained 16 combined statements and questions. 12 of the 16 survey items were statements while 4 were questions. For each statement or question, respondents were given 5 multiple choice answers to select from. Survey statements, listed in Table 3a along with their corresponding laws, were answered on a Likert scale where respondents selected one of the

following options: “strongly agree,” “agree,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree.” The survey questions, listed in Table Y along with their corresponding laws, were answered based on a selection of different ranges of time. Specific ranges for each question are mentioned below each question.

For the purpose of data analysis, survey statements and questions were categorized as either political, social, or economic, as labeled in the second column of Table 3a and Table 3b.

Table 3a: Survey Questions Answered on a Likert Scale and Corresponding Laws

State- ment Num- ber	State- ment Cate- gory	Survey Statement	Corresponding Law/Policy
1	Politi- cal	All adult men and women should be able to vote for government representatives.	Article 2 of the Rwandan Constitution of 2003 (revised in 2015) which states, “all Rwandans, both men and women, fulfilling the requirements provided for by law, have the right to vote and to be elected.” <sup>57</sup>
2	Politi- cal	Women should occupy at least 30% of decision-making positions in government, including in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate.	Articles 75 and 80 of the Rwandan Constitution of 2003 (revised in 2015) which state, “at least thirty percent (30%) of Deputies must be women” and “at least thirty percent (30%) of elected and appointed Senators must be women,” respectively. <sup>58</sup>
3	Politi- cal	Men and women should equally participate in official conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and reconciliation processes.	Article 4.5.3 of Rwanda’s National Gender Policy pledges “to ensure that women and men equally participate in conflict prevention peace building and reconciliation mechanisms.” <sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Const. Republic of Rwanda, art. 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 75, 80.

<sup>59</sup> “National Gender Policy,” (policy document, Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, Republic of Rwanda, July 2010), 25, <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/94009/110188/F-1576743982/RWA-94009.pdf>



4	Political	National institutions, such as the Gender Monitoring Office and National Women's Council, are important and should exist to monitor and advocate for gender equality.	Article 5.1.4 of Rwanda's National Gender Policy outlines the mandate of the Gender Monitoring Office which includes "monitoring progress towards gender equality." Article 5.1.5 of Rwanda's National Gender Policy outlines the mandate of the National Women's Council, which includes "advocating for women's rights and gender equality." <sup>60</sup>
5	Social	Boys and girls should be given access to a basic, 9-year education.	Article 1.3 of Rwanda's National Gender Policy affirms that "nine-year basic education is under implementation and will facilitate full access to education by both boys and girls." <sup>61</sup>
6	Social	Boys and girls should be given access to a basic, 9-year education. Having sex with your spouse without their consent should be legally forbidden.	Article 5 of Law no. 59/2008 on the Prevention and Punishment of Gender-based Violence states that "it is forbidden to make sex with one's spouse without one's consent." <sup>62</sup>
7	Social	Adult women should be able to manage their own land, regardless of marital status.	Article 4 of Law no. 43/2013 Governing Land in Rwanda states that "all forms of discrimination, such as that based on sex or origin, in relation to access to land and the enjoyment of real rights shall be prohibited." <sup>63</sup>
9	Social	Daughters and sons should be able to inherit land equally.	Article 54 of Law no. 27/2016 Governing Matrimonial Regimes, Donations and Successions states that "legitimate children of the de cujus succeed in equal portions without any discrimination between male and female children." <sup>64</sup>
10	Economic	Husbands should not be able to determine their wives' access to employment.	Article 4 of Law no. 59/2008 on the Prevention and Punishment of Gender-based Violence states that "it is forbidden to harass to deprive one's spouse of the right to property and to employment." <sup>65</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 11, art. 1.3.

<sup>62</sup> Law no. 59/2008 of 10/09/2008 on Prevention and Punishment of Gender-Based Violence, chap. 2, art. 5.

<sup>63</sup> Law no. 43/2013 of 16/06/2013 Governing Land in Rwanda, O.G. Special, June 16, 2013, 8-62 (Rwanda), chap. 1, art. 4.

<sup>64</sup> Law no. 27/2016 of 8/07/2016 Governing Matrimonial Regimes, Donations, and Successions, O.G. 31, August 1, 2016, 3-66 (Rwanda), chap. IV, §1, art. 54.

<sup>65</sup> Law no. 59/2008 of 10/09/2008 on Prevention and Punishment of Gender-Based Violence, chap. 2, art. 8.

12	Eco- nomic	Men and women should get paid equally for the same work.	Law no. 13/2009 Regulating Labor in Rwanda pursues the International Labour Convention n° 100 of June 29, 1951 concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value” and states that “it shall be forbidden to directly or indirectly make any discrimination aiming at denying the worker the right to equal opportunity or to the salary especially when the discrimination is based upon the following... sex, marital status or family responsibilities.” <sup>66</sup>
14	Eco- nomic	Maternity leave for women should be paid in benefits equal to their normal salary.	Article 11 of Law no. 003/2016 Establishing and Governing Maternity Leave Benefits Scheme guarantees paid maternity leave and states that “maternity leave benefits are equal to the last woman’s salary.” <sup>67</sup>
15	Eco- nomic	Gender equality is important for sustainable socio-economic development for everyone in society.	Rwanda’s National Gender Policy states that “the Government of Rwanda attaches great importance to the promotion of gender equality and equity as a prerequisite for sustainable development.” <sup>68</sup>

Table 3b: Survey Questions Answered with Ranges of Time and Corresponding Laws

State- ment Num- ber	State- ment Cate- gory	Survey Question	Corresponding Law/Policy
6A	Social	If you selected “strongly agree” or “agree” to statement 7, how long should they go to jail for? (If you didn’t answer with “strongly agree” or “agree,” leave this question blank). Possible answers: “no jail time,” “less than 6 months,” “6 months – 2 years,” “2 – 5 years,” or “more than 5 years”	Article 19 of Law no. 59/2008 on the Prevention and Punishment of Gender-based Violence states that “any person who coerces his/her spouse to sexual intercourse shall be liable to imprisonment of six (6) months to two (2) years.” <sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Law no. 13/2009 of 27/05/2009 Regulating Labour in Rwanda, O.G. Special, May 27, 2009, 3-120 (Rwanda), chap. 3, §3, art. 9.

<sup>67</sup> Law no. 003/2016 of 30/03/2016 Establishing and Governing Maternity Leave Benefits Scheme, O.G. Special, April 20, 2016, 3-17 (Rwanda), chap. 3, art. 11.

<sup>68</sup> “National Gender Policy,” 10.

<sup>69</sup> Law no. 59/2008 of 10/09/2008 on Prevention and Punishment of Gender-Based Violence, chap. 3, art. 19.

8	Social	How long should perpetrators of rape be imprisoned for? Possible answers: “less than 6 months,” “6 months – 5 years,” “5 – 10 years,” “10 – 20 years,” “more than 20 years”	Article 16 Law no. 59/2008 on the Prevention and Punishment of Gender-based Violence states that any person who is guilty with rape shall be liable to imprisonment of ten (10) years to fifteen (15) years. Where rape has resulted in a bodily or a mental illness, the person guilty with rape shall be liable to imprisonment of fifteen (15) years to twenty (20) years and medical care fees for the person raped shall be borne by him/her.” <sup>70</sup>
11	Eco- nomic	How long should perpetrators of workplace sexual harassment be imprisoned for? Possible answers: “no jail time,” “less than 6 months,” “6 months – 2 years,” “2 – 5 years,” “more than 5 years”	Article 24 of Law no. 59/2008 on the Prevention and Punishment of Gender-based Violence states that “Any employer or any other person guilty of exercising sexual harassment by way of orders, intimidation and terror over a person he/she leads shall be liable to imprisonment of two (2) years to five (5) years.” <sup>71</sup>
13	Eco- nomic	How long should women receive for maternity leave? Possible answers: “no time,” “1 month or less,” “2 months,” “3 months,” “more than 3 months”	Article 8 of Law no. 59/2008 on the Prevention and Punishment of Gender-based Violence states that “Upon delivery, a woman shall have the right to a maternity leave of three (3) months.” <sup>72</sup>

### *Appendix 3: Interview Questions*

All three interviewees were asked the following five questions:

1. What is your area of expertise around gender and what kind of work do you do with gender in Rwanda?
2. Do you think most Rwandans have a general understanding of legal provisions concerning gender equality under Rwandan law?
3. In which political, social, and economic areas do you think the greatest gaps exist between legal provisions concerning gender equality and norms and perceptions around gender in Rwanda?
4. Why do you think these gaps exist where they do?

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., chap. 3, art. 16.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., chap. 3, art. 24.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., chap 2, art. 8.

5. In your opinion, what would be the most effective mechanisms in changing gender perceptions to be more aligned with legal gender equality across political, social, and economic spaces?

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# POLITICAL REINCORPORATION OF FEMALE FARC–EP Ex–COMBATANTS: THE CREATION OF VICTIMS, HEROES, AND THREATS<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

Colombia<sup>3</sup> has experienced over a half-century of sustained conflict, the longest insurgency in Latin America.<sup>4</sup> Discord within the nation can be traced back to the 1940s, and has grown over the decades as insurgents created various armed groups to wrest territorial control and political influence from the Colombian state.<sup>5</sup> The largest of these groups, the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo* (FARC–EP), formed in response to the suppression of communism in rural Colombia.<sup>6</sup> The FARC,<sup>7</sup> composed of mostly rural farmers and led by a small cohort of senior officers, stated it was initiating warfare on behalf of poor Colombian workers, in addition to promoting Communism.<sup>8</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> All Spanish to English translations of the cited interviews in this paper were done by Viviana Andrea Sarmiento Peña of Bogotá, Colombia, and have been edited for length and/or clarity. All other Spanish to English translations were completed by the author.

<sup>4</sup> James J. Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia: The Origin and Direction of the FARC–EP* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), xv.

<sup>5</sup> Claire Felzer and Danielle Renwick, “Colombia’s Civil Conflict,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 1, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/background/colombias-civil-conflict>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> The -EP is commonly removed from the acronym.

<sup>8</sup> “Who Are the FARC?,” *BBC News*, November 24, 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-36605769>; Manuel Marulanda Veléz, “The Origins of the FARC–EP: The Birth of

Colombian state claimed to be fighting to ensure stability within the country. Likewise, paramilitary groups, informally linked to the Colombian army, made defeating the insurgents their central aim.<sup>1</sup>

Since the late 1980s, the Colombian government and the FARC have attempted negotiations, culminating in a peace agreement in November 2016.<sup>2</sup> Similar to its response to other conflicts over the last three decades, Colombia implemented the 2016 disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) program to transition the FARC, and the country, from war to peace. With the disarmament and demobilization phases officially completed in October 2017, thousands of ex-guerrilla fighters, 30 percent of whom are women, began the transition from combatant to civilian as part of the reintegration phase.<sup>3</sup>

This article explores the political reintegration (known as political ‘reincorporation’ under the Colombian program, and henceforth in this article) of female FARC ex-combatants. Specifically, it analyzes the ways in which these women are variously invoked as ‘heroes,’ ‘victims,’ and ‘threats’ by state leaders, political elites, women’s advocacy organizations, and the women themselves. Such narratives have shaped the possibilities and constraints of life after conflict for these women in diffuse ways: from accessing welfare and employment, to managing their family relations. In particular, I will discuss the opportunities and constraints for reincorporating female ex-combatants within Colombia’s formal politics.

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the Armed Resistance,” in *War in Colombia: Made in the U.S.A.*, ed. Rebecca Toledo, Teresa Gutierrez, Sara Flounders, and Andy McNerney, 115-122 (New York: International Action Centre, 2003), quoted in Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia*, 15.

<sup>1</sup> Stephanie Hanson, “Colombia’s Right-Wing Paramilitaries and Splinter Groups,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 10, 2008, <https://www.cfr.org/background/colombias-right-wing-paramilitaries-and-splinter-groups>

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Casey and Federico Rios Escobar, “Colombia Struck a Peace Deal With Guerrillas, but Many Return to Arms,” *New York Times*, September 18, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/18/world/americas/colombia-farc-peace.html>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, “Press Release on Formal Delivering to Colombian Government of Material Resulting from Laydown of Arms Process, That Were Stored in the UN Mission General Armament Warehouse,” press release, October 3, 2017, ¶1, <https://colombia.unmissions.org/en/press-release-formal-delivering-colombian-government-material-resulting-laydown-arms-process-were>; Saidalia Giraldo, “Demobilized Women Combatants: Lessons from Colombia,” (paper, Thinking Gender Conference, 22 Annual Graduate Student Research Conference, UCLA Center for the Study of Women, Los Angeles, CA, February 3, 2012), 4, <https://escholarship.org/content/qt08z6h9qk/qt08z6h9qk.pdf?t=m2oizq&nosplash=5ebcb889b4fcd804010b58b0a68f17f>



Examining female FARC ex-combatants' participation in formal politics is important as it reflects not only the ways in which the Colombian state views female ex-combatants, but also how these women view their own political voices. As Johanna Söderström emphasizes in her work on combatant political reincorporation in Liberia, "political involvement...reflects the degree to which the ex-combatants feel that they have a political voice, no matter how that voice is articulated."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, I am situating this article within the critical challenges to reincorporation and will explore female ex-combatant narratives about experiences in conflict in order to illustrate reincorporation as a prolonged, open ended process, rather than a finite phase defined only by policy.

This article reaches three conclusions: First, each narrative is constructed and reproduced by different actors with different motivations. Second, these narratives effectively shape the current reincorporation of female FARC ex-combatants into formal Colombian politics. Third, their experiences suggest that policymakers should view reincorporation as a potentially life-long process, rather than a neatly defined phase.

To accomplish this, the article consists of six sections. The first will briefly discuss the current state of DDR programs, focusing on the challenges within political reincorporation programs and policies. The second section will analyze the current Colombian political climate, and how it shapes the reincorporation of female FARC ex-combatants, by evaluating institutional structures, the nature of political violence in the country, peace negotiations and transitional justice, and the uncertain future of peace in Colombia.

Here, the analysis of institutional structures will examine how formal and informal institutions, and their leadership, marginalize female ex-combatants within the reincorporation process. Additionally, the discussion of political violence will investigate its impact upon the Colombian political climate, especially the prevalence of political violence against women. I further examine the complex peace negotiation process and the ensuing transitional justice program in order to highlight the ways in which female ex-combatants are marginalized by both. Lastly, in this section I will discuss the uncertainties surrounding the future of sustained peace in Colombia and the implications for female FARC ex-combatants.

The third section will outline the specific narratives about female FARC ex-combatants, as well as who creates and perpetuates these narratives, and why.

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<sup>4</sup> Johanna Söderström, *Peacebuilding and Ex-Combatants: Political Reintegration in Liberia* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 14. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315762807>

It will explore the creation and reproduction of the ‘victim’, ‘hero’, and ‘threat’ narratives, and will serve as a foundation for later analysis in the article. The fourth section will outline the current organization and condition of the FARC party. Here, I will argue that while the FARC’s strong internal cohesion allows women to fulfill leadership roles that are otherwise uncommon in other Colombian political parties, the constraints of the patriarchal hierarchy remaining from its time as an armed group ensure women continue to be politically subordinate to their male peers.

In the fifth section, I will present the Colombian government’s vision of the political reincorporation process, and how the process has allowed for an increase in the influence of women’s political advocacy groups. These groups are significant as they allow female ex-combatants to collectively create or destroy political narratives about themselves, thus giving non-elite female combatants a political voice.

The sixth and final section will conclude my analysis by profiling the two highest-ranking female ex-combatants in the FARC party: Senators Sandra Ramírez and Victoria Sandino Simanca Herrera. They serve as a significant point of comparison between elite and non-elite female experiences of political reincorporation in Colombia, as will be demonstrated through an analysis of how the three narratives of ‘victim’, ‘hero’, and ‘threat’ have impacted their political lives.

## **DDR AND POLITICAL REINCORPORATION PROGRAMS**

The current ‘sustainable peace’ reincorporation programs emerged within the last ten years, responding to the need to include non-state actors in the negotiation process.<sup>5</sup> This requirement necessitated a shift, during which DDR began to fulfill institutional voids during peacebuilding campaigns in weak states. Thus, the literature often argues that the DDR process is now inseparable from the post-conflict state-building process, especially in cases where weak state institutions may threaten the success of peace processes.<sup>6</sup>

However, women remain largely marginalized during political

<sup>5</sup> Jairo Munive and Finn Stepputat, “Rethinking Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programs,” *Stability* 4.1 (2015): 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.go>

<sup>6</sup> Antonio Giustozzi, introduction to *Post-Conflict Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration: Bringing State-Building Back In*, ed. Antonio Giustozzi, 1st ed. (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 20.

reincorporation processes.<sup>7</sup> Wenche Hauge, in her research on post-conflict political identity within armed groups, explains that often, “female returnees and ex-fighters face...a lack of skills, education and resources required to engage in an income-generating activity.”<sup>8</sup> Hauge further demonstrates that female fighters are also often subjected to gender discrimination within reincorporation policies, such as in Sierra Leone, where “female fighters were only entitled to receive economic assistance or land if they turned up together with their spouse, which was not always possible—and more important—not even desirable.”<sup>9</sup> Female ex-combatants are now expected to not only become fully productive members of their communities again, but to also allow their ‘successful’ transitions to be used as evidence of a political ‘peace.’<sup>10</sup> As Francisco Gutiérrez-Sanín and Andrea González-Peña argue, this burden of homecoming and peacebuilding placed on ex-combatants is difficult to achieve within the fragmented nature of modern conflict, especially when non-state armed groups have deep ties to criminal networks within local communities.<sup>11</sup>

Complicating this further, Mats Utas argues that women found agency and established identity in a variety of ways during war, and that committing violence was one of the most effective methods to do so. For many female ex-combatants, the idea of women participating in violence was not accepted within their local communities. Thus, asking these already stigmatized women to be ambassadors of peace when they returned home is problematic as it can further heighten their stigmatization.<sup>12</sup> In the case of Liberia in the 1990s, some women

<sup>7</sup> Priscyll A. Avione and Rachel Tillman, “Demobilized Women in Colombia: Embodiment, Performativity, and Social Reconciliation,” in *Female Combatants in Conflict and Peace: Challenging Gender in Violence and Post-Conflict Reintegration*, ed. Seema Shekhawat (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 216–31. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137516565\\_14](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137516565_14)

<sup>8</sup> Birgitte Sørensen, “Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Issues and Sources” (working paper, WSP Occasional Paper no. 3, Program for Strategic and International Security Studies, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva, Switzerland, June 1998), <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/148841>, quoted in Wenche Hauge, “Group Identity—a Neglected and Political Participation in Guatemala,” *Conflict, Security and Development* 8.3 (2008): 297, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678800802323316>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Kate Paarlberg-Kvam, “What’s to Come Is More Complicated: Feminist Visions of Peace in Colombia,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 21.2 (2018): 197–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2018.1487266>

<sup>11</sup> Francisco Gutiérrez-Sanín and Andrea González Peña, “Colombia’s Paramilitary DDR and Its Limits,” in *Post-Conflict Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: Bringing State-Building Back In*, ed. Antonio Giustozzi, 1st ed. (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 118.

<sup>12</sup> Mats Utas, “Victimcy, Girlfriending, Soldiering: Tactic Agency in a Young Woman’s Social Navigation of the Liberian War Zone,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 78.2 (2005): 404, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.78.2.404>

even returned to the front from refugee camps and reincorporation posts in order to regain agency experienced in conflict.<sup>13</sup> While few women from the FARC have dissented from the peace agreement and resumed arms, the same rejection of reincorporation has been present in Colombia. Women's peace organizations strengthened after the 2016 peace accord, sparking, as Kate Paarlberg-Kvam explains, "a revitalized feminist movement with a new space for radical, antineoliberal critique; and thousands of women fighters whose feminist rhetoric is concretized and strengthened by their experiences of demobilization."<sup>14</sup> As the Colombian women demonstrated, collectives of former combatants began to emerge as a means of circumventing the burden placed upon overtaxed or ineffective reincorporation programs.<sup>15</sup> Particularly for female ex-combatants, research is beginning to show that organizing in this capacity gives them some agency within state-led reincorporation programs.<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, for women, reincorporation entails relinquishing previously held autonomy. Meghan MacKenzie warns that political approaches and narratives which implore "women and girl soldiers to return to their 'normal places' in the community," destroy "any new roles or positions of authority they may have held during the conflict...and [in turn] any opportunities to rethink and reshape gender stereotypes and hierarchies are destroyed."<sup>17</sup> Political reincorporation programs do not only consist of a series of ambiguous policies and token financial handouts to ex-combatants. Particularly for women, it involves a prolonged and intense battle with gendered expectations at both the national and community levels. Within the last decade, there has been increased academic research into the political reincorporation of female ex-combatants,

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org/10.1353/anq.2005.0032.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 423.

<sup>14</sup> Paarlberg-Kvam, "What's to Come Is More Complicated," 213.

<sup>15</sup> Lalli Metsola, "'Reintegration' of Ex-Combatants and Former Fighters: A Lens into State Formation and Citizenship in Namibia," *Third World Quarterly* 27.6 (2006): 1122, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590600842407>

<sup>16</sup> Luisa M. Dietrich Ortega, "Untapped Resources for Peace: A Comparative Study of Women's Organizations of Guerrilla Ex-Combatants in Colombia and El Salvador," in *Female Combatants in Conflict and Peace: Challenging Gender in Violence and Post-Conflict Reintegration*, ed. Seema Shekhawat (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 232-235. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137516565\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137516565_15)

<sup>17</sup> Megan MacKenzie, "Securitization and Desecuritization: Female Soldiers and the Reconstruction of Women in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone," *Security Studies* 18.2 (2009): 258, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410902900061>

however, it remains a critically understudied topic.

Due to its recent peace agreement and high percentage of demobilizing female ex-combatants, Colombia provides an opportunity to study the reincorporation of women. As it transitioned from armed group to political party, the FARC continued to be influential, and, thus, presents an excellent case study of the political reincorporation of female ex-combatants. The aim of this article is to examine the post-conflict experiences of reincorporating FARC female ex-guerrilla fighters and the politics surrounding those experiences. By first considering the political context of their reincorporation, and then analyzing the women's narratives about their experiences, we can discern the constraints and possibilities that reincorporation places upon their lives.

### COLOMBIAN POLITICAL CLIMATE

Female FARC ex-combatants face a number of difficulties while navigating the Colombian political reincorporation processes. In order to understand these complexities, one must first understand the Colombian political economy, as it invariably shapes reincorporation processes. This section will analyze the political economy in four parts: formal and informal institutions and their leaders, the current role of violence in politics, peace negotiations and political justice, and the uncertain future of the peace agreement.

Both during the conflict and within the current peace process, female FARC ex-combatants' experiences have been inextricably linked with the tensions in Colombia's political system. These tensions have yielded a variety of narratives describing female FARC ex-combatants, which have shaped the lived realities of reincorporation for these women.

#### *Formal and Informal Institutions and their Political Elite*

Structurally, the Colombian government is divided into three branches: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial.<sup>18</sup> The head of government is the president, currently Iván Duque Márquez, who was elected in August 2018 on the Democratic Center Party ticket.<sup>19</sup> Colombia uses a multi-party system, and, as a result of Duque's election, the Democratic Center Party now represents the 'government's party'. In all, there are ten major parties registered in Colombia, with

<sup>18</sup> "South America, Colombia," *CIA World Factbook*, April 1, 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/co.html>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

many smaller, less influential ones throughout the nation. Legally, all blocs may register as an ‘opposition party’ to the government’s party if they meet certain establishing criteria, which affords them political legitimacy and privileges.<sup>20</sup>

Since signing the peace accord in November 2016, the FARC has been a recognized and registered opposition party, with five seats in the Chamber of Representatives and an additional five in the Senate. While they retained the guerrilla group’s acronym, the group renamed itself the Revolutionary Alternative Force of the Common (FARC, in Spanish) Party.<sup>21</sup> Currently, women occupy only two of the congressional seats allocated to the FARC.<sup>22</sup> While percentages alone are not enough to indicate political marginalization, the number is strikingly low. Additionally, the transformation of the armed group into a political party remains highly polarizing among other politicians and Colombian citizens.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the few elected FARC party women face multiple avenues of marginalization: first, simply as women in politics, and second, as leaders of a controversial political organization. This discrimination against these female politicians produces multifaceted barriers to elite political representation for female FARC ex-combatants.<sup>24</sup>

Colombia’s executive and legislative branches contain additional sub-units: the executive includes the National Police and Military Forces of Colombia, and the legislative houses the bicameral Congress.<sup>25</sup> This organization is significant because, while there is a constitutional separation of powers between the branches, corruption within the government undermines the political system.<sup>26</sup> As an example, Andrés Solimano argues that organized narco-terrorists unite

<sup>20</sup> Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, Colom.-FARC-EP, §2.1.1, November 24, 2016, U.N. Doc. S/2017/272.

<sup>21</sup> Jose M. Alonso Gonzalez, “How Is FARC’s Political Party Going after Its First Year?,” *Latin American Post*, September 13, 2018, <https://latinamericanpost.com/23229-how-is-farcs-political-party-going-after-its-first-year>

<sup>22</sup> “FARC Members Take Seats in Colombian Congress,” *Justice for Colombia*, July 23, 2018, <https://justiceforcolombia.org/news/farc-members-take-seats-in-colombian-congress/>

<sup>23</sup> Angelika Rettberg, “Peace-Making Amidst an Unfinished Social Contract: The Case of Colombia,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 14.1 (2019): 84-100, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2019.1619655>

<sup>24</sup> Kiran Stallone and Julia Zulver, “The Feminists of Farc: ‘We Are Not Demobilising, We Are Mobilising Politically,’” *Guardian*, March 27, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/mar/27/feminists-farc-colombia-female-inequality>

<sup>25</sup> “South America, Colombia,” *CIA World Factbook*.

<sup>26</sup> Winifred Tate, “Paramilitary Politics and Corruption Talk in Colombia,” *Culture, Theory and Critique* 59:4 (2018): 420, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14735784.2018.1522596>

state institutions in corruption, using the Colombian legal system to illustrate:

The effect of drug trafficking on the judicial system is a primary example of the impact of violent crime on institutions, where narco-terrorism, threats, and acts of kidnapping and assassination have influenced the administration of justice and changes in the penal code to benefit them. Corruption of the judicial system has manifested itself, for instance, in the arbitrary dismissal of evidence against, or the release of, well-known drug-traffickers.<sup>27</sup>

Furthering Solimano's point, Angelika Rettberg explains: "Colombia has been plagued by drug-trade related violence since the 1970s. The pervasive effects of drugs on politics, society, and the economy have been well documented, and include corruption, institutional atrophy, and a generalized perception of state incapacity."<sup>28</sup>

While narcotrafficking is not the only source of corruption in Colombian politics, the public strongly associates it with ex-FARC members, a fact which many oppositional politicians exploit when challenging FARC party policies.<sup>29</sup> For female ex-combatants seeking office, this is particularly damaging as they are subject to the same stigma as their male peers, but without access to the same economic, political, and social networks the drug trade provided.

Adversity to political cooperation with the FARC is best exemplified by the relationship between the last three Colombian presidents: Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010), Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018), and Iván Duque Márquez (2018-present).<sup>30</sup> Former President Uribe is currently a senator for the Democratic Center Party and is widely viewed as the most influential politician within the current administration. When president, Uribe was lauded for making significant advances in the fight against the left-wing armed groups.<sup>31</sup> However, he was unsuccessful at dismantling the FARC. As a result, he supported Juan Manuel

<sup>27</sup> Andrés Solimano, ed., *Colombia : Essays on Conflict, Peace, and Development* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2000), 32-33.

<sup>28</sup> Rettberg, "Peace-Making," 87.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 10-14.

<sup>30</sup> "Can Colombia's President Iván Duque Find His Feet?," *Economist*, June 20, 2019, <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2019/06/20/can-colombias-president-ivan-duque-find-his-feet>

<sup>31</sup> Maria A. Silva, "Alvaro Uribe: The Most Dangerous Man in Colombian Politics," *Council on Hemispheric Affairs*, October 20, 2017, <http://www.coha.org/alvaro-uribe-the-most-dangerous-man-in-colombian-politics/>



Santos, with whom his policy goals aligned as his presidential successor.<sup>32</sup> However, upon his election, Santos quickly began the peace negotiation process in a manner that alienated Uribe, causing Uribe to become a public political enemy to then-president Santos. Eventually, Uribe created a new political party (the current Democratic Center Party) to undermine Santos's support base.<sup>33</sup> Colombian citizens did not widely support the peace agreement, partly due to the influence of Uribe, who mobilized his Democratic Center party against the agreement, ultimately quashing a referendum to ratify it.<sup>34</sup>

A congressional vote, rather than a second national referendum, ultimately ratified the peace agreement in early October 2016.<sup>35</sup> Female ex-combatants were disproportionately affected by the frantic negotiations of the agreement, especially because the public believed the women received preferential treatment. As Catalina Ruiz-Navarro put it, "[within the first referendum] several sectors rejected the peace agreement arguing the gendered approach of the Agreement was an 'ideology' that de-stabilized family values, pushed for the transgression of traditional gender roles, and promoted homosexuality."<sup>36</sup> While the decision to conduct a congressional vote, rather than a referendum, preserved much of this approach, significant portions of Colombian society still viewed the inclusion of 'special privileges' for female combatants as unnecessary and even counterproductive.

Despite Santos winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2016 for his historic agreement with the FARC, he lost the 2018 presidential election to Iván Duque Márquez, Uribe's close political ally and preferred candidate.<sup>37</sup> Since gaining office, President Duque, who somewhat reluctantly supports the peace

<sup>32</sup> "Juan Manuel Santos," *Colombia Reports*, March 9, 2019, <https://colombiareports.com/juan-manuel-santos/>

<sup>33</sup> "Democratic Center," *Colombia Reports*, December 8, 2018, <https://colombiareports.com/democratic-center-colombia/>

<sup>34</sup> "La Polémica Valla Del Uribismo Contra La JEP," *El Espectador*, March 24, 2019, <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/politica/la-polemica-valla-del-uribismo-contra-la-jep-articulo-846721>; Silva, "Alvaro Uribe."

<sup>35</sup> Rettberg, "Peace-Making," 86-87.

<sup>36</sup> Catalina Ruiz-Navarro, "A Feminist Peace in Colombia?" *Heinrich Boll Stiftung: The Green Political Foundation*, February 14, 2019, <https://www.boell.de/en/2019/02/14/feminist-peace>

<sup>37</sup> John P. Rathbone and Gideon Long, "Polarised Colombia Prepares for Polls amid Lukewarm Links with US," *Irish Times*, May 25, 2018, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/polarised-colombia-prepares-for-polls-amid-lukewarm-links-with-us-1.3508532>; "Colombia's New President Iván Duque: Puppet or Rock Star?" *BBC News*, June 18, 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-44488011>



agreement, has been slow to enact key mandates, such as those concerning rural security.<sup>38</sup> As a result of these intensely personal political clashes at the highest level of the Colombian government, the success of the agreement is in jeopardy.

In response, critics argue that losing focus on implementing the peace agreement will hurt both the FARC party and the current administration politically. As Jaqueline O'Neill argued in *Foreign Policy*, the successful reincorporation of female ex-combatants is crucial to the political legitimacy of the FARC, the president, and the peace agreement:

For the FARC, ensuring women's full inclusion in the process... enables FARC leadership to sustain narratives about commitment to gender equality and fairness that could translate into votes during upcoming elections. For the government, focusing on women could solidify the country's reputation as a leader in defining global standards for addressing the aftermath of war.<sup>39</sup>

However, institutional exclusion of female ex-combatants in policymaking is only one constraint on their political participation. The reality of physical and psychological violence hinders them as well.

### *Current Role of Violence in Politics*

Violence and politics have long been symbiotic in Colombia; however, one must exercise caution when describing the nature of that violence. As Nazih Richani writes in the opening of his work, *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia*, "the country's violent history has led some social scientists and policy makers to believe that an inherent cultural character has contributed to such violence."<sup>40</sup> Viewing violence as inherent is a dangerous and overly simplistic mischaracterization of a complex Colombian history. Thus, the approach to violence in this analysis is one that aims to account for all of the present and past tensions in Colombian politics, social life, and economics. Understanding this violence is significant when analyzing the political reincorporation of female ex-combatants. These women face incredibly high threats of violence—not only as

<sup>38</sup> "Colombia's President Iván Duque."

<sup>39</sup> Jaqueline O'Neill, "Are Women the Key to Peace in Colombia?" *Foreign Policy*, April 20, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/20/are-women-the-key-to-peace-in-colombia-farc-talks/>

<sup>40</sup> Nazih Richani, *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013), 1.

former combatants, but also as women in an intensely patriarchal country.

One of the major vehicles of gendered violence in Colombia were the paramilitaries. In 1968, the Colombian Congress enacted Law 48, which legalized the creation of paramilitaries. The statute, which allowed the Colombian military to arm civilians to fight against guerrilla groups, was the primary military strategy until 2002.<sup>41</sup> In analyses of the conflict, the paramilitaries are widely regarded as the most vicious actors as they were indiscriminately violent against both civilians and guerrilla fighters.<sup>42</sup> While certainly not the only controversial law enacted during the conflict, Law 48 exemplifies the difficulty in determining the ‘perpetrators,’ ‘victims,’ and ‘prosecutors’ of violence within the Colombian conflict and surrounding politics. Law 48 allowed the state to act as all three depending upon the context. However, not all violence during the conflict was a result of state action. Just as state initiatives blurred the lines of responsibility, many non-state actors committed violence justified under their internal group ideology, but judged unnecessary by outsiders.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the enactment of the peace accords, political violence is still occurring in Colombia. This is associated with an increase in social violence, particularly in the country’s rural regions, where there is contention over social influence.<sup>44</sup> Incidents of political violence, defined by Solimano as the “commission of violent acts, motivated by desire, conscious or unconscious, to obtain or maintain political power,” are frequent against women in Colombia. Often, they are expressed as physical violence against female social and political activists.<sup>45</sup> Jeffrey Stevenson Murer, in his work on political violence and national security, warns that policymakers should regard incidents of “...men raping women as...expression[s] of misogynist political violence” much more thoroughly and harshly than violence during protests and against symbolic state property.<sup>46</sup> In Colombia, for women to participate in politics, particularly in rural regions,

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>42</sup> Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, 118.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 37–40.

<sup>44</sup> Joe P. Daniels, “Colombians Hear Grim Echo of Decades-Long War in Mayoral Contender’s Murder,” *Guardian*, October 25, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/25/colombia-peace-deal-war-farc-karina-garcia>

<sup>45</sup> Solimano, *Colombia: Essays*, 12; Daniels, “Colombians Hear Grim Echo”; Angela Gomez, Electoral Observation Mission, interview by author, Colombia, September 9, 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Jeffrey S. Murer, “Political Violence,” in *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. National Security*, ed. Derek S. Reveron, Nikolas K. Gvosdev, and John A. Cloud (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), 500. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190680015.013.28>

is physically and psychologically dangerous. Thus, for female FARC ex-combatants to have any real political involvement after demobilization, they not only have to overcome the stigma associated with being a former guerrilla fighter, but also that of being a woman challenging socio-political order.

On October 15th, 2019, the UN Security Council released a statement relaying their “concern about the increase in attacks against political party candidates across the political spectrum...[and] their serious concern over the continued killings of community and social leaders, including women leaders, and of former FARC-EP members.”<sup>47</sup> I conducted an interview with two representatives, Angela Gomez and Camilo Vargas, from the Electoral Observation Mission (EOM), an organization that collects data on Colombian political violence. They remarked that not only was violence against political candidates high, but that, as Angela describes below, violence against female FARC candidates was particularly intense:

We are seeing that the violence is more hateful. It is more violent. Because the woman can be raped. The family can be hurt. Maybe the kind of violence is with more hate. If we are talking about ex-combatientes...it's more difficult because I think everyone in Colombia have a feeling, a bad feeling about ex-combatientes in general. And because forgiveness is hard.<sup>48</sup>

This violence has a chilling effect on political participation. Female FARC ex-combatants interested in political engagement likely experienced some form of gendered violence while in the armed group. This potential re-occurrence of that same violence, as they test the boundaries of their political reincorporation as a civilian, may be enough to dissuade them from participating altogether. Many female FARC ex-combatants experienced domestic abuse, among other types of gendered violence, during the conflict. However, there were also mechanisms in place to punish the perpetrators.<sup>49</sup> Referencing a similar situation in El Salvador, Jocelyn Viterna explained that these female fighters, used to seeing violence against their bodies punished by the military leadership, suddenly found themselves without protection from violence during reincorporation, particularly protection

<sup>47</sup> United Nations Security Council, “Security Council Press Statement on Colombia,” Press statement no. SC/13988, October 15, 2019, <https://colombia.unmissions.org/en/security-council-press-statement-colombia-sc13988>

<sup>48</sup> Gomez, interview by author.

<sup>49</sup> Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, 192.

of a political nature.<sup>50</sup> Thus, they learned to fear and avoid situations in which violence may occur.

### *Peace Negotiations and Transitional Justice*

The Colombian government has attempted to negotiate peace with the FARC multiple times over the last two decades, finally reaching an agreement in November 2016. Though it was praised internationally as a progressive and remarkable agreement, there is dispute over which party actually ‘won.’ Due to stipulations within the accord itself, some Colombian citizens, particularly Uribe supporters, believe it was the FARC.<sup>51</sup> These policies include a monthly stipend to ex-guerrillas, and social and economic benefits for ex-combatants within the reincorporation process. Richani, in his work on the political economy of Colombia’s conflict during the peace negotiations, argues that peace was only achieved because political elites were growing weary of the costs of the war and its increasingly negative impact on the Colombian domestic economy and position in the global market.<sup>52</sup> Explaining the collapse of the ‘war system’, he further states that:

...sectors of the dominant classes [were] contemplating the deconstruction of the default hegemony, the war system, and reconstructing in its place a more “encompassing hegemony” by persuading the peasant-based guerrillas by granting them some concession as a price to accept a new basis of their authority and stabilizing property rights. The price of maintaining the war system has become too high and does not measure up to the opportunities that peace could offer to important sectors of the dominant class.<sup>53</sup>

These primarily economic motivations demonstrate the narrow view the political elite had of the social ramifications of the agreement. As Richani concludes, many elites saw an agreement as the most beneficial option for their finances, and

<sup>50</sup> Jocelyn Viterna, “Demobilization, Remobilization, and Retrenchment,” in *Women in War: The Micro-Processes of Mobilization in El Salvador* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 196. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199843633.001.0001>

<sup>51</sup> “Juan Manuel Santos,” *Colombia Reports*; “Colombia’s President Iván Duque.”

<sup>52</sup> Richani, *Systems of Violence*, 129.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

often the social, political, and economic reincorporation of female ex-combatants did not affect elites.

Perhaps the most divisive aspect of the peace agreement is the transitional justice system. Colombians are divided not only over the merits of the system as a whole, but also over how it regards victims of the conflict, especially the primarily female victims of sexual crimes. The most significant product of the program is the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), an extrajudicial court system tasked with trying conflict-related crimes committed by the FARC, state and paramilitary forces, and civilians.<sup>54</sup> The JEP's focus is on discerning the truth, with an emphasis on individual perpetrators being honest about their actions, especially if victims request an apology. The court's position is that "if the accused admits to his or her crimes up front, he or she will serve between five to eight years of an alternative sentence...if the crime is serious, and between two to five years if the crime is not."<sup>55</sup> These alternative sentences may include community service, reparations, or something else agreed upon between the victim, the court, and the perpetrator.<sup>56</sup>

However, despite its ostensible practicality, the transitional justice element of the peace agreement was the most contested portion during negotiations and was one of the primary reasons the peace agreement failed in the public referendum in early 2016.<sup>57</sup> It currently remains unpopular, particularly because those who are tried and 'convicted' by the JEP maintain their rights to political participation.<sup>58</sup>

Some of this disdain for the transitional court system can also be attributed to Uribe's anti-JEP campaigns. Uribe, as a result of his political initiatives, has become an obstacle to peace on multiple political and social fronts.<sup>59</sup> However, there remains evidence that some Colombian political leaders and policymakers strongly mistrust the court as an institution.<sup>60</sup> This mistrust is reflected within the current president's administration, as well. A proposed law formally legitimizing the JEP was approved by both the Congress and the Colombian Constitutional

<sup>54</sup> Brian Harper and Holly K. Sonneland, "Explainer: Colombia's Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP)," *Americas Society/Council of the Americas*, August 3, 2018, <https://www.as-coa.org/articles/explainer-colombias-special-jurisdiction-peace-jep>

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> "La Polémica."

<sup>58</sup> Harper and Sonneland, "Colombia's Special Jurisdiction."

<sup>59</sup> Jake Kincaid, "Colombia's Opponents of War Crimes Tribunal Clash with International Community," *Colombia Reports*, February 19, 2019, <https://colombiareports.com/colombias-hard-right-and-international-community-clash-over-war-crimes-tribunal/>

<sup>60</sup> "La Polémica."

Court, only to be rejected by President Duque, which many critics see as a maneuver by the executive to continue undermining the peace agreement.<sup>61</sup>

FARC members' histories have provoked division, even at the highest levels of government. Several senior FARC politicians have been publicly accused of human rights violations and asked to step down from office.<sup>62</sup> I conducted an interview with Democratic Center Party Representative Margarita Restrepo, a staunch Uribe supporter, and self-named defender of female FARC victims. In the interview, she reiterated the accusations she had made in the media against FARC leaders, including against female former FARC commander and current FARC party senator, Victoria Sandino Simanca Herrera:

...They shouldn't be here [in Congress]. They are the evidence, they and many others, that they are being re-victimized. That's nonsense. Everyone knows, everyone knows what they did, who they are and what they keep doing - the terrorists of the FARC - in all of the national territory. So, it's simply a sophisticated distraction [to allow 'perpetrators' in Congress], and it is the humiliation and re-victimization of the victims.<sup>63</sup>

Representative Restrepo's accusations are significant as they reflect Mike Kesby's claims in his work on post-conflict gender contestations in Zimbabwe: that progress made regarding gendered stereotypes and traditions during conflict does not necessarily continue afterwards. This, he claims, is due to unrealistic linear expectations of progress and failure to account for "struggles over masculine identity within the analysis of gender relations."<sup>64</sup> It is on this last point that Restrepo's accusations are most salient, as women can themselves act as agents of the patriarchy, and be used as legitimate voices to criticize other women whose influence threatens a male-dominated social order.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> "Uncertainty for Colombia's Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP)," *ABColumbia*, March 21, 2019, <https://www.abcolombia.org.uk/uncertainty-for-colombias-special-jurisdiction-for-peace-jep/>

<sup>62</sup> Representative Margarita Restrepo, interview by author, Colombia, September 4, 2019.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Mike Kesby, "Arenas for Control, Terrains of Gender Contestation: Guerrilla Struggle and Counter- Insurgency Warfare in Zimbabwe 1972-1980," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 22.4 (1996): 561, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057079608708512>

<sup>65</sup> Anita Desai, "Women's Role in Maintaining and/or Resisting Patriarchy," in *Feminism and*

However, when it came to transitional justice, the priorities of the FARC and many Colombians were, overall, incompatible. The FARC resisted prosecution from the state after disarming. However, many Colombian citizens were unwilling to accept any agreement that promised anything short of full prosecution and punishment of abuses committed during the half-century of combat.<sup>66</sup> Former members of the armed group, including those now serving as politicians within the FARC party, question the JEP as well. Specifically, there is resistance to President Duque's reluctance to finalize the JEP's judicial procedures and jurisdiction.<sup>67</sup> To them, the JEP is a projection of unchecked state power, shrouded by a cloud of 'legitimacy.' Some members of the FARC even fear that the JEP is being used to exploit female former combatants.

Many of those I interviewed expressed disgust at the "lies" concerning the rates of sexual violence that women's victim advocacy organizations reported to the JEP. They argue that the figures were inflated and meant to hurt the FARC party by making it seem like they are disorganized and brutal to their own members.<sup>68</sup> The transitional justice system, and specifically the JEP, created additional challenges for reincorporating women that their male peers did not face. Female ex-combatants seeking election with the FARC party may be stigmatized on two fronts: first, if they admitted to crimes in front of the JEP, they may be viewed as 'undeserving' of their salvaged political opportunities; second, they may be criticized for remaining politically aligned with a group 'known' for sexually violating women.

This double standard of stigmatization applied to politically elite female ex-combatants is not the only form of the JEP's marginalization of reincorporating female fighters. As Kelli Muddell and Hawkins Sibley explain in their work on gender and post-conflict justice: some women-centric restorative programs, such as reparations, are often criticized for "returning women to their status before the violations took place [and thus] likely to return to them to situations of discrimination and violence," rather than "challeng[ing] the structural inequalities

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*Contemporary Indian Women's Writing*, ed. Elizabeth Jackson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 112.

<sup>66</sup> "Why Colombians Distrust the FARC Peace Deal," *The Economist*, May 24, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2018/05/24/why-colombians-distrust-the-farc-peace-deal>

<sup>67</sup> Helen Murphy and Carlos Vargas, "Colombian Duque's Bid to Change Peace Deal Rattles Sabres, but War Unlikely," *Reuters*, March 17, 2019, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-colombia-peace-analysis/colombian-duques-bid-to-change-peace-deal-rattles-sabres-but-war-unlikely-idUKKCN1QY0MS>

<sup>68</sup> Multiple interviews conducted by the author, Colombia, 2019.



that women faced before the violations.”<sup>69</sup> Thus, whether they are a victim or an alleged perpetrator, being a female ex-combatant within Colombia’s transitional justice and greater restorative systems inevitably delegitimizes aspects of their political reincorporation.

### *An Uncertain Future*

The future of the peace agreement in Colombia remains uncertain. Within five years, almost half of all post-conflict peace agreements fail, and as of 2020, Colombia is nearing the three-and-a-half-year mark.<sup>70</sup> Peace accords fail for various reasons, depending on the countries and conflicts for which the accords were created. However, the presence of ‘spoilers,’ or those who pose political or violent challenges to peace, is a common antecedent.<sup>71</sup> Economic uncertainty, tied to what we might call the political ‘war system’ in Colombia, is also a predominant destabilizing factor. While the conflict devastated many aspects of Colombian society, the war became almost a political institution itself. Virginia Bouvier, reflecting on Richani’s work on ‘war systems,’ notes that the conflict has created alternative and durable political structures, as a result of “the failure of Colombia’s state institutions to mediate conflicts among antagonistic parties, the conflict parties’ repeated adaptations to conflict, and a comfortable balance of power and sufficient incentives to make peace a less attractive alternative than war.”<sup>72</sup> In turn, some analysts now fear that, by relying on the war for structure and legitimacy, Colombia’s political and economic institutions may have limited capacity to build and maintain peace.<sup>73</sup>

These uncertainties arise from both domestic and international actors and policies. In October 2019, the *New York Times* reported on the instability of the Colombian peace agreement: “the government was slow to follow through on promises to invest in rural areas where extreme poverty led to violence in the

<sup>69</sup> Kelli Muddell and Sibley Hawkins, “Module 2: Truth Seeking” (training document, Gender and Transitional Justice: A Training Module Series, International Center for Transitional Justice, New York, October 2018), 14, [https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/2\\_Gender%20%26%20TJ%20-%20Truth%20Seeking%20-%20Speaker%20Notes.pdf](https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/2_Gender%20%26%20TJ%20-%20Truth%20Seeking%20-%20Speaker%20Notes.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> Kofi Annan, “Learning the Lessons of Peace-Building” (lecture, Magee Campus, University of Ulster, United Kingdom, October 18, 2004), <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2004-10-18/secretary-general-kofi-annan-s-tip-o-neill-lecture-“learning-lessons”>

<sup>71</sup> Jack Snyder and Leslie Vinjamuri, “Trials and Errors” *International Security* 28.3 (2004): 13-15, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228803773100066>

<sup>72</sup> Virginia M. Bouvier, “Prologue: Prospects for Peace in Colombia,” in *Systems of Violence*, xiii.

<sup>73</sup> Rettberg, “Peace-Making,” 91-92.



first place. Social inequities remain rampant, and leaders of the most ardent rebel factions, left empty-handed and embarrassed, called for an official return to arms in early September.”<sup>74</sup> The last portion of the statement references a call made on August 29th, 2019 by Iván Márquez,<sup>75</sup> a senior FARC commander and a primary peace negotiator, to boycott the agreement and resume conflict.<sup>76</sup>

As of 2018, the Kroc Institute, in conjunction with UN Women and other organizations, assessed the peace agreement as having 578 “concrete, observable, and measurable actions...of which, 130 have a gender perspective.”<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, an analysis demonstrated that 51 percent of the gender components had not yet been initiated at all, and many others were only partially implemented. The investigation found a 14 percent gap between implementation of gendered and non-gendered commitments within all 578 stipulations.<sup>78</sup> This discrepancy demonstrates the lack of political and social prioritization of issues pertaining to female FARC ex-combatants, which, in turn, significantly affects their reincorporation into those spheres. According to Kate Paarlberg-Kvam, not only do these implementation gaps result in material inequality between reincorporating men and women, but the peace itself structurally excludes women. Referencing the 2000 UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which called for equal inclusion of women in peace-building processes, she states: “UNSCR 1325 represented a victory for women activists around the world, who had been insisting for many years that women’s inclusion in peace talks was essential; at the same time, its implementation has at times been subject to a strictly numerical understanding of women’s representation.”<sup>79</sup> Presence with limited influence, she further claims, meant that women became agents of “masculinist peacemaking...in which peace has been understood as the pacification of violence and women and women’s

<sup>74</sup> Mark R. Rinaldi, “A Peace Monument in Colombia Is Caught in a New Crossfire,” *New York Times*, October 23, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/23/arts/design/colombia-farc-peace-monument.html>

<sup>75</sup> Not to be confused with President Iván Duque Marquez.

<sup>76</sup> Adam Isacson, “To Save Colombia’s Peace Process, Prove the Extremists Wrong,” *New York Times*, September 3, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/03/opinion/international-world/colombia-farc-peace.html>

<sup>77</sup> “Special Report on the Monitoring of the Gender Perspective in the Implementation of the Colombian Final Peace Accord,” (report, Kroc Institute and the International Accompaniment Component, UN Women, Women’s International Democratic Federation, and Sweden, Bogotá, Colombia, 2018), 5, [https://kroc.nd.edu/assets/297624/181113\\_gender\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://kroc.nd.edu/assets/297624/181113_gender_report_final.pdf)

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>79</sup> Paarlberg-Kvam, “What’s to Come Is More Complicated,” 198.

concerns have been sidelined at best.”<sup>80</sup>

While uncertainty over the future success of the peace agreement does not affect only female ex-combatants, it is a constraint upon their political reincorporation, nonetheless. This national sense of uncertainty, coupled with a highly volatile and polarized political climate, generates exaggerated narratives about female FARC ex-combatants. This method of establishing control by political elites will be discussed in the next section.

### **POLITICAL NARRATIVES ABOUT FEMALE FARC EX-COMBATANTS**

The current political economy, persisting violence, uneven peace negotiations, and citizens’ uncertainty about the future, combine to produce a political climate that impedes the successful reincorporation of FARC ex-combatants, regardless of gender. However, female ex-combatants are exposed to a different reincorporation experience than their male counterparts and face a tension of political identities. In the following sections, I analyze the political narratives surrounding female FARC ex-combatants, their creation and reproduction, and the effects they have on these women.

Three main narratives are used to define the political identities of female FARC ex-guerrillas in Colombia: ‘victim,’ ‘hero,’ and ‘threat.’ It is important to note that these narratives are not always untrue, either in part or whole. Some women *are* victims, heroes, or threats to a variety of individuals, organizations, and institutions. However, these political narratives depart from that truth when the lived experiences of these women are diluted to caricatures.

#### *Victim*

Cultural and academic discourses are adapting to the idea that a woman can not only be a combatant, but can also do incredible violence when in that role. However, even if they are active participants, women can still be reduced to being victims of war, and often have their status as perpetrators of violence compared to that of their male peers.<sup>81</sup> Unfortunately, women are disproportionately victims of conflict, regardless of their status as civilian or combatant. However, not all have been victimized, and even those who were, have an individual and nuanced experience of that victimization. At times, instrumentalizing ‘victimcy’

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>81</sup> Utas, “Victimcy, Girlfriending, Soldiering,” 406.

for individual or collective gain is an expression of political agency for those who have very limited options.<sup>82</sup>

The important distinction between the reality of women as victims within conflict and the political narratives of female ‘victimcy’ is that the narrative does not take the truth of individual experience into account. It is deliberate in its erasure of both context and individual agency. Reflecting on realities for both genders, Lalli Metsola notes that it reduces them to “needy, helpless and potentially dangerous: antisocial, roaming from the countryside to the streets, prone to drunkenness, promiscuity, and crime, and incapable of engaging productively in the economy.”<sup>83</sup> However, many women are able to find empowerment through victimization. Molly Talcott explores this concept with female Oaxaqueña activists who challenge gender, race and class violence with increased resistance, emboldened by the erosion of their fear as a result of constant exposure to violence.<sup>84</sup> She concludes that “...even in the tragic politicized violence against activist women, the political responses women are able to generate to their violent life chances and social conditions transcend mere victimization.”<sup>85</sup>

By labeling female FARC ex-combatants ‘victims’ of the very conflict in which they fought, policymakers are able to project their agenda upon them, as ‘victims’ are inherently viewed as lacking agency or any sense of what they need.<sup>86</sup> When I discussed this issue with former President Santos, he promoted female FARC ex-combatants as “victims of the victims,” but went on to further clarify that “there is no major difference between the role of men or women from the FARC in the political work that they are starting to do after they give up their arms.”<sup>87</sup> By juxtaposing this sense of ‘victimhood’ and ‘equality with men,’ there is the potential for blame to be placed on women for having too much of the former, and not enough of the latter. Additionally, by positioning them as victims of their male comrades, political elites are able to continually fragment the strong political and social bonds that still make up the FARC party, thus reducing the actual threat the group poses to state authority, particularly in rural regions where the FARC

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 408.

<sup>83</sup> Metsola, “‘Reintegration’ of Ex-Combatants and Former Fighters,” 1123.

<sup>84</sup> Molly Talcott, “‘Together We Have Power’: Personal Traumas and Political Responses among Activist Oaxaqueñas,” *Latin American Perspectives* 41.1 (2014): 82-83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X13492142>

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>86</sup> Utas, “Victimcy, Girlfriending, Soldiering,” 407.

<sup>87</sup> Former President of Colombia Juan Manuel Santos, interview by author, Oxford, UK, November 6, 2019.

still has significant influence.<sup>88</sup>

### *Hero*

Perhaps the narrative most rarely consigned to female FARC ex-combatants is that of a hero, though motherhood is a notable exception. 'Hero' status is generally saved for male combatants. Even though women were prominent in the fight for independence and the founding of the armed group, much of the FARC propaganda only includes male military leaders such as Simón Bolívar, who secured Colombian independence from Spain, and Manuel Marulanda, one of the FARC's founders.<sup>89</sup>

However, when FARC ex-combatants become mothers, Colombian political elites begin to recognize them as 'heroes,' at least in that respect. This heroization first began with the women who chose to leave the FARC to either have children, or to find the children whom they had to abandon while moving from battle to battle. Political leaders lauded their 'righteous' decision to fulfil what one interviewee called their "traditional roles; [what the women] should be."<sup>90</sup> Perhaps the most widely viewed as 'heroic' were the women who had children immediately after the signing of the peace accord, which was described as an overt transition towards peace, even by former FARC fighters.<sup>91</sup> This experience was in contrast to mothers who left the FARC to raise children prior to the peace agreement, as those women were not unanimously respected. While political leaders still regarded these women as 'heroes,' one of the women I interviewed regarded anyone who left early, regardless of cause, as 'desertores,' or deserters.<sup>92</sup> Important to this narrative is that the woman is heralded for rejecting her combatant status, and for embracing the traditionally feminine role of motherhood. In rejecting her violent past, she further highlights that motherhood is the more righteous path for a woman.

<sup>88</sup> Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, 102.

<sup>89</sup> Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, 191; "FARC, The Sequel - Will Colombia Return to War?," *Economist*, September 5, 2019, <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2019/09/05/will-colombia-return-to-war>

<sup>90</sup> María Eugenia Vásquez Perdomo, interview by author, Colombia, September 5, 2019; "Simon Bolivar - Accomplishments, Revolution & Death," *Biography*, July 23, 2019, <https://www.biography.com/political-figure/simon-bolivar>

<sup>91</sup> John Otis, "After Peace Agreement, A Baby Boom Among Colombia's FARC Guerrillas," *NPR*, May 3, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/05/03/526690242/after-peace-agreement-a-baby-boom-among-colombias-farc-guerrillas?t=1574091333524>

<sup>92</sup> Ava, interview by author, Colombia, August 17, 2019.

Political leaders also use the ‘hero’ narrative in a way that justifies the ‘othering’ of ex-combatants. The narrative allows for the idolization of one from a group to delegitimize the rest.<sup>93</sup> Since the signing of the peace agreement, and throughout the reincorporation process, the state has promoted the public image of the ‘ex-combatant mother.’ According to the state, these women choosing peace over combat creates a moral imperative for all other ex-combatants to choose peace, as well. Their bodies and their children are used as objects of public shaming to generate compliance with the peace agreement, as the agreement’s success is vital to the legitimacy of the current administration and its elite members.<sup>94</sup> Additionally, by increasing the social pressure on female FARC ex-combatants to become mothers, the government is ensuring that there is a limit on women’s agency to again pursue violence against the state.

While senior public officials are the most prominent creators of the ‘hero’ narrative, the reason the narrative remains so pervasive is that local officials, other ex-combatants, and even civilians take part in its creation, and moreso, its reproduction. Often, the motivation for their role in the narrative process is to establish and maintain patriarchal structures at the individual and collective levels.<sup>95</sup> According to the EOM’s Angela Gomez, local political candidates need to ally with a party in order to run for office, so many adopt narratives about female ex-combatants that promote traditional family values in order to gain backing from the FARC party.<sup>96</sup> The FARC party has an interest in this ‘hero’ narrative for two reasons. First, classifying women as heroes delegitimizes political elites’ claims that female combatants were victims of the conflict. Second, the narrative reinforces the admirability of a former combatant deciding to assume the traditionally female roles of mother and caretaker, thus allowing male ex-combatants less economic and political competition in their reincorporation process.<sup>97</sup>

The ‘hero’ narrative is particularly significant as it can be molded to fit what the actor utilizing it needs. It can be weaponized by political elites to promote one woman at the expense of others, or it can be harnessed by the women themselves to empower their demands for greater political inclusion. Sam Wilkins discusses this range in usage of the hero narrative by youth groups in his work on the 2008

<sup>93</sup> Metsola, “‘Reintegration’ of Ex-Combatants and Former Fighters,” 1123.

<sup>94</sup> Avione and Tillman, “Demobilized Women in Colombia,” 220.

<sup>95</sup> Kimberly Theidon, “Reconstructing Masculinities: The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of Former Combatants in Colombia,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 31.1 (2009): 31, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.0.0053>

<sup>96</sup> Electoral Observation Mission, interview by author, Colombia, September 9, 2019.

<sup>97</sup> Theidon, “Reconstructing Masculinities,” 31.

death of a prominent Zimbabwean activist, Tonderai Ndira:

When given the opportunity, youth activists in Mabvuku-Tafara recall a diverse collection of heroes in Ndira, varying across multiple axes from peacemaker to street-fighter, visionary to comedian. What these recitals share is a will by activists to use the story of Ndira's heroism to bring private, contentious imaginations of socio-political achievement into social relevance.<sup>98</sup>

As female FARC ex-guerrillas navigate their political reincorporation process, the 'hero' narrative can create possibilities for those who either choose or are in a position to fashion themselves as heroes. Alternatively, the narrative poses a real limitation to those women who choose not to, or simply cannot.

### *Threat*

The final narrative conceptualizes former female FARC guerrillas as 'threats,' which occurs in two contexts: as what Metsola calls a "threat to the security of the state," and as a threat to the social order in Colombia.<sup>99</sup> This label is rarely used explicitly by political elites, but is implicit within their reincorporation policies, which often serve to legitimize the control of these women. A woman who has already shown a capacity for violence against the state is dangerous because she has demonstrated her ability to invalidate traditional gender and societal norms.<sup>100</sup> Unless her voice and agency are diminished, that same woman can continue to invalidate those norms while entering politics within the state she once rebelled against.

The public narrative of 'threatening' female FARC ex-combatants describes the 'threat' these women pose to the social order. María Eugenia Vásquez Perdomo, a former guerrilla fighter with M-19 and current feminist activist in Colombia, described how a woman transitions from combatant to ex-combatant in a 2000 speech on reintegration:

<sup>98</sup> Sam Wilkins, "Ndira's Wake: Politics, Memory and Mobility among the Youth of Mabvuku-Tafara, Harare," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 39.4 (2013): 885, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2013.858545>

<sup>99</sup> Metsola, "Reintegration' of Ex-Combatants and Former Fighters," 1123.

<sup>100</sup> Ortega, "Untapped Resources for Peace," 235.

A pressure, exerted the families in cases in which there were spouses, children and parents who demanded to make up for lost time and another, the company that charged the double transgression incurred by the guerrillas: your violent action against the establishment and its violation of the female patterns within which their conduct was not expected: became a threat to the social order in land as momentous as sexuality, reproduction and family care. In the new stage, guerrilla women were more stigmatized than recognized.<sup>101</sup>

The M-19 was one of the other left-wing guerrilla groups involved in the conflict, but had already demobilized and reintegrated itself in the early 1990s. However María faced significant obstacles to reintegration, similar to those FARC ex-combatants face now. In her speech, she spoke out against the Colombian policy makers' stigmatization of women who dared to challenge the status quo. When they oppose the prevailing gender hierarchy and roles in Colombian politics and society, women's bodies, actions, and voices, become a 'threat' because they challenge the legitimacy of those sexual and moral norms. If the norms defining what it means to be a woman are so easily invalidated, then those which define masculinity are susceptible to invalidation, as well.

Another way the political elite control the 'threat' that female FARC ex-combatants pose is by shaping the narrative to legitimize the state-led marginalization of these women. By justifying their attempts at 'othering' female ex-combatants, the state can then authorize the use of otherwise unacceptable means of 'controlling' the 'threat' from this population. This is important as the purported 'danger' these women pose highlights the failures of the state to build and maintain peace.

Many of the organizations formed by female FARC ex-combatants are publicly dictating that the government enact all provisions of the peace agreement, including those that assist ex-guerrillas. They also are demanding equal access to land, economic benefits, and political power as their male counterparts. The extremely influential women's advocacy group formed by the FARC party, *Mujeres Farianas*, is at the forefront of this movement, often using social media platforms to popularize their demands. In an October 21st, 2019 Instagram post, they

<sup>101</sup> María Eugenia Vásquez Perdomo, "Life Is Written in Draft and Corrected Daily: Effects of Armed Conflict on Women Ex-Combatants," (unpublished speech, 2000).



stated, “we are fighting for access to the land... economic autonomy...access to services of sexual and reproductive health...and the elimination of stigmas and stereotypes against the FARC and the women of the FARC.”<sup>102</sup> By exposing the state’s failure to fully implement the peace agreement and socially progressive legislation, the women undermine the state’s legitimacy to enact control over female FARC ex-combatants.

In the post-peace accord political climate in Colombia, the responsibility for a successful and lasting peace is placed, largely, upon the country’s leading politicians. To maintain that peace, they are charged with both reincorporating ex-combatants into socio-economic life, and engaging with their new congressional peers in the recently formed FARC political party. Thus, one means of influencing both situations simultaneously was by creating easily replicable narratives surrounding the ex-combatants.

While much rhetoric surrounds both male and female ex-guerrilla fighters, the political narratives about women are more delegitimizing and more readily accepted by the public. When I interviewed Herminia Rojas, a former M-19 fighter and current legal representative for the advocacy group *Network of Insurgent Women Ex-Combatants*, she responded to my question about demobilized life for women by stating, “...once women sign and they come back, I do think we take a step back, not generally, I can’t generalize, but in many cases, yes, we take a step back—women go back to their family-related and household roles.”<sup>103</sup> Herminia was not referring to any specific group or echelon of society, but was instead lamenting the oppressive climate that women face during reincorporation. Herminia’s formulation is important as it frames the most significant way that reincorporating female ex-combatants can become a political threat: challenging the status quo social order. If women reject the societal standard of being only mothers and caregivers and of being generally “low politics,” that means they assert claims to a place in the labor market, educational institutions, and elected or appointed political positions.<sup>104</sup> What makes female ex-combatants a more significant threat than non-combatant women in making these same claims is that the former have already proven their ability to organize around a political ideology—and in a militant manner that directly threatened

<sup>102</sup> Mujeres Farianas, “Woman Fariana,” *Partido Político FARC*, 2019, <https://www.partidofarc.com.co/en/woman-fariana>

<sup>103</sup> Herminia Rojas, interview by author, Colombia, August 24, 2019.

<sup>104</sup> MacKenzie, “Securitization and Desecuritization,” 243-244.



state authority.

After a peace agreement is ratified, 'control' of ex-combatants is a common justification for state officials to severely restrict ex-combatants' political identities and governmental avenues of redress. Metsola explains the way politicians frame the narratives of ex-combatants' lives: "'Reintegration' has sought to prevent them from stepping out of their place...[while] policy makers garnered support by framing the issue of the ex-combatants as a moral issue at the centre of the nation's historical identity."<sup>105</sup> By framing the need for control of ex-combatant identity as a national crisis, politicians legitimized their narrative creation.

Why do these narratives exist? If 'reincorporation' is a distinct phase, with *de jure* straight-forward steps such as registration, medical assessments, and housing allocation, why are female FARC ex-combatants, in reality, struggling to access these programs, while also facing damaging narratives? Political narratives are commonly used as a means of controlling ex-combatants, as labeling them creates a justification to treat them differently than the rest of the population.

However, female ex-combatants are especially susceptible to these narratives. Such stereotypes are already simply applied to them as women. By challenging the social order through participating in combat, they have further threatened the government. Thus, this article examines how female FARC ex-combatants are navigating the three political narratives: 'threat,' 'victim,' and 'hero' during reincorporation.

The current Colombian political economy is disjointed and unable to focus on reincorporating former FARC members. President Duque heads a weak state that has done little to further the implementation of specifically the rural security objectives outlined within the peace agreement.<sup>106</sup> Under his government, political violence has increased. For instance, at least 439 human rights advocates have been murdered since the signing of the peace agreement.<sup>107</sup> This, coupled with uncertainty as to the viability of long-term peace, has created a political climate that allows for stereotypes: By labeling female ex-combatants a 'threat' to political and social order, political elites justify extraordinary means to control and politically disempower the population. By labeling them 'victims', the state justifies stepping in and making decisions in their place, since 'victims' are often categorized as unable to act in their own best interest.<sup>108</sup> Lastly, by labeling select

<sup>105</sup> Metsola, "'Reintegration' of Ex-Combatants and Former Fighters," 1123.

<sup>106</sup> "Colombia's President Iván Duque."

<sup>107</sup> Gillooly and Zvobgo, "Human Rights Workers."

<sup>108</sup> Utas, "Victimcy, Girlfriending, Soldiering," 407.

female ex-combatants as ‘heroes,’ political leaders curate the ‘perfect female ex-combatant’ by promoting those select few at the expense of others. In Colombia, the female FARC guerrillas who reached ‘hero’ status are those who were already politically well-connected, and now vocally support the state.

Ultimately, these narratives are used to both constrain and offer opportunities to the women in formal politics. By limiting the women’s agency, the state diminishes their ability to challenge the legitimacy of the traditional state and social orders. Therefore, they are unable to demand privileges legally afforded to them as both Colombian citizens, and ex-combatants within the reincorporation process, such as access to land ownership, reproductive rights, and equal political representation.

If female ex-combatants of the FARC can be reduced to three socio-political categories, then that means society only has to reincorporate those three identities. If female ex-combatants are able to construct their femininity in their own way—and not just as a ‘victim,’ ‘threat,’ or ‘hero’—the FARC’s revolutionary ideology therefore persists, which threatens the otherwise patriarchal, and anti-left wing political reincorporation desired by political elites. The influence of revolutionary ideas, stemming from both the women and their armed group, on their lived experiences in Colombian formal politics, will be explored next in this paper.

## **CURRENT ORGANIZATION AND CONDITION OF THE FARC PARTY**

In transitions towards peace after armed conflict, the issue of political rights and privileges for ex-combatants is significant, particularly in cases of civil war. Discussing developments within political reincorporation practices, Johanna Söderström explains: “After war, the transformation of armed groups into political parties has become an integral part of peacebuilding, and an increasing number of armed groups transform into political parties and enter electoral politics,” and Colombia provides multiple examples of this transformation.<sup>109</sup> Upon its demobilization in 1990, another left-wing armed group, M-19, became the M-19 Democratic Alliance (AD/M-19) Party.<sup>110</sup> While AD/M-19 ultimately failed, studies have shown that many of its ex-combatant members have maintained an

<sup>109</sup> Johanna Söderström, “The Resilient, the Remobilized and the Removed: Party Mobilization among Former M19 Combatants,” *Civil Wars* 18.2 (2016): 214, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2016.1205565>

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

identity with the group and found new outlets for political participation.<sup>111</sup> Gustavo Petro, former mayor of Bogotá, former presidential candidate, and current senator, established the popular liberal movement ‘Progresistas’ in 2011. Since then, he has been one of the most successful former M-19 members in state politics, claiming legitimacy in ways previously reserved for non-ex-combatant political elites.<sup>112</sup> The historical transition of armed groups in Colombia into political parties during reintegration is important. Such examples set a precedent for the legitimation and potentially significant influence of the FARC party.

In 2008, while still an armed group, the FARC began a noticeable shift away from militarization. Instead, it began an internal reconsolidation, and adopted a strategy with greater emphasis upon political action rather than armed conflict.<sup>113</sup> This shift, among other factors, contributed to the initiation of the peace talks in 2012. Thus, the revolutionary guerrilla fighters transformed into a unarmed group which, according to Ugarriza and Quishpe, is “organized around a legal political party that bets on the social and political mobilization,” of its members to maintain political influence post-conflict.<sup>114</sup> While female ex-combatants were not officially prohibited from participating in this mobilization, the opportunities that political reincorporation afforded them on paper did not always translate into their lived realities.

The organization of the FARC remained relatively intact when it became a political party, affording certain elite female ex-combatants political positions inaccessible to most of the women. In their analysis of the political trajectory of the FARC from armed group to legitimate political party, Ugarriza and Quishpe explain:

The hierarchical structure of the FARC party resembles that of the former guerrilla, in so much that armed elites are now political elites. While the organizational structure does not copy the military structure, it does have enough continuities, in the middle

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 217; Hernando A. Benavides Correa, “Gustavo Petro, el ‘progresista,’” *Semana*, September 29, 2011, <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/gustavo-petro-progresista/247166-3>

<sup>113</sup> Juan E. Ugarriza and Rafael Quishpe, “Guerrilla sin armas: La reintegración política de FARC como transformación de los comunistas revolucionarios en Colombia,” in *Excombatientes y acuerdo de paz con las FARC-EP en Colombia: Balance de la etapa temprana*, ed. Erin McFee and Angelika Rettberg, 135-158 (Bogotá, Colombia: Ediciones Uniandes, 2019). <https://doi.org/10.30778/2019.45>

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 151.

of its transformation, regarding the structure of the party in war. And likewise, the visible leaders of the party are in turn the members of the former Secretariat and General Staff Central [senior command groups of the FARC as an armed group].<sup>115</sup>

Women who were already serving in senior roles within the FARC often saw that status reflected in their postaccord political positions. Senators Sandra Ramírez and Victoria Sandino are perhaps the best examples of this process. Senator Ramírez was a senior commander as well as the wife of Manuel Marulanda, a founder of the FARC, until his death in 2008. Senator Sandino also served in various senior roles, most prominently as commander of the FARC's Block 21.<sup>116</sup> I also conducted an interview with Valentina Beltran, another female ex-combatant who, while not a Colombian household name, demonstrated an instance where female leadership and authority in the FARC was recognized as real political potential during reincorporation. Valentina was a member of the armed group for 25 years, primarily in combat support roles. When asked why she joined the FARC, she explained:

I was a student and activist in poor neighborhoods in the 1990s, when the neoliberal model was being implemented, during the genocide of the UP [a 1985 political party made up of demobilized guerrilla fighters which had thousands of its members killed by paramilitary and state forces <sup>117</sup>], and the peace processes of 1991. All those things made me make the decision of looking for a long-term [political engagement] process, and it was me who looked for the insurgency.<sup>118</sup>

Valentina's political experience prior to becoming an armed actor is reflected in the way she discussed her life as a guerrilla fighter, and her experiences of

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 152. Translated by author.

<sup>116</sup> Juanita Ceballos, "Colombia: Talking Peace with a FARC Commander," *Al Jazeera*, 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/08/colombia-talking-peace-farc-commander-160809063317756.html>

<sup>117</sup> "Inter-American Court to Review Genocide of Patriotic Union Political Party," *Justice for Colombia*, 2018, <https://justiceforcolombia.org/news/inter-american-court-to-review-genocide-of-patriotic-union-political-party/>

<sup>118</sup> Valentina Beltran, interview by author, Colombia, August 18, 2019.

political reincorporation. Valentina noted that, while she didn't find "100 percent equality" in the FARC during the conflict, her experience in activism and urban background contributed to her strong performance as a leader, and her subsequent assignment of greater responsibilities in the group.<sup>119</sup> Valentina embodies aspects of the 'hero' narrative, acting as the "head woman" of the Territorial Training and Reincorporation Space (ETCR, in its Spanish acronym) she lived in. Everyone I spoke to concerning the political reincorporation of female ex-combatants asked if I had interviewed her yet, with many women at the camp refusing to speak to me until they had informed her first. Additionally, she was selected to run as the FARC candidate for mayor of her town. She told us that while she was proud to represent the FARC party, she was not voluntarily running for mayor, but simply following orders.<sup>120</sup> Thus, while she was being promoted as an electable, 'heroic' model of a former combatant, even Valentina's experience of political reincorporation had its borders drawn by her male superiors.

As such, this system of rewarding military merit with political assignments in the FARC party serves some female ex-combatants, but more often perpetuates the power differences between men and women of the FARC. Soraya Horos, a former UN Women official who worked with FARC women in the reincorporation process, explains:

So, if you look at the history of the political left in Colombia, you will see that it is extremely patriarchal...this is true for Colombia, but also for Latin America and women's movement. Movements, I would say, because there is not only one... And I think that has to do with the fact that the feminist – feminist perspective – will always question a vertical way of organizing a group. Whether it is a social group or political group or even the way we look at and understand the state, except the modern state itself, right? The way it's organized right now follows the same pattern that military armies have, which is based on a hierarchy. So, because of that, which is a patriarchal system, every feminist view of what needs to be changed will clash, with that structure, right?

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

I think that's something, something that in the long term will happen as well with the FARC. That many women will stay inside. You know, as in any other political party, there are women who can be, who can criticize the party in the way it stimulates or not the participation of women. I think the FARC will follow the same path, and there will be women's groups who will create their own little groups to work on their own because the same structure will never give them...I mean, gender equality cannot, in any way, cannot be lifted within a hierarchy. Because equality between men and women, but also among men and among women, and also on the sexual diversity, let's say, that feminism has brought with...does not fit into that hierarchical form.<sup>121</sup>

Soraya's discussion of the inherently patriarchal vertical organization of the FARC party foresees the disillusionment of female members with the establishment. To expand upon her claims, one must also consider whether or not the FARC party is still 'revolutionary,' and how the answer to that question affects the political reincorporation of female ex-combatants. After a half-century of fighting for communist ideology in Colombia, the FARC party is now in a delicate position of having to bridge those revolutionary ideologies with the need to win the popular vote, particularly as its polling numbers have been notoriously low, receiving only 0.5% of the popular vote in a March 2018 election.<sup>122</sup> For women, that transition into the mainstream ultimately prioritizes party survival, at the cost of the autonomy they gained while in the armed group. As Julie Shayne explains in her work on post-conflict feminism in Latin America: "Post-accords periods often see a backlash against women in State institutions, public discourse and the media, as the "gender-bending" women...are violently put back in their place."<sup>123</sup>

The victim, hero, and threat narratives are effectively marginalizing women on both the macro and micro scale. In utilizing these narratives, the political elites in Colombia, including those within the FARC party, are able to quell one of the most 'revolutionary' aspects of their legacy—'wild' and

<sup>121</sup> Soraya Horos, interview by author, Colombia, September 24, 2019.

<sup>122</sup> "Colombia Election: Farc Fails to Win Support in First National Vote," BBC News, March 12, 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-43367222>

<sup>123</sup> Julie Shayne, *The Revolution Question: Feminisms in El Salvador, Chile, and Cuba* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004); Paarlberg-Kvam, "What's to Come Is More Complicated: Feminist Visions of Peace in Colombia," 213.

‘immoral’ female fighters—in order to transition the armed group to a popular political entity. Specifically, the hierarchical structure of the FARC Party, directly allows for the stratification of its members, thus making it much easier to assign labels and reproduce narratives.

As Soraya discussed, the hierarchy labels a small, select group at the top, the ‘heroes.’ However, this hierarchy is ultimately supported by a base of ‘victims’ and ‘threats’ which inherently have less political power than those above them. Women, already marginalized within the Colombian political process, make up a majority of this foundation. Therefore, the integrity of the structure is reliant upon women remaining in the lower organizational tiers. To accomplish this, the ‘victims’ are disempowered from making their own decisions, and the ‘threats’ to the party’s political and social order are given limited access to resources such as educational programs and the labor market. To rein in ‘threats,’ the FARC party encourages them to remain home as mothers and caretakers, with some male party members actually engaging in physical violence to ensure women’s compliance.<sup>124</sup> This flattening of the female voice in the FARC party directly limits their access to political reincorporation. As Kesby argues, by reducing the threat politically mobilized female ex-combatants pose to traditionally powerful men, the reincorporation process is exploited to reproduce “the ‘permanence’ of men [as dualistically opposed] to the ‘impermanence’ of women.”<sup>125</sup> The concept is additionally reflected within the FARC, as this same ‘impermanence’ of women allows political reincorporation policies to regard them simply as instruments of peacebuilding, rather than those for whom peace is built.

### POLITICAL REINCORPORATION AND THE EXPANSION OF WOMEN’S ORGANIZATIONS

Understanding how female FARC party members are limited by the party’s current political aims is important. The party itself is the primary interface female ex-combatants have with the peace agreement. However, both the peace agreement and the FARC itself have a contentious history when it comes to gender inclusivity.

Assessing the degree to which the FARC is a feminist organization is difficult, but worth exploring. The FARC did not actively recruit women until nearly two decades after the armed group’s creation, but at the group’s height,

<sup>124</sup> Isabella Flisi, “The Reintegration of Former Combatants in Colombia: Addressing Violent Masculinities in a Fragile Context,” *Gender and Development* 24.3 (2016): 394, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2016.1233667>

<sup>125</sup> Kesby, “Arenas for Control, Terrains of Gender Contestation,” 567.



roughly 20 to 30 percent of its members were women.<sup>126</sup> Including women as combatants within the FARC was a decision based mostly on strategic, rather than ideological, needs. However, ideology did influence the decision to include women. As a left-wing, revolutionary group, the FARC did promote policies of equality, and many of the women who joined felt drawn to the ideology. Again, Sanín and Franco explain “as a result [of the need to recruit large numbers to meet rising demand in combat] their leftist ideology trumps traditional patriarchal structures.”<sup>127</sup> While some women were forcibly recruited into the FARC, and may have experienced personal victimization as a result, others did join voluntarily.<sup>128</sup>

While some women in the FARC were able to win significant legal victories, these were watered down by opposing parties and even the final products were not fully implemented. When peace talks first began in Havana, the only woman present on either side was Victoria Sandino.<sup>129</sup> Eventually, with Sandino’s efforts as well as campaigns by various Colombian women’s peace organizations, a gender sub-committee was created to address the needs of female ex-combatants.<sup>130</sup> As Ruiz-Navarro reported in her work, “the Colombian government acknowledged the importance of resolving gender asymmetries and inequities; recognizing and guaranteeing the rights of women in rural areas; improving political participation of women; and addressing the rights of the victims at the end of the armed conflict.”<sup>131</sup> While the final product is rightfully lauded as the most progressive in the world at the time, it was still one which capitulated to those who feared gender inclusivity, precluding the implementation of many of the additions won by the gender subcommittee.<sup>132</sup> In her article discussing feminist ideas of peace in Colombia, Paarlberg-Kvam remarked:

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In a demonstration of the potential power of gender inclusion

<sup>126</sup> Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín and Francy Carranza Franco, “Organizing Women for Combat: The Experience of the FARC in the Colombian War,” *Journal of Agrarian Change* 17.4 (2017): 770, <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12238>

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 772.

<sup>128</sup> Sruthi Gottipati, “Colombia’s Female FARC Fighters Wage a New War, for Gender Parity,” *New Humanitarian*, September 7, 2017, <http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2017/09/07/colombia-s-female-farc-fighters-wage-new-war-gender-parity>

<sup>129</sup> Ruiz-Navarro, “A Feminist Peace in Colombia?”

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Paarlberg-Kvam, “What’s to Come Is More Complicated,” 195.



in peace accords, the Colombian document was seen as a threat by the Church and various Evangelical groups, whose jeremiads about the documents “gender ideology” succeeded in securing their rejection in a public referendum. Following this brief hurdle, the accords were revised to include slightly softer language (“gender” was binarized into “men and women,” for example), and the Colombian Congress passed the accords in November of 2016.<sup>133</sup>

The ‘threat’ of ‘gender ideology’ in the peace agreement is significant as it shows the power of that narrative to affect actual change by limiting the reincorporation opportunities afforded to female ex-combatants. Groups opposing the gender-inclusive policies, such as those within religious sectors, claimed they “de-stabilized family values, pushed for the transgression of traditional gender roles, and promoted homosexuality.”<sup>134</sup> While a progressive agreement was ultimately put in place, it was only done once revisions were made to appease radical opposition parties, and had to be voted through Congress rather than put to another public referendum.

What this means for female ex-combatants is that they are re-marginalized on top of the already marginalizing process of political reincorporation; thus, the women encounter an environment in which they may have to continuously ally themselves to affect change. While women’s political organizations have long been present in Colombia, Paarlberg-Kvam notes that “with the FARC-EP demobilized, activists of all stripes may feel an increased freedom to speak. The removal of the FARC-EP as a polar referent for all Left political discourse could mean that activists’ agendas enjoy a safer space.”<sup>135</sup> Currently, two of the most well-known women’s political advocacy organizations are *Mujeres Farianas*, the FARC party’s official organization of female ex-combatants, and the *Rosa Blanca Corporation*, an organization comprised mostly of women who were sexually abused either while as members of the FARC or by someone in the armed group. Most of *Rosa Blanca*’s membership is female FARC ex-combatants, but not exclusively so.<sup>136</sup> Importantly, *Rosa Blanca* views the FARC as damagingly patriarchal—one more cog in Colombian sexism—a charge that *Mujeres Farianas* vigorously denies.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>134</sup> Ruiz-Navarro, “A Feminist Peace in Colombia?”

<sup>135</sup> Paarlberg-Kvam, “What’s to Come Is More Complicated,” 211.

<sup>136</sup> Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, “Historia de Lorena Murcia, Presidenta de La Corporación Rosa Blanca,” *El Tiempo*, May 6, 2019, <https://www.eltiempo.com/bogota/historia-de-lorena-murcia-presidenta-de-la-corporacion-rosa-blanca-358020>.

These organizations are useful examples because, while both are vocal advocates on behalf of female ex-combatants, their views on the legitimacy of the three categories ('victim', 'hero', and 'threat') diverge, demonstrating the polarizing nature of the narratives.

One of the women I spoke to in *Mujeres Farianas*, Ava, indicated a strong loyalty to the FARC party, often referring to her fellow combatants as "family."<sup>137</sup> Two others were especially open about how the gender discrimination they face now, during reincorporation, exceeds any they may have faced during the conflict with their "family." Ava, a young mother who joined the FARC at 14 years old, elaborated on the difficulties of reincorporating:

Well, it has been something difficult to adapt to this life, starting even to adapt to having a household, because there [in the armed group] we were not used to it, because there we were equal, your husband could wash your clothing or cook, but now here they [the men] have given up, and that's tough, but we have to stay firm with the peace and to see for how long they allow us, and hoping death will not come.<sup>138</sup>

While Ava acknowledged that male guerrilla fighters sometimes abandoned the FARC's policy of gender equality when it came to post-conflict household chores, she did not acknowledge the potential for sexual violence. When I asked Ava about her involvement with *Mujeres Farianas*, she proudly stated that she was present at the first national meeting in Bogotá.<sup>139</sup> However, when I asked her about the *Rosa Blanca Corporation*, she had a much different perspective, stating, "Uh, don't mention *Rosa Blanca* to me, because *Rosa Blanca* are just some women who deserted...that left the guerrilla and talk so badly and tell things that are just not true [in reference to their allegations of sexual assault by members of the FARC]."<sup>140</sup> When asked why she joined *Mujeres Farianas* over the *Rosa Blanca Corporation*, Ava stated, "The only thing we [*Mujeres Farianas*] want to do is to clarify...like building a network for communication for us to talk and say that that's a lie [the *Rosa Blanca Corporation's* claims], to clarify to the media

<sup>137</sup> Ava, interview by author, Colombia, August 17, 2019.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

our reality. That's what we want."<sup>141</sup> Ava was obviously very loyal to the *Mujeres Farianas* and expressed significant optimism that the group would seek political change on behalf of female FARC ex-combatants.<sup>142</sup>

Ava's testimony is important as it shows how a female ex-combatant can reject the 'victim' label while asserting her political voice through a women's advocacy group. The way she discusses *Rosa Blanca*—women claiming they were sexually assaulted while in the FARC—shows the complexity surrounding the issue of 'victimization' for female ex-guerrillas. This further highlights the vastly divergent experience of reincorporation and thus reinforces that policymakers should not view it as a set of tasks to be accomplished, but instead a lifelong journey for many ex-combatants.

For its part, the *Rosa Blanca Corporation* seemingly embraces the 'victim' narrative, using the victimization of the organization's members as a means for policy change. According to an *El Tiempo* profile of Rosa Blanca's president, Lorena Murcia, the organization was founded by a small group of women who were allegedly "forcibly recruited [to the FARC] as girls, and then raped and forced to abort."<sup>143</sup> In the signed peace agreement, those committing sexual crimes could originally be adjudicated through the JEP and be given an alternative sentence.<sup>144</sup> In response, the *Rosa Blanca Corporation* began lobbying politicians to recognize the sexual victimization of thousands of women, many of them FARC ex-combatants.<sup>145</sup> While President Duque pledged to amend the agreement to include punitive punishments for those convicted of sexual violence, no such change has yet been put into place.<sup>146</sup>

It would be inaccurate to view the use of the 'victim' narrative in this instance as entirely problematic. That would invalidate the policy changes enacted to benefit victimized female ex-combatants, and possibly invalidate their experiences of victimization. Post-conflict reincorporation studies are now engaging with women's strategic use of their 'victimhood' in creating a new space for "self-representation."<sup>147</sup> However, the *Rosa Blanca Corporation's* adherence to

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Mendoza, "Historia de Lorena Murcia, Presidenta de La Corporación Rosa Blanca."

<sup>144</sup> Nacho Doce and Daniel Flynn, "In Colombia, Victims of Sexual Abuse Speak out after Peace Deal," *Reuters*, 2018, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-colombia-conflict-abuse/in-colombia-victims-of-sexual-abuse-speak-out-after-peace-deal-idUKKCN1M01OQ>

<sup>145</sup> Mendoza, "Historia de Lorena Murcia, Presidenta de La Corporación Rosa Blanca."

<sup>146</sup> Doce and Flynn, "In Colombia, Victims of Sexual Abuse Speak out after Peace Deal."

<sup>147</sup> Utas, "Victimcy, Girlfriending, Soldiering," 403.

the singular narrative serves to limit the political agency of many FARC female ex-combatants. *Rosa Blanca*'s refusal to submit evidence supporting their claims to the JEP, combined with the organization's policy of infantilizing its members by referring to them as "girls" and deliberately posing them with children's toys, constructs a reductive notion of 'victimhood'.<sup>148</sup> This allows the very politicians they lobbied against to assume the voice of the victimized women, and reproduce the narrative, so long as it can be justified to 'to serve the victims,' regardless of the resultant constraints imposed upon the women's political agency.

The large political and societal transitions which occur during post-conflict reincorporation phases allow the expansion of the rights and privileges afforded to female ex-combatants. The increased influence of women's veteran advocacy groups during this time supports this claim. For example, in the October 2013 National Summit of Women for Peace, nine women's organizations successfully lobbied both parties of the Havana peace talks to include more women in the negotiations.<sup>149</sup> This creation of political space is one of the possibilities open to women in their political reincorporation process.<sup>150</sup> However, it is important to remember that building and maintaining peace is a significant driver of current Colombian policy. As David Cortright, in his research on changing approaches to the concept of peace, warns, this connection could be "abused as a tool of political propaganda."<sup>151</sup> Particularly as it relates to the 'threat' narrative, Paarlberg-Kvam states that it is important to prevent "reductive notions of peace [which] can invisibilize or even criminalize contentious politics, leading to an increase in structural violence even as a society declares itself to be in peacetime."<sup>152</sup> If the

<sup>148</sup> "JEP Insists A Group Of Women Raped In The FARC Submit Reports," *El Tiempo*, April 2, 2019, <https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/jep-colombia/jep-insiste-a-corporacion-rosa-blanca-grupo-de-mujeres-violadas-en-las-farc-a-presentar-informes-344938>; "Las FARC y la lucha de niñas y niños víctimas de sus delitos sexuales," Testigo Directo, video, 10:03, August 29, 2019, <https://youtu.be/YINaDuz9w98>

<sup>149</sup> Virginia M. Bouvier, "Gender and the Role of Women in Colombia's Peace Process," (report, United Nations Global Study on 15 Years of Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), UN Women, New York, March 4, 2016), 20, <https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Women-Colombia-Peace-Process-EN.pdf>

<sup>150</sup> Elisa Tarnaala, "Legacies of Violence and the Unfinished Past: Women in Post-Demobilization Colombia and Guatemala," *Peacebuilding* 7.1 (2019): 105–109, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2018.1469340>

<sup>151</sup> Michael Howard, *Studies in War and Peace* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 225, quoted in David Cortright, *Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511812675>

<sup>152</sup> Paarlberg-Kvam, "What's to Come Is More Complicated," 196.

politics of female FARC ex-combatants are criminalized, or even marginalized, for their 'contentious' nature, the Colombian state could 'other' this group of women during their own political reincorporation process.

### SENATORS SANDRA RAMÍREZ AND VICTORIA SANDINO SIMANCA HERRERA

The final portion of this article will examine two of the most politically prominent female FARC ex-combatants and analyze how the three narratives of 'victim', 'hero', and 'threat' shape their possibilities and limitations throughout the political reincorporation process. Senators Sandra Ramírez and Victoria Sandino were both elite figures in the FARC while it was an armed group and remained so during the transition to a political party. They use their political platforms to advocate for progressive policy change for both female ex-combatants and civilian women, with Senator Sandino leading the *Mujeres Farianas*.<sup>153</sup> However, in beginning to analyze the political influence of these two women, one must first acknowledge why these women do not have many peers at their level. Returning again to Paarlberg-Kvam's argument that a feminist peace in Colombia is required to overcome patrariarchal constraints, she explains that:

In the postwar period differences between women can reassert themselves, as the need to build coalitions wanes and social movement organizations are divided between those with access to resources and those without. Some organizational stars may rise while others fall; this may limit the power of women activists to address historic inequalities which underlie armed conflict.<sup>154</sup>

Senator Ramírez demonstrates the way in which access to political resources, in her case marriage to the founder of the FARC Manuel Marulanda, can advantage some women over others in formal politics. She served as her husband's radio operator during the conflict for over 20 years until his death in 2008.<sup>155</sup> However, that was not her only role during the war, and most accounts noted her communication and nursing skills, as well as her influence on Marulanda's strategic policy decisions.

<sup>153</sup> Victoria Sandino (@SandinoVictoria), Twitter profile, <https://twitter.com/SandinoVictoria>; Sandra Ramírez (@SandraFARC), Twitter profile, <https://twitter.com/sandrafarc>

<sup>154</sup> Paarlberg-Kvam, "What's to Come Is More Complicated," 213.

<sup>155</sup> Gloria Castrillon, "'Sandra Ramírez,' la viuda del fundador de las Farc," *El Espectador*, July 20, 2018, <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia2020/politica/sandra-ramirez-la-viuda-del-fundador-de-las-farc-articulo-856920>

After his death, she continued his military agenda, but was not chosen to replace him on the Secretariat.<sup>156</sup> Instead, she was chosen to be one of the few FARC women at the peace talks in Havana, a senior member of the UN Monitoring and Verification Mechanism, and ultimately as one of the first ten senators of the FARC party—all of which were rewards hailed as a recognition of her strength, leadership, and heroism.<sup>157</sup> This example of unequal access to political resources demonstrates how the ‘hero’ narrative rewards elites, and how the process becomes cyclical. As these privileged women become more politically elite, their increased access to political resources becomes more legitimate, thus widening the opportunity gap between elite and non-elite FARC female ex-combatants.

This ascent to power within the FARC party is similar for Senator Sandino, who was also selected by the senior male commanders of the armed group to serve in Havana, as well as in the Senate.<sup>158</sup> While it would oversimplify the situation to refer to their appointments as ‘token,’ one must consider why these women were chosen over others. Ultimately, the FARC party needed to convince the voting population of its electability, and the current government administration of its stability and legitimacy as a political party.

The FARC framed Senators Ramírez and Sandino as the ideal to which female ex-combatants should aspire, partly due to the two women having distinguished themselves as combatants in the armed group, but also because they helped diffuse the accusations that the party discriminates against women. In my interview with Senator Ramírez, I asked about the perception that she only has political authority due to her marriage. She responded:

It doesn't bother me at all, it doesn't bother me because I lived with comrade Marulanda for 24 years, with whom I had a beautiful relationship, full of difficulties, but very beautiful because I learned next to him. It was also having my own space to work, to be an empowered woman and ... and now as Senator the reference of being his widow doesn't bother me, it makes me proud it wasn't a life in which I was abused, or for example,

<sup>156</sup> Senator Sandra Ramírez, interview by author, Colombia, August 7, 2019.

<sup>157</sup> Castrillon, “‘Sandra Ramírez,’ la viuda del fundador de las Farc.”

<sup>158</sup> Ceballos, “Colombia: Talking Peace with a FARC Commander”; “Victoria Sandino Simanca Herrera,” *Congreso Visible*, <https://congresovisible.uniandes.edu.co/congresistas/perfil/victoria-sandino-simanca-herrera/13418/>

that now I feel regret? No, at no point. Being next to him in such difficult circumstances of war, I always felt supported, I always felt the learning from him, I was never alone or pressured. So now of course, a part of this, of carrying this with me, in my heart, I know that as a Senator of the Republic I have lots of work ahead, and that I have a huge responsibility with my people, with the common people, with the comrades who were next to us for so many years, too.<sup>159</sup>

The Senator's response juxtaposes her formally subordinate position to the male commander with her current elite politics. Senator Ramírez utilized the influence she gained from her proximity to Marulanda, which demonstrates agency on her part. However, her emphasis on how much she learned from him, and that her otherwise subordinate relationship with him was not abusive, suggests her limited ability to challenge him publicly, or otherwise drastically change their power imbalance. This is the aspect of their relationship that the FARC party promotes as a 'heroic' sacrifice: her political success is a result of her obedience.

By framing the senators as the 'ideal' female ex-combatant, the FARC reproduced the 'hero' narrative of the two senators at the expense of the thousands of female FARC ex-combatants who do not have the same access to political resources. This creates an unreachable standard which ultimately denies non-elite women the legitimacy of being a 'hero,' or a 'good' female ex-combatant during their own political reincorporation.

The relationship to 'victimhood' is equally complex for both of the senators. The notion of women as inherently victimized by conflict is still prevalent both socially and in formal DDR programs, regardless of the role the women served in that conflict.<sup>160</sup> Since many women joined the FARC at very young ages, and were almost always under the command of men, many domestic and international institutions ultimately view female ex-combatants as victims of the conflict due to their limited agency within the armed group. This label of 'victim' is particularly problematic as it often connotes an individual without agency, an image challenged by these elite female FARC ex-combatants.<sup>161</sup>

Since her appointment as senator, Victoria Sandino has been accused of

<sup>159</sup> Senator Ramírez, interview by author.

<sup>160</sup> Avione and Tillman, "Demobilized Women in Colombia: Embodiment, Performativity, and Social Reconciliation," 216.

<sup>161</sup> Utas, "Victimcy, Girlfriending, Soldiering," 406.



sexual abuse crimes against other female combatants in the FARC, including ordering their rapes, forcing abortions, and recruiting children.<sup>162</sup> These accusations were made by Representative Margarita Restrepo, a member of the current president's political party, a party opposing the FARC.<sup>163</sup> There have been requests for the JEP to investigate the allegations against Senator Sandino and her alleged male peers in Congress, but as of this writing, no investigation has taken place.<sup>164</sup> Thus, Senator Sandino serves as evidence that women may not only be victims of the conflict in which they participate. Even if she did not commit the alleged crimes, the fact that the allegations are being made by other members of the Colombian Congress is significant, as it demonstrates the power of the institutions to create a political space for female FARC ex-combatants, while also placing restrictions on women in that space.

Finally, one must consider the 'threat' narrative, and how it determines the relationship between the senators and other political elites and institutions in Colombia. In peacebuilding, there is an incentive to both enact progressive policies and return to a traditional sense of social order—generally an order under which the current political elites gained power.<sup>165</sup> As discussed previously, the idea of 'revolutionary' women within the FARC is one that has been minimized as it transitioned from an armed group to a political party. However, it is not only the FARC party that sees a threat in the gender-defying politics of female FARC ex-combatants.

The political reincorporation process is significantly more challenging for female ex-combatants than it is for their male peers. Remarking on this difference in the reintegration of female combatants in various African conflicts, Elise Barth writes:

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Women's involvement as combatants in revolutionary movements

<sup>162</sup> Interview: Restrepo; "Las FARC y la lucha de niñas y niños víctimas de sus delitos sexuales," 6:16 - 6:20.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Yuddy (@ykaritovar), "#ColombiaProvida ● Digamos NO al aborto ● Rechacemos presencia de Victoria Sandino en el Congreso ● Victoria Sandino proxeneta de las farc NO puede ser senadora ● La sanguinaria Victoria Sandino obligaba a niñas de @CorpoRosaBlanca abortar bajo amenaza de fusilamiento ● Asco." *Twitter*, October 25, 2019, 8:05 a.m., <https://twitter.com/ykaritovar/status/1187747127121924100?s=21>; "La JEP negó salida del país a la senadora de las Farc, Victoria Sandino," *Semana*, October 11, 2019, <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/por-que-la-jep-le-nego-salida-del-pais-a-senadora-de-las-farc-victoria-sandino/639760>

<sup>165</sup> Tarnaala, "Legacies of Violence and the Unfinished Past," 103, 116.



represents a break with earlier socialization represented by the values and way of life that their family has taught them. This can be contrasted with the role of males, which continue along the same lines as before. Men's gender roles are reinforced by activities associated with being soldiers.<sup>166</sup>

Additionally, Wenche Hauge discusses the effects of group identity within DDR programs, stating that "women may actually have something to lose from a demobilisation process."<sup>167</sup> Women of the FARC are reacting to this potential loss in various ways, including expanding the activism of women's combatant advocacy groups. As explained in her work analyzing the future of a feminist peace in Colombia, Paarlberg-Kvam notes that the *Mujeres Farianas*, led by Senator Sandino and with frequent input by Senator Ramírez, "have levied cogent feminist critiques of the neoliberal model which are framed in explicitly anti-capitalist terms... [while also petitioning for] acceptance into the civilian women's movement."<sup>168</sup> These anti-capitalist challenges remind Colombian political institutions of the 'threatening' communist ideology of the FARC. Further, its alignment with civilian feminist movements also signals that these women will not be bound by the singular identity of being a female FARC ex-combatant. Instead, by joining other women in the fight for greater access to land ownership, stronger security in rural and border regions, and increased access to sexual rights for women, the *Mujeres Farianas* are exposing the failure of the state to solve those problems.<sup>169</sup> Each of these issues was directly addressed in the peace agreement; therefore, by highlighting the state's inadequate implementation of the agreement, these female ex-combatants threaten the Colombian state's monopoly over processes of political reincorporation.

By lending their voices to these organizations, women are giving them credibility. Thus, the double edge of the 'hero' narrative becomes evident. Both Senators Ramírez and Sandino effectively leverage the authority that the FARC party and the Colombian government have given them to promote issues affecting female ex-combatants. However, by placing Senators Ramírez and Sandino in

<sup>166</sup> Elise F. Barth, "Peace as Disappointment: The Reintegration of Female Soldiers in Post-Conflict Societies—A Comparative Study from Africa," (report, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRIO International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, Norway, August 2002), 15, <https://www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=7293>

<sup>167</sup> Hauge, "Group Identity—a Neglected and Political Participation in Guatemala," 308.

<sup>168</sup> Paarlberg-Kvam, "What's to Come Is More Complicated," 211-212.

<sup>169</sup> *Mujeres Farianas*, "Woman Fariana."

positions of power due to their ‘courage’ and ‘leadership,’ these institutions cannot invalidate their voices for fear of undermining their own authority and legitimacy. This recognition of authority, even if reluctant, permits political participation for elite female ex-combatants.

## CONCLUSION

This article first explained the current political economy in Colombia, and specifically how the peace negotiations, political and social violence, transitional justice system, and uncertainty over the future of the peace agreement all create delegitimization within the political system. This destabilization is shaping the reincorporation process of FARC ex-combatants. One of the ways in which it is perpetuated is through the creation and reproduction of narratives defining the political identities of female ex-guerrillas. By labeling these women as either ‘victims,’ ‘threats,’ or ‘heroes,’ those with an interest in marginalizing female FARC ex-combatants from Colombian politics are able to do so.

Overall, the participation in elite politics is limited for reincorporating female ex-combatants of the FARC. However, the three political narratives of ‘victim,’ ‘threat,’ and ‘hero,’ influence the spectrum of constraints and possibilities within that participation. Since its transition from an armed group in early 2017, the FARC has consistently performed poorly in elections, incentivizing the party to adapt its platform to one that can win the popular vote. In turn, this means appointing leaders who can turn ‘revolutionary’ ideas into mainstream politics. As the political elites and institutions in Colombia prioritize peacemaking and peacekeeping, their desire to return to a ‘traditional’ social order only increases. A patriarchal society is safe and familiar to many of the formal political structures in Colombia. Political elites exploit this familiarity in the name of ‘peacebuilding,’ instead retaining power throughout this significant period of transformation.

As female FARC ex-combatants seek political redress through either individual activism or membership in these influential veterans’ organizations, they are challenging the narrative that they are solely ‘victims’ who can be easily disregarded. Additionally, since the leaders of some of these organizations are the hand-picked, ‘exemplary’ female ex-combatants, some women create new political space by leveraging the use of the ‘hero’ narrative in order to gain legitimacy. This engagement with the various narratives allows female FARC ex-combatants to insert their voices throughout the political reincorporation process.

However, this approach is constrained by the third narrative: ‘threat.’ As these women continue to push the frontiers of their formal political rights and privileges, they are also highlighting the fragile boundaries of state authority in building and maintaining peace. This is evident in the relationship between Senators Sandra Ramírez and Victoria Sandino, and the three narratives. As the highest ranking female members of the FARC party, the two senators have expanded the possibilities of political engagement for female ex-combatants by remaining revolutionary in the Senate. However, their atypical ascents to power exemplify the unequal distribution of formal political privileges to female ex-combatants. Ultimately, the FARC women are not solely navigating elite political challenges, nor is political reincorporation only relegated to formal politics.

The highly egalitarian peace agreement has not prevented women from being ‘othered’ during processes of reincorporation. Because women are typically less socially and politically empowered than men, political elites can take advantage of their vulnerability to disenfranchise a major portion of the ex-combatant population. As Lalli Metsola explains, “The evils that the ex-combatants are associated with—migration, crime, alcoholism, loosening of family ties, indiscipline, HIV/AIDS—have a prominent place in upper and middle class discourse, threatening their lifestyle and the orderly course of development as modernisation.”<sup>170</sup> Thus, elected elites and policymakers often employ ex-combatants in ways that politically disempower them under the justification of ‘national security’ and ‘peacebuilding.’<sup>171</sup> Female ex-combatants are most easily oppressed, especially in patriarchal societies such as Colombia’s, due to societal acceptance of their repression. As a result, female ex-combatants disrupt social order and traditional forms of ‘femininity’ when they engage in violence. In Colombia, many communities are grateful to have these women ‘put back in their place’ by state institutions.

By analyzing female FARC ex-combatant narratives, it is possible to determine their experiences of conflict and its aftermath, as well as the ramifications on the politics of reincorporation. The stories these women tell, and those that are told about them, suggest that reincorporation is much more than a phase, as state agencies in Colombia currently view it. Rather, it is a protracted process, especially for female ex-combatants who face marginalization from multiple angles.

<sup>170</sup> Metsola, “‘Reintegration’ of Ex-Combatants and Former Fighters,” 1125.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 1124-1126.

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# CHINA'S NEOCOLONIALISM IN THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF A.I. SURVEILLANCE<sup>1</sup>

SHARMA, ISHAN<sup>2</sup>

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*The result of neocolonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world.*

Kwame Nkrumah

*Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*<sup>3</sup>

*The Enlightenment started with essentially philosophical insights spread by a new technology. Our period is moving in the opposite direction. It has generated a potentially dominating technology in search of a guiding philosophy.*

Henry A. Kissinger<sup>4</sup>

*I think we don't even quite understand the full scale of the problem that we are dealing with when it comes to Chinese surveillance technology when it is exported.*

Samantha Hoffman (2019)

*Australian Strategic Policy Institute*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, "How the Enlightenment Ends," *The Atlantic*, June 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/06/henry-kissinger-ai-could-mean-the-end-of-human-history/559124/>

<sup>5</sup> Arjun Kharpal, "China's Surveillance Tech is Spreading Globally, Raising Concerns About Beijing's Influence," *CNBC*, October 8, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/10/08/china-is-exporting-surveillance-tech-like-facial-recognition-globally.html>

## INTRODUCTION

In the Fourth Industrial Revolution of data, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things, exploitation will manifest itself in new ways. While the United States dominates the artificial intelligence marketplace, China occupies a close second place. This analysis focuses on China's strategic decision to specialize in artificially intelligent surveillance systems (AISS) for geopolitical aims. This paper reviews characteristics of 19th century British and French colonial enterprises, identifying shared practices of exploitation and providing a framework for analyzing modern day examples in our rapidly developing technological environment.

China's State Council has declared that it will become the world leader in artificial intelligence by 2030.<sup>1</sup> Aside from its volume of data, China actually lags far behind the United States in the artificial intelligence race.<sup>2</sup> However, China is optimistic that its massive data repositories will usher in technological primacy. China's access to data has allowed it to become a leader in exporting AISS, a technology that can quantify and dismantle budding political opposition, closely monitor extremism, and provide critical information infrastructure. In short, AISS meets a critical security and stability demand of almost all countries today. In the past year alone, the reported number of countries implementing China's AISS increased from eighteen to sixty-three.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, with the world awestruck by the rapid spread of COVID-19, demand for AISS is likely to only increase as East Asian countries demonstrate the technology's application for the current and future outbreaks.<sup>4</sup>

While China does export AISS to developed, liberal democracies, most of its exports are delivered to developing countries. In turn, China uses its network of importing countries for strategic purposes. A "foreign policy

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Ding, "Deciphering China's AI Dream: The Context, Components, Capabilities, and Consequences of China's Strategy to Lead the World in AI" (report, Future of Humanity Institute, Oxford University, March 2018), 10, [https://www.fhi.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/Deciphering\\_Chinas\\_AI-Dream.pdf](https://www.fhi.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/Deciphering_Chinas_AI-Dream.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 29

<sup>3</sup> Steven Feldstein, "The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance," (working paper, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC, September 17, 2019), 1, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/09/17/global-expansion-of-ai-surveillance-pub-79847>

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas D. Wright, "Coronavirus and the Future of Surveillance: Democracies Must Offer an Alternative to Authoritarian Solutions," *Foreign Affairs*, April 6, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2020-04-06/coronavirus-and-future-surveillance>

aimed at cyberspace dominance,” China’s export-specialization in AISS grants unparalleled access to data resources and markets, while also shaping favorable international norms.<sup>5</sup> China further exploits this asymmetric exchange by convincing importing countries that their best interests are dutifully considered by its surveillance systems. Such practices can and should be considered part of a new form of exploitation.

The following literature review stresses the connection between literature on China’s historical relationship to the neocolonialist tradition, the importance of data in modern artificially intelligent systems, and China’s current AISS exportation practices. While the literature on China’s neocolonialism primarily focuses on its historical engagement with Africa, this section will also indicate how such neocolonialist practices have been updated to conform to international normative constraints.

The third section of the paper will build the theoretical foundation of the neocolonialist claim. The paper qualifies this framework in China’s case, noting that its neocolonialist engagements remain largely constrained by international norms of sovereignty. Nevertheless, this paper contends that the presence of some mutual benefits in the interaction between China and its import-empire should not acquit China of the neocolonialist label. Next, it will investigate the present linkages drawn between China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and accounts of 19th century British and French colonialism. From these associations, this section will distill four key elements of colonialism: extraction of resources, pursuit of unsaturated markets, desire for global prestige, and altruistic rhetoric. Finally, these characteristics will be mapped onto China’s present modern-day exportation of AISS.

The paper will conclude by calling for a more comprehensive conception of neocolonialism in the digital world. It will also recommend the use of the United States as a comparative case to contextualize normative forms of exploitation in the geopolitical, artificial intelligence marketplace.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

To date, literature on the topic of China and AISS has been sparse, and

<sup>5</sup> Arthur E. Gwagwa, “How China’s Artificial Intelligence is Shaping Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Global Order,” *Medium*, April 2, 2019, <https://medium.com/@arthurgwagwa/how-chinas-artificial-intelligence-is-shaping-geopolitical-and-geoeconomic-global-order-fb7fa341bd3c>



most falls into one of two categories. On the one hand, China's actions are framed as an effort to exert global political influence and establish regional security, since the exportation of AISS encourages countries to fall in line with China's own authoritarian tendencies and preferred international norms. On the other hand, China's actions are perceived as driven by market-based incentives to export AISS, given the ongoing battle with the United States for global market hegemony. Existing literature thus fails to adequately draw a nexus linking the political and economic incentives behind China's AISS exportation. As a result, neocolonialist literature largely neglects to identify modes of Chinese exploitation beyond foreign direct and trade investments in Africa. When viewed from the perspective of the international political economy, China's AISS exportation emerges as a profoundly global, neocolonialist narrative.

### *Chinese Neocolonialism*

Neocolonialist literature surrounding China almost entirely focuses on its development in Africa, and is generally divided into two schools—Sino-pessimism and Sino-optimism. Sino-pessimists, such as Lee, contend that China's investments in Africa largely exploit natural resources and undermine democracy.<sup>6</sup> They point to literature indicating that the degree of Chinese foreign direct investment in services is correlated with recipient countries' natural resources.<sup>7</sup> Zhao, for example, notes that "the Chinese government worked with any government that could help secure its investments in mining and drilling rights, including those accused of rampant corruption or severe human rights violations."<sup>8</sup>

Sino-optimists, in contrast, view Chinese engagement in Africa as welcome.<sup>9</sup> In fact, calling Chinese investments in Africa 'neocolonialist' may be viewed as quite ironic, since China has deliberately sought to distinguish itself

<sup>6</sup> Margaret C. Lee, "The 21st Century Scramble for Africa," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 24.3 (2006): 303-330, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589000600976570>; Chibuzo N. Nwoke, "The Scramble for Africa: a Strategic Policy Framework," *Nigerian Journal of International Affairs* 33. 2 (2007): 31-55.

<sup>7</sup> Chen Wenjie, David Dollar, and Tang Heiwai, "Why is China Investing in Africa? Evidence from the Firm Level," *The World Bank Economic Review*, 32.3 (2018): 610, 612, 628, <https://doi.org/10.1093/wber/lhw049>

<sup>8</sup> Zhao Suisheng, "A Neo-Colonialist Predator or Development Partner? China's Engagement and Rebalance in Africa," *Journal of Contemporary China* 23.90 (2014): 1039, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2014.898893>

<sup>9</sup> Li Anshan, "China and Africa: Policy and Challenges," *China Security* 3.3 (2007): 68-94, <http://cpfd.cnki.com.cn/Article/CPFDTOTAL-BDFZ201305003010.htm>

from the West as a non-interventionist deal-maker.<sup>10</sup> As Lim argues, unlike the history of Western investments, China's devotion to infrastructure projects fills an important development gap in Africa.<sup>11</sup> It also perpetuates the narrative that China represents a trustworthy actor with "no history of enslavement, colonization, financing coups against unfriendly African regimes or deploying military forces in support of its foreign policies."<sup>12</sup> Instead, China's infrastructure investments are exchanged for resources, largely mirroring its own positive, oil-exchange experiences with Japan in the 1970s.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, China's investments are especially attractive to African nations, according to some scholars, because the deals, unlike those with the West, are claimed to come without strings attached.<sup>14</sup> China's recent decisions to establish special economic zones in several African countries and move growth-stimulating manufacturing facilities to sub-Saharan Africa are allegedly suggestive of long-term regional interests, as opposed to quick-fix, short-term projects evident in the post-colonial period.<sup>15</sup>

However, despite China's propagandistic non-interventionism principle—its purported willingness to conduct business without involving itself in the internal affairs of countries—reality tells a different story. In times of crisis, when investments are threatened, China has shown that it will interfere. For example, China provided weapons to Sudan for use against Darfur rebels, deployed the first Chinese battalion in Africa in South Sudan, and most recently acquired a military base in Djibouti.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, China's historical practices have

<sup>10</sup> Zhao, "A Neo-Colonialist Predator or Development Partner?," 1036-37; Alvin C-H. Lim, "Africa and China's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road," *Asia-Pacific Journal* 13.11.3 (2015): 5-6, <https://apjpf.org/-Alvin-Cheng-Hin-Lim/4296/article.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Lim, "Africa and China's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road," 6.

<sup>12</sup> Zhao, "A Neo-Colonialist Predator or Development Partner?," 1036.

<sup>13</sup> Lim, "Africa and China's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road," 3.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Aidoo and Steven Hess, "Non-Interference 2.0: China's Evolving Foreign Policy towards a Changing Africa," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 44.1 (2015): 108, 118, <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810261504400105>

<sup>15</sup> Zhao, "A Neo-Colonialist Predator or Development Partner?," 1036-37; Lim, "Africa and China's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road," 3; Timothy S. Rich and Sterling Recker, "Understanding Sino-African Relations: Neocolonialism or a New Era?" *Journal of International and Area Studies* 20.1 (2013): 62, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43111515>

<sup>16</sup> Osman Antiwi-Boateng, "New World Order Neo-Colonialism: A Contextual Comparison of Contemporary China and European Colonization in Africa," *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies* 10.2 (2017): 186, <https://www.jpanafrican.org/docs/vol10no2/10.2-13-Antwi-Boateng.pdf>; Karen Allen, "What China Hopes to Achieve with First Peacekeeping Mission," *BBC News*, December 2, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34976580>

revealed a similar pattern of intervention. China has intervened by providing military equipment and training to the FNLA and UNITA liberation movements in Angola and southern Africa and to Mozambique's government during its civil war in 1977.<sup>17</sup> The paradox of conflicting, recent accounts of China's (non) interventionism are suggestive of a complex, but disingenuous commitment to the development of its host countries.

### *Artificially Intelligent Surveillance Systems*

As Wright argues, artificial intelligence involves the “the analysis of data to model some aspect of the world, where inferences from these models are then used to predict and anticipate possible future events”—essentially, systems that “learn from data in order to respond intelligently to new data.”<sup>18</sup> Known as the “deep learning revolution,” two 2012 AI breakthroughs in particular have enabled the rapid capacity for computers to learn independently and effectively.<sup>19</sup> First, using the Imagenet data set, a repository of over 1.2 million images, neural networks were able to classify images with a significantly lower error rate compared to previous technology.<sup>20</sup> Second, neural network algorithms built off a large set of pixels and game scores data sets from Atari computer games were able to successfully operate as well as professional human gamers.<sup>21</sup> These advances eventually culminated in the world-famous victory of AlphaGo over a world-class human Go player, a feat only possible after AlphaGo studied some 100 million game types.<sup>22</sup> Data, then, is

<sup>17</sup> Indira Campos and Alex Vines, “Angola and China: A Pragmatic Partnership” (paper, Center for Strategic and International Studies Conference on “Prospects for Improving U.S.-China-Africa Cooperation,” Washington DC, December 5, 2007, published March 2008), 2, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/angola-and-china-pragmatic-partnership>; Paula C. Roque, “China in Mozambique: A Cautious Approach Country Case Study,” (report, SAIIA Occasional Paper 23, South African Institute of International Affairs, Braamfontein, South Africa, January 2009), 2, [https://media.africaportal.org/documents/SAIIA\\_Occasional\\_Paper\\_no\\_23.pdf](https://media.africaportal.org/documents/SAIIA_Occasional_Paper_no_23.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Nicholas D. Wright, “The Technologies: What Specifically is New?,” in Shazeda Ahmed et al., “Artificial Intelligence, China, Russia, and the Global Order: Technological, Political, Global, and Creative Perspectives,” ed. Nicholas D. Wright (white paper, Strategic Multilayer Assessment Periodic Publication, U.S. Department of Defense, Washington DC, December 2018), 2, [https://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/AI-China-Russia-Global-WP\\_FINAL2\\_fromMariah8mar2019\\_ndw11mar2019.pdf](https://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/AI-China-Russia-Global-WP_FINAL2_fromMariah8mar2019_ndw11mar2019.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Jay Stanley, “The Dawn of Robot Surveillance: AI, Video Analytics, and Privacy,” (report, American Civil Liberties Union, New York, June 17, 2019), 6-8, [https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field\\_document/061819-robot\\_surveillance.pdf](https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/061819-robot_surveillance.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Wright, “The Technologies,” 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

crucial to the ability of such systems to learn and operate.

AISS is the result of a technological intersection between the rapid global deployment of surveillance cameras and developments in AI data analytics.<sup>23</sup> The former provides an endless supply of progressively powerful, ultra-high-resolution footage, whereas the latter automatically scans troves of such data to learn correct and incorrect recognition of objects and people.<sup>24</sup> Surveillance cameras are therefore an integral part of AISS. China, for example, has increased the number of domestic surveillance cameras by 70% in the past three years alone. Furthermore, market analytics predict that by the end of 2021, over 1 billion cameras will be in use worldwide.<sup>25</sup> However, an average of only 2% of footage collected by surveillance cameras is observed, and even less is analyzed.<sup>26</sup>

AI data analytics thus represents a paradigm shift, since surveillance cameras are increasingly becoming augmented with the algorithmic ability to intelligently detect loiterers, trespassers, missing objects, and demographic features.<sup>27</sup> While “complex background clutters, varying illumination conditions, uncontrollable camera settings, severe occlusions and large pose variation,”<sup>28</sup> remain complications for AI data analytics, it still provides a revolutionary breakthrough in processing “oceans of data,” compared to manual analysis of digital content.<sup>29</sup> Presently, the universe of data doubles every two years—an “information Big Bang.”<sup>30</sup> Data analytics algorithms have subsequently been enabled with the capacity to draw linkages from real-time surveillance footage to individual identities. As more data continues to be collected, a “wealth of personal data,” such as online searches and purchases, as well as social media

<sup>23</sup> Michael Kwet, “The Rise of Smart Camera Networks, and Why We Should Ban Them,” *The Intercept*, January 26, 2020, <https://theintercept.com/2020/01/27/surveillance-cctv-smart-camera-networks/>

<sup>24</sup> Stanley, “The Dawn of Robot Surveillance,” 3, 6-8.

<sup>25</sup> Kwet, “The Rise of Smart Camera Networks.”

<sup>26</sup> David Tang et al., “Seeing What Matters: A New Paradigm for Public Safety Powered by Responsible AI,” (report, Accenture Strategy and Western Digital Corporation, 2018), 4. [https://www.accenture.com/\\_acnmedia/pdf-94/accenture-value-data-seeing-what-matters.pdf](https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/pdf-94/accenture-value-data-seeing-what-matters.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Stanley, “The Dawn of Robot Surveillance,” 5-9.

<sup>28</sup> Xu Jing et al., “Attention-Aware Compositional Network for Person Re-Identification,” (paper, 2018 IEEE/CVF Conference on Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition, Salt Lake City, UT, June 18-22, 2018), 2119. <https://doi.org/10.1109/CVPR.2018.00226>

<sup>29</sup> Stanley, “The Dawn of Robot Surveillance,” 7-9.

<sup>30</sup> Cameron F. Kerry, “Protecting Privacy in an AI-Driven World,” *Brookings Institution*, February 10, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/protecting-privacy-in-an-ai-driven-world/>

communications, could be brought into the AI data analytics fold.<sup>31</sup> While in 2018, only 5% of cameras were equipped with data analytics capabilities, by 2025, over 70% of surveillance cameras worldwide are projected to possess the capacity to interpret behavior in real-time.<sup>32</sup>

Though such huge data reservoirs are necessary for algorithmic development, a fundamental bottleneck of AISS is the availability of *labeled* training data. Such “ground truth” data trains the deep learning neural network to distinguish between and recognize relevant objects accurately.<sup>33</sup> For example, training an AISS system to differentiate between a child’s face and an adult’s face requires a dataset of images or videos for each category and labeled as such (e.g. Child Faces vs. Adult Faces). The labeling of datasets has proven to be “laborious and expensive,” which is why ground truth data is a “vital currency in the computer vision field.”<sup>34</sup> However, AISS ground truth data—the property records, birthdates, and medical records of citizens—is usually in the hands of governments, not companies designing the technology.<sup>35</sup> International access to governments’ citizen ground truth data thus proves especially lucrative for exporting AISS around the world.

At present, over 75 countries are known to be utilizing AISS in one of three forms: smart cities, facial recognition systems, and smart policing. Smart cities exist in 56 countries, and have been described by the World Bank as technological urban centers responding to information collected from “thousands of interconnected devices.”<sup>36</sup> While the term has been used ambiguously to define a range of infrastructure, smart cities are becoming “spaces of systematic data collection...[that] have been increasingly surveilled.”<sup>37</sup> In the Australian city of Darwin, a network of “smart” devices—from street lights to environmental sensors and video cameras—consistently collect information on the residents.<sup>38</sup> Sadowski

<sup>31</sup> Stanley, “The Dawn of Robot Surveillance,” 19–21.

<sup>32</sup> Tang et al., “Seeing What Matters,” 10.

<sup>33</sup> Wright, “The Technologies,” 5.

<sup>34</sup> Stanley, “The Dawn of Robot Surveillance,” 8.

<sup>35</sup> Wright, “The Technologies,” 5.

<sup>36</sup> Feldstein, “The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance,” 1; Victor Mulas, Eva Clemente, and Arturo Muenste-Kunigami, “Smart Cities,” *World Bank*, January 8, 2015, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/digitaldevelopment/brief/smart-cities>

<sup>37</sup> “Smart Cities: Utopian Vision, Dystopian Reality,” (report, Privacy International, October 31, 2017), 19, <http://www.privacyinternational.org/report/638/smart-cities-utopian-vision-dystopian-reality>

<sup>38</sup> Jathan Sadowski, Anna Carlson, and Natalie Osborne, “Darwin’s ‘Smart City’ Project is About Surveillance and Control,” *The Conversation*, February 4, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/darwins-smart-city-project-is-about-surveillance-and-control-127118>

et. al explain that the “vision” of smart cities—a world of convenience, information efficiencies, and security—ignores the deep nexus to “older practices of colonial control,” like the targeting of minority communities.<sup>39</sup> They describe citizens of such cities as “‘captured,’ both by surveillance that collects data and by authorities who control territory.”<sup>40</sup>

Facial recognition systems which combine still-image datasets of human faces with real-time footage of citizens to find a biometric match are used in at least sixty-four countries, and are already “actively incorporating facial recognition systems in their AI surveillance programs.”<sup>41</sup> The infrastructure of exports provided by China involves the deployment of thousands of high-definition cameras across a city.<sup>42</sup> For example, these are used in Malaysia by security officials equipped with facial recognition body cameras, and in Kenya to process the inflow of data at a centralized police facility.<sup>43</sup>

Smart policing relies on training artificial intelligence systems with large quantities of data including information on “geographic location, historic arrest levels, types of committed crimes, biometric data, [and] social media feeds” to respond to and even predict criminal activity.<sup>44</sup> In short, it is the application of data for powerful, systematic enforcement. In the United States, 60 police departments use PredPol, an artificially intelligent system trained on continuously updated crime data sets, including the times and locations of past crimes, to predict in which neighborhoods serious crimes are anticipated within a given time frame.<sup>45</sup> Given the racial and socioeconomic bias inherent in historical incarceration datasets, such algorithms could be used to target minority communities. Indeed, as Rieland argues, a tool like PredPol could enable presumptive judgements on the likelihood of crime in a given neighborhood, creating a reason for more surveillance and police monitoring.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Feldstein, “The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance,” 23.

<sup>42</sup> “Video Surveillance as the Foundation of ‘Safe City’ in Kenya,” *Huawei*, <https://www.huawei.com/en/industry-insights/technology/digital-transformation/video/video-surveillance-as-the-foundation-of-safe-city-in-kenya>

<sup>43</sup> Feldstein, “The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance,” 23.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Randy Rieland, “Artificial Intelligence Is Now Used to Predict Crime. But Is It Biased?” *Smithsonian Magazine*, March 5, 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/artificial-intelligence-is-now-used-predict-crime-is-it-biased-180968337/>

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



In China, enforcement is even more intensive. The Integrated Joint Operations Platform operates at the data intersection of “CCTV cameras, facial recognition devices, and Wi-Fi sniffers” (devices that eavesdrop on activities or communications within wireless networks).<sup>47</sup> IJOP procures additional data from license plates and identification cards scanned at checkpoints, as well as health, banking, and legal records.<sup>48</sup> As a result, China has been able to systematically target Muslim Uighur populations, who were tracked, arrested, and placed within internment camps for purported “re-education.”<sup>49</sup>

Empowered by ground-truth data, facial recognition AISS can categorically alter the power of governments. It could be applied to stay abreast of popular discontent, control mass protests with heat maps, delegitimize electoral opponents with automated, highly personalized disinformation campaigns, and adopt social credit registration systems to reward state support. For the authoritarian, it provides a critical update. When AISS allows for dissent to be quantified, budding uprisings dismantled, and political opposition precluded, there is no longer a costly reliance on the unstable use of military force for repression. For example, civilians, aware that Wi-Fi sniffers may be tracking the amount of time spent on a certain website, in a chat group, or at a location, are likely to avoid any trouble altogether. For context, Schneier writes that, “the exceptionally paranoid East German government had 102,000 Stasi surveilling a population of 17 million: that’s one spy for every 166 citizens.”<sup>50</sup> But through AI surveillance, the activities of billions of people may be monitored through only a few thousand individuals.<sup>51</sup>

For liberal democracies, AISS also meets the post-9/11 world demands for security. Bush-era policies like Stellarwind have normalized the digital use of surveillance, and with recent terrorist attacks, liberal democracies like France, Germany, and Spain have bought into China’s surveillance solutions. In a broader sense, new AI technology offers an elegant alternative to the normative, costly, and labor-intensive forms of surveillance, providing stability and security for almost all regime types.

<sup>47</sup> Feldstein, “The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance,” 20.

<sup>48</sup> Feldstein, “The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance,” 25.

<sup>49</sup> “Data Leak Reveals How China ‘Brainwashes’ Uighurs in Prison Camps,” *BBC News*, November 24, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-50511063>

<sup>50</sup> Bruce Schneier, *Data and Goliath: The Hidden Battles to Collect Your Data and Control Your World*, United States: W.W. Norton, 2015, 20.

<sup>51</sup> Greg Allen and Taniel Chan, “Artificial Intelligence and National Security” (report, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, Cambridge, MA, July 2017), 93, <https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/AI%20NatSec%20-%20final.pdf>

The COVID-19 global pandemic represents the latest iteration of AISS applicability. In China, surveillance cameras are pointed at the apartment doors of those under quarantine, while other surveillance devices are equipped to recognize high-body temperatures in individuals.<sup>52</sup> Recently, the Ministry of Public Security implemented a surveillance tool to account for a mask-wearing public with a facial recognition success rate of 95%.<sup>53</sup> The deployment of numerous technologies to track the spread of the virus could very well become a “catalyst” for normalizing even stricter mass surveillance measures in China and beyond, as a set of countries are already applying technology to enhance COVID-19 containment.<sup>54</sup>

## STATUS QUO

### *China's Relative (Dis)advantage*

AI development is expected to add USD 15.7 trillion to global GDP by 2030, a 14% increase.<sup>55</sup> Largely, though, the competition over AI is between the United States and China. AI will critically shape both countries’ “interaction in the political, economic, and security arenas,” defining the relative “balance of power between them.”<sup>56</sup> With a forecasted 26% boost to its GDP from AI developments, China has been clear about its strategy to prioritize the AI industry.<sup>57</sup> China’s 2017 Artificial Intelligence Development Plan stipulates that “AI has become a new focus of international competition.”<sup>58</sup> Further, by 2025,

<sup>52</sup> Arjun Kharpal, “Use of Surveillance to Fight Coronavirus Raises Concerns About Government Power After Pandemic Ends,” *CNBC*, March 26, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/27/coronavirus-surveillance-used-by-governments-to-fight-pandemic-privacy-concerns.html>; “AI and Control of COVID-19 Coronavirus,” *Council of Europe*, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/artificial-intelligence/ai-and-control-of-covid-19-coronavirus>

<sup>53</sup> Martin Pollard, “Even Mask-Wearers Can Be ID’d, China Facial Recognition Firm Says,” *Reuters*, March 9, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-facial-recognition/even-mask-wearers-can-be-idd-china-facial-recognition-firm-says-idUSKBN20W0WL>

<sup>54</sup> Arjun Kharpal, “Coronavirus Could Be a ‘Catalyst’ for China to Boost Its Mass Surveillance Machine, Experts Say,” *CNBC*, February 4, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/02/25/coronavirus-china-to-boost-mass-surveillance-machine-experts-say.html>

<sup>55</sup> Jeffrey Ding, “Deciphering China’s AI Dream,” 33.

<sup>56</sup> Wang You and Chen Dingding, “Rising Sino-US Competition in Artificial Intelligence,” *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 4.2 (2018): 242. <https://doi.org/10.1142/S2377740018500148>

<sup>57</sup> Ding, “Deciphering China’s AI Dream,” 32.

<sup>58</sup> Graham Webster et al., trans., “China’s ‘New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development



China expects to reach “world-leading” status with gross output exceeding USD 60.3 billion, and by 2030 to become the “world’s primary AI innovation center” at gross output exceeding USD 1.5 trillion.<sup>59</sup>

However, China must hurdle a large, technological deficit to overcome the United States. Wang and Chen write that “U.S. superiority over China in talent reserve, innovation systems, and related hardware development is first and foremost manifested in its leading position in developing computer algorithms.”<sup>60</sup> For example, open source platforms like TensorFlow and Caffe, which enable the more complex algorithmic abilities of AI, are American academic and company creations. Similarly, since China’s top ten chip-making companies are specialized in less flexible ASIC chips and have not expanded into the production of graphics processing units, China depends on international companies for GPUs, the predominant computer chip option for training AI algorithms.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, China’s AI talent pool in 2018 was only one-fifth that of the United States, according to the China Institute for Science and Technology Policy at Tsinghua University.<sup>62</sup>

But China is aggressively playing catch up. China’s State Council has released a plan to integrate AI as an academic discipline, while researchers are frequently replicating and implementing advances in the field.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, China has increased its output of research to 15,199 AI papers published in 2017 compared to the United States’ 10,287.<sup>64</sup> While the U.S. continues to enjoy an advantage in the field-weighted citation impact (FWCI) of its AI papers, since 1998, the United States’ FWCI has only increased by 24%, while China’s FWCI has increased by 154%.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the U.S. share of the top 10% of most-cited AI papers has steadily declined from 49% in 1982 to 29% in 2018, whereas China’s share has

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Plan’ (2017),” *New America*, August 1, 2017, <https://www.newamerica.org/cybersecurity-initiative/digichina/blog/full-translation-chinas-new-generation-artificial-intelligence-development-plan-2017/>

<sup>59</sup> Ding, “Deciphering China’s AI Dream,” 7.

<sup>60</sup> Wang and Chen, “Rising Sino-US Competition in Artificial Intelligence, 246.

<sup>61</sup> Ding, “Deciphering China’s AI Dream,” 24.

<sup>62</sup> Xue Lan et al., “China AI Development Report 2018” (report, China Institute for Science and Technology Policy, Tsinghua University, Beijing, July 2018), 3-4, [http://www.sppm.tsinghua.edu.cn/eWebEditor/UploadFile/China\\_AI\\_development\\_report\\_2018.pdf](http://www.sppm.tsinghua.edu.cn/eWebEditor/UploadFile/China_AI_development_report_2018.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> Daniel Castro, Michael McLaughlin, and Eline Chivot, “Who Is Winning the AI Race: China, the EU or the United States?” (report, Center for Data Innovation, Washington DC, August 2019), 19-20, <http://www2.datainnovation.org/2019-china-eu-us-ai.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 20

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 21.

grown from 0% in 1982 to 26.5%.<sup>66</sup> Researchers suggest that China will surpass the U.S. in producing the top 10% and 1% of all AI papers by the end of 2020 and 2025, respectively.<sup>67</sup>

One larger point of disagreement, however, is whether China possesses a so-called data advantage. Demchak writes that “scale in demographic size multiplies the AI advantage when the large state’s resources are able to employ it strategically” towards “acquiring the enormous volumes of data needed.”<sup>68</sup> As a result, “no Westernized civil society alone has the scale to exploit AI...sufficiently enough to balance [China’s] advantage.”<sup>69</sup> Yet Lewis notes that while Chinese companies may have access to millions of Chinese users, this does not guarantee a data advantage.<sup>70</sup> Rather, he finds that Chinese companies are limited to China because of foreign markets’ distrust of their services. By contrast, Western companies like Facebook and Google “service a global market and have access to twice as much data as Chinese companies.”<sup>71</sup> Wright, on the other hand, argues that simply comparing data set quantities overlooks China’s advantage based “in terms of combining breadth of data with ground truth data” for which “liberal democracies should not compete.”<sup>72</sup> This advantage particularly enables China to construct a surveillance state and enable it for export.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, Ding highlights that a CCID Consulting report projects China to possess 30% of the world’s data by 2030.<sup>74</sup>

### *China’s AI Geopolitics*

Deibert explains that world governments are largely divided into two camps: those that prefer a more open Internet and society, like the United States and Asian democracies, and those that prefer state-led governance like China,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Chris C. Demchak, “Four Horsemen of AI Conflict: Scale, Speed, Foreknowledge, and Strategic Coherence,” in Ahmed et al., “Artificial Intelligence, China, Russia, and the Global Order,” 101-102.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>70</sup> James A. Lewis, “AI and China’s Unstoppable Global Rise,” in Ahmed et al., “Artificial Intelligence, China, Russia, and the Global Order,” 96.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Wright, “The Technologies,” 6-7.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ding, “Deciphering China’s AI Dream,” 25.

Iran, and Russia.<sup>75</sup> Importantly, emerging-market countries—such as Brazil, India, and Indonesia—may align with either camp.<sup>76</sup>

China's specialization in AISS comes as a strategic response to the “growing impetus worldwide to adopt cybersecurity and antiterror policies.”<sup>77</sup> The strategy is immensely top-down, as the Communist Party of China (CCP) officials influence the state-owned and private enterprises of AISS exportation. Weber defines these enterprises as comprising a “security-industrial complex”: a network of state agencies, state-owned companies, and private companies.<sup>78</sup> State agencies utilize government officials to train Sri Lankan officials, install surveillance cameras in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and share practices with Russia;<sup>79</sup> state-owned companies like the China National Electronics Import and Export Corporation (CEIEC) handle national security projects abroad, including managing Venezuela's Integrated Monitoring and Assistance System and facial recognition hardware and installation in Ecuador;<sup>80</sup> private companies like Huawei, ZTE, and Tencent contain CCP committees on high-level decision-making processes and comprise the bulk of filtering and surveillance technology exports to countries such as Iran, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.<sup>81</sup>

Furthermore, China maintains access to the data collected by companies and their technologies. Article 7 of the 2017 Chinese National Intelligence Law requires that “any organization or citizen shall support, assist and cooperate with the state intelligence work.”<sup>82</sup> Likewise, the 2014 Counter-Espionage law stipulates that “when the state security organ investigates and understands the situation of espionage and collects relevant evidence, the relevant organizations and individuals shall provide it truthfully and may not refuse.”<sup>83</sup> While Chinese technology companies claim they would never hand over data to the government, the legal structure and coordinated top-down effort of its technology export system

<sup>75</sup> Ron Deibert, “Authoritarianism Goes Global: Cyberspace Under Siege,” *Journal of Democracy* 26.3 (2015): 70, <http://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2015.0051>

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>78</sup> Valentin Weber, “Understanding the Global Ramifications of China's Information Controls Model,” in Ahmed et al., “Artificial Intelligence, China, Russia, and the Global Order,” 72, 74-75.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Arjun Kharpal, “Huawei Says It Would Never Hand Data to China's Government. Experts Say It Wouldn't Have a Choice,” *CNBC*, March 4, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/03/05/huawei-would-have-to-give-data-to-china-government-if-asked-experts.html>

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

suggests otherwise.

Consequently, companies become a proxy for the Chinese government to obtain data on an international scale. Cave et al. report that Internet and technology companies are believed to have the highest proportion of CCP committees in the private sector.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, Steckman reports that China's state dealings with companies often require review of the company's intellectual property, including their acquired data.<sup>85</sup> Such access is significant and widespread, as China's coordinated efforts have culminated in training sessions in over 36 countries, and the construction of "Chinese-style Internet surveillance systems" for 18 others.<sup>86</sup> In total, Feldstein finds that Chinese companies are exporting AISS to at least sixty four countries, including thirty six that are a part of the BRI.<sup>87</sup>

Scholars agree that China's export endeavors are an attempt to reshape international norms and thereby retain regional hegemony. In order to shield its domestic use of AISS from international influence,<sup>88</sup> China, according to McKune and Ahmed, has become the "primary norm entrepreneur," the leading international advocate of Internet sovereignty.<sup>89</sup> Internet sovereignty, according to Xi Jinping, is violated when countries "pursue cyber hegemony, interfere in other countries' internal affairs or engage in, connive at or support cyber activities that undermine other countries' national security."<sup>90</sup> According to McKune and Ahmed, Xi's view embodies "the absolute, exclusive right of the state to control its domestic Internet environment, and its citizens' interaction with that environment."<sup>91</sup> This norm-shaping effort can be most directly identified in

<sup>84</sup> Danielle Cave et al., "Mapping China's Technology Giants" (report, Issues Paper 15/2019, International Cyber Policy Centre, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, April 18, 2019), 3, 7, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/mapping-chinas-tech-giants>

<sup>85</sup> Laura Steckman, "Pathways to Lead in Artificial Intelligence," in Ahmed et al., "Artificial Intelligence, China, Russia, and the Global Order," 82.

<sup>86</sup> Richard A. Clarke and Rob Knake, "The Internet Freedom League: How to Push Back Against the Authoritarian Assault on the Web," *Foreign Affairs* 98.5 (2019): 185.

<sup>87</sup> Feldstein, "The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance," 1.

<sup>88</sup> Refers to the creation of China's social credit scoring system that ranks residents on the basis for actions committed both online and offline, as well as the detention of 1-2 million Uighur Muslims in the Xinjiang province via facial recognition systems.

<sup>89</sup> Sarah McKune and Shazeda Ahmed, "The Contestation and Shaping of Cyber Norms Through China's Internet Sovereignty Agenda," *International Journal of Communication* 12 (2018): 3840, <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/8540/2461>

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 3837.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

China's usage of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), World Internet Conference, and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which are "focused sites of learning and norm promotion where ideas, technologies, and 'best' practices are exchanged."<sup>92</sup> With meetings of "like-minded officials from neighboring authoritarian states," behind closed doors, Deibert argues that both the SCO and the CSTO are "venues where commercial platforms for both mass and targeted surveillance are sold" under the auspices of countering terrorism, separatism, and extremism.<sup>93</sup>

Through these institutions, China is embarking on coordinated and strategic efforts to promote the Internet sovereignty norm as beneficial to developing states in particular.<sup>94</sup> As Mueller argues, by incentivizing countries to internalize and adopt a model of Internet governance, the control of communications is realigned within national state boundaries, instead of wealthy democracies who hold the current concentration of infrastructural power.<sup>95</sup> The end goal for China appears to be "global recognition of the norm over the long term."<sup>96</sup>

But scholars debate the motives behind China's Internet sovereignty norm entrepreneurship in developing countries. Feldstein views it as an effort to erode democratic norms by providing fragile democracies with the means to quell discontent, and thereby accelerate authoritarianism or backsliding.<sup>97</sup> Economy sees a grander vision, with China exporting political values internationally to usher in its era of a "closed Internet."<sup>98</sup> However, Weiss contends China's export of AISS instead reflects "less a grand strategic effort to undermine democracy and spread autocracy than the Chinese leadership's desire to secure its position at home and abroad" and instead, simply makes it "easier for authoritarian states to coexist alongside democracies."<sup>99</sup> As this analysis will show, China's AISS export-specialization is not a total upheaval of the liberal world order nor solely constrained to aims of regional

<sup>92</sup> Deibert, "Authoritarianism Goes Global," 71-72.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> McKune and Ahmed, "The Contestation and Shaping of Cyber Norms," 3837.

<sup>95</sup> Milton Mueller, *Will the Internet Fragment? Sovereignty, Globalization and Cyberspace* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2017), 140 quoted in McKune and Ahmed, "The Contestation and Shaping of Cyber Norms," 3837.

<sup>96</sup> McKune and Ahmed, "The Contestation and Shaping of Cyber Norms," 3835.

<sup>97</sup> Steven Feldstein, "The Road to Digital Unfreedom: How Artificial Intelligence is Reshaping Repression," *Journal of Democracy* 30.1 (2019): 42-43, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0003>

<sup>98</sup> Elizabeth C. Economy, "China's New Revolution: The Reign of Xi Jinping," *Foreign Affairs* 97.3 (2018): 66.

<sup>99</sup> Jessica C. Weiss, "A World Safe for Autocracy? China's Rise and the Future of Global Politics," *Foreign Affairs* 98.4 (2019): 93-94.

security; instead, China's geopolitics can in part be explained by its neocolonialist exploitation of importing countries for gains in the global political economy.

### *Literature Takeaways*

The Sino-optimist/pessimist divide selectively captures elements of China's neocolonialism at the expense of painting a representative picture. Sino-pessimists overlook the Sino-optimists' emphasis on China's engagement in long-term infrastructure projects throughout Africa, such as the establishment of special economic zones. Further, Sino-optimists importantly recognize China's particular interest in distinguishing itself as non-Western, an interest consistent with its normative practices of non-interventionism and Internet sovereignty. Meanwhile, Chinese investment—which is made irrespective of political instability, and at times, preferential toward corrupt states—suggests China considers little else other than the bottom line. Equally important, then, is the historic and recent deviance from these normative practices, like with Mozambique in 1977 and Sudan in 2015, ignored by Sino-optimists and captured by the Sino-pessimists.

The paradox between these two positions suggests that Nkrumah's condition of neocolonialism—that is, investment must increase rather than decrease the wealth gap between the rich and poor countries of the world—may be a sufficient but unnecessary indicator of neocolonialism. Indeed, an important takeaway from the literature is that neocolonialism today is complex. While China's long-term infrastructure projects may enrich African countries in one way, its engagement with such countries can extract resources and political leverage in another. When a new source of wealth is introduced, but international conventions of wealth remain, it is possible to extract this new wealth from developing countries while simultaneously enriching them in old wealth.

As literature on AI indicates, this new wealth is data. It is well understood that data is the backbone of AI—only when AlphaGo studied over 100 million game types did it successfully overcome a world-class human Go player.<sup>100</sup> Ground-truth data, especially, is crucial for unlocking the potential of AI.<sup>101</sup> This particular source of wealth, then, is routine access to another nation's ground-truth data, further advantaging China in its development of all types of artificially

<sup>100</sup> Brenden M. Lake et al., "Building Machines That Learn and Think like People," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 40 (2017): 22-23, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X16001837>

<sup>101</sup> Wright "The Technologies," 5.

intelligent systems.

The growing concern here is that Chinese technology enables state access to data. The legal and political climate behind China's security-industrial complex indicates that its powerful companies are access points to international data. This data extraction may occur directly, as most export partnerships are expected to grant China access to civilian ground-truth data.<sup>102</sup> In particular, China leverages the sale of its technology for access to biometric data on citizens—such as those in Zimbabwe, Angola, and Ethiopia.<sup>103</sup> Alternatively, backdoors within technological operations can provide another avenue to data for China. In addition to international concern over backdoors in China's 5G infrastructure, recent reports have also revealed that the cameras made by Dahua Technology, the world's second-largest CCTV manufacturer, have been, whether deliberately or not, engineered with vulnerable access points.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, China could potentially gain parallel access to systems' data by assisting surveillance operations, as it has done in Venezuela.<sup>105</sup>

As it faces an opportunity to grow its GDP significantly, China's full-scale use of its security-industrial complex is unsurprising.<sup>106</sup> The declaration of AI as the "new focus of international competition" further underscores China's perception of the ascendancy of AI as an international issue.<sup>107</sup> Yet, it is crucial to recognize that China is a lagging entity in aggressive pursuit of market supremacy.<sup>108</sup> Its use of its AISS exports secures unparalleled access to ground-truth data to upgrade algorithms, but also grants worldwide hegemony in an ever increasing AI world. While seemingly paradoxical, the global, coordinated effort of the Chinese security-industrial complex to build and train AISS models for other countries

<sup>102</sup> Steckman, "Pathways to Lead in Artificial Intelligence," 82.

<sup>103</sup> Gwagwa, "How China's Artificial Intelligence is Shaping Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Global Order."

<sup>104</sup> Bruce Schneier, "China Isn't the Only Problem With 5G," *Foreign Policy*, January 10, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/10/5g-china-backdoor-security-problems-united-states-surveillance>; Zak Doffman, "Warning As Millions Of Chinese-Made Cameras Can Be Hacked To Spy On Users," *Forbes*, August 3, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zakdoffman/2019/08/03/update-now-warning-as-eavesdropping-risk-hits-millions-of-chinese-made-cameras/#301ed6c06bf2>

<sup>105</sup> Angus Berwick, "How ZTE Helps Venezuela Create China-Style Social Control," *Reuters*, November 14, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/venezuela-zte/>

<sup>106</sup> Ding, "Deciphering China's AI Dream," 32.

<sup>107</sup> Nicholas D. Wright, "AI and Domestic Political Regimes: Digital Authoritarian, Digital Hybrid, and Digital Democracy," in Ahmed et al., "Artificial Intelligence, China, Russia, and the Global Order," 22-24.

<sup>108</sup> Wang and Chen, "Rising Sino-US Competition in Artificial Intelligence," 246.



remains consistent with China's view of Internet sovereignty norms.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, in light of developments at the SCO, the World Internet Conference, and the CSTO, China's international, norm entrepreneurial efforts appear to be aimed at establishing regional partnerships and securing China's domestic AI practices outside the ambit of Western regulation. Convincing developing countries of the benefits of realigning control over communications domestically plays an important role in achieving the "global recognition of the norm over the long term."<sup>110</sup> While most of the contemporaneous conceptions of China's norm entrepreneurialism focus on the acceleration of authoritarianism,<sup>111</sup> Weiss offers a comparatively benevolent conception of China as merely interested in authoritarian coexistence.<sup>112</sup>

However, these scholars ignore the larger stratagem, particularly as it relates to developing countries. China facially represents its ideology with benevolence, using such trust to gain entry into developing countries' security apparatuses and pragmatically pursue resource extraction. Indeed, supplying the networks and infrastructure to countries grants unique access for China to countries' citizen data and markets, while also providing a platform to shape favorable norms in the strategic global AI competition. China's AISS export model can then be understood both as a neocolonialist mechanism to both feed its ground-truth data advantage and influence Internet norms in a world of emerging-market countries.<sup>113</sup>

### THE NEOCOLONIALIST TRADITION & THE AISS EMPIRE

In the Nanshan district of Shenzhen, a "growing new breed of Chinese technology companies specializing in surveillance and censorship equipment" is emerging.<sup>114</sup> China has used its natural access to facial data—troves of video surveillance footage on a massive population—to immensely enhance the

<sup>109</sup> Weber, "Understanding the Global Ramifications of China's Information Controls Model," 74-75; McKune and Ahmed, "The Contestation and Shaping of Cyber Norms," 3841-43.

<sup>110</sup> Mueller, *Will the Internet Fragment?*, 140; McKune and Ahmed, "The Contestation and Shaping of Cyber Norms," 3835.

<sup>111</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Feldstein, "The Road to Digital Unfreedom," 60-74; see Weiss, "A World Safe for Autocracy?"

<sup>113</sup> Deibert, "Authoritarianism Goes Global," 70.

<sup>114</sup> Ryan Gallagher, "Export Laws," *Index on Censorship* 48.3 (2019): 37, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306422019876445>



accuracy of its facial recognition software.<sup>115</sup> China has published over 900 facial recognition sector patents in 2017 alone, a stark contrast to the 150 patents filed in the US.<sup>116</sup> By developing an unparalleled ability to “link people’s identities and activities” with real time assessments of individuals’ location, activities, gender, clothing, and facial characteristics,<sup>117</sup> Wang argues that China’s AISS is expected to attain “world leading” status.<sup>118</sup> From Algeria to Zimbabwe, China’s export empire in AISS is expansive. By 2023, China is expected to dominate the facial recognition market with nearly a 45% market share—an increase from today’s 29%.<sup>119</sup>

Admittedly, China’s security-industrial complex has exported broadly to liberal democracies, such as Germany and France, who have both supplied—but also bought into—China’s facial recognition expertise.<sup>120</sup> However, the conception of an AISS empire here refers specifically to the 50 developing countries importing China’s technology.<sup>121</sup> The decision to focus on these countries is, in large part, to indicate the strength of a neocolonialist relationship in the export of AISS. Many of these countries are in pivotal positions for China to enhance its own position in the international AI market.

The following sections will lay the theoretical foundation behind the subsequent section’s claims of Chinese AISS neocolonialism. First, the reality of Chinese neocolonialism in the international normative climate will be explored, concluding that the presence of mutually beneficial engagement should not acquit China from indictment for neocolonialist exploitation. Next, four elements of neocolonialist practice based on Antiwi-Boateng’s research—derived from the heritage of colonialism in 19th century British and French empires—will be

<sup>115</sup> Qiang Xiao, “The Road to Digital Unfreedom: President Xi’s Surveillance State,” *Journal of Democracy* 30.1 (2019): 56-58, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0004>

<sup>116</sup> Jeffrey Ding, “China’s AI Superpower Dream with Jeffrey Ding,” interview by Lucas Perry, in *AI Alignment Podcast*, August 16, 2019, produced by the Future of Life Institute, podcast, MP3 audio, 1:12:20, <https://futureoflife.org/2019/08/16/chinas-ai-superpower-dream-with-jeffrey-ding/>

<sup>117</sup> Xiao, “The Road to Digital Unfreedom,” 58, 64.

<sup>118</sup> Eudora Wang, “China To Take Nearly Half Of Global Face Recognition Device Market By 2023,” *China Money Network*, August 23, 2018, <https://www.chinamoneynetwork.com/2018/08/23/china-to-take-nearly-half-of-global-face-recognition-device-market-by-2023>

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Steven Feldstein, “The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance,” 8.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. e.g. Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Burma, Chile, Ecuador, Egypt, Ghana, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Krygzstan, Laos, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Philippines, Qatar, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, South Africa, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Zambia, and Zimbabwe

identified and compared to China's modern exportation of AISS. The section will focus on developing countries' engagement with China's AISS exports, which highlights the nexus between traditional and modern elements of neocolonialism: 1) the extraction of data as a resource, 2) the pursuit and creation of exclusive markets, 3) the accumulation of global prestige to influence norms, and 4) the ulterior framing of China's AISS-export relationship with developing countries as altruistic. It should be noted, however, that such characteristics are only the most salient elements of colonialism—not an exhaustive account. Nonetheless, China's specialization in AISS should be viewed as a strategic decision on its path to global AI supremacy.

### *The Reality of China's Neocolonialism*

Before exploring the elements of China's engagement with Africa as a neocolonialist enterprise, it is important to first consider the complexities of China's modern interaction with African countries. In many cases, China's investments, while producing immense returns and access to new markets, have generated enormous benefits for the African countries it contracts with. For example, Chinese capital development funding for African infrastructure totaled about \$328 billion from 2009 to 2014, and China has pledged about \$1 trillion in aid for the following decade.<sup>122</sup> But evidence of mutual benefit should not vindicate neocolonialist aims. Rather, as this section will contend, all of China's displays of mutual beneficence can be explained by strategic attempts to distinguish itself from prior and current Western engagements.

International norms changed the pragmatic calculus of industrialization for China. Antiwi-Boateng writes that:

... the Chinese have had to engage African people under a completely different international political, economic, and legal framework ... Chinese engagement in Africa is occurring at a period where the concept of statehood and sovereignty has been globally accepted and institutionalized ...<sup>123</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Steve Johnson, "China By Far The Largest Investor In African Infrastructure," *Financial Times*, November 30, 2015, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/3/716545c0-9529-11e5-ac15-0f7f7945adba.html>

<sup>123</sup> Antiwi-Boateng, "New World Order Neo-Colonialism," 189.

Indeed, as Zhao argues, China learned its “lessons the hard way” and after engendering “local and international concern . . . of a zero-sum competition for finite resources,” has “made efforts to adjust such sensitive business practices.”<sup>124</sup> China’s doctrine of non-interference and declaration of “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” point towards the idea that, for neocolonialist enterprises, such careful balancing is required by international norms.<sup>125</sup> At the same time, the principles form a visibly sharp distinction from previously destabilizing Western colonial policies and post-independence Western conditionality of resources.<sup>126</sup> For example, unlike the manipulation of African elites by patronizing European elites, China has emphasized respectful and purportedly mutually-beneficial interactions when engaging African leaders. As Antiwi-Boateng argues, these relationships have “been driven by the need to reduce Western influence in Africa,” a choice made easy for many African leaders now comparatively viewing the “burdensome and indifferent attitude from the West.”<sup>127</sup>

China’s refrain from a “civilizing mandate” of cultural assimilation, as European colonialists engaged in, is another example of China’s careful balancing to satisfy international norms. Instead, as Antiwi-Boateng argues, China pursues strategic forms of cultural diplomacy to improve its image and leave the appearance of the West as inflexible and traditional.<sup>128</sup> China Central Television—“the most powerful soft power tool used by China”—broadcasts programming on positive trade relations to some 47 countries, strengthening its influence indirectly, as opposed to political or administrative control.<sup>129</sup> Similarly, China funds approximately 12,000 African students to study in China, far outpacing all other countries’ scholarship programs for African students in an attempt to “shape and cultivate the next generation of African leaders who will be amenable to future

<sup>124</sup> Zhao Suisheng, “A Neo-Colonialist Predator or Development Partner?,” 1033.

<sup>125</sup> “The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence: The Time-Tested Guideline of China’s Policy With Neighbors,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, July 30, 2014, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zwjg\\_665342/zwbd\\_665378/t1179045.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665378/t1179045.shtml); Refers to the following: mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence.

<sup>126</sup> Antiwi-Boateng, “New World Order Neo-Colonialism,” 186.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

Chinese policies.”<sup>130</sup> Even the massive developmental aid projects are stained by ulterior motives of expanding Chinese influence at the expense of supplanting the West. The over \$75 billion of Chinese investments in aid and development projects is largely considered a “charm offensive”—a design to woo its recipients in order to establish political and economic influence in the region.<sup>131</sup>

China’s choice to distinguish its operations from that of the West has granted it increased access to investments within Africa. Dreher and Fuchs have noted that African states were drawn to Chinese partners in large part to avoid the ideological and political remedies required from Western investors.<sup>132</sup> Given this framing, China’s favorability has increased as investments have risen over the years. In 2011, China had a favorability polling of 50% in Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa, and by 2014, it was 60%.<sup>133</sup> As of 2015, African respondents have a significantly more positive view of China at 70% favorability, compared to Europe at 41%.<sup>134</sup>

While Sino-optimists and Sino-pessimists categorize China’s neocolonialism as binary, the complexities of neocolonial traditions engender a modern scenario in which China’s exploitation can both have mutually beneficial outcomes and still be manipulative. Rich and Recker suggest that the reality: China’s engagement with developing countries “is somewhere in the middle” of Sino-optimist and Sino-pessimist perspectives, oscillating between neocolonialist exploitation and mutual beneficence.<sup>135</sup>

China’s recent engagements, however, are more indicative of strategic conformity, rather than genuine adherence to non-interference. Verhoeven, for instance, found that China’s growing material interests are “forcing it to

<sup>130</sup> Simon Allison, “Fixing China’s Image in Africa, One Student at a Time,” *Guardian*, July 5, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/31/china-africa-students-scholarship-programme>; Antiwi-Boateng, “New World Order Neo-Colonialism,” 184.

<sup>131</sup> Claire Provost and Rich Harris, “China Commits Billions in Aid to Africa as Part of Charm Offensive,” *Guardian*, April 29, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/interactive/2013/apr/29/china-commits-billions-aid-africa-interactive>

<sup>132</sup> Axel Dreher and Andrea Fuchs, “Rogue Aid? An Empirical Analysis of China’s Aid Allocation,” *Canadian Journal of Economics* 48.3 (2015): 993-995, <https://doi.org/10.1111/caje.12166>

<sup>133</sup> Chen Wenjie, “Chinese Investment in Africa Is More Diverse and Welcome than You Think,” *Quartz Africa*, August 26, 2015, <https://qz.com/africa/488589/chinese-investment-in-africa-is-more-diverse-and-welcomed-than-we-give-it-credit/>

<sup>134</sup> Chen, Dollar, and Tang, “Why is China investing in Africa?,” 2.

<sup>135</sup> Rich and Recker, “Understanding Sino African Relations,” 72.

in practice abandon the principle of non-interference.”<sup>136</sup> This is evidenced by examples in Sudan and Djibouti, as well as historical experiences in Angola and Mozambique.<sup>137</sup> Antiwi-Boateng thus argues that although it maintains itself internationally as non-interventionist, China is a “neo-colonialist entity” capable of resource extraction without the “unbridled territorial control” that 19th-century colonists relied upon.<sup>138</sup> When considering neocolonialist engagements, China’s export of AISS must be evaluated in light of this complexity, especially with respect to China’s strategic use of international norms for material gain.

## ELEMENTS OF NEOCOLONIALISM

### *Resource Extraction: Harvesting Data*

For Antiwi-Boateng, the core of the British and French colonial regimes was the search for sources of raw materials, like timber, ivory, and copper.<sup>139</sup> These materials served a higher order goal of industrialization, largely spurred by a competitive international dynamic.<sup>140</sup> It appears that, in the present day, China views Africa as a central piece in its international grand strategy. While Africa is a large buyer of manufactured products like machinery and textiles, and import resources like crude oil and copper that are of little value to Africa, China’s engagements have largely been spurred by Chinese efforts to compete internationally.<sup>141</sup> For example, China is the world’s largest user of copper and eighth largest exporter of refined copper products.<sup>142</sup> Thus, Zhao finds that China’s renewed interests in Africa does resemble European colonial powers’ natural resource expeditions.<sup>143</sup>

In the AISS context, China’s State Council, in its 2017 “New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan,” outlined the importance of AI for “supply side structural reform[s]” and the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”<sup>144</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Harry Verhoeven, “Is Beijing’s Non-Interference Policy History? How Africa is Changing China,” *The Washington Quarterly* 37.2 (2014): 66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2014.926209>

<sup>137</sup> See Antiwi-Boateng, “New World Order Neo-Colonialism,” 186; Allen, “What China Hopes to Achieve With First Peacekeeping Mission”; Campos and Vines, “Angola and China,” 2-3; Roque, “China in Mozambique,” 2.

<sup>138</sup> Antiwi-Boateng, “New World Order Neo-Colonialism,” 177.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 181-82.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Zhao, “A Neo-Colonialist Predator or Development Partner?,” 1042.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 1043.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 1035-36.

<sup>144</sup> Webster et al., “China’s ‘New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan.’”

Considering that the integration of AI systems could boost Chinese GDP by 26%, AISS is a crucial element of China's future industrialization plans.<sup>145</sup> A report by the China Industry Economy Research & Consulting group noted that China's facial recognition software is expected to maintain an average annual growth rate of 25%, hitting over \$1.06 billion by 2022.<sup>146</sup>

Integral to such AI industrialization, however, is ground-truth data, which AISS exportation grants tremendous access to. For example, Alibaba's CloudWalk Technology company contracted with Zimbabwe to install facial recognition software. According to a UN Special Rapporteur report, to read and differentiate African faces, Cloudwalk asked the Zimbabwean government to turn over massive amounts of biometric data.<sup>147</sup> Such datasets are incredibly valuable, as facial recognition software today largely struggles with differentiating faces that are not white.<sup>148</sup> In written testimony to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Cook explained that datasets of millions of sub-Saharan African faces enable Chinese developers to overcome pervasive, race-related software errors—an immense market share advantage for China.<sup>149</sup> The operation of such technology in a majority black population like Zimbabwe's creates an algorithmic advantage over American and European developers.<sup>150</sup> But the situation in Zimbabwe is not unique. In Uganda, there is a lack of transparency over the regulation of information flows in what appears to be a "policy to hand over the country's entire communications infrastructure," according to an official

<sup>145</sup> Ding, "Deciphering China's AI Dream," 32.

<sup>146</sup> Zhang Hongpei, "Chinese Facial ID Tech To Land In Africa," *Global Times*, May 17, 2018, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1102797.shtml>

<sup>147</sup> "MISA Zimbabwe's Submission on the Surveillance Industry and Human Rights in Zimbabwe" (report, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Media Institute of Southern Africa, Harare, Zimbabwe, February 15, 2019), 1, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Opinion/Surveillance/MISA%20ZIMBABWE.pdf>

<sup>148</sup> Steve Lohr, "Facial Recognition Is Accurate, If You're a White Guy," *New York Times*, February 9, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/09/technology/facial-recognition-race-artificial-intelligence.html>

<sup>149</sup> Sarah Cook, "China's Cyber Superpower Strategy: Implementation, Internet Freedom Implications, and U.S. Responses," *Freedom House*, September 26, 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/article/chinas-cyber-superpower-strategy-implementation-Internet-freedom-implications-and-us#Ftn31>

<sup>150</sup> Lynsey Chutel, "China Is Exporting Facial Recognition Software To Africa, Expanding Its Vast Database," *Quartz Africa*, May 25, 2018, <https://qz.com/africa/1287675/china-is-exporting-facial-recognition-to-africa-ensuring-ai-dominance-through-diversity/>

in the Ugandan Parliament.<sup>151</sup> Similar deals were struck in Angola and Ethiopia, and China's export partnerships are expected to include requirements that grant Chinese access to a civilian ground-truth data.<sup>152</sup> In effect, China's AISS accuracy will improve against international competition.

However, as Chutel writes, the CloudWalk example is only one method by which China's security industrial complex circumvents ethical and legal concerns to access countries' data cheaply.<sup>153</sup> Another method involves inputting backdoors within the infrastructure of AISS, which then less visibly siphon data. Recently, the African Union Headquarters' computers, imported from China, were discovered to have been sending information to mainland China for years without consent or awareness.<sup>154</sup> Such backdoors can be expected in the over 18 countries where China has internally constructed surveillance infrastructure.<sup>155</sup> For example, the state-owned enterprise China National Electronics Import & Export Corporation (CEIEC) built the facial recognition hardware for Ecuador, while ZTE, a private Chinese company, embedded employees into Venezuela's telecommunications systems to assist in managing information databases and building centralized video surveillance systems.<sup>156</sup> ZTE's Venezuelan database contains details such as birthdays, family information, employment income, medical history, property owned, presence on social media, and political affiliation.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, China's Transsion has taken over Africa's mobile market, surpassing Samsung along the way.<sup>158</sup> It has recently introduced the Tecno Camon X Pro, which will enable the facial recognition data collection of millions of customers.<sup>159</sup> Like the export-partnership deals granting China explicit access to data, information backdoors

<sup>151</sup> Joe Parkinson, Nicholas Bariyo, and Josh Chin, "Huawei Technicians Helped African Governments Spy—Chinese Giant's Staff Aided Cybersecurity Forces' Snooping On Opposition," *Wall Street Journal*, August 15, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/huawei-technicians-helped-african-governments-spy-on-political-opponents-11565793017>

<sup>152</sup> Gwagwa, "How China's Artificial Intelligence is Shaping Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Global Order"; Steckman, "Pathways to Lead in Artificial Intelligence," 82.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>154</sup> Weber, "Understanding the Global Ramifications of China's Information Controls Model," 73-74.

<sup>155</sup> Clarke and Knake, "The Internet Freedom League," 187-88.

<sup>156</sup> Jun Mai, "Ecuador Is Fighting Crime Using Chinese Surveillance Technology," *South China Morning Post*, Jan 22, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2129912/ecuador-fighting-crime-using-chinese-surveillance>; Berwick, "How ZTE Helps Venezuela Create China-Style Social Control."

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> Chutel "China Is Exporting Facial Recognition Software To Africa"

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*



in Chinese cyber infrastructure projects should be expected as a means of data collection.<sup>160</sup> Indeed, the frequency of such backdoors has led Australia and the U.S. to avoid purchasing infrastructure from companies like Huawei and ZTE, and have caused public concern in Ghana over a Chinese digital television infrastructure project.<sup>161</sup>

China's theft of developing countries' data should thus be viewed as a deliberate extraction of resources. In 2017, the *Economist* wrote that "the world's most valuable resource is no longer oil, but data."<sup>162</sup> But even that comparison underplays the importance of data. Data can be replicated and transported with little limitation, and, unlike energy, its utility increases with use.<sup>163</sup>

As the world turns more and more towards artificial intelligence, the demand for data can only be expected to increase. However, in the internationally competitive environment of artificial intelligence, "it's not just the volume of data that's important . . . [but] the kind of data and where they originate."<sup>164</sup> A country with access to numerous other countries' data will be able to develop more universally applicable AI products, since merely having data on "Spanish speech patterns will not make a system robust at identifying Mandarin characters."<sup>165</sup> If China is able to acquire numerous countries datasets, then the competitive advantage they will gain in providing technologies to these countries will remain unparalleled. Sacks and Sherman point out just precisely what is at stake:

In a world increasingly underpinned and powered by AI, those looking to develop globally competitive AI systems—algorithms that will be precise and accurate in many parts of the world, across many demographics—will need access to data on those different demographics, from those different regions.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>160</sup> Weber, "Understanding the Global Ramifications of China's Information Controls Model," 73-74.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> "The World's Most Valuable Resource Is No Longer Oil, But Data," *Economist*, May 6, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2017/05/06/the-worlds-most-valuable-resource-is-no-longer-oil-but-data>

<sup>163</sup> Bernard Marr, "Here's Why Data Is Not The New Oil," *Forbes*, March 5, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2018/03/05/heres-why-data-is-not-the-new-oil/#16c01a773aa9>

<sup>164</sup> Samm Sacks and Justin Sherman, "The Global Data War Heats Up," *Atlantic*, June 26, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/06/g20-data/592606/>

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.



Increasingly, data especially makes all the difference for gaining a competitive market advantage in the realm of AI.<sup>167</sup>

*Pursuit of Unsaturated Markets: Security and Stability*

Antiwi-Boateng argues that the second archetypal feature of 19<sup>th</sup> century colonialism was the search for markets. The British and French, for instance, used infrastructure projects—such as roads and railways—to establish expanded markets for products and economies. China, through state financing, has similarly provided “billions in loans to African governments to fund infrastructure projects which are usually contingent on the use of Chinese labor, technology and raw materials.”<sup>168</sup> China emulates colonial heritage presently by tapping into Africa’s “*unsaturated market[s]*” (emphasis added).<sup>169</sup> Indeed, as Herrero argues, the bulk of China’s investment and project finance within Africa is “directed towards China’s strategic objectives, namely securing access to resources and using [its] excess capacity in construction and transportation.”<sup>170</sup>

AISS, by nature, is a technology offering a paradigm shift for guaranteeing security and stability, and recipient countries are likely to grow more and more reliant on its capabilities. Even more telling is that China’s specialization in AISS arrives at the intersection of two trends: a reverse wave of authoritarianism and a rapidly digitizing global South. Over the past two centuries, according to Huntington, the emerging diversity of regime types can largely be organized in terms of three “waves” of democratization, each wave followed by a “reverse wave” of authoritarianism: 1820s democracy, 1920s fascism; 1940s allied victory, 1960s bureaucratic authoritarianism; and the 1970s democracies.<sup>171</sup> Presently, the world finds itself in its third, reverse wave of authoritarianism—over 2.5 billion people now live in countries affected by the “global autocratization trend.”<sup>172</sup> At

<sup>167</sup> Kai-Fu Lee, “Kai-Fu Lee’s Perspectives On Two Global Leaders In Artificial Intelligence: China and the United States,” interview by Michael Chui, *McKinsey Global Institute*, June 14, 2018, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/artificial-intelligence/kai-fu-lees-perspectives-on-two-global-leaders-in-artificial-intelligence-china-and-the-united-states>

<sup>168</sup> Antiwi-Boateng, “New World Order Neo-Colonialism,” 182.

<sup>169</sup> Zhao, “A Neo-Colonialist Predator or Development Partner?,” 1033-1052.

<sup>170</sup> Alicia-Garcia Herrero, “China’s Investments In Africa: What The Data Really Say, and the Implications For Europe,” *Forbes*, July 24, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/aliciagarciaherrero/2019/07/24/chinas-investments-in-africa-what-the-data-really-says-and-the-implications-for-europe/#a723dc8661f9>

<sup>171</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, “Democracy’s Third Wave,” *Journal of Democracy* 2.2 (1991): 12-13, 18, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1991.0016>

<sup>172</sup> Anna Lührman et al., “Democracy for All? V-Dem Annual Democracy Report 2018” (report,

the same time, an explosive growth of digital connectivity has taken place in the global South, particularly among authoritarian regimes, weak states, and flawed democracies.<sup>173</sup> As Deibert reported, “In Indonesia, the number of Internet users increases each month by 800,000,” while “the Internet-penetration rate in Cambodia rose a staggering 414 percent from January 2014 to January 2015.”<sup>174</sup> Overall, “the steepest rates of growth in mobile-data traffic will be found in the Middle East and Africa.”<sup>175</sup> With the advent of the “dual use” apparatus of smartphones and digital assistants in even non-authoritarian government systems, the barriers to the adoption of AISS systems are at their lowest point ever.<sup>176</sup> Since crucial components of digital authoritarian monitoring are already in place in many developing countries, such as smart phones and Internet services, the rise in digital connectivity creates “security and governance pressure points” that regimes can squeeze.<sup>177</sup>

In fact, the political economy behind security represents the major demand behind AISS, and the resurgence of digital authoritarianism in many importing countries.<sup>178</sup> For the authoritarian, the gravest threats to state survival are no longer from coup d'états, but, as Feldstein puts it, “discontented publics on the streets or at the ballot box.”<sup>179</sup> Governments who previously had strong-armed stability through coercion or cooptation now face fears of collapsing into a military state at the hands of emboldened police or encountering sustainability issues as resource demands increase among a more discontented populace.<sup>180</sup> But AISS contains none of these drawbacks. Instead, according to Feldstein, it “requires considerably fewer human actors than conventional repression, entails

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V-Dem Institute, University of Gothenburg, May 28, 2018), 19, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3345071>, quoted in Feldstein, “The Road to Digital Unfreedom,” 43.

<sup>173</sup> Deibert, “Authoritarianism Goes Global,” 73.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Jeffrey Ding, “The Interests Behind China’s AI Dream,” in Ahmed et al., “Artificial Intelligence, China, Russia, and the Global Order: Technological, Political, Global, and Creative Perspectives,” 38.

<sup>177</sup> Jacob Poushter, “Smartphone Ownership Rates Skyrocket in Many Emerging Economies, but Digital Divide Remains,” *Pew Research Center*, February 22, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/02/22/smartphone-ownership-rates-skyrocket-in-many-emerging-economies-but-digital-divide-remains>; Deibert, “Authoritarianism Goes Global,” 73.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>179</sup> Feldstein, “The Road to Digital Unfreedom,” 43.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

less physical harassment, and comes at a lower cost.”<sup>181</sup> Chinese companies are thus in the business of providing state solutions to many developing countries’ problems of governance and political instability.<sup>182</sup>

For the digitizing global South—countries like Laos, Kenya, and Indonesia—stability now has an affordable price, as product pitches are often accompanied by loans which encourage equipment purchases.<sup>183</sup> China has used its burgeoning market dominance in AISS and state-backed loans to open AISS to countries that previously could not afford it. The surveillance-solution multiplies the value of increasingly prevalent Internet connectivity and mobile devices, which are used to deliver critical and often lacking information infrastructure. Its facial recognition technology therefore exploits the need for social stability in developing countries.<sup>184</sup> The result is that, on the condition of contracting with Chinese firms, countries like Mauritius gain long-term financing from the Chinese government and companies like Huawei assume sole proprietorship over AISS installations. Zimbabwe is the first example of China entering Africa with AISS, but it has been far from the last.<sup>185</sup>

Already, via partnerships forged in its Belt and Road Initiative, China has supplied surveillance systems to nearly half of the 86 countries enrolled in the project.<sup>186</sup> Xi Jinping may have publicly stated China is not exporting a particular model nor asking for others to copy it, but this matters little.<sup>187</sup> Feldstein argues that as countries integrate Chinese systems into their governance practices, they develop a greater reliance on the infrastructure, software, and technical expertise of such systems and subsequently face “increasing pressure to align their policies with the PRC’s strategic interests.”<sup>188</sup> Similarly, Benaim and Gilman surmise that ambitions of AISS exports may very well be long term and resemble “algorithmic authoritarianism,” where China’s exportation of domestic surveillance methods contributes to a greater need for additional, similarly functional technology.<sup>189</sup>

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Cave et al., “Mapping China’s Technology Giants,” 4.

<sup>183</sup> Feldstein, “The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance,” 2.

<sup>184</sup> Zhang, “Chinese Facial ID Tech to Land in Africa.”

<sup>185</sup> Gallagher, “Export Laws,” 35-37.

<sup>186</sup> Feldstein, “The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance,” 1.

<sup>187</sup> Weiss, “A World Safe for Autocracy?,” 94-96.

<sup>188</sup> Feldstein, “The Road to Digital Unfreedom,” 49.

<sup>189</sup> Daniel Benaim and Hollie R. Gilman, “China’s Aggressive Surveillance Technology Will Spread Beyond Its Borders,” *Slate*, August 9, 2018, <https://slate.com/technology/2018/08/chinas-export-of-cutting-edge-surveillance-and-facial-recognition-technology-will-empower-authoritarians-worldwide.html>

For example, in 2008, during his presidency, Hugo Chavez visited Shenzhen and learned of the power of surveillance mechanisms.<sup>190</sup> By 2013, Venezuela had contracted with CEIEC to install over 30,000 security cameras in what current President Maduro called the Integrated Monitoring and Assistance System.<sup>191</sup> In 2018, ZTE was hired by Venezuela on a \$70 million national security project constructing a “Fatherland Card” database that closely resembles China’s own Social Credit Registry method of rewarding and punishing citizens through technology.<sup>192</sup>

At the intersection of global authoritarianism and digitization, China has successfully opened access to its specialized market. Feeding on pressing and unsaturated needs for security and stability, China cultivates an increasing dependence among these countries for its state-solutions. In what can best be described as an exploitative vicious cycle, China’s AISS export regime stokes greater demand within its empire for its product and provides for ever-increasing influence and access to data.<sup>193</sup> In turn, with greater access to data, especially on citizens within recently digitizing developing countries where citizen digital data has seldom, if ever, been systematically acquired, China will gain a marked advantage for developing country-specific AI products, even beyond AI surveillance.

### *Desire for Global Prestige: Achieving Internet Sovereignty*

The third key marker of neocolonialism, according to Antiwi-Boateng, is power projecting with the intent of securing the ability to pursue national interests “unhindered by other great powers.”<sup>194</sup> In the colonial heritage of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, European naval superiority functioned to protect and pursue British and French national interests.<sup>195</sup> China presently shares with European colonialists a similar strategic desire, as it views Africa as a part of a larger strategy for global influence.<sup>196</sup> The November 2006 Forum on China-

<sup>190</sup> Berwick, “How ZTE Helps Venezuela Create China-Style Social Control.”

<sup>191</sup> Ryan Mallett-Outtrim, “30,000 More Security Cameras and 17,000 Less Guns on Venezuelan Streets,” *Venezuela Analysis*, November 27, 2013, <https://venezuelanalysis.com/news/10198>

<sup>192</sup> Berwick, “How ZTE Helps Venezuela Create China-Style Social Control.”

<sup>193</sup> Steckman, “Pathways to Lead in Artificial Intelligence,” 82-83.

<sup>194</sup> Antiwi-Boateng, “New World Order Neo-Colonialism,” 182.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Daniel Large, “Beyond ‘Dragon in the Bush’: The Study of China-Africa Relations,” *African*

Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) prompted deep anxieties in the West, as German Chancellor Angela Merkel responded by: "Europeans should not leave the continent of Africa to the People's Republic of China ... We must take a stand in Africa."<sup>197</sup>

China is similarly using its AISS-export prestige—its relationships with developing countries—to influence global norms about the use of technology. According to Finnemore and Sikkink, the lifecycle of a norm occurs in three stages: norm emergence, facilitated by a norm entrepreneur; norm cascade, when countries begin to adopt the norm more rapidly; and norm internalization, where a norm gains widespread acceptance.<sup>198</sup> Presently, norms of Internet governance are in contest and are emerging. On one end, open governance espouses the global free flow of ideas and information exchanges, while on the other end, Internet sovereignty rejects the present Internet order in exchange for a more localized and sovereign approach. McKune and Ahmed write that China has been the state most dedicated to a coordinated and strategic effort to promote Internet sovereignty globally—the primary norm entrepreneur of "Internet sovereignty."<sup>199</sup> As this section will argue, China has strategically used its empire of developing countries to bring about Internet sovereignty norms and protect its ability to pursue further exploitative AISS practices.

The importance of Internet sovereignty for China should not be understated. First and foremost, it is an attempt to craft information borders. Chen Xueshi, from the PLA-affiliated National University of Defense Technology, writes that information borders can be defined as the "national security relevant virtual space (and corresponding physical carriers) stored on electronic devices used by a state's infrastructure systems, government, and extra-governmental institutions and individuals."<sup>200</sup> According to the Chinese government, states that abide by Internet sovereignty 1) "must participate in international Internet governance on an equal footing" 2) shall not "engage in, condone, or support cyber activities that undermine the national security of others states" and 3) shall have the "right to

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*Affairs* 107.426 (2008): 56-58, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adm069>

<sup>197</sup> Jilio Godoy, "China Swaggers into Europe's Backyard," *Asia Times*, November 17, 2006, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China\\_Business/HK17Cb03.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China_Business/HK17Cb03.html), quoted in Horace Campbell, "China in Africa: Challenging US Global Hegemony," *Third World Quarterly* 29.1 (2008): 92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590701726517>

<sup>198</sup> Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* 52.4 (1998): 894, <https://doi.org/10.1162/002081898550789>

<sup>199</sup> McKune and Ahmed, "The Contestation and Shaping of Cyber Norms," 3840.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 3837.

choose their own paths of cyber development, their models for Internet regulation and their public Internet policies” without interference from other states.<sup>201</sup>

Given its centralized, authoritarian structure, China views a potential open Internet as a threat. Information borders are key to the survival of its mode of governance.<sup>202</sup> In one of the most prominent CCP journals, top officials wrote that the Party’s ideas must become the “strongest voice in cyberspace,” for “if our party cannot traverse the hurdle represented by the Internet, it cannot traverse the hurdle of remaining in power for the long term.”<sup>203</sup> By contrast, a hallmark of Internet sovereignty has been to conceptualize it in the same domain as sovereignty over national airspace and maritime zones.<sup>204</sup> Thus, by constructing linkages to established legal norms of state sovereignty, China can protect domestic regime practices from Western-based human rights criticism.<sup>205</sup>

AISS forms a critical part of the effort to normalize Internet sovereignty on the global stage. Indeed, “China’s Cyber Superpower Strategy” emphasizes the importance of enhancing the “global influence of Internet companies like Alibaba, Tencent, Baidu [and] Huawei” in order to secure “international consensus” for Internet sovereignty.<sup>206</sup> In fact, China’s “AI National Team” of Alibaba, Tencent, Baidu, and iFLYTEK operates with a mandate to invest heavily and export effectively.<sup>207</sup> Developed countries figure centrally in its plan. Its international claims on Internet sovereignty are made on behalf of the developing world, calling countries to refocus the control of information technologies within jurisdictional borders.<sup>208</sup> Moreover, thirteen of the top twenty “Digital Decider” states for the future openness of the Internet have imported China’s AISS technology, including the top five—Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, India, and

<sup>201</sup> “International Cyberspace Cooperation Strategy,” (policy document, no. CD/2092, Conference on Disarmament, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China and State Information Office, March 1, 2017), <https://undocs.org/CD/2092>, quoted in Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 3838.

<sup>203</sup> Webster et al., “China’s ‘New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan.’”

<sup>204</sup> McKune and Ahmed, “The Contestation and Shaping of Cyber Norms,” 3838.

<sup>205</sup> Webster et al., China’s ‘New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan.’”

<sup>206</sup> Sarah Cook, “China’s Cyber Superpower Strategy: Implementation, Internet Freedom Implications, and U.S. Responses,” *Freedom House*, September 26, 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/article/chinas-cyber-superpower-strategy-implementation-Internet-freedom-implications-and-us#Ftn31>

<sup>207</sup> Gwagwa, “How China’s Artificial Intelligence is Shaping Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Global Order,” 1.

<sup>208</sup> Mueller, *Will the Internet Fragment?*, 18–19, quoted in McKune and Ahmed, “The Contestation and Shaping of Cyber Norms,” 3839.



Singapore.<sup>209</sup> Wright has therefore referred to China as using these companies' "market power" to "influence technical standards, 'normalize' domestic control and shape norms of behavior through international organizations."<sup>210</sup>

The interstate collaborations from Chinese companies exporting AISS ultimately legitimizes Internet sovereignty norms in multilateral settings.<sup>211</sup> In Ethiopia and Sudan, the CCP has led workshops on managing public opinion, adopting key legislation, and implementing surveillance technologies.<sup>212</sup> Further, in Cambodia, the National Police were trained in the use of surveillance cameras by China's Ministry of Public Security, while in Sri Lanka, PLA officials trained Sri Lankan officials on website filtration practices.<sup>213</sup> Overall, China appears to be leading a "charm offensive" by cultivating media and government elites in a network of countries sympathetic to Internet sovereignty norms.<sup>214</sup> It uses prior relationships to host sessions offering tools for monitoring and maintaining a "positive energy public-opinion guidance system."<sup>215</sup>

China also hosts conferences "to convince foreign officials and businesspeople of its view of the Internet."<sup>216</sup> In January 2018, the China Electronic Standardization Institute oversaw a joint effort by 30 academic and industry organizations to produce a "White Paper on Artificial Intelligence Standardization."<sup>217</sup> Such efforts promote Chinese AI companies' global competitiveness and set the rules in a

<sup>209</sup> Robert Morgus, Jocelyn Woolbright, and Justin Sherman, "The Digital Deciders: How a Group of Often Overlooked Countries Could Hold the Keys to the Future of the Global Internet," *New America*, October 23, 2018, <https://www.newamerica.org/cybersecurity-initiative/reports/digital-deciders/>

<sup>210</sup> Nicholas D. Wright, "Global Competition," in Ahmed et al., "Artificial Intelligence, China, Russia, and the Global Order: Technological, Political, Global, and Creative Perspectives," 32.

<sup>211</sup> Marcus Michaelsen and Marlies Glasius, "Authoritarian Practices in the Digital Age—Introduction," *International Journal of Communication* 12.7 (2018): 3788, <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/8536>

<sup>212</sup> Economy, "China's New Revolution: The Reign of Xi Jinping," 66-68.

<sup>213</sup> Khuon Narim, "Chinese Police Start Placing Surveillance Cameras," *Cambodia Daily*, July 16, 2015, <https://english.cambodiadaily.com/news/chinese-police-start-placing-surveillance-cameras-88535/>; Bandula Sirimanna, "Chinese Here for Cyber Censorship," *Sunday Times*, February 14, 2010, [www.sundaytimes.lk/100214/News/nws\\_02.html](http://www.sundaytimes.lk/100214/News/nws_02.html)

<sup>214</sup> Adrian Shabaz, "The Rise of Digital Authoritarianism," *Freedom House*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2018/rise-digital-authoritarianism>

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Economy, "China's New Revolution," 66.

<sup>217</sup> Jeffrey Ding, trans., "Excerpts from China's 'White Paper on Artificial Intelligence Standardization,'" ed. Paul Triolo, *New America*, June 20, 2018, <https://www.newamerica.org/cybersecurity-initiative/digichina/blog/translation-excerpts-chinas-white-paper-artificial-intelligence-standardization/>

strategically competitive, international environment. Meanwhile, regional security forums like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) are focused sites of learning best practices and provide a platform to disseminate digital norms to the international community.<sup>218</sup> Discussions at these conferences are normally kept behind closed doors and disclosures are rarely, if ever, released in English.<sup>219</sup> Indeed, the SCO is composed of shared interests of maintaining regime stability; ergo, the propensity to view and identify ethnic groups and political opposition as a security threat is streamlined through the SCO framework.<sup>220</sup> McKune and Ahmed argue that the fact that both India—the world’s largest democracy—and Pakistan have joined the SCO “demonstrates the significant potential for the diffusion of authoritarian norms and practices.”<sup>221</sup>

The role China’s security-industrial complex plays in setting international standards at the UN’s International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is especially telling. The ITU, a crucial multilateral body of nearly 200 member states, “is a space where companies outside of North America and Europe tend to shape and drive standard development.”<sup>222</sup> Ratified standards on facial recognition, video monitoring, and city and vehicle surveillance are “increasingly being authored by companies” like ZTE, Dahua, and China Telecom, and are commonly adopted by developing ITU member nations in the global South—who may often lack the capacity to design standards themselves.<sup>223</sup> Reflecting the strategic access to data resources and development of China’s AISS sector, one global human rights expert remarked that “there are virtually no human rights, consumer protection, or data protection experts present in ITU standards meetings.”<sup>224</sup> The result, for example, is that facial recognition draft standards on smart street light services are written to advantage the particular design of ZTE product’s “back-end architecture and functionality.”<sup>225</sup> Overall, Chinese companies have been responsible for “every submission to the UN for international standards on

<sup>218</sup> Deibert, “Authoritarianism Goes Global,” 72; McKune and Ahmed, “The Contestation and Shaping of Cyber Norms,” 3842-3843.

<sup>219</sup> Deibert, “Authoritarianism Goes Global,” 72.

<sup>220</sup> McKune and Ahmed, “The Contestation and Shaping of Cyber Norms,” 3842.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 3843.

<sup>222</sup> Anna Gross, Madhumita Murgia, and Yuan Yang, “Chinese Tech Groups Shaping UN Facial Recognition Standards,” *Financial Times*, December 1, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/c3555a3c-0d3e-11ea-b2d6-9bf4d1957a67>

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*



surveillance technology in the past three years...[and] half of the standards have already been approved.”<sup>226</sup>

The June 2019 G20 Summit in Osaka placed China in opposition to Japan, the U.S., and the EU for the world governance over data, suggesting China will continue to be the primary norm entrepreneur for Internet sovereignty. Indeed, summit debates highlighted China's contrast from Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's "free flow of data with trust," a principle to promote cross-border data flows with protection.<sup>227</sup> However, China's resistance lies beyond sacrificing its ability to extract the data of importing countries from unprotected backdoors, as the present U.S. administration might solely assume.<sup>228</sup> Rather, China views multilateral settings as avenues to protest the current western-biased Internet order. As the *Economist* points out, data flows have largely concentrated where data is "most efficiently crunched"—the United States, which offers "the biggest and most innovative tech companies, but [also] plenty of potential customers, fibre optic cables, cheap power and land to build cavernous data centres[sic]."<sup>229</sup> Data localization practices are the antithesis, and China's encouragement of such practices strategically and subversively undermines the default network benefits accruing in the West. Accordingly, China's signature on the Osaka Declaration on the Digital Economy should not be viewed as conciliation, but rather the next step in the long game to convince other nations to limit the free flow of data and move away from the western Internet. Indeed, the Declaration is merely an agreement for continued discussions. Already, several G20 countries have indicated their desire to keep data internally, as Indonesia, Egypt, South Africa, and India, which specifically cited the importance of data localization, elected not to sign the Declaration.<sup>230</sup> As Sacks and Sherman argue, the solidified norms over the global

<sup>226</sup> Anna Gross and Madhumita Murgia, "China Shows Its Dominance in Surveillance Technology," *Financial Times*, December 27, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/b34d8ff8-21b4-11ea-92da-f0c92e957a96>

<sup>227</sup> Masumi Koizumi, "Japan's Pitch For Free Data Flows 'With Trust' Faces Uphill Battle At G20 Amid 'Splinternet' Fears," *Japan Times*, June 27, 2019, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/06/27/business/tech/japans-pitch-free-data-flows-trust-faces-uphill-battle-g20-amid-splinternet-fears/>

<sup>228</sup> Shubhajit Roy, "G-20 Osaka Summit: India Refuses To Sign Declaration On Free Flow Of Data Across Borders," *Indian Express*, June 29, 2019, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/g-20-osaka-summit-narendra-mod-india-declaration-on-free-flow-of-data-across-borders-shinzo-abe-5805846/>

<sup>229</sup> "Governments Are Erecting Borders For Data," *Economist*, February 20, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2020/02/20/governments-are-erecting-borders-for-data>

<sup>230</sup> "G20 Summit: India Does Not Sign Osaka Declaration On Cross-Border Data Flow," *Scroll*.

governance of data will, in turn, “influence AI competition, because not getting these data could limit how well tailored products are to different people.”<sup>231</sup>

However, China’s AISS empire grants it an alarmingly advantageous game-theoretic position for ushering in data localization and Internet sovereignty. Ironically, much of the modern data localization practices in place were initially prompted by a knee-jerk reaction to the 2013 Snowden revelations on foreign surveillance.<sup>232</sup> Since then, more and more countries have adopted data localization practices to keep data within their respective borders, like how China denies its citizens access to Wikipedia, Facebook, and large portions of Google or Iran established its ‘Halal net’ free from any western architecture.<sup>233</sup> At present, about 45 countries have adopted policies preventing data from leaving their geographic borders, a trend not limited to authoritarian states but one that includes Australia, South Korea, India, Philippines, Russia, and India.<sup>234</sup> China’s AISS exports, on the one hand, left unfettered, enable the raw extraction of data from developing countries, which continues to feed the Chinese security-industrial complex with increasingly diverse, international data. On the other hand, as data becomes more recognized as an industrial resource, the scale and ease by which China’s siphoning of countries citizen data is occurring may prompt a similar reaction seen in 2013 and further accelerate the data localization trend globally. This time, a data localization surge, will likely become a permanent shift in the future of the open Internet, since thirteen of the top twenty “Digital Decider” states have imported China’s AISS technology.<sup>235</sup>

The global pandemic world of COVID-19 represents another vehicle of strategic import for AISS and Internet sovereignty norm-setting. The virus has arrived when democracy is already in a geopolitically fragile state, “and it risks exacerbating democratic backsliding . . . and potentially reset[ting] the terms of the global debate on the merits of authoritarianism versus democracy.”<sup>236</sup> It

*in*, June 29, 2019, <https://scroll.in/latest/928811/g20-summit-india-does-not-sign-osaka-declaration-on-cross-border-data-flow>

<sup>231</sup> Sacks and Sherman, “The Global Data War Heats Up.”

<sup>232</sup> Nigel Cory, “Cross-Border Data Flows: Where Are the Barriers, and What Do They Cost?” (report, Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, Washington DC, May 2017), <http://www2.itif.org/2017-cross-border-data-flows.pdf>

<sup>233</sup> Akash Kapur, “The Rising Threat of Digital Nationalism,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 1, 2019, [wsj.com/articles/the-rising-threat-of-digital-nationalism-11572620577](https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-rising-threat-of-digital-nationalism-11572620577)

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> Morgus, Woolbright and Sherman, “The Digital Deciders.”

<sup>236</sup> Frances Z. Brown, Saskia Brechenmacher, and Thomas Carothers, “How Will the Coronavirus

has accelerated the use of new surveillance technologies, as governments from Israel to Hong Kong attempt to flatten the curve with locational tracking and contact tracing efforts.<sup>237</sup> Indeed, perhaps one of the “most significant legacies” of the global pandemic world is its increased reliance on AISS, “prompted by the public health need to more closely monitor citizens.”<sup>238</sup> Wright’s contention that Western democracies design, implement, and export its own surveillance model “as the world rebuilds in the wake of the pandemic” further underscores the geopolitically strategic importance of AISS and the capriciousness of international AI norms.<sup>239</sup> However, under pressure to control the pandemic, even ostensibly liberal democracies may be inclined to experiment and implement antidemocratic surveillance measures. For example, the Indian government has “pressured local media to maintain positive coverage” on its responses to the virus,<sup>240</sup> while states like Karnataka and Telangana are requiring the submission of selfies geo-tagged to periodically confirm the location of citizens.<sup>241</sup>

Without permanently accepted global standards for ethical, legal, and practical implications of AI, key players like China have a special incentive to shape norms that favor their needs. For instance, one prominent PLA scholar, Ye Zheng, described the “logic of Internet sovereignty as a starting point” for control over cyberspace.<sup>242</sup> The more countries the PRC can bring under its model of governance, the lesser the threat to Internet sovereignty. The market of AISS should thus be viewed as an “active shaper of the preferences, practices, and policies” of those who partake, as the services provided by China create critical solutions to state problems.<sup>243</sup> As Feldstein argues, such technology concentrates power in the hands of the few, furnishing even the heads of ostensibly democratic governments the strong incentive to “arm security forces with intrusive technology, monitor

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Reshape Democracy and Governance Globally?” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, April 6, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/06/how-will-coronavirus-reshape-democracy-and-governance-globally-pub-81470>

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Wright, “Coronavirus and the Future of Surveillance.”

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Brown, Brechenmacher, and Carothers, “How Will the Coronavirus Reshape Democracy and Governance Globally?”

<sup>241</sup> Venkat Ananth, “As Covid-19 Cases Rise In India, “Covtech” Based Surveillance Intensifies,” *Economic Times*, March 30, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/as-covid-19-cases-rise-in-india-covtech-based-surveillance-intensifies/articleshow/74876078.cms>

<sup>242</sup> McKune and Ahmed, “The Contestation and Shaping of Cyber Norms,” 3837.

<sup>243</sup> Deibert, “Authoritarianism Goes Global,” 73.

the activities of political opponents and civil society, and take preemptive action against potential challenges to their authority.”<sup>244</sup> The dangers are greatest for backsliding regimes, the most common contemporaneous route to authoritarianism, as illiberal governments may find natural interest in such tools enabling protection from mass discontent.<sup>245</sup> The increased global propensity to adopt Chinese practices is heightened with each successive government integration, which is likely to induce others to follow. For example, replicas of Ecuador’s ECU-911 system were sold to Venezuela, Bolivia, and Angola.<sup>246</sup> Laura Steckman therefore concludes that China’s “dual-pronged” approach of outreach partnerships and export agreements grant it:

...access to the world’s cutting-edge researchers to develop AI faster, and the ability to export its internally-developed technologies, whether developed entirely domestically or in collaboration with partners, to (re)shape the world through AI. In the process, China may influence educational curricula, set international standards for AI, selectively highlight or impede the spread of news and other information, gain access to extensive personal data, and use the technologies to disseminate its ideological perspective.<sup>247</sup>

The breadth of China’s AISS empire has helped ensure norms of Internet sovereignty are a viable alternative to the U.S. dominated open Internet norms.

### *Rhetoric of Altruism: Paying for Harm*

The last relevant indicator of neocolonialism in the colonialist heritage is the framing of self-serving engagements with developing countries as benevolent. As Antiwi-Boateng argues, the rhetoric of altruism cloaked European colonialism as a civilizing mission to remedy the perceived “ignorance and cultural backwardness” of Africa.<sup>248</sup> Similarly, China uses carefully selected phrases of

<sup>244</sup> Feldstein, “The Road to Digital Unfreedom,” 48.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

<sup>246</sup> Paul Mozur, Jonah M. Kessel, and Melissa Chan, “Made in China, Exported to the World: The Surveillance State,” *New York Times*, April 19, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/24/technology/ecuador-surveillance-cameras-police-government.html>

<sup>247</sup> Steckman, “Pathways to Lead in Artificial Intelligence,” 82.

<sup>248</sup> Antiwi-Boateng, “New World Order Neo-Colonialism,” 183.

common prosperity to convey a “win-win” relationship.<sup>249</sup> For example, on the Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the following:

Africa faces challenges of maintaining peace and security, and of promoting development and revitalization. In response to the needs, China will step up mediation in regional hotspots as well as cooperation with African countries on unconventional security threats such as terrorism, piracy and natural disaster...China welcomes our African brothers and sisters in getting on board of [sic] the fast train of development.<sup>250</sup>

Antiwi-Boateng contends that this rhetoric accomplishes a distinction from previous Western practices, and therefore hides the “self-seeking results of economic extraction and unbridled opportunism” beneath its words.<sup>251</sup> As he argues, the framing of a win-win relationship should therefore be viewed more as a “pragmatic response to a new world order shaped by international norms and institutions.”<sup>252</sup>

Through the exportation of AISS, China gains data for industrialization purposes, renders countries dependent on its surveillance markets, and protects its regime’s domestic Internet practices. In effect, these ramifications pose a serious risk to these countries’ sovereignty and stability. However, this asymmetrical exchange is largely masked by its framing of the interaction as altruistic. Freedom House has reported that many countries are shifting to the “China Model” of surveillance control, because China has convinced such countries that its AISS systems are particularly advantageous for ideas of state sovereignty.<sup>253</sup> Companies like Huawei market their products to the Middle East as an extremism prevention tool, and to Latin America as a weapon for crime prevention.<sup>254</sup> In February 2011, Ecuador, financed by Chinese loans, received an AISS system in exchange for oil; soon after, it had signed away over \$19 billion in exchange for credit facilities towards a variety of Chinese infrastructure projects like hydroelectric dams.<sup>255</sup> In July 2018, Xi Jinping publicly called for the Arab world to import its “social stability”

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Li Xiang, “China to Boost Ties, Advance Belt and Road Initiative in Africa,” *China Daily*, March 3, 2018. <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201803/08/WS5aa0d6b3a3106e7dcc140675.html>

<sup>251</sup> Osman Antiwi-Boateng, “New World Order Neo-Colonialism,” 183.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>253</sup> Gallagher, “Export Laws,” 35-37.

<sup>254</sup> Feldstein, “The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance,” 17.

<sup>255</sup> Mozur, Kessel, and Chan, “Made in China, Exported to the World.”

systems for around \$150 million.<sup>256</sup> Most notably, in the deal with Zimbabwe, China claimed it as an example of win-win diplomacy. Former Zimbabwean Ambassador to China, Christopher Mutsvangwa, agreed: “China has proved to be our all-weather friend and this time around, we have approached them to spearhead our AI revolution in Zimbabwe.”<sup>257</sup>

Similarly, Internet sovereignty is strategically framed as a new model of international relations that better represents the interests of the developing world.<sup>258</sup> At regional security forums, China has attempted to convince developing nations that Internet sovereignty is in their best interests. Arguing that the present Internet infrastructure system was established by the West, China frames Internet sovereignty as preferable since the present core infrastructure concentrates benefits in wealthy democracies while the majority of Internet users hail from developing countries.<sup>259</sup>

### *Violating Internet Sovereignty*

According to President Xi Jinping, “no country should pursue cyber hegemony, interfere in other countries’ internal affairs or engage in, connive at or support cyber activities that undermine other countries’ national security.”<sup>260</sup> Despite calls for international balance, China has failed to heed its own words. In April 2018, President Xi Jinping announced at the National Cyber Security and Informationization Work Conference that he will move forward with “the construction of China as a cyber superpower.”<sup>261</sup> Given that AI has become the driver of a new industrial revolution and international markets, China has formulated long term strategies to enhance its AI development sectors, increasingly the main battlefield of competition with the United States.<sup>262</sup> China has set up barriers for the entry of foreign AI companies and complicates

<sup>256</sup> Charles Rollet, “Ecuador’s All-Seeing Eye Is Made in China,” *Foreign Policy*, August 9, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/09/ecuadors-all-seeing-eye-is-made-in-china/>

<sup>257</sup> Problem Masau, “Zimbabwe: Chinese Tech Revolution Comes to Zimbabwe,” *AllAfrica*, October 9, 2019, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201910090185.html>

<sup>258</sup> McKune and Ahmed, “The Contestation and Shaping of Cyber Norms,” 3835, 3837, 3839.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 3839-40.

<sup>260</sup> Xi Jinping, “Remarks by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People’s Republic of China At the Opening Ceremony of the Second World Internet Conference” (speech, Second World Internet Conference, Wuzhen, China, December 16, 2015), [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/t1327570.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1327570.shtml)

<sup>261</sup> Gallagher, “Export Laws,” 35.

<sup>262</sup> Wang and Chen, “Rising Sino-US Competition in Artificial Intelligence,” 241.

international firms' ability to have data flow outside its borders.<sup>263</sup> Meanwhile, domestic artificial intelligence companies are expected to control 80% of the domestic market by 2025.<sup>264</sup> In the long term, China aims to exert influence on the global Internet, while exploiting the presently fragmented Internet norms for personal gain. China's extraction of countries' data, pursuit of unsaturated markets, and desire for global prestige further attest to the aims of Chinese AI supremacy.

China has also routinely violated Internet sovereignty norms through pervasive digital intrusion and espionage of extraterritorial targets.<sup>265</sup> In addition to the unauthorized siphoning of information from the African Union,<sup>266</sup> analysis of AISS projects within the BRI by Cave et al. show "serious concerns about the erosion of sovereignty for host nations, such as when a recipient government doesn't have full control of the operations, management, digital infrastructure or data being generated through those projects."<sup>267</sup> Co-located within its Great Firewall, which limits access to online materials deemed inappropriate by the CCP, an offensive weapon "inserts malicious content in unencrypted Web traffic to overseas users."<sup>268</sup>

Moreover, China's specialization in AISS and market dominance grant it a high degree of control over the user experience of such technology. Unfairly trained AI or imbalanced data sets create the opportunity for bias, which poses significant issues for exporting AI technologies abroad. The exporter possesses the power to shape norms of implementation for recipients of its technology. Through its AISS technology, China may have an opportunity to shape global privacy norms. In some cases, AISS is exported to support authoritarian-leaning leaders, in others it is done to undermine international law and threaten sovereignty.<sup>269</sup> However, the "right to choose" Internet policies and practices without international interference appears to be largely absent from such instances of China's engagement.

### *Entrenching Corruption*

The most pernicious Chinese engagement with its empire, however, has

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Economy, "China's New Revolution," 65.

<sup>265</sup> See Bill Marczak et al., "China's Great Cannon" (brief, Citizen Lab, Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto, April 10, 2015), <https://citizenlab.ca/2015/04/chinas-great-cannon/>

<sup>266</sup> Weber, "Understanding the Global Ramifications of China's Information Controls Model," 73-74.

<sup>267</sup> Cave et al., "Mapping China's Technology Giants," 9.

<sup>268</sup> McKune and Ahmed, "The Contestation and Shaping of Cyber Norms," 3843.

<sup>269</sup> Economy, "China's New Revolution," 69.



been its impact on clients' corruption and state-sponsored abuse. Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis describe how digital technologies like AISS may simply be too powerful to resist, as "the failure of digital checks and balances often renders an electoral process even more vulnerable to rigging than it was before."<sup>270</sup> In Zimbabwe, facial recognition is operated at political rallies to monitor and track opponents of the regime.<sup>271</sup> Amid hyperinflation and widespread shortages of food and medicine from economic meltdown, Venezuela's Fatherland Card has been used to curb discontent and allocate resources towards loyalists.<sup>272</sup> During the 2018 elections, Venezuela voters were asked to scan their Fatherland Cards to register for a prize and those who did received a message thanking them for supporting Maduro.<sup>273</sup>

Chinese companies operate with little scrutiny and consideration for corporate social responsibility, according to Mozur.<sup>274</sup> Indeed, when interviewed, Su Qingfeng, head of ZTE's Venezuela unit simply remarked: "we are just developing our market."<sup>275</sup> In Zimbabwe's telecommunications sector, Huawei has played a central role, continuing multimillion-dollar contracts with companies like NetOne, which has been the subject of a number of corruption allegations.<sup>276</sup> For Ecuador, one former legislator commented that they lack the capacity to demand information from China on systems like ECU-911.<sup>277</sup> In Uganda and Zambia, the effects of Chinese involvement were even more salient. Huawei aided government officials in spying on political opponents, including intercepting "encrypted communications and social media, and using cell data to track their whereabouts."<sup>278</sup> Ugandan security officials were encouraged to travel to Algeria to study Huawei's operations in Algiers, and shortly after, Uganda imported a Huawei AISS system for \$126 million.<sup>279</sup> Moreover, China's company

<sup>270</sup> Nic Cheeseman, Gabrielle Lynch, and Justin Willis, "Digital Dilemmas: The Unintended Consequences of Election Technology," *Democratization* 25.8 (2018): 1397, 1400, 1405-08, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2018.1470165>

<sup>271</sup> Gallagher, "Export Laws," 35-37.

<sup>272</sup> Berwick, "How ZTE Helps Venezuela Create China-Style Social Control."

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Mozur, Kessel, and Chan, "Made in China, Exported to the World."

<sup>275</sup> Berwick, "How ZTE Helps Venezuela Create China-Style Social Control."

<sup>276</sup> Cave et al., "Mapping China's Technology Giants," 11-12.

<sup>277</sup> Mozur, Kessel, and Chan, "Made in China, Exported to the World."

<sup>278</sup> Parkinson, Bariyo, and Chin, "Huawei Technicians Helped African Governments Spy on Political Opponents."

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.



Semtpian viewed regimes with a record of detaining and torturing critics as potential clients, including Saudi Arabia, Belarus, and Sudan.<sup>280</sup> Hikvision similarly provided Iran with facial recognition and smart policing software.<sup>281</sup> In this way, China is cementing the fate of authoritarianism within such countries. As Feldstein argues, the potential of AI to repress and weather discontent for an illiberal regime is all too enticing, leading to even steeper deterioration into authoritarian governance.<sup>282</sup>

While China's AISS exports may be welcomed by these countries, the consequences in terms of governance and human rights is ultimately negative, particularly for those with records of abuse.<sup>283</sup> Privacy norms may be altered universally as intensive, ubiquitous surveillance is instead normalized. China's maintenance of the win-win narrative behind exporting AISS, and disregard for its social and governmental impact on host countries largely resembles the neocolonialist tradition. Indeed, digitization is being pursued by countries that "lack the political will and institutional framework necessary for it to function effectively."<sup>284</sup> Rather than a 'civilizing' mission, at the expense of such countries, China has embarked on a 'securitization' mission, with the added effect of materially exploiting and normatively shaping their clients in favor of Chinese geopolitical interests.

## CONCLUSION

With a projected 14% increase in Global GDP due to AI, the development of AI has become a recognized manifestation of a country's comprehensive power.<sup>285</sup> In this newfound international, technological environment, China's AISS exportation is one method of acquiring and enhancing control. Much like 19<sup>th</sup> century European colonialists imposed sovereignty over water or land, China's pursuit of global primacy in cyberspace is a similar assertion of authority.

However, China recognizes it is currently losing the race for the position of world AI leader. In fact, China is lagging when compared to the U.S. in every single indicator besides data.<sup>286</sup> In response, China has resolved to pursue specialization

<sup>280</sup> Gallagher, "Export Laws," 37.

<sup>281</sup> Feldstein, "The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance," Appendix 1.

<sup>282</sup> Feldstein, "The Road to Digital Unfreedom," 42-43.

<sup>283</sup> Gwagwa, "How China's Artificial Intelligence is shaping Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Global Order Summary."

<sup>284</sup> Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis, "Digital Dilemmas: The Unintended Consequences of Election Technology," 1400.

<sup>285</sup> Wang and Chen, "Rising Sino-US Competition in Artificial Intelligence," 242-243.

<sup>286</sup> Ding, "Deciphering China's AI Dream," 27.

in the one field it has a relative advantage in: AISS. In one year alone, China has sought over 900 patents in the domain of facial recognition, outpacing a mere 150 patents from the U.S.<sup>287</sup>

China feeds and protects such specialization initiatives through the exertion of neocolonialist influence over its empire of importers: over 50 countries have received Chinese AISS technologies. China extracts unique data resources from these countries for the purposes of its industrialization. China certainly recognizes the potential of data, particularly as it endeavors to leapfrog the United States' AI position. Indeed, ground-truth data, like tax returns or medical records, is mostly in the hands of governments, but it is precisely that data which is crucial for developing AI surveillance states. Thus, data exchange requirements, like those of Zimbabwe's AISS contract—where massive troves of Zimbabwean biometric data were harnessed to enhance China's algorithms—are to be expected from China's AISS export partnerships. Even without such contracts, merely possessing China's infrastructure leads a country to be susceptible to backdoors of information—and China has already constructed AISS systems in over 18 countries.<sup>288</sup>

Similarly, China's specialization in AISS during the digitization of the global South, as well as the reverse wave of authoritarianism in developing countries, suggests a strategic manipulation of interests for market gain. Purporting to provide state solutions to developing countries' problems, China has categorically enhanced the capacity of nations to weather discontented publics—the key threat to regime survival today. In making such technology available through financing measures, China has ultimately created a market-based reliance on its AISS political solutions: its customers always want more methods of control. As with Venezuela, this is likely to result in further purchases of AISS upgrades from China, locking in an unsaturated market for AISS exportation.

In the colonial past, the British and French empires exerted influence beyond regional spheres to pursue national interests without external interference. Likewise, China pursues countries in Africa and beyond with a similar platform and has pursued protections for its rise to AI power. Holding

<sup>287</sup> Jeffrey Ding, "Is China Taking the Lead in AI?" Interview by Frieda Klotz, *MIT Sloan Management Review*, April 30, 2020, <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/is-china-taking-the-lead-in-ai/>

<sup>288</sup> Clarke and Knake, "The Internet Freedom League," 184–192.

training sessions on the application of its technology in 36 countries and using international conferences to diffuse favorable norms to recipients of its technology, China has secured Internet sovereignty as a successful alternative to the present normative consensus. In the international contest for Internet norms, China has become the champion of Internet sovereignty and has used the market power of its companies—Alibaba, Tencent, Baidu, and Huawei—to recruit developing countries into its fold. The end result is the creation of a normative protectorate of countries, who enable AISS practices to continue unhindered by Western, rights-based criticisms.

Overall, China has used its position to gain asymmetrically from the countries to which it exports AISS. But, just as European powers once did with their 'civilizing' mission, China uses similar altruistic rhetoric. China effectively sells countries on the idea that AISS and Internet sovereignty norms are key for developing countries' interests while hiding more pernicious effects from the limelight. Describing its data extraction from Zimbabwe as "win-win" is particularly telling, but so is China's routine violation of Internet sovereignty norms. As China aspires for cyber hegemony, it pervasively intrudes on nations' sovereignty to information, and embeds its own national values within the technology it exports. Moreover, it feigns ignorance when it directly, as in the case of Uganda and Zambia, or indirectly undermines nations' political processes with its technologies. Seeking out clientele with records of state-sponsored human rights abuses and corruption only further deepens the dive into authoritarianism presently taking place. The net effect is negative, as China's technology increasingly becomes a conduit for human rights abuses and backwards progress.

Such elements—resource extraction, pursuit of unsaturated markets, desire for global prestige, and altruistic rhetoric—are indicative of neocolonialist exchange between China and the recipient countries. However, constrained by a set of international norms prohibiting explicit exploitation, China has been forced to add substance to its rhetorical 'win-win' framing. In this context, it appears that China still contributes to the wealth gap, satisfying Nkrumah's condition of neocolonialism. Its heedless extraction of developing countries' data is applied to improve its algorithms far beyond what may be capable in the countries it pulls; its tapping into the heartstrings of countries' desires for security and stability creates a tangible reliance on AISS; its adoption of Internet sovereignty norms enable a more oppressive domestic censorship operation, a geopolitical lottery for China; and its exportation of AISS to countries with sub-par human rights records suggest

the entrenchment of deleterious corruption. Such consequences do not echo the positive win-win rhetoric underlying China's AISS exports.

Earlier it was also argued that the presence of mutual beneficence should not acquit China's exportation of AISS as neocolonialist, because, in large part, China's mutual beneficence emerged solely out of conformity to international standards. But a key shortcoming of this paper is its failure to address two questions: If countries are seeking and implementing AISS as intended, why should China's intentions matter? Moreover, could not any mutually-beneficial, strategic partnership between a wealthier and less-wealthy country be explained away as neocolonialism 'boxed in' by international normative constraints?

One avenue to addressing such questions might involve a comparative case with U.S. AI geopolitical market policy. Future scholarship could contextualize the neocolonialist nature of the AI international marketplace with such comparison. Indeed, an analysis of how the U.S. interacts with its own set of international Internet norms, along with an evaluation of the dynamics between the U.S. and its recipient countries would prove useful for understanding the norms of AI superpower's market operations.

Nonetheless, since China exerts its position as a specialist in AISS to set the rules of engagement with the countries who import its technology, China's specialization in AISS should be viewed as a strategic foreign policy decision for cyberspace domination. COVID-19 is but the latest example highlighting the crucial importance of AISS and testing the Western democratic model of governance. Undoubtedly, more instances will follow as the technology evolves and proves its capacity to solve crises, from extremism to epidemics. In this way, China's abuse of developing countries' resources, markets, soft power, and trust on its path to AISS domination can and should be discerned as neocolonialism. But the questions above highlight the lack of clarity in what precisely qualifies as neocolonialism today. Future research would therefore also benefit from an updated conception of neocolonialism that adequately factors in international normative constraints in its calculus of exploitation.

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# TWITTER AND INDIA'S 2019 LOK SABHA ELECTION: COMPARING INDIAN NATIONAL PARTIES' CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES ON TWITTER<sup>1</sup>

JIN, XIAOLI<sup>2</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

India's 2019 Lok Sabha Election was one of the largest democratic elections in the world. During this election, candidates used social media to reach out to voters and advertise their policy initiatives. In this paper, I examine how India's major parties differ in their campaign strategies on Twitter with respect to their general tweeting patterns, policy prioritizations, and messages to underrepresented voters. To conduct this research, I adopt three methods—LASSO Logistic, Mutual Information, and Keywords Subsetting—to uncover policy initiatives in tweets. My findings suggest that India's major parties and their leaders differ in their tweeting frequency, choice of language, and the number of times they mention one another. They not only prioritize different sets of policies in their tweets, but also shift their priorities over time in response to major political events. Finally, parties and politicians also differ in the messages they deliver to underrepresented voters. The data collected from candidate and party tweets highlights a clear set of policy initiatives addressing traditionally marginalized voters.

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## INTRODUCTION

As smartphone penetration rate and mobile data consumption increase steadily in India, social media has allowed India's political campaigns to infiltrate digital spaces. Many voters now receive their news from social media platforms like Twitter, and politicians rely on these platforms to amplify their campaign messages.<sup>1</sup> From April to May 2019, India held its 17th Lok Sabha National Election to elect members to the lower house of India's Parliament. It was one of the world's largest democratic exercises, with over 900 million eligible participants.<sup>2</sup> In the build-up to this election, India's political parties constantly vied for advantages on social media. From March to April 2019, 45.6 million tweets were posted about this election.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, understanding campaign messages on social media is crucial to interpreting major parties' election strategies.

There is a wealth of research on the use of social media in American elections. Peterson, for instance, analyzes why U.S. politicians like to use Twitter for their campaigns.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, LaMarre and Suzuki-Lambrecht demonstrate that Twitter is an effective tool for candidates to inform and engage voters, as increases in candidates' Twitter usage significantly increased their odds of winning.<sup>5</sup> Most of the research focusing on the U.S. share the same conclusion: political parties display many distinct differences in their social media strategies, based on differing policies, supporters and governing statuses. For example, Lassen and Brown show that members of the minority party use Twitter more frequently than members of the majority party.<sup>6</sup> Evans, Cordova and Sipole find

<sup>1</sup> "Twitter Provides a Front Row to the World's Largest Democratic Election," *Twitter*, May 27, 2019, [https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_in/topics/events/2019/lok-sabha-2019-wrap-up.html](https://blog.twitter.com/en_in/topics/events/2019/lok-sabha-2019-wrap-up.html)

<sup>2</sup> David Schultz and Manisha Madhava, "How India Holds an Election With 900 Million Voters and 8000 Candidates," *The Washington Post*, May 8, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/05/08/india-more-than-candidates-states-are-campaigning-parliament-seats/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.9c5e1ede6807](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/05/08/india-more-than-candidates-states-are-campaigning-parliament-seats/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9c5e1ede6807)

<sup>3</sup> "India Election Sees 45.6 Million Tweets; PM Modi Most Mentioned Figure: Twitter," *Business Today*, April 11, 2019, <http://www.businesstoday.in/top-story/india-election-sees-456-million-tweets-pm-modi-most-mentioned-figure-twitter/story/336443.html>

<sup>4</sup> Rolfe D. Peterson, "To Tweet or Not to Tweet: Exploring the Determinants of Early Adoption of Twitter by House Members in the 111th Congress," *The Social Science Journal* 49.4 (2012): 430–31, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2012.07.002>

<sup>5</sup> Heather L. Lamarre and Yoshikazu Suzuki-Lambrecht, "Tweeting Democracy? Examining Twitter as an Online Public Relations Strategy for Congressional Campaigns," *Public Relations Review* 39.4 (2013): 360–61, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2013.07.009>

<sup>6</sup> David S. Lassen and Adam R. Brown, "Twitter: The Electoral Connection?" *Social Science*

that challengers are more likely than incumbents to mention their opponents' names and attack them on Twitter.<sup>7</sup> Alashri et al. reveal that candidates focus on different areas of policies on social media, ranging from healthcare to immigration to the economy,<sup>8</sup> while Barbera demonstrates that political parties are more responsive to their supporters than to the general public on social media.<sup>9</sup>

While plenty of research has been done on social media in the U.S., fewer papers explore the same topic in India. As of 2018, only 24 percent of India's population had access to social networks.<sup>10</sup> Campaigning on social media is also a more recent trend for Indian politicians than for their U.S. counterparts. However, India's internet usage has been steadily increasing in the past 10 years.<sup>11</sup> There are reasons to believe that the differences in campaign strategies which U.S. political parties display on social media may also exist in India's elections.

Therefore, this paper will test whether and how India's political parties use different social media strategies in the 2019 Lok Sabha Election. I examine the Twitter accounts and tweets of India's two major parties—the Bharatiya Janata Party (the incumbent, hereafter referred to as BJP) and the Indian National Congress (the challenger, hereafter referred to as the Congress)—and their respective leaders, Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi. To formulate my hypothesis in depth, I posit these five research questions:

Q1. How often did each party and politician tweet?

Q2. How often did each party and politician mention or attack one another?

Q3. Which languages did each party and politician tweet in?

Q4. Which key areas of policy did each party and politician pay attention

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*Computer Review* 29.4 (2010): 419–20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439310382749>

<sup>7</sup> Heather K. Evans, Victoria Cordova, and Savannah Sipole, "Twitter Style: An Analysis of How House Candidates Used Twitter in Their 2012 Campaigns," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 47.2 (2014): 459, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1049096514000389>

<sup>8</sup> Saud Alashri et al., "The 2016 US Presidential Election on Facebook: An Exploratory Analysis of Sentiments," *Proceedings of the 51st Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (2018): 1775–76, <https://doi.org/10.24251/hicss.2018.223>

<sup>9</sup> Pablo Barberá et al., "Who Leads? Who Follows? Measuring Issue Attention and Agenda Setting by Legislators and the Mass Public Using Social Media Data," *American Political Science Review* 113.4 (2019): 883, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055419000352>

<sup>10</sup> Sanika Diwanji, "India - Social Network Penetration 2017–2023," *Statista*, March 31, 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/240960/share-of-indian-population-using-social-networks/>

<sup>11</sup> Sanika Diwanji, "India - Internet Penetration 2017," *Statista*, March 30, 2020, [www.statista.com/statistics/255135/internet-penetration-in-india/](https://www.statista.com/statistics/255135/internet-penetration-in-india/)



to, and how did their attention shift over time?

Q5. Did the two parties and politicians differ in the policy messages they conveyed to underrepresented voters? If so, which policy messages did each of them emphasize?

Based on research on American elections discussed above, I expect the Congress and Gandhi to tweet more often than the BJP and Modi (Q1). I also expect the Congress and Gandhi to mention the BJP and Modi in their tweets more often than the BJP and Modi mention them (Q2). Since the BJP-led government made the use of Hindi mandatory on government social media accounts in 2013, I expect the BJP and Modi to tweet in English less often than the Congress and Gandhi (Q3).<sup>12</sup> To test the fourth research question, I review popular tweets about India's 2019 election and sort them into three policy areas that are most frequently discussed: *Economy and Jobs*, *Security and Defense*, and *Corruption*. Since research shows that incumbents in developing countries face significant disadvantages such as corruption charges, I expect the Congress and Gandhi to discuss *Corruption* more than the BJP and Modi.<sup>13</sup> I also expect Gandhi and the Congress to talk more about *Security and Defense* in February 2019, as a deadly bombing attack in Pulwama, Kashmir had occurred in February under the incumbent's watch.<sup>14</sup> Since a report from India's National Sample Survey Office was leaked in January 2019, showing that India's unemployment rate had reached a four-decade high, I expect Gandhi and the Congress to have increased their attacks on Modi's performance on *Economy and Jobs* following this announcement (Q4).<sup>15</sup>

Among the research questions, the fifth question is potentially the most unique and interesting to answer. Since the 2019 Lok Sabha election was

<sup>12</sup> See "India PM Modi Demands Hindi, Not English For Social Media," *NBC News*, August 11, 2014, <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/india-pm-modi-demands-hindi-not-english-social-media-n172421>

<sup>13</sup> Marko Klačnja, "Corruption and the Incumbency Disadvantage: Theory and Evidence," *The Journal of Politics* 77.4 (2015): 928–929, <https://doi.org/10.1086/682913>

<sup>14</sup> Shaurya K. Gurung, "What Happened at Pulwama and History of Terror Attacks on Convoys," *Economic Times*, February 20, 2019, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/what-happened-at-pulwama-and-history-of-terror-attacks-on-convoys/articleshow/68019194.cms>

<sup>15</sup> Somesh Jha, "Unemployment Rate at Four-Decade High of 6.1% in 2017-18: NSSO Survey," *Business Standard*, January 30, 2019, [www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/unemployment-rate-at-five-decade-high-of-6-1-in-2017-18-nssso-survey-119013100053\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/unemployment-rate-at-five-decade-high-of-6-1-in-2017-18-nssso-survey-119013100053_1.html); "Troubling Unemployment Data, Leaked in January, Now Released Post-Elections," *The Wire*, <https://thewire.in/economy/official-data-unemployment-2017-2018>; "Is the Job Scene in India Bad? Depends on How You See It, Says Govt," *Economic Times*, June 1, 2019, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/jobs/indias-unemployment-rate-hit-6-1-in-2017-18/articleshow/69598640.cms>

highly competitive, winning voters from traditionally underrepresented groups was especially important. Studying how parties and politicians reach out to underrepresented voters is also critical to reveal how they use social media to get their messages across. To answer the fifth question, I identify four groups of underrepresented voters: women, Muslims, farmers, and young voters, which cover minorities in terms of gender, religion, economic status, and age. I expect to see each party and politician talk about their distinctive policy initiatives relevant to each underrepresented group when reaching out to those specific voters (Q5). By answering the aforementioned five research questions, I seek to reveal whether and how India's major parties differed in their social media strategies through a policy-oriented perspective.

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data in this study comes from the official Twitter pages of Modi, Gandhi, the BJP, and the Congress. I collected all the tweets from their respective Twitter timelines from November 1, 2018 to April 30, 2019, using this to compile a dataset of 9295 tweet objects from the BJP, 3972 tweet objects from the Congress, 2034 tweet objects from Modi and 287 tweet objects from Gandhi.<sup>16</sup> Each tweet object contains a series of attributes pertaining to the tweet, including but not limited to date, text, hashtag, URL, number of re-tweets, and number of likes.

To clean up the tweets for subsequent analyses, I tokenize and lemmatize the contents of the tweets. Tokenization means breaking a sentence into words. For instance, "I love my supporters" will be broken into four words: "I," "love," "my" and "supporters." Lemmatization is the process of reducing inflectional or derivationally related forms of a word to a common base form. For instance, "am," "are," and "is" will all be reduced to "be" and "cars" and "car's" will both be reduced to "car." I also remove stop-words, pictures, and hyperlinks from the tweets. I mark the tweets that contain videos, pictures, hyperlinks, or tags to another tweet as "multimedia" content. I use the Google Translate API to label the language of tweets and translate non-English tweets to English. For tweets that contain both English and local languages, Google may label them as English or as non-English. Concededly, the usage of the Google API can incur

<sup>16</sup> The time frame is set from November 2018 to April 2019 since this paper was originally written for a class that ended in May 2019. As the Lok Sabha election started in April 2019, this time frame covers the period when the most intense social media campaigns took place.

translation errors. I assume such translation errors are equally spread across the two parties' and politicians' tweets, and that the usage of the Google API does not give one party advantage over the other.

To identify tweets about each key policy category and group of underrepresented voters, I first tried unsupervised machine-learning techniques like Latent Dirichlet Allocation,<sup>17</sup> and K-means clustering.<sup>18</sup> However, since tweets are short and usually contain mixed topics, these unsupervised methods produce unconstructive results. Therefore, I compile a list of search-words for each policy category introduced before: *Economy and Jobs*, *Security and Defense*, and *Corruption*. Tweets that contain these search-words were tagged with the corresponding policy category. A tweet can have more than one tag if it contains search-words from multiple categories. Similarly, to identify tweets that target underrepresented voters, I compile a list of search-words for each of the four groups of underrepresented voters: farmers, women, Muslims and youths. I tag tweets that contain these search-words as related to the corresponding group; a single tweet could be tagged with multiple groups.

The most challenging part of this study was identifying keywords in tweets that can shed a light on each party's policies towards underrepresented voters. Given the large volume of tweets, it is almost impossible to manually review all the tweets, extract policy terms, and rank the terms by frequency. Therefore, I adopt a keyword-extraction method that maximizes the chance of uncovering insightful terms in a large number of tweets.

To start, I tally the one hundred most frequent words in tweets related to each group of underrepresented voters. For each party or politician, let vector  $F_i$  denote the one hundred most frequent words in tweets related to group  $i$  ( $i \in \{1, 2, 3, 4\}$ .) Let  $F_{ij}$  denote the  $j^{th}$  word in  $F_i$ , where  $1 < j < 100$ .  $F_{i,1}$  is the most frequent word while  $F_{i,100}$  is the one hundredth most frequent word. While some

<sup>17</sup> Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) is a statistical model best known for topic modelling. In this study, LDA clusters tweets into topics based on text similarity, so that the texts in each tweet are best represented by the topic the tweet belongs to. See Thushan Ganegedara, "Intuitive Guide to Latent Dirichlet Allocation," *Towards Data Science* (blog), *Medium*, March 27, 2019, <https://towardsdatascience.com/light-on-math-machine-learning-intuitive-guide-to-latent-dirichlet-allocation-437c81220158>.

<sup>18</sup> K-means clustering is a basic machine learning algorithm best known for data partitioning. In this study, K-means classifies tweets into  $k$  clusters, where each tweet belongs to the cluster with the nearest mean (the averaging of the data). See Michael J. Garbade, "Understanding K-Means Clustering in Machine Learning," *Towards Data Science* (blog), *Medium*, September 12, 2018, <https://towardsdatascience.com/understanding-k-means-clustering-in-machine-learning-6a6e67336aa1>

of these words are specific to the group of underrepresented voters, others are generic words like “India” that appear frequently in all tweets. To filter out the latter, I use three methods to further select keywords out of  $F_i$  that are distinctly relevant to group  $i$ . The three methods are the Lasso Logistic, Mutual Information and Keywords Subsetting methods. The main reason to use three methods concurrently is to ensure the output is accurate. A keyword is included into the final result only if it is selected by at least two of the three methods. As the three methods are built upon different mathematical principles, using them together ensures that the keywords they produce are accurate and high-quality. Below are the mathematical details behind each method.

### *Method 1: Lasso Logistics*

The LASSO logistic method aims to identify words that contribute the most to determining if a tweet would be related to a group. For a random tweet  $k$  from the given party/politician, let  $X_{i,k}$  denote the word-count vector of  $k$ , which records the number of occurrences of words in  $F_i$  that appear in  $k$ . In other words, the  $j^{th}$  element of  $X_{i,k}$  would be the frequency of the word  $F_{ij}$  in tweet  $k$ . Let  $y_{i,k}$  indicate whether tweet  $k$  is related to group  $i$ . The probability of  $y_{i,k}=0$  and  $y_{i,k}=1$  can be expressed respectively as:

$$P(y_{i,k} = 1|X_{i,k}) = \frac{e^{\beta_i^0 + \beta_i^T X_{i,k}}}{1 + e^{\beta_i^0 + \beta_i^T X_{i,k}}}$$

$$P(y_{i,k} = 0|X_{i,k}) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{\beta_i^0 + \beta_i^T X_{i,k}}}$$

Combining the two equations above gets the following:

$$P(y_{i,k}|X_{i,k}) = P(y_{i,k} = 1|X_{i,k})^{y_{i,k}} * P(y_{i,k} = 0|X_{i,k})^{1-y_{i,k}}$$

Let  $L_{\beta,N,i}$  denote the log likelihood of  $N$  independent observations, given parameters  $\beta$  and group  $i$ . Then  $L_{\beta,N,i}$  can be written as:

$$\begin{aligned} L_{\beta,N,i} &= \log\left(\prod_{k=1}^N P(y_{i,k}|X_{i,k})\right) = \sum_{k=1}^N \log(P(y_{i,k} = 1|X_{i,k})^{y_{i,k}}) + \log(P(y_{i,k} = 0|X_{i,k})^{1-y_{i,k}}) \\ &= \sum_{k=1}^N y_{i,k} * (\beta_i^0 + \beta_i^T X_{i,k}) - \log(1 + e^{\beta_i^0 + \beta_i^T X_{i,k}}) \end{aligned}$$

Accordingly, the objective function for group  $i$  with  $l_1$  penalization can be written as:

$$\min(-L_{\beta,N,i} + \lambda \sum_{n \geq 1} |\beta_i^n|),$$

where  $\lambda$  is the regularization parameter. I then used 10-fold cross validation to find the optimal values for each pair of group and party/politician.<sup>19</sup> After regularization, the number of keywords returned by these optimal values usually ranges from less than fifteen up to fifty, which suggests that further ranking among returned keywords is needed.<sup>20</sup>

To rank keywords further, let  $X_{i,k}^r$  be the frequency of word  $r$  in tweet  $k$  associated with group  $i$ , in which  $r$  is one of the keywords returned by the LASSO logistic regression. Let  $\beta_{i,k}^r$  be the regression coefficient of  $r$ . Here  $\beta_{i,k}^r$  represents the change in the log-odd ratio  $\frac{P(y_{i,k}=1|X_{i,k})}{P(y_{i,k}=0|X_{i,k})}$  by unit change of  $X_{i,k}^r$ . Since the change of log-odd ratio is positively correlated with the change of probability  $P(y_{i,k} = 1|X_{i,k})$  and the measurement of keywords' exact interpretative power is beyond the scope of this study, I used  $\beta_i^r$  directly as a proxy to rank keywords returned by LASSO regression. If further studies want to be more precise in gauging each keyword's impact to the change of probability  $P(y_{i,k} = 1|X_{i,k})$  by unit change of  $X_{i,k}^r$ , they would need to further transform  $\beta_i^r$  into a coefficient of marginal effect. To do so, they can take the derivative of  $P(y_{i,k} = 1|X_{i,k})$  with respect to  $X_{i,k}^r$ , i.e.,

$$\begin{aligned} &\text{marginal effect of word } r \\ &= \frac{1}{N} \sum_{k=1}^N \frac{d}{dX_{i,k}^r} P(y_{i,k} = 1|X_{i,k}) = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{k=1}^N P(y_{i,k} = 1|X_{i,k}) * P(y_{i,k} = 0|X_{i,k}) * \beta_i^r \end{aligned}$$

## *Method 2: Mutual Information*

Mutual information measures the amount of information about variable  $A$  obtained by observing variable  $B$ . In this paper, variable  $A$  refers to whether tweet  $k$  belongs to group  $i$  and variable  $B$  refers to whether word  $w \in F_i$  exists in  $k$ .

<sup>19</sup> Cross validation is a statistical technique that helps to discover and reduce the error of a model over a test set. Scholars use it to select the parameters that fit their models the best and to avoid overfitting.

<sup>20</sup> Regularization is a form of regression that shrinks the coefficient estimates to avoid overfitting. Scholars use it to reduce the interference of noise (data points that are not generalizable) in their training data. See Prashant Gupta, "Regularization in Machine Learning," *Towards Data Science* (blog), *Medium*, November 16, 2017, <https://towardsdatascience.com/regularization-in-machine-learning-76441ddcf99a>

Let  $T$  denote all tweets from a given party/politician; let  $t$  be the number of elements in  $T$ . Let  $W_i$  denote all tweets in  $T$  that are related to group  $i$ ; let  $w_i$  be the number of elements in  $W_i$ . Let  $W_k$  denote all tweets in  $T$  that contain word  $k$ ; let  $w_k$  be the number of elements in  $W_k$ . Let  $P_i$  denote the probability of occurrence of group  $i$ ; let  $P_k$  denote the probability of occurrence of word  $k$ . Accordingly,  $P_i$  and  $P_k$  can be expressed as:

$$P_i = \frac{w_i}{t}, \text{ in which } i \in 1,2,3,4$$

$$P_k = \frac{w_k}{t}, \text{ in which } k \in F_i$$

Next, let  $w(i,k)$  denote the number of tweets in  $W_i$  that contains word  $k$ ; let  $P(i,k)$  denote the probability of co-occurrence between group  $i$  and word  $k$ . Accordingly:

$$P(i,k) = \frac{w(i,k)}{t}$$

The formula of mutual information between  $i$  and  $k$  is given as the following:

$$I(i,k) = P(i,k) * \log\left(\frac{P(i,k)}{P(i) * P(K)}\right)$$

Based on the formula above, I select the words in  $F_i$  with high mutual information  $I$  as the top keywords of group  $i$  for the given party/politician.

### *Method 3: Keywords Subsetting*

The Keywords Subsetting method is the most straightforward among the three. It selects the most frequent words among tweets related to an underrepresented group and filters out those that are also the most frequent words among all tweets. By filtering out common words like “India” that appear in all tweets, this method helps identify keywords that are unique to the voters of interest. Specifically, let  $A$  denote the 200 most frequent words among all tweets of a given party/candidate.<sup>21</sup> As defined before,  $F_i$  denotes the one hundred

<sup>21</sup> Having tried setting the count parameter to 100, 200, 300, 400 and 500, I found 200 returned

most frequent words related to group  $i$  and from the same party/politician. Now consider:

$$B_i = F_i \in - \{x | x \in F_i, x \in A\}$$

The words in  $B_i$  would be the keywords of group  $i$  for the given party/politician. When there are too many words in  $B_i$ , I select the ones that appear first in  $B_i$ , since  $B_i$  preserves the order of  $F_i$ .

## RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

### *General Tweeting Styles and Patterns*

This section presents testing results for my expectations outlined for Q1, Q2, and Q3. In general, findings of this section indicate that the two parties and politicians did exhibit different strategies on Twitter. However, these findings also contradict my hypotheses for Q1 and Q3.

First, contrary to the expectation that challengers tweet more often than incumbents, on average, the BJP tweeted twice as frequently as the Congress, and Modi tweeted seven times more frequently than Gandhi (Table 1). One explanation goes to Modi's large social media following. Since Modi is the world's third most followed politician, just after Barack Obama and Donald Trump, he is more likely to use his popularity to his advantage by sending out more tweets.<sup>22</sup> A closer look at Modi's Twitter account provides another potential explanation: Modi is likely not the only person writing his tweets, as many of his tweets come up within extremely short intervals. It is not uncommon to see five tweets from Modi's account in three minutes. Furthermore, compared to Gandhi, Modi seems to be less selective about what he tweets. Rather, his main strategy was to always keep his audience engaged. On the contrary, Gandhi's tweets usually received more likes and re-tweets than Modi's tweets, indicating that Gandhi's priority might be to receive the most responses from voters to each of his tweets.

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the most interpretable results.

<sup>22</sup> Matthias Lüfkens, "Twiplomacy Study 2018: Executive Summary," *Twiplomacy*, July 10, 2018, <https://twiplomacy.com/blog/twiplomacy-study-2018/>



Table 1: A Comparison of Volume and Likability

	Modi	Gandhi	BJP	Congress
Average Number of Tweets Per Day	16	2	76	32
Average Number of Re-Tweets Per Tweet	4,413	8,207	618	636
Average Number of Likes Per Tweet	18,604	30,315	1,815	1,827

In line with my expectation for Q2, that challengers tend to mention incumbents more often than incumbents mention challengers in their tweets. The percentage of Gandhi's tweets that mentioned Modi or the BJP is almost three times as high as the percentage of Modi's tweets that named Gandhi or the Congress. However, this is not conclusive evidence to show that Modi and the BJP refrained from calling out their opponents. As the governing party, Modi and the BJP had to respond to many opposing parties, not just Gandhi and the Congress. For instance, as the heat of the campaign moved to West Bengal, Modi and the BJP temporarily put aside their "tug of war" with Gandhi and focused on Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister of Bengal and the Chairperson of the All India Trinamool Congress.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the findings for Q2 are still able to show that criticizing the BJP was a larger component in the Congress' social media strategy than criticizing the Congress was in the BJP's strategy.

Findings for Q3 both support and defy my expectation that the BJP and Modi would tweet in English less often than the Congress and Gandhi. In line with my expectations, the Congress tweeted mainly in English and the BJP predominantly tweeted in languages other than English (mostly Hindi with some other local dialects). This is not surprising, as the core support for the BJP often comes from the Hindi belt of the country, especially in the 2014 general election.<sup>24</sup> Yet contrary to my expectation, Modi—a well-known promoter of

<sup>23</sup> "PM Modi, Mamata To Launch Poll Campaign In West Bengal Today," *Outlook*, April 2, 2019, [www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-pm-modi-mamata-to-launch-poll-campaign-in-west-bengal-today/328011](http://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-pm-modi-mamata-to-launch-poll-campaign-in-west-bengal-today/328011)

<sup>24</sup> Gilles Verniers, "Lok Sabha Elections 2019: Can BJP Retain Dominance in Hindi Heartland?" *Hindustan Times*, April 29, 2019, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/lok-sabha->

Hindi—had the highest percentage of English tweets: 20 percent more than that of Gandhi. NBC News once reported that under Modi’s watch, government officials in India could use English only as a secondary language to Hindi.<sup>25</sup> Given this information, Modi’s pivot to English on Twitter is even more interesting. This particular finding reveals that a political party and its party leader may exhibit different tweeting patterns, underscoring the multifaceted nature of political parties’ social media strategies.

Overall, observations in this section provide convincing evidence that the BJP and the Congress exhibited different tweeting styles. However, some findings, like Modi predominantly tweeting in English, also remind readers of the complexity of political parties’ social media tactics.

Table 2: A Comparison of Content Attributes

	Modi	Gandhi	BJP	Congress
Percentage of tweets written in English	84.27%	63.76%	31.65%	61.63%
Percentage of tweets with multi-media content	69.03%	62.02%	72.56%	82.48%
Percentage of tweets that mentions the other party	11.50%	31.71%	17.51%	38.82%

### *Responses to Key Policies and Events*

This section presents testing results for the expectations I put forth for Q4: how much attention each party and politician paid to the key areas of policies, and how their attention shifted over time. In general, the findings indicate that the two parties and politicians did differ in the level of attention they devoted to various policy topics. However, their attention to each area of policy did not always change as expected.

elections/lok-sabha-elections-2019-can-bjp-retain-dominance-in-hindi-heartland/story-6LPGqs3mjr2PexB7Muc1TI.html

<sup>25</sup> “India PM Modi Demands Hindi, Not English For Social Media,” NBCNews, NBCUniversal News Group, accessed April 2019, <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/india-pm-modi-demands-hindi-not-english-social-media-n172421>.

First, as anticipated, Gandhi and the Congress showed more interest in *Corruption* than Modi and the BJP: Gandhi was almost four times more likely to bring up corruption in his tweets than Modi. Gandhi's interest manifested itself most intensely in January 2019, right after India's Supreme Court announced that it found nothing wrong with a deal brokered by Modi to purchase 36 Rafale fighter jets from France. Gandhi and the Congress then started to mobilize supporters on social media to protest the Supreme Court's decision. In February 2019, India's Supreme Court announced that it would revisit the case and hear the review pleas in detail.<sup>26</sup> Although it is unclear whether the Supreme Court's compromise was prompted by Gandhi and the Congress' social media campaigns, this incident demonstrates the potential of party activity on social media to influence national politics and to convey party messages across to the electorate.

Also in line with my expectation, Gandhi had focused on *Security and Defense* in February, primarily because of the tragic suicide bombing attack in Pulwama, Kashmir. Since Gandhi was not the incumbent and could not directly address the nation's anger through policy as much as Modi could, social media became the channel for him to show the nation how much he cared about this attack. On the contrary, Modi, as the Prime Minister, could directly show his stance through military action against Pakistan. Thus it might be less necessary for Modi to repeatedly highlight his position on social media than it was for Gandhi.

Gandhi and the Congress paid more attention to *Economy and Jobs* than Modi and the BJP did on average. Yet contrary to my expectations, Gandhi and the Congress did not increase their attention on this policy topic following the release of the news that India's unemployment rate reached a forty-year high in late January 2019. Instead, Gandhi and the Congress doubled down on *Economy and Jobs* in March 2019. A closer investigation into Gandhi and the Congress' tweets reveals Modi's Goods and Service Tax (GST) as one of the main reasons for their surge of interest. In March 2019, the World Bank released its India Development Update Report and placed GST as one of the world's most complex tax systems.<sup>27</sup> Gandhi and the Congress might have seized this opportunity and

<sup>26</sup> "Supreme Court to Hear Plea Seeking Review of Rafale Deal Judgment on Feb 26," *India Today*, February 22, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/supreme-court-plea-rafale-deal-judgment-review-feb-26-1462841-2019-02-22>

<sup>27</sup> Poonam Gupta et al., "India Development Update: India's Growth Story" (report,

increased their criticism of Modi's economic performance.<sup>28</sup>

Table 3: Percentage of Tweets Relevant to Policy Fields

	Modi	Gandhi	BJP	Congress
Economy and Jobs	8.41%	9.76%	11.46%	15.66%
Security and Defense	5.21%	9.01%	12.88%	5.21%
Corruption	3.15%	14.29%	5.56%	10.47%

Figure 1: Percentage of Tweets Relevant to Economy and Jobs by Monthly Average

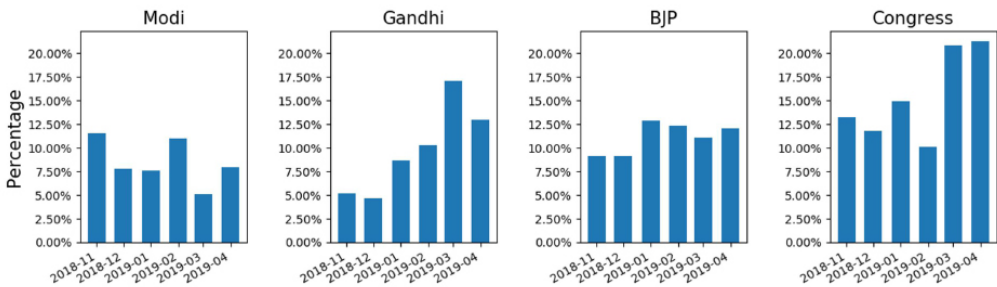
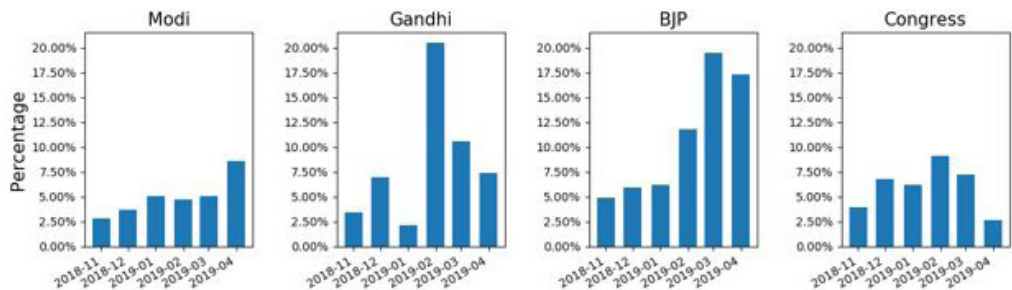


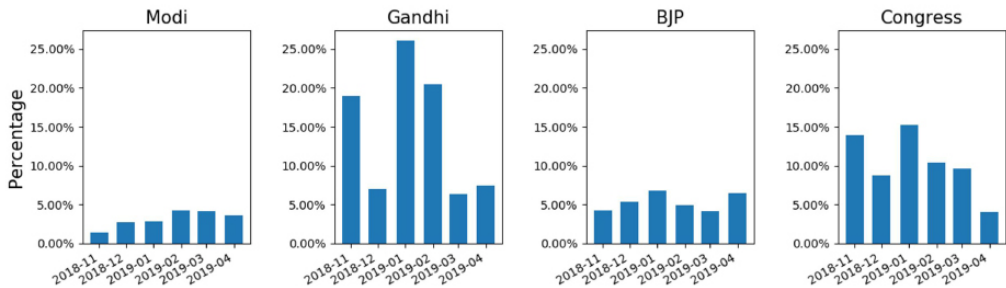
Figure 2: Percentage of Tweets Relevant to Security and Defense by Monthly Average



World Bank, New Delhi, India, March 7, 2018), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/814101517840592525/pdf/India-development-update-Indias-growth-story.pdf>; "GST: Indian System among the Most Complex Globally, Says World Bank Report," *Business Standard*, March 16, 2018, [https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/gst-indian-system-among-the-most-complex-globally-says-world-bank-report-118031600472\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/gst-indian-system-among-the-most-complex-globally-says-world-bank-report-118031600472_1.html)

<sup>28</sup> "Gabbar Singh Tax Now Globally Acclaimed: Rahul Gandhi Mocks PM Modi," *Times of India*, March 18, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/gabbar-singh-tax-now-globally-acclaimed-rahul-gandhi-mocks-pm-modi/articleshow/63354146.cms>

Figure 3: Percentage of Tweets Relevant to Corruption by Monthly Average



### *Messages to Underrepresented Voters*

This section presents testing results for my expectations outlined for Q5: Did the two parties and politicians differ in the policy messages they conveyed to traditionally underrepresented voters? In line with my expectations, both parties and politicians sought to promote their own policy initiatives in their tweets to underrepresented voters. The following subsections explain their differences in detail.

### **Farmers**

On the side of Modi and the BJP, keywords like “pmkisan” and “nidhi” were associated with the Prime Minister Modi’s *Kisan Samman Nidhi* scheme. Launched in February 2019, Modi’s Kisan plan included a 6000-rupee annual income support program to marginalized farmers.<sup>29</sup> The keywords “water,” “middlemen,” and “irrigation” highlighted Modi’s policies to provide farmers with better irrigation sources, and eliminate the multi-layer middleman system required for farmers to distribute their produce.<sup>30</sup> The keywords “debt” and “income” echoed the BJP’s slogan to increase farmers’ income and alleviate their debt.

<sup>29</sup> “PM Rolls out ₹75,000-Cr Income Support Scheme for Farmers,” *Hindu BusinessLine*, February 24, 2019, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/pm-launches-kisan-scheme-over-1-crore-farmers-get-1st-instalment/article26356409.ece>; “Narendra Modi Launches PM-Kisan Scheme, 12 Crore Farmers Will Be Benefited,” *Livemint*, February 24, 2019, <https://www.livemint.com/politics/policy/narendra-modi-launches-pm-kisan-scheme-12-crore-farmers-will-be-benefited-1550995773911.html>

<sup>30</sup> Kamakshi Ayyar, “The Global Water Crisis: Why Are India’s Taps Running Dry?” *Time*, June 6, 2018, <https://time.com/5302661/water-crisis-drinking-india-drought-dry/>

On the other side, Gandhi and the Congress denounced the exorbitant insurance prices farmers had to pay for their crops under the BJP's watch, which is reflected in the keyword "insurance." They also criticized the inadequacy of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) Modi's government granted to farmers, which is reflected in the keywords "msp" and "distress." On the offensive front, the Congress proposed a series of loan waivers to alleviate farmers' debts, which was reflected in the keywords "loan," "debt," "bank," "assistance," and "forgive." The keywords "small" and "unemployment" implied that Gandhi and the Congress often addressed farmers together with small-business owners and the unemployed population in order to build a coalition of those who might have suffered economic hardship under the incumbent's governance.

Table 4: Top Keywords Related to Farmers

	Top Keywords Related to Farmers
Modi	income, pmkisan, nidhi, loan, suffer, welfare, irrigation, water, middle/middlemen, hardwork, waiver, debt, promise, step, class
Gandhi	intention, distress, forgive, bank, get, insult, hard, lakh, boot, debt, small, suit
BJP	kisan, assistance, crop, irrigation, debt, nidhi, waive/waiver, double, income, pension
Congress	msp, forgive, insurance, debt, suicide, crop, acquisition, food, waive/waiver, loan, budget, unemployed

## Women

The two parties and politicians also conveyed different sets of policy initiatives in their tweets to female voters. The keyword "empowerment" occurred frequently in Modi's and the BJP's tweets, as Modi wanted to remind female voters of how women's lives had improved during his term. Specifically, the keywords "gas," "smoke," "ujjwala," and "ojana" all refer to Modi's *Ujjwala* initiative that introduced Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) connections to ordinary Indian families, which helped women by eliminating the smoke created through cooking.<sup>31</sup> Building lavatories in villages was another policy Modi liked to use to

<sup>31</sup> Utpal Bhaskar, "PM Highlights Ujjwala Success; Reaches out to Women, Poor, Muslims," *Livemint*, May 28, 2018, [www.livemint.com/Politics/OVJ1CPuxjSCNtdggALEm6N/PM-Modi-says-10-crore-LPG-connections-given-in-4-years-again.html](http://www.livemint.com/Politics/OVJ1CPuxjSCNtdggALEm6N/PM-Modi-says-10-crore-LPG-connections-given-in-4-years-again.html)

attract female voters (reflected in the keyword “toilet”).<sup>32</sup> The *Swachh Bharat Mission* Modi's government launched in 2014 has increased rural women's access to lavatories and reduced the rate of open defecation. Accordingly, Modi and the BJP framed their promotion of lavatories as a symbol of respect for the nation's mothers and daughters. Interestingly, Muslim women were another focus in Modi's and the BJP's tweets, the specifics of which will be unpacked in the section about Muslims.

Gandhi and the Congress campaigned on bringing more women into politics. In April 2019, the Congress had passed the election manifesto *Hum Nibhayenge*, which promised to reserve 33 percent of all jobs in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for women if the Congress won the election (reflected in the keyword “reservation”).<sup>33</sup> The Congress also campaigned to promote women's participation in businesses, especially through Self-Help Groups (SHG) that have taken off in India in recent years (reflected in the keywords “group” and “self”). SHGs have played an important role in including rural women into India's financial networks.<sup>34</sup> In November 2018, the Congress tweeted that it would allocate a grant of 500 crores to female entrepreneurs and a grant of 100,000 rupees to each SHG.<sup>35</sup>

Overall, both parties promoted distinct policies in their tweets to appeal to female voters, and economic, political, and social empowerment set the tone for most women-related tweets.

<sup>32</sup> Narendra Modi, “Swachh Bharat Mission Has Benefited the Poor and the Women Most: PM Modi” (speech, Goalkeepers Global Goals Awards 2019, New York City, NY, September 25, 2019), <https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-modi-s-speech-at-goalkeepers-global-goal-award-2019-546603>

<sup>33</sup> “In Its Manifesto, Congress Proposes NYAY Scheme, ‘Kisan Budget,’ Review Of AFSPA,” *Outlook*, April 1, 2019, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-congress-releases-manifesto-for-lok-sabha-elections-2019/327983>

<sup>34</sup> “Self-Help Groups: Congress President Rahul Gandhi,” Rahul Gandhi (website), <https://rahulgandhi.in/en/amethi/shgss.php>

<sup>35</sup> Congress (@INCIndia), “Without women Telangana cannot progress. Congress and TDP both believe in SHGs. Every group will be given ₹1,00,000 grant. ₹500cr will be allocated for women entrepreneurs: Congress President @RahulGandhi #TelanganaWithRahulGhandi,” Twitter, November 28, 2018, 4:31 a.m., <https://twitter.com/INCIndia/status/1067757801282318339>



Table 5: Top Keywords Related to Women

	Top Keywords Related to Women
Modi	brother, man, empowerment, nari, yojana, million, role, focus, movement, youngsters, focus, house, enthusiasm, hospital, large, caste, tribal
Gandhi	bright, acknowledge, hunger, choksi, declaration, kashmiri, refalescam, brother, build, trader
BJP	bharti, narishakti, empowerment, ujjwala, muslim, brother, divorce, son, ganga, smoke, yojana, gas, connection, toilet
Congress	incforwoman, reservation, brother, reserve, entrepreneur, child, group, account, respect, fighter, dream, self

## Youth

Similar to their messages to farmers and women, the two parties and politicians promoted different policy initiatives in their tweets to young voters. As unemployment was the one of the most pressing problems plaguing India's young voters, both parties set out different policy priorities to save young people from the quagmire of unemployment.<sup>36</sup>

The BJP focused on education (reflected in the keyword "education"). For instance, in January 2019, the BJP announced on Twitter that it would reserve 10 percent of the seats in government-run educational institutions to students from underprivileged backgrounds.<sup>37</sup> Innovation was another focus of the BJP and Modi's campaign. The keyword "hackathon" refers to a kind of technology competition that aims to promote talent in the sciences. In multiple tweets, Modi expressed his pride that young people in India have participated in hackathons. Furthermore, the recurring keywords "especially," "particularly," and "remarkably" echoed Modi's special shoutout to young voters in his tweets. On his Twitter Timeline, Modi consistently thanked young people for coming to his rallies and

<sup>36</sup> "Youth Unemployment Rate for India," *Economic Research: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis*, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/SLUEM1524ZSIND>; "33% Of India's Skilled Youth Jobless: Official Survey," *Livemint*, August 7, 2019, <https://www.livemint.com/politics/policy/a-third-of-skilled-youth-in-india-jobless-official-survey-1565161972818.html>

<sup>37</sup> BJP (@BJP4India), "केदर सरकार युवाओं को समान अवसर देने के लिए समर्पित है। हाल में ही सरकारी सेवाओं और शिक्षण संस्थानों में गरीब सामान्य वर्ग के युवाओं को 10 प्रतिशत आरक्षण देने का फैसला लिया गया है : पीएम श्री नरेन्द्र मोदी #NaMoInJK," Twitter, February 2, 2019, 11:59 p.m., <https://twitter.com/BJP4India/status/1091969357008105473>

supporting him. He also stressed that he would treat the demands of the youth as a policy priority.

On the other hand, the Congress accused Modi's government of not investing enough in the future, especially with regards to supporting young entrepreneurs. Gandhi and the Congress vowed to make it easier for India's young people to start businesses (reflected in keywords "business," "entrepreneur," and "permissions"). Under their plan, young entrepreneurs would not need to apply for government permissions to start their new businesses for up to three years.

Table 6: Top Keywords Related to Youths

	Top Keywords Related to Youths
Modi	bal, hackathon, especially, friend, tell, remarkably, particularly, motivate, voter, hope, dream, large, puraskar, awareness, request
Gandhi	persecute, future, small, new, declaration, get, trader, unemployed, business, bring, reduce
BJP	youthwithmodi, pregnant, skill, employment, man, elderly, education, future, opportunity, earn, medicine, irrigation
Congress	unemployed, permission, house, opportunity, student, entrepreneur, suicide, employ, job, provide, business

## Muslims

Neither the parties nor their leaders frequently mentioned "Muslim" in their tweets.<sup>38</sup> Even with only a few keywords, however, there is still evidence to show that the BJP differed from the Congress in its outreach to the Muslim community.

The BJP often appealed to Muslim women by mentioning its abolition of the triple divorce practice on Twitter (reflected in keywords "triple," "divorce," and "talaq"). Triple divorce (also known as triple talaq) was a controversial practice in India that allowed a Muslim man to legally divorce his wife by stating the word "divorce" three times. Since Modi's government abolished this practice in 2017, the BJP consistently featured triple divorce in its tweets, portraying the party as the champion of Muslim women's rights.<sup>39</sup> On the contrary, Congress

<sup>38</sup> I also look at tweets that mentioned "Islam." The results have no substantial difference.

<sup>39</sup> Casey Quackenbush, "India Outlaws Islamic Practice of 'Instant Divorce,'" *Time*, September

did not often mention this policy in their tweets about Muslims. Findings in the “Women” section echoed this observation.

Table 7: Top Keywords Related to Muslims

	Top Keywords Related to Youths
Modi	none
Gandhi	none
BJP	divorce, triple, islamic, daughter, talaq, pass
Congress	grow, zay, ia, islamia

### CONCLUSION

As smartphones and Internet access become more prevalent around the world, social media has increasingly played a role in elections in developing countries. Although research suggests that political parties in the U.S. often employ different campaign strategies on social media, similar research on developing countries’ elections is lacking. In this paper, I examined whether India’s two major parties, the BJP and the Congress, displayed distinctly different campaign strategies on Twitter. In general, results produce clear evidence that the two parties differed in their Twitter strategies during the 2019 Lok Sabha Election. However, in a few cases, the exact way they differed was not as expected.

First, testing results reveal that Modi and the BJP tweeted more often than Gandhi and the Congress. This observation is contrary with previous findings in U.S. research that the challenging party uses social media more often than the incumbent. Second, results reveal that Gandhi and the Congress mentioned Modi and the BJP in their tweets more often than Modi and the BJP mentioned them. This observation is consistent with findings in U.S. research that the challenging party tends to mention/attack the incumbent more often. However, contrary to expectations, Modi tweeted in English more often than Gandhi, despite being a well-known promoter of the Hindi language. The rationale behind this discovery needs to be explored by future research.

Next, testing results indicate that the two parties and politicians displayed different levels of attention to different policy areas and that their attention shifted

20, 2018, <https://time.com/5401422/india-instant-divorce-outlaw/>; “Congress Backs Triple Talaq Bill, Khurshid Strikes Discordant Note,” *Economic Times*, December 28, 2017, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/congress-backs-triple-talaq-bill-khurshid-strikes-discordant-note/articleshow/62283011.cms>

over time. In line with my expectations, Gandhi and the Congress paid more attention to *Corruption*. They also indicated increasing interest in security-related issues after the terrorist attack in Kashmir in February 2019. Yet contrary to my expectations, the news that India's unemployment rate had reached a forty-year high did not make Gandhi and the Congress more likely to write about *Economy and Jobs* in their tweets. This observation shows that the challenging party does not necessarily respond to every piece of negative news about the incumbent, as it needs to prioritize which topics to address. Last but not least, testing results indicate that the two parties and politicians emphasized different sets of policy messages to underrepresented voters. Through keyword analysis, I identified a series of policies each party and politician featured in their tweets to attract these voters.

This paper contributes to the study of political elections by integrating natural language processing and statistical methodologies with policy analyses. Specifically, this paper introduces three methods to extract interpretable keywords from tweets. These three methods often returned similar but slightly different keywords, which indicates that they can be used together to achieve more precise results. The methods also prove to be an effective way to identify policies from a large number of tweets (15,000 tweets in this study). Future research in other fields of social science can also apply these methods to assist their own study.

Finally, this paper raises some interesting questions for further exploration in the future. For one, the dearth of tweets about Muslim males deserves more investigation. Furthermore, future research can apply similar analyses to other popular social media sites in India, like Facebook and WhatsApp, to test if the findings in this paper still hold. Last but not least, this paper hopes to inspire more scholarly work on the use of social media to promote public policies, especially with regards to underrepresented voters in developing countries.

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