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# International Relations Journal 2026

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Our heartfelt gratitude to

IR Librarian

Mira Foster

Every question was a door to which  
you held the key and the map

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# Editorial Policy

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## OVERVIEW

The International Relations Journal at San Francisco State University strives to exhibit the diverse range of undergraduate and graduate research interests that flourish in our department.

Each semester, the Journal is offered as a course in which students participate as writers or editors in a peer review process, or as administrative staff members who assist authors and editors as well as guide the Journal through its production.

The goal of the course is to expose students to the peer review process, focusing on academic standards of argumentation and factual accuracy, citation formatting, and collaborative editing using Microsoft Word's "track changes" feature. More broadly, the Journal's executive editors aim to help students develop writing/editing skills applicable in other courses and promote a deeper understanding of the discipline of International Relations as a whole.

## SUBMISSIONS & PROCESS

The Journal encourages all students pursuing a B.A. or M.A. in International Relations to submit completed works (incomplete papers and abstracts are not accepted) at the beginning of each semester. From these submissions, the Journal's executive editors assign students to positions on the writing and editorial boards as well as a number of administrative-level appointments.

The course curriculum includes a number of informational workshops and at least three rounds of structured editing and revision. All editing is anonymous and each submission is reviewed by three different editors.

The structured peer review is as follows: [1] a submission is first edited by an undergraduate or graduate "peer expert" who has conducted prior research on topics and/or regions relevant to the paper and can thus provide fact checking and citation suggestions; [2] second round editing focuses on clarity and academic tone by pairing the manuscript with an editor unfamiliar with the paper's subject; [3] finally, the paper is edited for proper citation formatting and technical aspects.

At the end of the semester, authors participating in this process are expected to submit a final manuscript for consideration by the Journal's executive editors and the faculty advisor.

## PUBLICATION OF ARTICLES

Only submissions that have gone through the peer review process and meet the content and formatting requirements will be considered for publication. The Journal is published yearly.

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# Acknowledgments

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# Author Biographies

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## TEMUUIJIN BATKHUU

Temuujin Batkhuu is a second-year international relations graduate student at San Francisco State University. He received his undergraduate degree from the National University of Mongolia, and his interest in international relations focuses on small states, national identity, cultural diversity in diplomatic settings, and security cooperation on a global scale. Temuujin has worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia before coming to the United States of America, and his knowledge and experience of the industry shape his unique opinion towards both small states and superpowers. Temuujin plans to complete his doctorate in international relations and continue working in the field of global affairs.

## SHANNON FOLEY

Shannon Foley is a second-year Master's student in International Relations at San Francisco State University and earned her Bachelor of Arts Degree in International Relations at California State University, Chico. With a focus on international migration, she has analyzed international labor migration laws and conducted actor-specific foreign policy analysis. Before her master's program, Shannon taught K-12 students for five years and hopes to contribute critical research to the IR field that will allow for more effective problem-solving on issues related to international migration and human rights.

## PHANUEL DONKOR KADEY

Phaniel Donkor Kadey is an international student from Ghana pursuing his M.A. in International Relations at San Francisco State University. He earned his Bachelor's degree from the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana. Currently, Donkor is a part-time intern with Strategic Aid Partners, a nonprofit organization in San Francisco. His research interests include climate change, global health, and migration, with a focus on immigration and remittances in the context of evolving U.S. immigration policies.

## GABRIEL SINGER

A Project Rebound student at San Francisco State, Gabriel Singer, who was formerly incarcerated, recently earned a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice and was honored with his department's Distinguished Student Award, among many other recognitions. As an SF Scholar, he will complete a Master's degree in international relations next year.

During his 16 years in prison, Gabriel developed a deep understanding of systemic oppression within the criminal justice system. He is passionate about research on criminal justice reform, especially restorative justice, and is committed to helping incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals find their liberation through education, just as he has.

## KYLE STANNER

Kyle Stanner is a second-year graduate student in the International Relations department at San Francisco State University. His interests include global security, great power competition, alliance formation, and environmental policy and the impacts of climate change. In addition to his studies, Kyle currently works as an Executive General Adjuster for a major international loss-adjusting firm. Kyle holds a B.A. in Political Science from SFSU, as well as several Insurance Industry designations and licenses.

## XIULI TONG

Xiuli Tong is a second-year M.A. student in International Relations at San Francisco State University and an international student from China. Her research interests include Asian foreign policy and U.S.–China relations. Before SFSU, she studied English (Language and Literature) at Changchun University of Science and Technology. Her recent papers examine tourism diplomacy in China, Japan, and South Korea; the role of emotions in Chinese media; China and India relations; and China's soft power and normative influence, including constructivist perspectives on global strategy and domestic legitimacy.

# Russian Security Strategy Debate: NATO Expansion and Ukraine

TEMUUJIN BATKHUU

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## ABSTRACT

This research investigates the growing tension of the Russian state under President Putin's government and NATO's response as it relates to the state's ontological security. Small states in the region, more specifically those in close geographical proximity and formerly part of the Soviet Union, need to rethink their foreign policy strategies. This study examines the ontological security — Russian 'sense of self' and makes an argument that it plays a critical role in the state's ongoing unprovoked war in Ukraine and the possible spread of regional violence. The paper sheds light on the unique traditionalist policy makers in Putin's government and examines Russia's use of active measures and information strategies, including amplification of narratives by external actors, and analyzes their effect on regional security alliances. By integrating case studies, theoretical models, and policy analyses, this work illuminates the complex interplay of Russia's public threat perceptions.

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Russia and Europe, particularly in relation to NATO expansion and the resulting strategic developments and changes in alliances, has been widely discussed in recent years. The literature examines multiple dimensions of Russia's methods of influence in Europe, including public diplomacy, active measures, security dilemmas, and ontological security. After Finland and Sweden joined NATO, questions arise about regional stability, power dynamics, and future Russian foreign policy. Understanding motivation and narratives related to the current conflicts in Russia is important for small states in the Euro-Asia region and NATO's foreign policy decisions. This paper serves to address two significant questions:

1. How can NATO understand Russian ontological security so it can prevent further escalation in the future?
2. What roles do neighboring small states play in the Russian sense of self?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The invasion of Crimea, Ukraine, by Russia was a consequential event that altered the course of international relations strategies across the world and revealed Russia's latest nationalist values that align with its ontological security. Small states around the world, especially those that were part of the Soviet Union, must respond — as the ontological security being broadcast from the Kremlin is increasingly becoming conflicting and unpredictable. In response to a full-scale attack, NATO and the West imposed all kinds of sanctions on Russia and eliminated economic alliances with the state. However, the cause and effect of the Russian attack can be related to the under-balanced measures from NATO and its member countries, as well as those of small states. Therefore, small states must respect Russian ontological security for the sake of their own physical

security. “A theory of balancing – Elite consensus and cohesion primarily affect the state’s willingness to balance, while government, regime vulnerability, and social cohesion affect the state’s ability to extract resources for this task. The combination of these four variables determines the degree of state coherence.”<sup>1</sup> When analyzing Russia through Schweller’s theory, the elite cohesiveness of the state from the Soviet Union era —specifically, the elite group that seized power and persists to this day —should be examined at the macro level, given the current president of Russia, Vladimir Putin’s government’s successful management of domestic legitimacy. Although there are many instances of deterioration of freedom, democracy, and rigged election systems, the elite group remains united behind the current government. NATO, in terms of balancing Russia, has been overwhelmingly slow in response because NATO did not recognize the evolving Russian strategy over the last decade as a serious threat.

Government/State Vulnerability is undermined from the West, as Putin’s government authority is based on self-legitimizing in the eyes of the public, with the notion that “Russia has its own destiny as a nation.”<sup>2</sup> Not only the government authority but also the state government’s effectiveness had been grossly misguided, as Western countries and the press tend to villainize the Russian government to discredit its legitimacy. However, the country’s national ambitions and nationalism always serve as a unifying factor among the elites and the people. The popularity of the current leader, Putin, and nationalist ideals are interconnected, exerting a commanding influence over many generations of the Russian people. NATO, on the other hand, becomes an organization that interferes with Russia’s ontological security and poses external threats to it. Schweller argues, “A Common theme in international relations is that the emergence of a serious external threat causes an increase in social cohesion.”<sup>3</sup> Following the Soviet Union’s disintegration, Russia experienced political turmoil, and subsequent generations faced economic hardship. Given the lifelong psychological state of the people, unity came from shared beliefs and historical factors of Russian history. During decades of Communism, the common enemy was the West, an ideology not distant memories for millions of people in Russia. Putin’s government is actively creating parallelism between NATO and the wartime “West” to create a “serious external threat” to its people and win over popularity within its country.

Putin’s aggression towards the West is not only multi-layered and calculated but also in serious violation of the Founding Act of 1997 between NATO and Russia, as well as the renewed Declaration of 2002. In the political commitment, principles of democracy and cooperative security formed the foundation of the partnership, with the preservation of peace and an “undivided” Europe being a crucial part of the agreement.<sup>4</sup> Ukraine, located in Eastern Europe, was included in the security alliances and territorial integrity agreement between the two entities, but was later excluded from consideration by Putin’s government. The Russian invasion of Crimea was a shocking issue that altered the course of a multi-phased strategy from the West to welcome Russia as a global partner in international affairs. In the Declaration by Heads of State and Government of

1 Randall L. Schweller, “A Theory of Underbalancing: A Neoclassical Realist Explanation.” In *Unanswered Threats*, 46–68. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, (2006): 57

2 Andrei P. Tsygankov, and Pavel A. Tsygankov. “Constructing National Values: The Nationally Distinctive Turn in Russian IR Theory and Foreign Policy.” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 17, no. 4 (2021): 3

3 Randall L. Schweller, “A Theory of Underbalancing: A Neoclassical Realist Explanation.” In *Unanswered Threats*, 46–68. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, (2006): 51

4 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). *Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation*. Signed May 27, 1997.

NATO Member States and the Russian Federation, a renewed agreement of 2002, based on the framework of the Founding Act of 1997, has carefully chosen phrases such as “on the principles of democracy”, “cooperative security”, “Euro-Atlantic community is indivisible”, “joint action for the member states of NATO and Russia on a wide spectrum of security issues in the Euro-Atlantic region.”<sup>5</sup> Although Ukraine’s membership to NATO has been streamlined over the years, it does not grant Putin’s government the right to claim Ukraine’s land. In other words, the scope of Putin’s government violence has no basis in democratic values. It is working against the system that their government has repeatedly agreed to in the international system. Instead of relying on the false promises of the Russian government, NATO needs to independently evaluate the current country’s environment in which Putin’s national movement is popularized.

“The narrative of Russian heroism and triumphant victory over Nazism, and the framing of modern Russia’s duty to maintain this order, has been increasingly used as a framework for Putin’s narrative on Russian military involvement in Ukraine.”<sup>6</sup> This ideology of good versus evil or Russia against Nazism is proving to be a useful unification tool that the government is deploying to push the Russian ontological security as rightfully justified in the modern world. While maintaining the narrative that Ukraine’s joining NATO is an unprovoked threat to Russian territory and a betrayal of the Russian state by both NATO and Ukraine, Putin can simultaneously promote Russian ontological security internationally and social cohesion domestically.

According to Amy Schuette, the Kremlin alleges that the expansion of NATO to former Soviet countries is breaking a promise to the 1990 agreement between US Secretary of State James Baker and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in which the Secretary of State promised that the NATO expansion would not move one inch to the east if the United Germany stayed in NATO. However, Schuette argues that the supposed promise on classified material was never intended for former Soviet Union countries, but rather for Germany; therefore, Russia is rewriting history by alleging a broken promise from NATO to Russia.<sup>7</sup> The agreement between NATO and the Russian Federation specified the security alliance to be a cooperative joint council, with the primary value being to maintain peace in Europe and ensure the security of its borders. Clearly, Putin’s government is choosing violence instead of joint discussion over their alleged new security challenges.

Until 2022, Sweden and Finland employed a neutral approach, which enabled them to withdraw from conflicts and presented them with economic advantages within the international system. For these small states, a neutral approach may provide a means to safeguard their security and increase the chances of cooperation with larger states that are engaged in a power struggle. Unfortunately, the Russian invasion of Ukraine proved to these states that Putin’s government will not respect neutrality, and an attack on their national sovereignty and independence may be launched if it is deemed to be offensive to the Russian state’s ontological security and ever-changing self-interest. On the other hand, states such as Hungary and Mongolia have started actively using a hedging approach after the changes in the region’s larger state; the Russian international relations strategy has changed drastically in recent years. Hungary has been a NATO member

5 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). “Declaration by Heads of State and Government of NATO Member States and the Russian Federation.” May 28, 2002.

6 Andrew Preen, “Putin’s Retelling of the Great Patriotic War Myth and the Construction of Russian National Identity.” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies* 15, no. 3 (2024): 53

7 Christian Schuette, “Russian Disinformation on NATO Expansion and the War in Ukraine.” *Journal of Strategic Security* 16 (2023)

since 1999 and has a strong democratic party that has held power for the last twenty years, similar to Mongolia. However, following changes in the security alliances and Sweden and Finland's requests for new membership in NATO, Hungary's process was lengthy and careful, particularly in relation to Russia.

Amanda Coakley, a journalist and Europe's Future Fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna, reports that approximately 80 percent of Hungary's natural gas and 65 percent of its oil come from Russia; meanwhile, over 95 percent of Mongolia's petroleum usage is supplied by Russia as well. "A hedging strategy consists of an attempt to spread a small state's bet by taking shelter from a powerful state but at the same time seeking to form coalitions on certain issues with other states based on their common interests."<sup>8</sup> Given that these small states, previously part of the Soviet Union and currently experiencing central economic dependence, Hungary and Mongolia are purposefully revising their IR strategies to align with Russia's ontological security, while carefully avoiding involvement with international organizations such as NATO and others.

It remains unclear whether the international relations strategy these small states are launching will suffice to ensure their independence and protection from the Russian state's expansionist regime. Schweller argues that the transition from an authoritarian regime to an oligarchy allows elites to control the state's power, and they typically seek support from the masses by introducing extreme nationalist values. He states, "In a highly politicized atmosphere of mass politics, elites will be tempted, in varying degrees, to mobilize the masses through nationalist propaganda designed to whip up support for predatory expansion."<sup>9</sup> The Declaration of State of Sovereignty of Ukraine was adopted in 1990, shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union regime. If we discuss the legality of the invasion of 2022, there is no ground for the Russian claim to Ukrainian land. Through repetitive propaganda and carefully strategized international and domestic politics, Russia is mobilizing the masses to support its expansionist regime in the modern world. The physical security of countries bandwagoning and aligning with the West would be theoretically advantageous. However, they must be cautious not to overextend their military preparedness, which could inadvertently give the Russian government a strategic advantage to initiate a war. Additionally, they must consider the narrative of Russian national identity.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN/METHODOLOGY

Russian ontological security, or "sense of self," has undergone drastic changes since the start of the new millennium. The state's actions, which contradict its new values and norms, are carefully reintroduced as traditional, aligning with its long history as a nation. In terms of small states that are in geographical proximity to the Russian state, each had to take an approach that could guarantee its survival in the international system. Finland and Sweden were the first small states to align themselves with the European Union and join NATO after the Russian offensive in Ukraine in 2022. Indications of displeasure with Russia are evident in the media programs disseminated by the Russian state government worldwide. Such propaganda that actively attacks the internal affairs of neighboring countries is in direct conflict with the values of Orthodox Christianity of the Russian state, but in agreement with the state's ontological security.

8 Diana Panke and Baldur Thorhallsson. "Foreign Policy of Small States." In *The Oxford Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2024): 506

9 Randall L. Schweller, "A Theory of Underbalancing: A Neoclassical Realist Explanation." In *Unanswered Threats*, 46–68. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, (2006): 56

In this paper, I argue that Russia is not only seeking physical security in the world but is also actively working towards achieving ontological security, and small states in geographical proximity must be aware of its values and sense of self within the international system. Correlation between the Soviet Union's allied countries and the current state of Russia is studied to create a link between the routinized relations of the historical past and the new identity that modern Russian centralized power is introducing in the global system. As Jennifer Mitzen points out, "Attachment to routines and the social order they implicate is thus connected to, indeed a precondition for, identity and therefore the capacity for rational action."<sup>10</sup> Following Tsygankov, I argue that in the pursuit of a renewed identity, Russia is reclaiming the routines of the past and requiring the relationships between Russia and other states to remain predictable and manageable from Russia's perspective.

To support my hypothesis regarding media propaganda, I will present data and a case study from the NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence.<sup>11</sup> This study examines the media narratives of PRC and Russia concerning Sweden and Finland before and after their NATO accession, which was prompted by the 2022 annexation of Crimea. Then I will conclude my claim using a historical narrative by further explaining the Russian ontological security struggles and NATO's need for reevaluation of the Russian ideological difference from the West.

#### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SWEDEN AND RUSSIA

Sweden and Russia have successfully maintained a historical diplomatic relationship that benefits both countries and shares common values rooted in socialist principles. Throughout his ascension to the presidency, Putin and his government have expressed satisfaction with Sweden's international relations diplomacy, particularly its neutral stance, which has allowed the Russian government to form economic alliances and trade partnerships with the small state. These significant diplomatic achievements are frequently emphasized, and historical alliances are often referenced in public statements and speeches. However, the Russian offensive international relations strategy, primarily actions taken towards Ukraine, created uncertainty and distrust between the two countries. The Swedish government and its people had carefully considered the Russian view of itself as a regional superpower and empire.

Martin Kragh and Sebastian Asberg argue that "Increasingly since 2014, Sweden has been the target of a wide array of active measures: disinformation, forged telegrams and fake news items have surfaced in the information landscape; Russian politicians and diplomats have intervened in Swedish domestic political affairs on NATO and Baltic Sea Security."<sup>12</sup> In theory, the internal affairs of the Swedish government and its people have little to no correlation with Russia, and it must remain independent of Putin's opinion and his government. Nonetheless, Kragh and Asberg report that Russia actively uses media coverage to spread disinformation regarding policies and regulations among Swedish citizens, steering them away from the Western alliance being formed or advanced in the state. Sweden, having previously maintained a good relationship with the Russian state, and its potential to join NATO could be seen as a threat to the "basic

10 Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma." *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2006): 342

11 Johan Hellström, Mikael Puranen, Salla Kytöneva, and Pauli Kallioniemi. *Are Russian Narratives Amplified by PRC Media? A Case Study on Narratives Related to Sweden's and Finland's NATO Applications*. Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2024.

12 Martin Kragh and Sebastian Åsberg. "Russia's Strategy for Influence through Public Diplomacy and Active Measures: The Swedish Case." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40, no. 6 (2017): 788

trust system,”<sup>13</sup> thereby, introducing an intolerable level of uncertainty to Russian ontological security.

NATO reports that the agreement signed between China and Russia involves previous socialist countries vowing to create strategic alliances for the spread and exchange of “objective, comprehensive and accurate coverage”<sup>14</sup> by state media. In contrast, a study by Hellström et al. examined the collaboration between Russia and China within the information space to obstruct Sweden’s request to join NATO in 2022. They observed that “coverage of challenges to Sweden’s NATO bid, through opposition from Turkey and to a lesser extent Hungary and Croatia, was somewhat frequent in Chinese and especially Russian sources compared to Western sources.”<sup>15</sup> Among a total of 4359 articles on the theme of opposition Chinese sources account for 33.4%, and Russian sources account for 37.2%. These data points reveal that Putin’s government is utilizing constant and active media propaganda to minimize the impact of Sweden’s international relations strategy and discredit its need for physical security guaranteed by NATO, in pursuit of its own ontological security.

#### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FINLAND AND RUSSIA

Finland has been a member of the European Union since 1995 and has successfully served as a border of the EU to Russia for the last thirty years. Culture and language are drastically different, and yet they share many historical events and geographical similarities. Finland’s membership application to join NATO came quickly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the Finnish government expressed border security concerns. As one of the Nordic countries sharing borders with Russia, a military escalation was seen as a possibility, necessitating a strategic alliance with a strong military power to ensure its survival in the international system.

However, by doing so, Finland created ontological insecurity for Putin’s government and its view of itself as a regional superpower. Moreover, as it became a NATO member country, Finland effectively maximized the hard uncertainty of the cognitive order of the environment for Russian centralized power. Mitzen argues, “because actors cannot respond to all dangers at once, the capacity for agency depends on a basic trust system, which takes most questions off the table.”<sup>16</sup> As Mitzen states, the basic trust system of the state relies on day-to-day identity, and the current Russian identity is rooted in past achievements and historical identity.

To minimize the loss of identity and potential loss of influence, Russia has launched media propaganda to sway public opinion regarding NATO accession in Finnish and global media outlets, and has tried to portray membership as a dangerous, uncertain, and risky move that could lead to escalation. Based on the same survey by NATO,<sup>17</sup> the number of media articles shared from Russian Twitter super spreader accounts is below:

13 Jennifer Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma.” *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2006): 346

14 Johan Hellström, Mikael Puranen, Salla Kytöneva, and Pauli Kallioniemi. *Are Russian Narratives Amplified by PRC Media? A Case Study on Narratives Related to Sweden’s and Finland’s NATO Applications*. Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2024.

15 Ibid.

16 Jennifer Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma.” *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2006): 346

17 Johan Hellström, Mikael Puranen, Salla Kytöneva, and Pauli Kallioniemi. *Are Russian Narratives Amplified by PRC Media? A Case Study on Narratives Related to Sweden’s and Finland’s NATO Applications*. Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2024

- *“Finland joins NATO just before NATO is losing its biggest war while destroying EU industry with a Norwegian leader who helped the US Govt blow up the Nordstream pipelines in an act of war against its own members?” The study shows 12,000 likes and 2,900 retweets on the tweet*
- *“Join the conversation as we discuss Finland joining NATO and escalating tensions with Russia; the unhealthy influence of Wall Street on the housing market.” The study shows 558 likes and 130 retweets on the tweet.*
- *“Not a good day for NATO and their proxies: EU ban on Russian oil blocked by Hungary, NATO expansion on Finland/Sweden blocked by Turkey, US arms shipments to Ukraine could end May 19, Russian encirclement in northern Donbas begins, US gasoline prices reach all-time high.” The study reveals 3,900 likes and 1,200 retweets on the tweet.<sup>18</sup>*

The above shows a small margin of the tweets shared through Russian super spreader accounts on Twitter, which disseminate Russian propaganda. State-controlled media outlets are allegedly directly connected to such super-spreader accounts. A legitimate effort to disseminate news produced by Russian state-controlled media and their Chinese state-controlled media partners suggests that international relations strategies are being expressed and communicated. The identity of the state needs to be reconciled and recognized by other states, in addition to its self-identity, to confirm and sustain the sense of self. Therefore, Finland, a partner with which the Russian state has a long history, joining security alliances with strong organizations can be seen as a contributing factor to the Russian identity crisis and ontological insecurity.

The Russian state's contradictory identities, stemming from multiple generations of people who lived through different economic policies, governments, and international relations, have a direct impact on the ontological insecurity the state faces today. “Russia, as well as other states that found themselves on the periphery of the international society, can only hope to achieve a stable sense of being if they address their subordinate position in the global hierarchical structure. In other words, Russia must exercise its reflexive agency within externally defined parameters, within the constraints imposed by the hegemony of the European discourse.”<sup>19</sup> State-controlled power, Putin's government takes a multi-layered, contradictory constructivist approach in dealing with identity narratives. Moreover, by refusing to accept the subordinate position and identity that comes with the position, Russia proactively narrates its own self-image relative to the past historical events, culture, religion, and identity. It uses it as a unifying factor to “other” the West, NATO, and many other international organizations. It is crucial for NATO and the small states in the region to understand the threat perception narratives in order to steer clear of conflicts and address the narratives presented to the Russian public.

## CONCLUSION

It is beneficial to understand that the current Russian government does not function under democratic values and principles. Instead, Putin is positioning his country to pursue a separate foreign policy in which Russia is a regional superpower. Ontological security theory, as suggested by Mitzen, is as follows: “As a fundamental need, ontological security operates in all social contexts, cooperative or conflictual...Because states

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Natalia Morozova, “From Ontological Insecurity to Counter-Hegemony: Russia's Post-Soviet Engagement with Geopolitics and Eurasianism.” In *Fear and Uncertainty in Europe*, 153–76. Cham: Springer, (2018): 163

cannot know one another's present and especially future intentions with certainty, security seekers can be forced to take measures that threaten other states' motive structure or type."<sup>20</sup> It is established throughout this paper that Russia is a conflictual ontological security seeker that requires external validation, which makes it unpredictable. I argue that the need for external validation extends to internal struggles with self-identity within the Russian public. To avoid geographical or military conflicts, small states must consider the ontological insecurity of the current Russia to safeguard their physical security.

In other words, the ontological security of Russia is as crucial as its physical security for functioning, and the basic safety system relies on the previously established relationship routine as a hegemon of the Soviet Union era and the empire before that. The distinctiveness of Russian culture and language, along with the vast geographical expanse of their land, forms the foundation of their self-identity. The "brotherhood" of relationships among socialist countries is prioritized and expected from small states in the region, including but not limited to Ukraine, Sweden, and Finland.

Constructivist ontological security theory facilitates a deeper exploration of the country's unique past, present, and future dynamics, as well as its identity. In turn, the study's findings on detailed, conscious macro-level patterns of self-aid will aid in preventing further escalation or the outbreak of military conflicts at the international level. NATO, being the global organization that Sweden and Finland chose to become members of, must further calculate their regional strategy based on the Putin government's ongoing media propaganda, the general ethical census of the Russian people, and its shared common history with Sweden, Finland, and other small socialist states in the region. Evidence provided by NATO suggests that the media propaganda against the membership ascension of both Sweden and Finland, despite their historically positive diplomatic relationship with Russia, indicates a looming physical threat to the small states. Chinese and Russian joint media propaganda and mutual support are consistent with the past era of socialist partnership. They must be taken into consideration by NATO and the small states of the region. NATO must correct its course of under-balancing Russia by addressing the Russian ontological security-seeking strategy to avoid future potential conflicts.

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20 Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma." *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2006): 353

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# Reforming the Kafala System in Qatar: The Role of International Organizations in Labor Migration Compliance

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of international organizations in promoting compliance with international labor migration standards through a case study of Qatar's *kafala* system and its reforms from 2014-2023. The research shows that international organizations, particularly the International Labor Organization (ILO), play a positive role in increasing compliance due to their neutral positioning, consensus-building capacity, and substantial resources. However, this paper argues that political, social, and cultural barriers present larger obstacles that prevent full implementation of labor standards. Analysis of the ILO-Qatar Technical Cooperation Program reveals significant policy achievements, including the elimination of exit visa requirements, the establishment of non-discriminatory minimum wages, and improved worker mobility. Qatar approved over 669,000 job change applications and 86% of migrant workers reported positive reform impacts. However, persistent limitations include asymmetrical power structures, reliance on state self-reporting, global economic inequities, and discriminatory practices. The study concludes that while international organizations serve as essential catalysts for labor rights improvements, comprehensive reform requires addressing structural inequalities, strengthening enforcement mechanisms, and prioritizing anti-discrimination measures to protect migrant workers in an increasingly globalized economy.

## INTRODUCTION

International temporary labor migration is defined as workers migrating to a host country for fixed-term employment. Labor migration is beneficial to both the host country and the country of origin as it can supplement the host country's labor shortages and the country of origin's economy through remittances. Despite the mutual benefits of labor migration, workers are vulnerable stakeholders to its downsides. International frameworks consist of treaties and organizations that elaborate and work to ensure international human and labor rights. However, the implementation of international agreements falls short due to political interests and social and cultural implications of global inequities and discrimination.

What is the role that international organizations play in international labor migration compliance? I argue that international organizations play a positive role in increasing compliance because of neutral positioning, consensus-building capacity, and substantial resources. However, there are political, social, and cultural barriers that may still prevent states from full compliance, regardless of the role international organizations play. This paper proceeds by analyzing international frameworks for human and labor rights, strengths and weaknesses of the international labor migration regime, and a case study on reforming the *Kafala* System, specifically in Qatar.

## INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR HUMAN AND LABOR RIGHTS

In practice, labor rights are human rights. International human rights law is a universal set of rules to protect individuals and their dignity. Several international human rights laws in the United Nations (UN) include the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The Slavery Convention, The Torture Convention, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (2016) is the first of its kind, passed by the General Assembly, to declare the collective responsibility of the international community to ensure equal treatment of migrants regardless of migration status. New York Declaration commits to promoting ethical recruitment policies between host and origin countries, lowering transaction fees, and ensuring the safety of migrant workers, particularly women. It also encourages member states to accede to the International Labor Organization.<sup>1</sup>

The International Labor Organization (ILO) leads a global initiative to combat forced labor worldwide, one of the four core labor standards established in ILO's 1998 Declaration. Forced labor is legally defined as work inflicted under threat and without voluntary consent. Categories include state or military-imposed labor, private economic exploitation (debt bondage, forced domestic work, labor in agriculture), and commercial sexual exploitation. Private economic exploitation constitutes roughly two-thirds of forced labor cases.<sup>2</sup> The ILO introduced workers and trade unions into the global governance sphere.<sup>3</sup> ILO Resolution of 2017 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlight the necessity of safeguarding decent working conditions for migrant workers. The Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW) is responsible for examining state compliance and promoting rights of migrant workers. Additionally, the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) focuses on how laws affect workers and advocates for migrant workers' rights. Lastly, the Conference Committee on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CAS) is a trilateral political body consisting of government, employer, and worker representatives.<sup>4</sup>

## STRENGTHS OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The first strength of international organizations (IOs) in promoting compliance is their neutral, diplomatic, and democratic nature. Through this, they pass comprehensive international agreements on human rights law. UN-related organizations, such as ILO, are advantageous for their universality, neutrality, and program mandates. The UN has established mechanisms to foster impartiality through its bureaucratic structure that provides checks and balances and emphasizes the importance of objective language.<sup>5</sup>

1 United Nations General Assembly. 2016. New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/71/1>.

2 Jens Lerche. 2007. "Global Alliance against Forced Labor? Unfree Labor, Neo-Liberal Globalization and the International Labor Organization." *Journal of Agrarian Change* 7, no. 4: 425–52.

3 Judy Dempsey. 2023. "Judy Asks: Is the United Nations Still Fit for Purpose?" *Carnegieendowment.org*. September 21, 2023. <https://carnegieendowment.org/europe/strategic-europe/2023/09/judy-asks-is-the-united-nations-still-fit-for-purpose?lang=en>.

4 Mark Freeman. 2001. "The United Nations and the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights: Identifying Strengths, Weaknesses and Limitations in a Complex System." *Sicherheit Und Frieden (S+F) / Security and Peace* 19, no. 3: 110–19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24230977>

5 Ibid.

Second, through IOs' sprawling networks and expert resources, specifically under the UN, they provide quality research for international policymaking. IOs tend to have stronger coordination with experts and researchers than state governments. IOs are more welcoming to a broad range of research surrounding international migration than state actors. Furthermore, the technical and scientific legitimacy of the experts working closely with IOs gives IOs more legitimacy and authority.<sup>6</sup>

The UN has access to government, academic, CSO, and policy spheres and has provided critical research to counter the spread of misinformation surrounding international migration. Specifically, their academic research (white literature) is high-quality for conducting extensive expert peer-review and establishing requirements to build upon existing scientific evidence. Their non-academic (grey) literature also has its benefits of high public accessibility, rapid publishing of policy updates and debates, and reliable information drawn from expert scholarly sources. The UN's literature contributes to knowledge on migration and evidence-based policy-making. Furthermore, the ILO and UN have conducted extensive research to empirically negate the rapid spread of misinformation. As such, IOs provide essential knowledge for constructive problem definition, resolution, and policy making. The purpose, structure, and sprawling networks of IOs, specifically the UN, strengthen capacities for international governance. Nevertheless, IOs are still political bodies, and the global inequities from social and cultural barriers make full implementation challenging.<sup>7</sup>

## The Struggle for State Compliance

### POLITICAL INTERESTS

Although international organizations carry an essential global presence through their apolitical values, thorough policy research, and diplomacy, a prevailing weakness identified in most literature is the inability to ensure compliance with international treaties and agreements. States' compliance with UN human rights laws poses challenges for various reasons. First, despite pronounced neutrality, complete impartiality is difficult to accomplish, as most institutions are composed of actors with special interests. For example, most international organizations depend on the self-reporting of states for compliance, resulting in information that may be compromised to spare state leaders from facing accountability. To aid this, Carraro examined state compliance with UN human rights treaties. He found that promoting state compliance may be achieved through instilling pressure, fostering learning, curating state performance evaluations, and providing feasible recommendations for states through UPR and UN Treaty bodies. This would provide states with the necessary tools to understand how to meet UN standards and provide material consequences for state compliance failures, such as exclusion from trade deals.<sup>8</sup>

Another threat to impartial practices within international organizations is asymmetrical power structures. Faradj Koliev and James H Lebovic investigated whether politics influences ILO behaviors or if the ILO operates according to norms established

6 Martin Geiger, and Antoine Pécoud. 2014. "International Organisations and the Politics of Migration." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40, no. 6: 865–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2013.855071>.

7 Marie McAuliffe and Anna Triandafyllidou. 2022. "4 Migration Research and Analysis: Recent United Nations Contributions." *World Migration Report 2022* (1). <https://doi.org/10.1002/wom3.25>

8 Valentina Carraro, "Promoting Compliance with Human Rights: The Performance of the United Nations' Universal Periodic Review and Treaty Bodies," *International Studies Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2019): 1079–93, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqz078>.

in labor conventions. They explored how political affiliations may affect ILO actions and whether naming directly corresponds to shaming. Their findings supported the idea that while the ILO operates within its mandate, it also demonstrates political influences in its targeting of countries.<sup>9</sup> Evidence suggested that the ILO targets powerful countries less often, while leftist governments enjoy relative impunity from harsh sanctions. Additionally, consistent violations by one state led to further scrutiny and targeting by both bodies. Although this demonstrates that the ILO enforces standards rather than allowing violations to go unchecked, it also demonstrates that the ILO disproportionately targets those countries previously flagged for violations. Koliev and Lebovic's results indicated that norms could prevail in IGOs even when political pressures are apparent. This supports the argument that IOs offer a structurally positive mechanism for labor rights compliance, even with political constraints. Koliev and Lebovic suggest IGOs expand their structure in ways that further minimize political considerations<sup>10</sup>

### **SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BARRIERS**

In addition to structural and political barriers within international organizations, global social and cultural barriers also play a role in preventing safe and equal treatment for migrant workers. Trafficking and forced labor often correlate with poverty and precarious labor conditions, particularly in the developing world. The ILO report emphasizes the link between modern capitalism, deregulated labor markets, and the prevalence of forced labor relations. Lerche<sup>11</sup> notes that labor issues often remained absent in broader development goals, despite the push for labor rights integration. The relationship between prolonged poor conditions and economic vulnerability of laborers often results in a cycle of bonded labor. Forced labor must be understood in conjunction with broader systemic inequity created by globalization and capitalist structures. Differentiating nuances in unfree labor relationships highlights a continuum of exploitation rather than a binary of free/unfree. A pressing need exists for comprehensive historical and contextual analyses to fully address the complexities of forced labor in the modern era and inform effective policies and practices.<sup>12</sup>

Temporary migrant workers are particularly vulnerable because they are generally low-income and non-citizens. Many face a wide range of human rights violations, such as forced labor, physical and sexual abuse, and non-payment of wages. Furthermore, they face obstacles in receiving redress or justice. Networks of labor activism that connect labor unions and migration organizations have formed because of the lack of cohesive global governance on ensuring labor migrant rights are implemented. The networks of labor activism have successfully influenced the issue of labor migration on global governance agendas through the International Labor Organization and the UN. Effective implementation of temporary labor migrant rights requires collaboration and cohesion between IOs, CSOs, and labor unions.<sup>13</sup>

9 Faradj Koliev and James H Lebovic. 2018. "Selecting for Shame: The Monitoring of Workers' Rights by the International Labor Organization, 1989 to 2011." *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 2: 437–52. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqy005>.

10 Koliev and Lebovic, "Selecting for Shame."

11 Lerche, "Global Alliance against Forced Labor?"

12 Ibid.

13 Nicola Piper, Stuart Rosewarne, and Matt Withers. 2017. "Migrant Precarity in Asia: 'Networks of Labor Activism' for a Rights-based Governance of Migration." *Development and Change* 48, no. 5: 1089–1110.

## Case Study: The Kafala System and Temporary Labor Migration in Qatar

### THE KAFALA SYSTEM IN THE GULF REGION

The name of the *Kafala* system in the Gulf Region originated from the religious Islamic notion of *kafala*. The Arabic word *kafala* means “sponsorship” or “responsibility”. It is a concept in Islamic family law with an obligation to provide temporary legal guardianship and support for an orphaned child. It is also prevalent in business practices in which a guarantor assumes liability and financial responsibility for someone. The Islamic values under this practice foster trust, cooperation and solidarity. *Kafala* provides the vulnerable and weak with financial, legal, or political representation as a form of community responsibility. This term was not used regarding labor migration policies until the 1940s for pearl divers in Gulf states bound to a *kafil*, or guarantor, who owned the boats. It added a layer of legitimacy for the foreigner expected to abide by the agreements of the business contract and the laws of the country. The practical use of the term changed in the 1950s and 60s at the start of Qatar’s modern development with oil revenues. British colonial rule created systems of sponsorships for Gulf states, including Qatar, which coincidentally had theoretical similarities to traditional *kafala*. However, *kafala* labor policies among Gulf states have differences from the traditional meaning of *kafala* where the guarantor doesn’t reap any rewards. In practice, sponsors receive payments from workers through exploiting the system. Additionally, although the *kafil* is responsible for obtaining the work visa and residency permit, if those documents aren’t renewed, the worker is illegal and faces legal punishment such as arrest or deportation. Therefore, the contemporary system is not pure *kafala*.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1950s during economic growth, *kafala* temporary labor migration policies in the Persian Gulf expanded to build infrastructure for small populations and allowed flexible leave during economic slowing. These new labor migration policies were intended to offer workers protection since many didn’t speak the language or were unfamiliar with cultural norms. This led to a tenfold population increase over fifty years for Qatar. Economic shocks, such as the 2014 oil price crash and COVID-19, resulted in states investing in opportunities for their local workers and growing anti-migrant sentiment. Most migrant workers in the Persian Gulf come from Africa and South Asia, serving sectors that domestic citizens leave vacant. The *kafala* system offers higher-paying jobs for prospective migrant workers than their countries of origin and workers can send remittances home. Additionally, liberal labor migration results in lower rates of human smuggling. However, there are also flaws and concerns. For example, the policy can stunt the host country’s economic development by neglecting investment in higher-skill industries. Additionally, public protests in the Persian Gulf in 2020 condemned human rights abuses of the *kafala* system. In response to global and domestic backlash, most host countries have reformed the system.<sup>15</sup> However, no host country that uses the *kafala* system has signed the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, an agreement banning forced labor, providing a minimum wage, and regulating worker safety.<sup>16</sup>

14 Ray Jureidini and Said Fares Hassan, “The Principle of Kafala as Applied to Migrant Workers: Traditional Continuity and Reform,” *Migration and Islamic Ethics*, November 2019, 92–109, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004417342\\_007](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004417342_007).

15 Abdi Latif Dahir, Justin Scheck, and Kiana Hayeri. 2025. “East African Housekeepers Face Rape, Assault and Death in Saudi Arabia.” *The New York Times*, March 16, 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/16/world/africa/saudi-arabia-kenya-uganda-maids-women.html?searchResultPosition=6>.

16 Kali Robinson. November 18, 2022. “What Is the Kafala System?” Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-kafala-system>.

Dahir et al recently spent months in cities and villages in Uganda and Kenya to gather testimonials and unveil the current disorderly and lethal trade of domestic workers with Saudi Arabia.<sup>17</sup> Under this system, company recruiters and governments encourage women to work abroad for a couple of years as a nanny or housekeeper, promising them enough money upon the end of the contract to build their future back home. There are growing rates of deaths among Kenyan temporary migrant workers. There are about half a million Kenyan and Ugandan workers in Saudi Arabia, and most are women in the care industry.

Despite widespread abuse against East African women workers, the governments of Kenya, Uganda, and Saudi Arabia have powerful actors incentivized to increase migrant flows. For example, members of the Saudi royal family and politicians in Uganda and Kenya own staffing agencies for domestic workers. Fabian Kyule Muli, Vice Chairman of the labor committee in Kenya's National Assembly, has often rejected evidence of abuse against Kenyan migrants.<sup>18</sup> A close advisor of Kenya's president, Moses Curia, owned a staffing agency. The president, William Ruto, has declared intent to mitigate unlicensed recruiting firms. Like Kenya and Uganda, top officials in Saudi Arabia are shareholders of recruitment companies, including officials of human rights boards. Remittances are a large source of income for Kenya and Uganda's stagnant economies.<sup>19</sup>

Although work opportunities in Gulf countries are advertised as prosperous, once workers encounter concerning, dangerous, or deadly working conditions, recruitment agencies and governments often neglect these women, sometimes resulting in murders by employers. Eunice Achieng was a Kenyan housekeeper who called her mother in a plea for rescue from her boss's lethal threats. After she died, Saudi police declared it a natural death. This is one case of many in which Dahir and Scheck reported severe cases of physical and sexual brutality and death, declared as "natural causes" by Saudi police. Recruitment agencies seek out impoverished individuals desperate for work and adequate income, most often not knowing the language of the host country. Saudi Arabia's wage hierarchy places East African workers lowest. The report by Dahir and Scheck reflects a corrupt temporary labor migration system that perpetuates gendered and ethnic violence and works to cover up these cases for the special interests of many powerful actors. These interests and discriminatory labor laws create a significant obstacle in ensuring safe and fair international labor practices.<sup>20</sup>

Today, *kafala* is considered a radical form of employer sponsorship.<sup>21</sup> Power imbalances between employers and workers have human rights implications. An example is restriction of worker mobility. Employers sometimes confiscate travel documentation and confine workers to crowded living conditions, exposing them to illness. Workers are also bound to employers by debt since recruitment fees for employers are passed down to the workers and workers take loans to pay for them. Moreover, employers have used contracts and language barriers to deceive and coerce workers into forced labor. Furthermore, sponsors can terminate their workers for any reason. There is also racialized treatment, as most migrant workers are from South Asia or Africa. Women experience gendered violence and imprisonment, prevalent in Qatar and Kuwait. Most *kafala*

17 Dahir, Scheck, and Hayeri, "East African Housekeepers Face Rape, Assault and Death in Saudi Arabia."

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ryszard Cholewinski. February 1, 2023. "Understanding the Kafala Migrant Labor System in Qatar and the Middle East at Large, with ILO Senior Migration Specialist Ryszard Cholewinski." Georgetown Journal of International Affairs. <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2023/02/01/the-kafala-system-a-conversation-with-ryszard-cholewinski/>.

workers in Lebanon are women.<sup>22</sup> Although states give sponsorship permits to employers to bring in workers, this binds workers to their employers.<sup>23</sup>

### QATAR'S KAFALA SYSTEM

The history of Qatar's *kafala* system and its existing reform efforts with the ILO demonstrate IO influence and perpetual structural limits. Qatar first enacted *kafala* labor migration policies in the 1960s with *Law 9, Governing Aliens Entry and Residence in Qatar*. Under this law, foreigners could be granted a visa for providing labor services, having a sponsor to hire and care for them, and signing a contract. When the work is done, the *kafil* pays for repatriation. In 2009, *Law 4, Regulating the Entry and Exit of Expatriates in Qatar and their residence and Sponsorship* included a requirement of an exit visa to be approved by the employer more explicitly, which caused infringements of freedom of movement. The intent of *Law 4* was to prevent workers from leaving employers with large debts and defrauding them. Another concern is that Qatar originally based worker salaries on countries of origin, which is racial discrimination.<sup>24</sup>

Qatar has experienced ample failures through its *kafala* system, most notoriously from the 2022 World Cup. The system violated human rights and harmed Qatar's reputation. As such, Qatar has also implemented many reforms along the way. Global backlash began in 2014 when international trade unions submitted complaints to the ILO that Qatar was not resolving worker rights violations.<sup>25</sup> During the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Qatar rushed to construct its infrastructure. Migrants worked in 100-degree weather for construction, resulting in injuries and four hundred to five hundred deaths.<sup>26</sup> Countries of origin, such as Indonesia, Kenya, and Nepal, have restricted their workers from emigrating to Qatar due to human rights concerns. Additionally, the European Union and the United Nations have called for Qatar to abolish the *kafala* system.<sup>27</sup>

Regarding Qatar's political and economic goals, the failures of their temporary labor migration laws have led to many successes. This is mainly through the state's willingness to work with the ILO and improve its global reputation as a leader for migrant workers' rights in the Gulf region. Qatar expressed its goal to protect worker mobility for migrants through the *Qatar Vision 2030*, indicating a long-term commitment to economic development and ensuring sustainable labor rights measures. Qatar's reforms are the most advanced of the Gulf states.<sup>28</sup> For example, Qatar retracted employer consent requirements in 2020. Now, workers can change their jobs at any time, with up to two months' notice and no longer need employer consent to leave the country. From September 2020 to October 2023, over 669,000 applicants for job changes have been approved. Qatar also became the first country to implement a flat minimum wage for migrant workers that is nondiscriminatory of ethnicity or country of origin. Employers must coordinate employee wages with the banks to prevent any wage abuse. Since 2019,

22 Robinson, "What Is the Kafala System?"

23 Cholewinski, "Understanding the Kafala Migrant Labor System in Qatar and the Middle East at Large."

24 Ibid.

25 International Labour Organization. 2023. "What Has Changed for Migrant Workers in Qatar?" Webapps.ilo.org. International Labour Organization. <https://webapps.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Country-Focus/world-cup-qatar#landing>.

26 Dan Roan. 2024. "Fifa Legacy Fund after Qatar World Cup 'Shameful' for Lack of Migrant Worker Aid, Says Amnesty." BBC Sport, November 27, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/articles/ce9gllgn0d7o>.

27 Kali Robinson. November 18, 2022. "What Is the Kafala System?" Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-kafala-system>.

28 Cholewinski, "Understanding the Kafala Migrant Labor System in Qatar and the Middle East at Large."

US \$630 million has been paid to workers as financial reimbursements.<sup>29</sup> Qatar also established penalties for employers who withhold workers' wages.<sup>30</sup>

Through the ILO–Qatar Technical Cooperation Program, the ILO has provided technical assistance for Qatar in ethical economic development and quality data collection for policy evaluations. Qatar established the Occupational Health and Safety department under its Ministry of Labor, focusing on prevention of accidents and law compliance. Workers can now submit complaints online, which makes justice more accessible. In 2023, 60% of complaints were resolved, and 23% were referred to labor courts. Workers need more help through representation, so the Ministry of Labor and the ILO have established joint worker-management committees for resolving workplace issues, which is a first in the Gulf region. Over 70 companies have established joint committees with a vision to eventually hold elections. Qatar has established fourteen Qatar-Visa centers in six different countries to provide information for migrant workers about trustworthy recruitment and to safeguard them from deception. The Visa centers also provide standardized contracts for migrants to sign before departing to the host country relating to overtime compensation, safety, and termination of employment.<sup>31</sup> Qatar also took measures in response to the backlash surrounding the 2022 FIFA World Cup. ILO helped Qatar implement new health and safety policies for workers to include a mitigation of heat stress. The first policy limits outdoor work to safe hours of the day and year, the most limiting work hours rule of all the Gulf States. There are also temperature caps for eligible workdays. The second policy requires annual health check-ups for outdoor workers.<sup>32</sup> In 2015, through *Law no. 21, Regulating the Entry, Exit of Expatriates and their Residence*, Qatar took the term *kafala* out of the previous law and replaced Islamic religious terms, *kafil* (guarantor) and *makful* (guaranteed person), with more business-literal terms.<sup>33</sup> Qatar has been more responsive to international critics than other host countries in the Gulf region and local NGOs, the International Trade Union Confederation, and top government officials have expressed approval of Qatar's reforms on its *kafala* system.<sup>34</sup>

Despite Qatar's adjustments, human rights advocates continue to call for more enforcement and reforms. As highlighted previously, the United Nations called for Qatar to abolish the *kafala* system and implement a regulated open labor market that allows workers to leave their employers and host countries.<sup>35</sup> Qatar has rescinded employer consent requirements to promote worker mobility, however, there are issues with the *kafala* system being completely abolished. Inherent aspects of *kafala*, common to other labor migration laws globally, are exploitative. Binding a worker to an employer fosters power imbalances and reveals a broader issue with temporary labor migration, for low-skilled workers especially.<sup>36</sup> 54% of low-wage workers in Qatar paid recruitment fees to work there, which opens the door for debt bondage to employers. Many workers don't have a day off despite improvements in law and awareness.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, not enough migrant

29 International Labour Organization, "What Has Changed for Migrant Workers in Qatar?"

30 Robinson, "What Is the Kafala System?"

31 International Labour Organization, "What Has Changed for Migrant Workers in Qatar?"

32 International Labour Organization, "What Has Changed for Migrant Workers in Qatar?"

33 Jureidini and Hassan, "The Principle of Kafala as Applied to Migrant Workers."

34 Robinson, "What Is the Kafala System?"

35 Ibid.

36 Cholewinski, "Understanding the Kafala Migrant Labor System in Qatar and the Middle East at Large."

37 International Labour Organization, "What Has Changed for Migrant Workers in Qatar?"

workers know of *kafala* reforms, such as the right to change employers. Therefore, employers can attempt to prevent their workers from leaving and retaliate in the form of revoking residency permits or issuing false absconding charges. Another existing issue is that many workers must wait a month to receive their wages. When employers withhold wages, the waiting period between submitting a complaint and receiving their wages can be several months. Further, despite Qatar's increase in joint worker-management committees, companies have the jurisdiction to establish them or not. Unions remain illegal.<sup>38</sup>

The ILO assessed Phase 2 of the partnership project in 2023 and most outcomes were in progress. The four outcomes surveyed were labor migration governance (policy), enforcement of labor laws and access to justice (implementation), workers' voice and social dialogue expanded and international cooperation and exchange of experience. In evaluating Outcome 1, the ILO measured that over 669,000 individuals were approved for job changes, with 15% being females. Other policy improvements include the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Labor's procedural changes in absconding cases, training for recruiters and workers, and new visa centers. Under Outcome 2, the ILO surveyed respondents' access to justice and policy implementation. Visa centers have expanded the use of different languages in their public information and resources. 98% received wages on time. However, labor late or non-payment of wages remain the most common causes of labor disputes. 92% of respondents reported working 5-6 days a week at an average of 8.5 hours per day. These examples represent improvement. However, poor and illegal working conditions are still reflected. 8% reported working seven days per week.<sup>39</sup>

Outcome 3 has demonstrated considerable progress with Qatar's establishment of 72 joint committees across 9 industries and semi-annual committee meetings between constituents and international institutions. Women constituted a smaller portion of beneficiaries to the program. The care industry was not included in the joint committee partnerships. Lastly, bilateral and multilateral technical cooperation between Qatar and fellow member states, such as Sweden, the UK, and the Netherlands, has contributed to improvement in Outcome 4.<sup>40</sup>

Amnesty International specified recommendations for Qatar: reform the *kafala* system, strengthen domestic workers law, allow workers to form organizations, enforce a decent minimum wage, protect workers from abuse, and improve access to justice.<sup>41</sup> The Technical Cooperation Project between Qatar and the ILO has established mechanisms and frameworks to address each of those concerns. Overall, 86% of low-wage migrant workers reported that Qatar's *kafala* reforms have positively impacted their lives. Furthermore, there was a significant decline in worker complaints from 2022 to 2023.<sup>42</sup> Qatar's response to international scrutiny from the 2022 World Cup demonstrated that IOs have both political influence and structural limitations for implementing labor rights.

38 Amnesty International, "Qatar: Promises Yet to Be Fulfilled," February 2019, 5, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/MDE2297832019ENGLISH.pdf>.

39 Evaluation Office, "Final Independent Evaluation for Technical Cooperation Project for the State of Qatar – Phase 2," 80.

40 Evaluation Office, "Final Independent Evaluation for Technical Cooperation Project for the State of Qatar – Phase 2."

41 Amnesty International, "Reality Check: Migrant Workers' Rights in Qatar," Amnesty.org, February 5, 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/02/reality-check-migrant-workers-rights-with-four-years-to-qatar-2022-world-cup/>.

42 Evaluation Office, "Final Independent Evaluation for Technical Cooperation Project for the State of Qatar – Phase 2," 80.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

My policy recommendations for more effective implementation in Qatar consider the country's special interests and behavior as a small, wealthy, and strategically positioned Gulf state. Qatar has gained its wealth through its natural resources since the early 20th century and has advanced its development. From a realist perspective, Qatar strategically utilizes the status-seeking approach, notably by administering negotiations during conflict in the Middle East and leveraging its image on the global stage by hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Qatar prioritizes its legitimacy and reputation to foster its political networks. As such, Qatar's failures in its *kafala* program have also provided Qatar with an opportunity to work closely with the ILO and spearhead reforms to the *kafala* system for labor rights for migrants in the Gulf region. To strengthen its commitments and global legitimacy, Qatar needs to ensure all migrants can benefit from *kafala* reforms, streamline access to justice and recovery of wages, and ensure that laws are thoroughly implemented.

Neither countries of origin nor host countries want to completely abolish temporary labor migration due to economic benefits.<sup>43</sup> The aim shouldn't be to legally abolish the *kafala* system, but to systematically dismantle it. Focus areas include awareness of migrant rights and ensuring fair wages.<sup>44</sup> Procedures and regulations need to be clarified for workers who don't know the laws or their rights. There needs to be more awareness on *kafala* reforms, streamlined access to justice and wage reimbursements, and assurance that these reforms are fully implemented. Workers need more proactive guidance from Qatar's Ministry of Labor to understand which documents they need to prepare for court hearings. Training courses and awareness services for workers, employers, and recruitment agencies would benefit their knowledge and skills in dispute reconciliation. More broadly, Qatar can implement stronger standard operating procedures to evaluate bureaucratic efficiency. Qatar's Minimum Wage Commission should work closely with representatives of employers and workers. Bureaucratic agencies and coordination with the ILO can ensure minimum wage standards remain fair, such as by continuing scheduled submission of data to the ILO for review. Qatar can also improve social dialogue with sectors and companies to promote joint worker-management committees or simply require this of their companies.<sup>45</sup>

The case study of the *Kafala* system reflects a larger international pattern. The effectiveness of existing provisions for global international labor migration is challenged by vague enforcement guidelines in international law. Migrant workers face exploitation risks due to restrictive migration laws. Additionally, the nature of many migration laws creates fears amongst workers of expulsion and hinders labor rights. Furthermore, limited access to justice for migrants complicates enforcement.<sup>46</sup> Factors like employer dependency, the complexity of legal frameworks, and limited knowledge of rights hinder enforcement.<sup>47</sup> International Human Rights Laws typically only bind state actors, not non-state actors. Not all rights are absolute; some can be restricted legally (e.g., to maintain public order). States may suspend certain rights during public emergencies, but core rights often remain protected.<sup>48</sup>

43 Robinson, "What Is the Kafala System?"

44 Cholewinski, "Understanding the Kafala Migrant Labor System in Qatar and the Middle East at Large."

45 International Labour Organization, "What Has Changed for Migrant Workers in Qatar?"

46 Petra Herzfeld Olsson. 2020. "The Role of Effective Enforcement in International Law on Labor Migration." *International Organizations Law Review* 17, no. 1: 206–32. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15723747-01701009>.

47 Ibid.

48 Freeman, "The United Nations and the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights."

Migration law and limited access to justice pose challenges for labor migrants in receiving equal working conditions to local workers. This includes equal pay. The states should be encouraged to implement protective measures ensuring equal rights for migrants regardless of their legal status. UN bodies should also encourage states to establish firewalls between immigration status and access to public services to protect migrants when enforcing their rights. States can also promote human rights and access to justice for migrant workers through community-based organizations, trade unions, and monitoring sectors with high migrant employment rates (e.g., agriculture, construction) for discriminatory practices and labor abuses. The care industry should be particularly investigated and monitored. Both the ILO and CMW need a comprehensive approach to assess how national laws intersect with international standards.<sup>49</sup>

Discrimination is another issue inadequately targeted. In addition to a smaller portion of women gaining access to the ILO-Qatar resources, the elimination of discrimination is not a priority under the program. The Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations has provided recommendations, but the ILO acknowledges that this action area is lacking. A more robust structure around norms and addressing discrimination in the international labor migration regime is needed.

Lastly, despite ILO's comprehensive assessment, due to the reliance of self-reporting of member states, the ILO is limited in quantitative data that fully reflects domestic worker conditions. The New York Times article on the low-regulated care industry of Saudi Arabia provided essential research through in-person interviews with community members in East Africa. As such, IOs should facilitate the deployment of reporters, researchers, or journalists to conduct interviews. This would provide more authentic and critical knowledge about policy implementation at the local level in Qatar and other Gulf states.

## CONCLUSION

The case study of reforms on the *Kafala* system, specifically in Qatar, reflects the challenges and opportunities within international governance for ensuring fair and lawful labor migration practices. The strengths of IOs are their neutral positioning, resources, and high capacity for international consensus on human and labor rights. This is demonstrated in the Technical Cooperation Program between Qatar and the ILO, and these strengths resulted in a comprehensive framework for specified objectives and outcomes. Furthermore, the ILO-Qatar Technical Cooperation Program revealed significant policy achievements, including the elimination of exit visa requirements, the establishment of non-discriminatory minimum wages, and improved worker mobility. However, the ILO evaluation and report on migrant workers in Saudi Arabia also reflected political barriers for state enforcement. Moreover, inadequacies in addressing global disparities and inequities against women and ethnic groups represented continued social and cultural barriers to full implementation of *kafala* reforms and international labor laws. While international organizations serve as essential catalysts for labor rights improvements, comprehensive reform requires addressing structural inequalities, strengthening enforcement mechanisms, and prioritizing anti-discrimination measures to protect migrant workers in an increasingly globalized economy.

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49 Olsson, "The Role of Effective Enforcement in International Law on Labor Migration."

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# Immigration and Remittances: A Case Study of Ghanaian Immigrants In The United States

PHANUEL DONKOR KADEY

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is a holistic case study that analyzes the factors influencing the financial behavior of Ghanaian immigrants in the US. The paper primarily focuses on secondary data sources from the World Bank, Bank of Ghana, the International Monetary Fund, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). It unpacks the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors that affect the transactional flows of remittances from the US to Ghana. This paper argues that Ghanaian migrants' remittance behavior is shaped by a combination of factors including family obligations, socio-economic integration in the host country and its foreign policy, cultural expectations rooted in transnational ties, and micro-economic conditions of the home country.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the factors influencing the remittance behavior of Ghanaian immigrants in the United States, focusing specifically on private unrequited transfers. Remittances — money sent by international migrants to relatives and others in their home countries — have long been recognized as an important source of income for many developing countries. The paper explores the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors that shape remittance flows from the U.S. to Ghana.

Remittances, defined as transfers of cash or goods sent by migrants to their home countries, play a major role in both global and national economies. In Ghana, they constitute one of the most important sources of foreign exchange, contributing significantly to household income and national development. This paper argues that the remittance behavior of Ghanaian migrants is shaped by several factors, including family obligations, socio-economic integration in the U.S. as the host country and its immigration policies, cultural expectations tied to transnational relationships, and the micro-economic conditions in Ghana as the destination country for remittances. Although economic capacity remains a key determinant of the ability to remit, the desire to maintain close social ties and meet family responsibilities is equally important. Furthermore, legal status, income levels, and the cost of living in the U.S. can either support or limit migrants' remittance patterns.

Understanding the remittance behavior of Ghanaian immigrants in the U.S. contributes to wider discussions on migration and development, especially regarding the role of diasporas in supporting economic growth in their home countries. Funds sent home remain an important source of inflows for many emerging and developing economies, particularly for foreign exchange and household support. Examining the remittance practices of Ghanaian migrants provides insights into how transnational ties

are sustained and strengthened across borders. Moreover, this paper can help inform policies in both Ghana and the United States that aim to leverage remittances for national development while also addressing the challenges migrants encounter as they support families back home.

Research shows a strong connection between immigrants' remittances and the economic development of their families and home countries, though the nature of this relationship is debated. Some scholars argue that the developmental impact of remittances is indistinguishable from income received through other sources. Others suggest that remittances lead to behavioral changes that influence development differently from sources such as pensions, wages, or government benefits. A third viewpoint holds that remittances stimulate development by boosting investments in human and physical capital and by reducing poverty. Overall, studies examining the effects of remittances indicate that these flows yield benefits at multiple levels individual, household, community, and national.

The World Bank reports that remittances received in Sub-Saharan Africa reached \$53 billion in 2022, marking a 6.1% increase from the previous year.<sup>1</sup> This growth was mainly fueled by notable rises in countries like Ghana (12%), Kenya (8.5%), Tanzania (25%), Rwanda (21%), and Uganda (17%). Nigeria, which makes up about 38% of the region's total remittance inflows, saw its remittances grow by 3.3% to \$20.1 billion in the same year.<sup>2</sup> Other countries also received significant amounts: Zimbabwe \$3.1 billion, Senegal \$2.5 billion, the Democratic Republic of Congo \$1.7 billion, Sudan \$1.5 billion, Uganda \$1.3 billion, Mali \$1.1 billion, and South Africa \$900 million.<sup>3</sup> These examples show that remittances serve as a vital financial lifeline for many African economies, especially during times of crisis.

Remittances inflows have been essential in helping many African countries manage economic pressures. For instance, these funds have provided support to nations facing food shortages, supply chain problems, and severe weather events, such as drought in the Horn of Africa, flooding in countries like Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Cameroon, and pandemics such as COVID-19 in Ghana, and Ebola in Angola.<sup>4</sup> Remittances have also helped countries deal with rising debt and the cost of debt repayment.<sup>5</sup> For instance, the Ministry of Finance in Ghana reports that foreign remittances flow, which exceeded official development assistance (ODA), supported Ghana in its debt management with external creditors through currency stabilization.<sup>6</sup>

Remittances are part of the group of items classified as Transfers in the Balance of Payments (BOP) by the Bank of Ghana (BOG). Transfers are defined in the fifth edition of the Balance of Payments Manual (BPM5) as offsetting entries for real resources

1 World Bank. 2023. Remittances Remain Resilient but Are Slowing. Migration and Development Brief 38, Washington DC: World Bank Group.

2 The World Bank's Country Reports on Ghana's Inward Remittances (2016-2022). Personal Remittances, Received (Current US\$), Sub-Saharan Africa.

3 World Bank. 2023. Immigrants, Refugees and Societies. World Development Report, Washington DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank.

4 Richmond Atuahene. 2024. "Balance of Payments (BoPs) and Inward Remittances Compilation and Analysis Issues: The Case of Ghana from 2016-2022." *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 12 (02): 479-97. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2024.122028>.

5 World Bank. 2022. Opt. Cit.

6 Republic of Ghana. 2023. "Restoring and Sustaining Macroeconomic Stability and Resilience through Inclusive Growth and Value Addition." The Budget statement and Economic Policy of the Government of Ghana for the 2023 Financial Year. Accra: Ministry of Finance, November 23.

or financial items provided, without a quid pro quo, from one economy to another.<sup>7</sup> To measure remittances, several cross-national panel studies rely on the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) database. This database is valued for its comprehensiveness and cross-country comparability. The compilation of the remittance dataset follows the globally recognized definition of remittances, which includes personal transfers and compensation of employees disclosed in the nation's BOP. The Bank of Ghana typically records these funds as receipts under the capital account.<sup>8</sup>

A notable pattern in this global trend is the rising migration of Ghanaians to various parts of the world, especially to countries in North America, Europe, and Asia. The United States has become a key destination for Ghanaian immigrants, offering educational, economic, and social opportunities. These inflows have also supported the stabilization of Ghana's finances, particularly during periods of economic uncertainty following COVID-19.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper is related to and contributes to three strands of theory in literature: Neoclassical Theory, New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) Theory, and Transnational Theory. The paper fills the gap in the literature by undertaking a systematic and rigorous analysis of the factors influencing immigrants' remittance flows while also challenging the conventional wisdom that remittances are countercyclical, by providing evidence that the net effect is a function of several conditions affecting immigrants' decisions to remit.

First, this paper is related to neoclassical economic theory. This theory asserts that migration is predominantly motivated by rational individuals aiming to optimize their income.<sup>9</sup> This concept posits that migrants relocate from low-wage to high-wage areas, with remittances regarded as excess income sent back to their home countries. This theory has faced criticism for its oversimplification of the migration process and its neglect of social and structural factors. However, the theory provides a foundational model in economics, as a starting point for analysis.

Ratha, a lead economist at the World Bank, argues that migrants often send more money home during periods of economic hardship, especially in low-income countries where families depend heavily on these transfers for basic needs.<sup>10</sup> When households struggle to meet essential expenses, remittances can serve as a critical safety net. Imam et al. contend that uncertainty in remittance-receiving countries has a more complex, dual effect.<sup>11</sup> In countries with high private investment ratios, increasing domestic uncertainty tends to reduce remittance flows. However, in countries with low public spending on education and health, remittances rise in response to uncertainty, acting as a form of social protection. Unlike other financial flows — such as foreign direct investment (FDI) that often decline sharply during crises, remittances typically remain stable and may even increase, making them a dependable income source for families and a stabilizing force

7 Ernest K Y Addison. 2003. "The Macroeconomic Impact of Remittance in Ghana." Bank of Ghana.

8 Bank of Ghana. 2025. Balance of Payment: BoP Indicator. Accessed 09 25, 2025. <https://www.bog.gov.gh/economic-data/balance-of-payment/>.

9 Douglas Massey, et al. 1993. Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal. *Population and Development Review*, 19(3), 431–466.

10 Dilip Ratha, 2005. "Remittances: A Lifeline for Development." *Finance & Development* 42 (4).

11 Imam, Patrick A, Kangni Kpodar, Djoulassi K Oloufade, and Vigninou Gammadigbe . 2024. "Remittances in Times of Uncertainty: Understanding the Dynamics and Implications ." IMF Working Paper (AFR). Washington D.C.: IMF.

for national economies. Quartey, a research fellow at the Institute of Statistical, Scientific and Economic Research at the University of Ghana, also notes that remittances significantly enhance household welfare and contribute to poverty reduction in Ghana.<sup>12</sup> They help families better manage economic shocks, such as sudden income drops or rising prices. For instance, households that receive remittances tend to be more resilient during difficult periods than those without such support. Overall, remittances play a vital role in strengthening the economic stability and well-being of many households in Ghana.

The second strand of literature draws on the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) theory.<sup>13</sup> This perspective suggests that migration decisions are made not just by individuals, but by households aiming to diversify income and reduce risk. From this viewpoint, remittances are not simply acts of generosity or leftover income; rather, they often form part of a deliberate household strategy to manage economic uncertainty, secure capital, or invest in education and healthcare.

A third theoretical perspective relevant to this study is transnationalism theory. This perspective adds further complexity to migration theory by emphasizing how migrants sustain various social, economic, political, and cultural ties across transnational boundaries.<sup>14</sup> Immigrants maintain ties with their country of origin, actively participating in practices that connect them to both their country of origin and their host nation. This methodology is especially pertinent for Ghanaian migrants who maintain regular communication with their families and communities in their home country via remittances, visits, and involvement in hometown associations.<sup>15</sup>

To summarize, this paper contributes to the literature on immigrant behavior in three key dimensions: (I) migrant-specific factors, (II) home country economic conditions, and (III) socio-cultural, institutional, and logistical factors. It aligns with recent scholarly efforts to differentiate migration and remittance research by national origin, gender, and legal status, instead of regarding migrants as a homogeneous entity.<sup>16</sup>

#### MIGRATION AND REMITTANCE PATTERNS IN GHANA

The literature reveals that Ghana is the second-largest recipient of remittances in Sub-Saharan Africa, profoundly influencing the nation's economy.<sup>17</sup> A significant portion of these remittances originates from the United States. Over the past decade, remittance flows through official channels have increased from \$117.6 million in 2007 to an estimated \$3.8 billion in 2018, constituting 7.4% of Ghana's GDP.<sup>18</sup> These remittances are an essential source of foreign currency for Ghana, surpassing Official Development Assistance (ODA) and providing substantial assistance to households and the broader economy. The United States is one of the principal destination countries for Ghanaian migrants, with more than 170,000 Ghanaians residing there as of 2020.<sup>19</sup> The Bank

12 Peter Quartey, 2011. "Remittances Markets in Remittances-Receiving Countries: Ghana." In *Remittance Markets in Africa*, edited by Sanket Mohapatra and Dilip Ratha, 133-152. Washington D.C.: World Bank.

13 Douglas Massey, et al. 1993. *Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal*. *Population and Development Review*, 19(3), 431-466.

14 Linda Basch, N Glick-Schiller, and C Szanton-blanc. 1994. *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. Langhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers.

15 John Arthur, 2016. *The African diaspora in the United States and Europe: The Ghanaian experience*. Routledge.

16 Peggy Levitt, and Deepak Lamba-Nieves. 2011. "Social Remittances Revisited." *Journal of Ethics and Migration Studies* 37: 1-25.

17 Deodat Adenutsi, and Christian Ahorator. 2021. *Macroeconomic Determinants of Remittance Flows to Sub-Saharan Africa*. African Economic Research Consortium.

18 World Bank. 2019. *Migration and Remittances: Recent Developments and Outlook*. <https://www.worldbank.org>.

19 Migration Policy Institute. 2020.

of Ghana reports that remittances from the U.S. were over 30% of total remittance inflows to Ghana in 2020, positioning the U.S. as a significant source of remittances for the country.<sup>20</sup> The Pew Research Center also reveals that Ghanaian immigrants in the U.S. are significantly inclined to remit money, with 75% of Ghanaian adults in the U.S. reporting that they consistently send money to their place of origin.<sup>21</sup> This underscores the strong linkages between the Ghanaian diaspora in the United States and their families and communities in Ghana.

Since the 1980s, Ghana has experienced substantial emigration, with the United States emerging as a major destination. The Ghanaian diaspora in the U.S. is relatively well-educated and economically active, with many employed in the healthcare, education, and service sectors. While a large share of remittances is sent through official channels, it is estimated that an additional 50 percent flows through informal means, such as friends, relatives, or unregistered money transfer services. Monitoring and documenting these informal transfers could potentially increase Ghana's recorded remittance totals by as much as 50 percent. The Bank of Ghana has stressed the importance of formalizing these informal channels to improve data accuracy and enhance the economic impact of remittances. Bringing these flows into the formal system would provide a clearer picture of total remittances and strengthen the government's ability to harness them for national development.

#### MIGRATION TRENDS IN GHANA

Scholars use migration as a mechanism to respond to long-term global imbalances, such as growing differences in economic opportunity and state welfare, political conflicts, and climate change. Some 184 million people live outside of their country of nationality, about 20 percent of whom are refugees.<sup>22</sup> Migrants move based on different motives. Economic theory suggests that potential migrants compare their expected welfare in various situations and the corresponding financial and nonfinancial costs of moving from their home country. They eventually settle for the option most likely to let them achieve their objectives in terms of economic prospects, social and psychological well-being, or safety. This confirms the rational thought where individuals aim to optimize their income.<sup>23</sup> This concept posits that migrants relocate from low-wage to high-wage areas, with remittances regarded as excess income sent back to their home countries. According to the World Bank, over 80 percent of migrants move in search of opportunities in the destination country.<sup>24</sup> Others also move to find improved personal safety, a stronger rule of law, and more personal freedoms.<sup>25</sup> However, migration is constrained by factors such as: uncertainties – the risk of unemployment, social isolation, psychological stress, or even injuries and death while in transit; unfamiliarity costs, both monetary and nonmonetary, and migrants need to familiarize themselves with the language, social norms, and culture of their destination society; job search finding a job in a new country is mostly

20 Bank of Ghana. 2021. Annual Report on Remittance Flows. 2021. <https://www.bog.gov.gh>.

21 Pew Research Center. 2019. Immigrants Sent a Record Amount of Money Home to Sub-Saharan African Countries in 2017. December 15. Accessed 09 24, 2025. <https://www.pewresearch.org>.

22 World Bank. 2023. Immigrants, Refugees and Societies. World Development Report, Washington DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank.

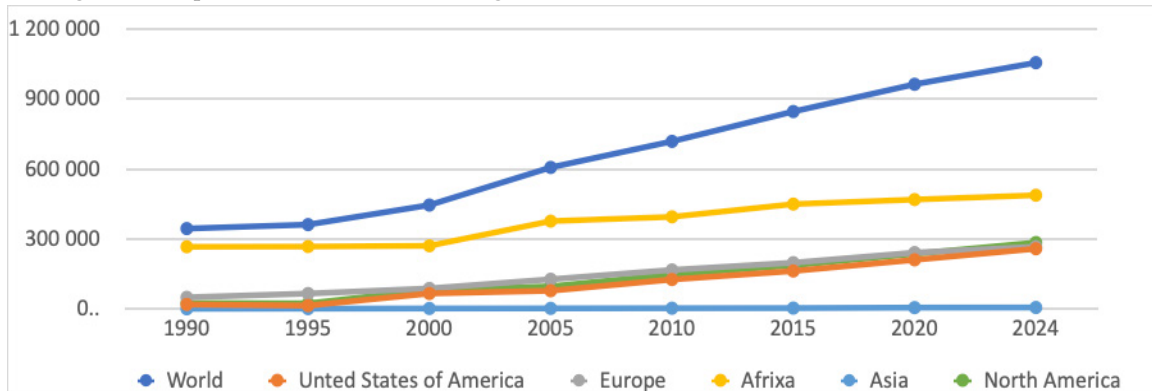
23 Douglas Massey, et al. Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal. *Population and Development Review*, 19(3), 431–466. 1993.

24 World Bank. 2023. Opt. Cit.

25 Jeffery H Cohen, and Ibrahim Cirkesi. 2012. "Theoretical Appraisal: Understanding Remittances." In *Migration and Remittances During the Global Financial Crisis and Beyond*, edited by Ibrahim Sirkeci, Jeffery H Cohen and Dilip Ratha, 15-22. Washington D.C.: World Bank.

challenging. Skills, credentials, or diplomas acquired in one country are usually not transferable easily to another country. Many migrants end up “downgrading” to a lower-skill occupation, leading to “brain waste; and financing upfront costs of migration are sometimes substantial. Typically, they include travel and relocation, visas and processing, and payments to intermediaries to find a job or arrange a move.<sup>26</sup>

The United Nations estimates that approximately 1 million Ghanaian emigrants lived abroad in 2020, 3.2 percent of Ghana’s population. This diaspora is distributed almost equally between OECD countries North America and Europe 52 percent, and sub-Saharan Africa 48percent (Figure 4.1).<sup>27</sup> In Africa, the Ghanaian diaspora is primarily found in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) area, hosting about 46 percent of all Ghanaian emigrants worldwide.<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 4.1:** Number of Ghanaian Emigrants in main Destination Areas from 1990 -2024  
 Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2024)

According to the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), Ghana’s emigrant population is largely composed of young adults, with a median age of 29 years. Over three-quarters of emigrants (77.2%) fall within the 20–49 age range: 47.5 percent are male and 52.5 percent are female. The proportion of children under 15 years among emigrants is very small.<sup>29</sup> In addition, there are more emigrants from rural areas (78.6%) within the 20–49 age group than from urban areas. Table 4.1 shows the main destinations of Ghanaian emigrants, which continue to be Europe (37.6%) and the Americas (23.7%), similar to patterns observed in the 2010 Population and Housing Census (PHC), where the figures were 37.7 percent and 23.6 percent, respectively. This trend is partly linked to historical ties between Ghana and both Europe and the Americas. About one-third of Ghanaian emigrants (33.3%) reside in African countries, with 23.3 percent in ECOWAS member states and the remaining 10.0 percent in other African countries.<sup>30</sup>

26 World Bank. 2023. Opt. Cite; Aline Büttikofer, and Giovanni Peri. 2021. “How Cognitive Ability and Personality Traits Affect Geographic Mobility.” *Journal of Labor Economics* 39 (2): 559–95; David J. McKenzie. 2022. *Fears and Tears: Should More People Be Moving within and from Developing Countries and What Stops This Movement?* Policy Research Working Paper, Washington D.C.: World Bank Group.

27 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. 2024. *International Migrant Stock 2024: Destination and Origin*. Washington DC: United Nations.

28 OECD. 2022. “A Review of Ghanaian Emigrants, Talent Abroad.” Paris: OECD Publishing. Accessed 09 10, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1787/5342a9d4-en>

29 Ghana Statistical Services. 2023. *Thematic Report: Migration. Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census*, Accra: Ghana Statistical Service.

30 Ibid.

Country of Destination	Number Both Sexes	Percent	Number of Males	Percent	Number of Females	Percent
<b>Total</b>	293,416	100	188,054	100	105,362	100
<b>Burkina Faso</b>	105,362	1.0	1,810	1.0	995	0.9
<b>Cote d'Ivoire</b>	21,526	7.3	11,155	5.9	10,371	9.8
<b>Liberia</b>	4,130	1.4	2,961	1.6	1,169	1.1
<b>Gambia</b>	4,115	1.4	2,502	1.3	1,613	1.5
<b>Nigeria</b>	17,607	6.0	12,076	6.1	5,531	5.3
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	1,593	0.5	1,052	0.6	541	0.5
<b>Togo</b>	8,525	2.9	4,306	2.3	4,219	4.0
<b>Other ECOWAS Countries</b>	8,210	2.8	6,073	3.2	2,137	2.0
<b>Africa, other than ECOWAS</b>	29,310	10.0	23,684	12.6	5,626	5.3
<b>Americas (North, South/ Caribbean)</b>	69,600	23.7	41,595	22.1	28,005	26.6
<b>Asia</b>	13,684	4.7	9,532	5.1	4,152	3.9
<b>Europe</b>	110,239	37.6	69,884	37.2	40,355	38.3
<b>Oceania</b>	40,355	0.7	1,406	0.7	645	0.6
<b>Unknown Destination</b>	21	0.0	18	0.0	3	0.0

Table 4.1: Emigrants by Sex and Country of Destination. Source: Ghana Statistical Service (2023)

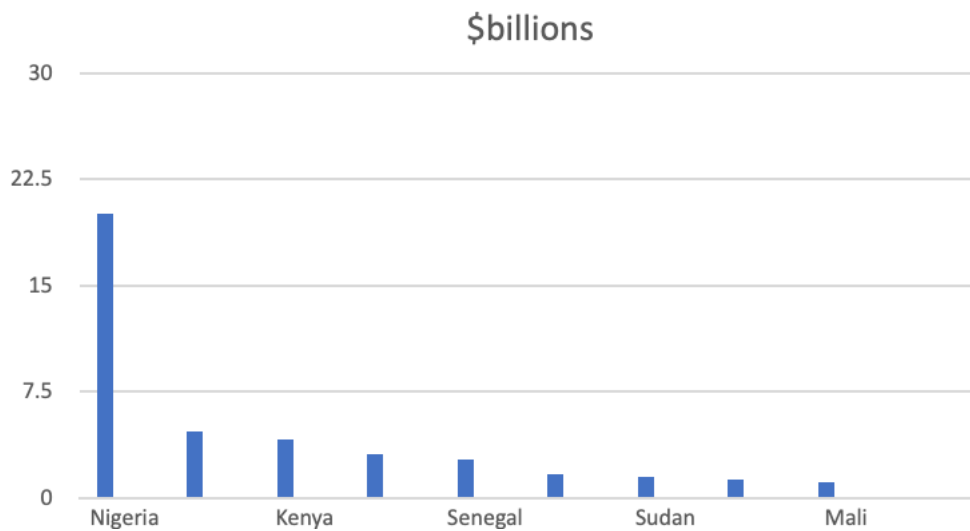
#### REMITTANCES TRENDS IN GHANA

The World Bank asserts that remittance flows in 2022 to low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) increased by 8 percent, reaching \$647 billion. In 2023, it was expected to moderate to 1.4 percent, resulting in total inflows of \$656 billion. Globally, remittance flows were expected to reach \$840 billion in 2023, with a growth rate projected to increase to 2.0 percent in 2024, increasing inflows by \$18 billion. Reports show that remittances represent a larger source of external finance for LMICs, relative to FDI, ODA, and portfolio investment flows (PIF).<sup>31</sup>

In Sub-Saharan Africa, remittance flows grew by 6.1 percent in 2022, to \$52.9 billion. Regional growth in remittances in 2022 was driven by remittance growth in Ghana (11.9 percent), Kenya (8.5 percent), Tanzania (25 percent), Uganda (17.3 percent), and Rwanda (21.2 percent). Remittances to Nigeria, which were 38 percent of total remittance inflows to the region, also increased by 3.3 percent to \$20.1 billion (Figure 4.2). The increase in remittance flows to the region supported the current accounts of several African countries dealing with food insecurity, supply chain disruptions, severe drought, floods, and debt-servicing difficulties.<sup>32</sup>

31 World Bank. 2023. *Remittances Remain Resilient but Are Slowing*. Migration and Development Brief 38, Washington DC: World Bank Group.

32 World Bank. 2023. Opt. Cit.



**Figure 4.2:** Top Remittance Recipients in the Sub-Saharan Africa Region, 2022

Source: KNOMAD–World Bank staff estimates; World Development Indicators; IMF Balance of Payments Statistics

#### FACTORS INFLUENCING THE REMITTANCES BEHAVIOR OF GHANAIAN MIGRANTS

The empirical evidence demonstrates that remittance inflows respond sensitively to factors such as macro-economic factors - example: host country conditions, home country conditions (GDP, inflation, financial development, interest rates, etc.); migrant specific factors — such as: migrant stock, skill composition, trade and colonial ties; logistics and institutional factors – such as transaction cost, access to financial services, institutional qualities. Other factors include political shocks, migrant well-being, dependency ratio, etc.

**Migrant-Specific Factors:** Data from the Ghana Statistical Service shows that the primary motivation for Ghanaian emigration is the pursuit of economic opportunities.<sup>33</sup> The 2021 Population and Housing Census report indicates that nearly three-quarters (73.4 percent) of emigrants cite employment as their main reason for leaving the country. A higher proportion of males (76.7 percent) than females (23.3 percent) migrate for economic reasons. Education and training account for 14.6 percent of emigration, with a slightly higher share among females (16.2 percent) compared to males (13.7 percent). Marriage or family reunification represents 9.6 percent of migration motives. The number of Ghanaians who emigrate due to socio-political displacement or natural disasters remains very small.

These factors can be grouped into four theoretical views, each offering a different perspective on remittance behavior. These are: the altruistic motive - suggests that migrants remit out of genuine care and responsibility for their families. For example, someone might send money to help parents pay for food or school fees, simply because they want their loved ones to have a better life;<sup>34</sup> the self-interest motive - focuses on migrant's own economic goals. Here, migrants send money home to invest in property,

33 Ghana Statistical Services. 2023. *Thematic Report: Migration. Ghana 2021* Population and Housing Census, Accra: Ghana Statistical Service.

34 Reynell Badoe. 2024. *Remittances As a Driver of Economic Growth in Ghana*. August 20. Accessed 09 15, 2025. <https://www.stanbicbank.com.gh/gh/personal/about-us/news/Remittances-As-a-Driver-of-Economic-Growth-in-Ghana>.

land, or businesses in their country of origin. Family members often help manage these investments while the migrant is abroad; the implicit family contract - loan repayment theory views remittances as part of an unwritten agreement within the family. Often, families help cover the costs of migration, such as travel and settling expenses. Once the migrant is established and earning income, they send money back as a way of repaying this support. In this sense, the family “invests” in the migrant, expecting returns over time; and finally, the explicit family contract - co-insurance approach highlights risk-sharing within families. By sending some members abroad, families can protect themselves against economic shocks at home. When there are problems in the home country, the migrant sends money to support. Conversely, when the migrant faces difficulties abroad, he is given support from home. This arrangement relies on trust and mutual support, making remittances a form of family insurance.<sup>35</sup>

Collectively, these explain the complex and varied reasons behind migrants’ choice to remit. Put together, the factors can be both personal and family-driven and often overlap in practice. In addition, the literature demonstrates that Ghanaian migrants frequently remit funds not only to nuclear family members but also to extended relatives, friends, and community initiatives.<sup>36</sup>

**Home Country Economic Conditions:** The literature shows that fixed exchange rates and capital controls affect foreign exchange markets and remittance flow channels. For instance, Nigeria has a large black-market premium on foreign exchange. On May 27, 2023, in the Lagos black market, the dollar was exchanged between 759 and 760 naira, while the official exchange rate was around 460 Naira to a dollar. Similarly, in Ethiopia, a US dollar is worth double the official bank rate. In Ghana, the exchange rate was around 15 cedis and 16 cedis per dollar for both the black market and the official exchange rate. Such large differences between the official and black-market rates tend to drive remittances to informal channels. This partly explains the decline in officially recorded remittances in many countries. This shows that both exchange rate and interest rate differentials are important in attracting remittance flows through official channels.<sup>37</sup> From this context, Imam, et al., remarked that uncertainties in microeconomic conditions can have dual consequences on remittances flow.<sup>38</sup>

**Cost of Remittances:** Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the highest remittance costs. Senders paid an average of 8.0 percent to send \$200 to African countries during 2022 Q4, compared with 7.8 percent in 2021Q4. Costs vary across the region, ranging from 2.1–4.0 percent in the lowest cost corridors to 17–35 percent in the highest.<sup>39</sup> The high cost of remittance transfer influences the decision of senders whether to send money back home or not.

**Logistics and Institutional Factors:** The World Bank in 2020 reported that remittance flows to Sub-Saharan Africa declined by 9% partly due to stringent immigration policies and the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>40</sup> For example, US Immigration Policies such as Executive Order 14159 can have comparable effects on

35 Ernest K Y Addison. 2003. “The Macroeconomic Impact of Remittance in Ghana.” Accra: Bank of Ghana.

36 Joseph Kofi Teye, Louis Boakye-Yiadom, Edward Asiedu, Mariama Awumbila, and Johnson Wilson Appiah Kubi. 2019. “Changing Patterns of Migration and Remittances: A Case Study of Rural Ghana.” Working Paper. Brighton: Migrating Out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium, September.

37 Mohammed El Sakka, and Robert McNabb. 1999. “The Macroeconomic Determinants of Emigrant Remittances.” *World Development* 27 (8): 1493-1502.

38 Patrick A Imam, et al. Opt. Cit.

39 World Bank. 2023. Opt. Cit.

40 World Bank. 2023. Opt. Cit.

Ghanaian immigrants to confront diminished income stability, restricting their capability to send remittances. In addition, the economic ramifications of stringent policies may instigate a climate of apprehension and unpredictability among Ghanaian immigrants. For instance, emphasis on detaining and deporting individuals who breach immigration laws may deter Ghanaians from utilizing formal financial systems for remittance transfers. Large-scale deportations can introduce significant uncertainty and disruption for the Ghanaian diaspora. Consequently, individuals may resort to informal methods, which are less secure and more costly.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This paper showed that the major destinations for Ghanaian emigrants are the U.S., Europe, and ECOWAS countries. Both men and women migrate for various reasons, including education, economic opportunities, family reunification, and political shocks. The study highlights that remittances from migrants make up about 3.5 percent of Ghana's GDP, amounting to roughly US\$4.7 billion. Remittance flows are influenced by several factors: migrant-specific motivations, as immigrants remit to maintain family ties and support household welfare; home-country economic conditions, such as favorable exchange rates that encourage higher remittance inflows; logistical and institutional factors, including U.S. foreign policy, where favorable regimes can increase remittances and unfavorable ones may reduce them; and the cost of remitting, as high fees and limited financial services negatively affect remittance behavior.

Policymakers should work with U.S. authorities and international organizations to advocate for the protection of Ghanaian migrants' rights and to reduce the negative effects of abrupt deportations. Diplomatic engagement should aim to create more legal migration pathways and ensure due process for affected individuals. Financial institutions should also be encouraged to lower transaction costs and expand access to formal remittance channels. Doing so would make it easier for migrants to send money home and improve the accuracy of official remittance data by reducing dependence on informal systems. Future research should examine the long-term socioeconomic impacts of mass deportations on remittance-receiving households and the broader Ghanaian economy.

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# Rehabilitation and Removal: The Contradictions Within California's Rehabilitation Efforts and the Continuous Removal of Undocumented People

GABRIEL SINGER

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## ABSTRACT

California is considered a sanctuary state with a common norm that state law enforcement agencies cannot report undocumented people to federal immigration agencies. Correctional facilities, however, still to this day, work closely with ICE to assist in the deportation of undocumented people. This entanglement of state and federal laws to deport undocumented individuals has allowed the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) to continue this practice even after the state has invested in a new rehabilitative model called the “California model,” which represented a shift from retributive to rehabilitative. This new initiative has focused on four pillars of rehabilitation: dynamic security, normalization, peer support, and trauma-informed organizations. Each one of these pillars is to ensure that CDCR focuses on individual rehabilitation. This paper argues that California's rehabilitative prison model is structurally incompatible with federal immigration enforcement, producing a dual-system outcome in which individuals deemed rehabilitated under state standards are, nevertheless, excluded under federal membership criteria. The paper analyzes the parole board hearing of Jorge Villavicencio, an individual who demonstrated rehabilitation to BPH commissioners over nearly three decades of incarceration, only to face ICE detention and potential deportation upon release. This case study shows how rehabilitation can prepare a person for reintegration, while deportation interrupts that process.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2023, Congresswoman Wendy Carrillo introduced a bill, AB-1306, known as the Home Act, which would have prevented the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) from being able to report undocumented people to ICE after incarceration. However, after passing the California Assembly, the bill was vetoed by Governor Gavin Newsom. Upon vetoing the bill, Gavin Newsom stated that the bill would prevent information sharing and coordination upon a person's release from CDCR custody for a significant number of people and, as a result, would impede CDCR's interaction with a federal law enforcement agency charged with assessing public safety risks.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Gavin Newsom. 2023. Assembly Bill 1306 “Letter from the Office of the Governor”. <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/AB-1306-Veto-Message.pdf>.

The purpose of this bill was to combat a thirty-year penal code policy that allowed the CDCR to report individuals to ICE for detention in the California Penal Code sections 5025 and 5026. These two penal codes were introduced in 1993, and the intention was to be able to identify non-citizen inmates and then cooperate with federal immigration authorities to report undocumented inmates for deportation. In addition to this state law, the Clinton administration was passing a series of federal bills that would make these collaborative efforts streamlined. These bills are the Violent Crime Control Act and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA) of 1996. With these federal laws and the penal codes within the California laws, there has been an entanglement of state and federal law, despite the efforts of rehabilitation an undocumented individual does, they will still be expected to face deportation even in a sanctuary state.

Over the past twenty years, California State Prisons have tried to improve rehabilitation efforts. First, in 2005, the California Department of Corrections added an R for (Rehabilitation) at the end of their name, signaling that rehabilitation was becoming a focus, becoming what it's known as now, CDCR. Arguably, individuals who are experiencing incarceration within the California carceral system are rehabilitated. This raises the question of why a person should be subjected to deportation based on their immigration status. Even if they pose a low risk of recidivism and are no longer a threat to public safety, undocumented individuals still must go through the deportation courts, which completely undermines the entire purpose of rehabilitation within California's carceral system.

### CALIFORNIA'S SYSTEM OF REHABILITATION

California State Prison system, known as California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) has had a long debate over the ideology between rehabilitation and retribution regarding how they manage their prison system. The California criminal justice system is set to punish, rehabilitate, and reform offenders.<sup>2</sup>

However, an entanglement of state and federal laws to deport undocumented individuals has allowed CDCR to continue this practice even after the state has invested in a new rehabilitative model called the "California model," which has enabled CDCR to move from being retributive to rehabilitative. This was done by a panel of rehabilitative experts who recommended expanding and targeting programs to those with assessed need to reduce recidivism by building social, job, and educational skills.<sup>3</sup>

On July 1, 2005, the California DOC (formerly CDC) was renamed the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). This was done by the passing of SB 737 to create a more rehabilitative system within the California carceral system. Even though this bill was about the reorganization of the California Department of Corrections, it brought the fact that CDCR is responsible for the incarceration, training, education, and care of adult felons and nonfelons, narcotic addicts, as well as juvenile offenders. It also changes the name of the Board of Prison Terms (BPT) to the Board of Parole Hearings (BPH).<sup>4</sup> In addition to these name changes, CDCR and BPH were

2 Gabriel Singer. 2025. "The Inmate Bill of Rights and the California Model Can Transform Prison Rehabilitation." *The Annual Review of Criminal Justice Studies* 3 (Volume 3): 225–30. <https://journals.calstate.edu/arcjs/article/view/4793>.

3 Heather Harris. 2024. "California Prison Programs and Reentry Pathways." Public Policy Institute of California. June 26, 2024. <https://www.ppic.org/publication/california-prison-programs-and-reentry-pathways/>.

4 Melvin Mentor. Mentor, Melvin. 2006. "California Legislature \_Reorganizes\_ DOC to Add \_Rehabilitation\_ Prison Legal News." *Prisonlegalnews.org*. 2006.

expanding program offerings and targeting programs to those with assessed need, to reduce recidivism through social, vocational, and educational programs.<sup>5</sup>

In 2016, Prop 57, known as the Public Safety and Rehabilitation Act, was passed and expanded the focus of rehabilitation by providing milestones and early release efforts for people who engaged and succeeded in the self-help groups, vocation, and education, which were being provided by CDCR to assist with reintegration efforts. CDCR increased credits for Good Conduct and Milestone Completion Programs and introduced credits for Rehabilitative Achievement and Educational Merit.<sup>6</sup>

These milestone opportunities help individuals get involved with different rehabilitation programs, which lead to their early release from incarceration. With the focus on rehabilitation, Governor Newsom decided it was time to expand CDCR's rehabilitative efforts with a new idea, the California Model, to help incarcerated individuals prepare to become better neighbors when they return to our communities.<sup>7</sup> This is accomplished through a four-pillar system, which consists of dynamic security, normalization, peer support, and a trauma-informed organization that all engage in the rehabilitation process.

An example is a self-help program called Guiding Rage into Power (GRIP). The GRIP program aims to help violent offenders by (i) stopping their violent behavior, (ii) cultivating mindfulness, (iii) developing emotional intelligence, and (iv) increasing awareness about victim impact.<sup>8</sup> The GRIP program was first started at San Quentin State Prison by Jacques Verduin in 2012 and was expanded to five other correctional institutions in California.<sup>9</sup> This year-long program focused on engaging the current incarcerated population in social and emotional education to make positive changes in the participants' lives. At the most foundational level, key program goals involved helping incarcerated men learn to recognize bodily sensations, emotions, and thoughts (i.e. potential triggers of destructive reactions) in real time and real space (i.e. in the heat of the moment) before they lead ('blindly') to destructive reactions.<sup>10</sup> This self-help education has helped incarcerated individuals to reintegrate into society without returning to prison, lowering the recidivism rate in California.

Since GRIP's inception, 1,233 students have graduated, and 421 have been released. Only two students have returned to prison, resulting in a recidivism rate of 0.2%.<sup>11</sup> The results of this study were that the participants who engaged in GRIP reported a positive transformation of their own identities. In addition, the non-GRIP participants, when recalling the GRIP participants they know, tend to see them positively transformed.<sup>12</sup>

The California model took the blueprint from the Norway model to guarantee that the best practices were being implemented into the California carceral system to ensure the best possible outcome for returning people. The goal is to learn from Norway's

5 Harris, 2024.

6 David Maldonado. 2024. "The California Model Magazine, Summer 2024, Issue No. 1 - California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation." California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. September 26, 2024.

7 Maldonado 2024.

8 Sarah Calhoun, Mario A. Maggioni, Bowen Paille, Camillo Regalia e Domenico Rossignoli. 2024. "Socio Emotional Learning within Prison Walls: The Effects of GRIP Program (Guiding Rage into Power) as Perceived by Participant and Non-Participant Incarcerated Persons." *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 35 (1).

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Calhoun, et al, 2024.

12 Ibid.

successful approach to normalcy in corrections, focusing on lowering recidivism, increasing post-release employment, and enhancing employee wellness.<sup>13</sup> This is how CDCR is run today under the California model, which focuses on creating a rehabilitative environment to equip individuals with the tools to lead successful lives post-incarceration.<sup>14</sup> I will argue that California's prison rehabilitation efforts are undermined by crimmigration policies that prioritize deportation over reintegration, revealing contradictions in the state's claims of progressive reform.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

"Crimmigration" is the intersection of criminal and immigration law, based on Stumpf's "membership theory," which is understood as a way for the state to restrict rights and privileges to those deemed "members" of a certain demographic of people as the root of crimmigration law. She argues that the state's sovereign power can define who is allowed into or excluded from entering the country.<sup>15</sup> These rights can range from voting rights to the right to remain in the United States.<sup>16</sup> Membership theory is where the blend of criminal law and immigration law can be used to remove individuals who have been labeled a "criminal" and pose a threat to public safety. This is where Stumpf argues the ever-changing carceral system moves from a less rehabilitative focus to a retributive focus.

Before the 1980s, sentencing laws and institutions were more focused on the rehabilitative aspect, providing a pathway to release once an individual could prove their rehabilitation through a process of intermittent sentencing and parole board review. Once an individual was deemed rehabilitated, they were released back into society. However, after the 1980s when sentencing moved away from indeterminate to determinate for most crimes, there became less of a focus on rehabilitation and more on retribution. The rehabilitation model fell into disfavor after the 1970s, and criminal penology turned to retribution, incapacitation, and deterrence as motivating ideologies.<sup>17</sup>

Stumpf highlights the changes in government policies that allowed the criminalization of undocumented people. This historical analysis outlines federal laws that were introduced in the Mass Incarceration and tough-on-crime era, which allowed law enforcement agencies to collaborate and make it easier to detain and remove an undocumented individual after a criminal conviction, such as the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1996, the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, and the USA Patriot Act of 2001. These hallmarks included loss of voting rights, exclusion from public office and jury service, ineligibility for public benefits, public housing, government support for education, and exclusion from professional license eligibility.<sup>18</sup> This exclusion, she argues, is due to the use of the membership status of the individual upon conviction as seen as a collateral consequence of crime and immigration prevention.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast, Messinger et al. analyze how the state of California developed a parole system to relieve the governor of the burden of approving a commutation or pardon

13 Maldonado 2024.

14 Ibid.

15 Juliet Stumpf, 2020. "The Crimmigration Crisis: Immigrants, Crime, and Sovereign Power." *Governing Immigration through Crime* 56 (2): 59–76.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Stumpf, 2020.

19 Ibid.

for the incarcerated individual.<sup>20</sup> They look at the origins of parole to early twentieth-century efforts and assesses two major findings. First, this process was intended to modernize corrections while also creating a more flexible system for parole management. Second, to create a rehabilitative system with sought to balance the state's goals of public safety, reformation, and Prison efficiency. Only with this development did parole-supervision come to be emphasized and parole begin to be justified as a means for helping to assure the "rehabilitation" of released prisoners.<sup>21</sup>

Messinger et al. lay out how parole became a defining aspect of the California Prison system by outlining the shift from governors' pardons to parole boards and officers under the concept of evaluating suitability for release and conditions while on parole. The parole office became a multiservice agency, helping parolees who had lost their jobs to find another, providing clothes and tools needed for work, arranging transportation, and even securing housing.<sup>22</sup> This shows a fundamental system that first assesses the requirements for parole and then has a system to support and monitor upon release from incarceration. This idea of a system of rehabilitation before and after release is a key argument in this article. Messinger et al. explain that in the early years of developing this process had yet to figure out how to be informative and found that people were being denied release or being released for different reasons. For instance, not serving enough time, unfair sentencing, the nature of the crime, and a parole advisory committee would advise against releasing a person from incarceration.<sup>23</sup>

The whole idea of this new system was to separate individuals who can function in society after their release from incarceration and those who still pose a risk to public safety. Messinger shows that parole boards were separating the individuals who were "vicious and totally depraved" from the individuals who were well "behaved in confinement" and a "reasonable prospect" for becoming self-sustaining in some honest and honorable occupation.<sup>24</sup> The idea behind the Parole board today is trying to figure out who will be successful in society upon release, and when they deem an individual ready for release or being found "suitable" for release, then that individual is labeled as a person who is not a threat to public safety but a person who is ready to reintegrate into society. While CDCR evaluates individuals based on rehabilitation and risk, immigration law evaluates them based on membership status, creating fundamentally incompatible criteria for release.

#### **ENTANGLEMENT OF FEDERAL LAW AND STATE LAW: CRIMMIGRATION IN CALIFORNIA**

In the 1990s there was a movement both in the state of California and federally to become tougher on crime and illegal immigration. In 1993, Governor Pete Wilson signed two bills into the California Penal Code books. They were Penal Code 5025 and 5026, which allowed the CDCR to report undocumented people to ICE for deportation. Penal Code 5025, CDCR had 48 hours to identify the undocumented individual and create a report for the United States Department of Immigration and Naturalization Service. This penal code was used to classify any undocumented individual who entered the CDCR's system. This allowed for California Penal Code 5026 to be effective because

20 Sheldon Messinger, John E. Berecochea, David Rauma, and Richard A. Berk. 1985. "The Foundations of Parole in California." Jpllnet.sfsu.edu. Cambridge University Press. 1985.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Messinger et al.1985.

24 Ibid.

this penal code allowed CDCR to be used for the use of prison facilities, transportation to a detention facility, and general support for the purpose of conducting and expediting deportation hearings and subsequent placement for deportation holds. This shows the institutionalization of immigration enforcement within the California correctional system, effectively transforming incarceration into a pipeline for deportation processing of undocumented people.

With these two new laws on the books of California, there was a perfect system for the CDCR and Federal law enforcement agencies, like ICE, to work collectively in removing undocumented individuals from the United States. At the time these penal codes were being passed, California was going through a tough-on-crime approach, and the people of California were voting on bills that would create a deeper tough-on-crime approach. For example, in 1994, the Three Strikes law was passed on the ballot. This law imposed a mandatory 25-year life sentence for anyone with a third felony conviction. This led to an increase in the prison population by 30%.<sup>25</sup> In addition, voters in California also passed Prop 187, better known as "Save Our Streets," to limit access to public education and health care for undocumented people. The results were that undocumented populations were politically constructed as a source of economic strain. With the public response, the expansion of the carceral system is due to economic insecurity rather than a mechanism for public safety.

It is understood that the cause of this bill being passed was because of the California economic recession, and undocumented people were being used as a scapegoat in these trying times.<sup>26</sup> Even though Proposition 187 was eventually overturned by the courts because it was declared unconstitutional by a federal Judge, Pfalzer.<sup>27</sup> California in these times was not doing well economically, and the reaction was a rise in crime bills and immigration reform, like the federal level under William "Bill" Clinton, who was the current President of the United States.

There was a series of bills that were passed under President Clinton, which helped create this entanglement between states and federal immigration practices. First was the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, better known as the 1994 Crime Bill. This bill is considered the most expansive bill, creating funding to build more prisons, a mandatory third strike sentencing law, and authorizing the death penalty for dozens of existing and new federal crimes.<sup>28</sup> In a second round of tough-on-crime legislation, President Clinton signed the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (AEDPA). This bill, which was in reaction to the Oklahoma Bombing, created a connection between immigration and criminal law. It allowed for undocumented people who have been convicted of a crime and restricted the use of habeas corpus for people who have been convicted of a crime to challenge their convictions

Lastly, during Clinton's presidency, he signed a tough-on-immigration bill called Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA).

25 Magnus Lofstrom, Magnus, Mia Bird, and Brandon Martin. 2016. California's Historic Corrections Reforms. Public Policy Institute of California, [https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/content/pubs/report/R\\_916MLR.pdf](https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/content/pubs/report/R_916MLR.pdf)

26 Library of Congress. "California Proposition 187." *Latinx Civil Rights*. Accessed October 5, 2025. <https://guides.loc.gov/latinx-civil-rights/california-proposition-187#:~:text=In%201994%2C%20California%20voters%20flocked,were%20conflated%20in%20their%20minds>

27 Vikram Amar D. 2014. "Why the California Legislature Can't Simply Repeat the Judicially Invalidated Proposition 187." *School of Law*. June 20, 2014

28 Bill McCollum, McCollum, Bill. 1995. "Struggle for Effective Anti-Crime Legislation: An Analysis of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994." *University of Dayton Law Review* Volume: 20 Issue: 2 Dated: (Winter 1995) Pages: 561-565, January.

On September 30, 1996, President William (Bill) J Clinton stated, "It strengthens the rule of law by cracking down on illegal immigration at the border, in the workplace, and in the criminal justice system — without punishing those living in the United States legally."<sup>29</sup> This bill, which consolidated proposals from both the House and the Senate, was categorized into six sections that increased border enforcement both on and near the border, in addition to enforcing immigration policies for local and state law enforcement. It also created stricter penalties for alien smuggling, illegal immigrants caught inside the United States, and increased restrictions on illegal immigrants' employment, benefits, and assistance programs. Lastly, this bill also established the law for forced abortion, involuntary sterilization, and "resistance to a coercive population control policy" as grounds for refugee status; limited the number of Refugees to 1,000 a year, and other policies related to immigration reform. This period marks an intersection of criminal and immigration law into a unified enforcement system. Creating the legal architecture that increasingly treats immigration status as a determination of criminality.

Since the IIRIRA has gone into effect, there has been a rise in the number of undocumented people either being deported or detained in the United States. For example, before the IIRIRA under President George Bush's leadership, there were 141,326 removals of undocumented people while he was in office; however, under President Bill Clinton, the removal rate was 869,646 of undocumented people.<sup>30</sup> This trend of removals exponentially went up under every President after the signing of the IIRIRA. In addition to the rise in the removal of undocumented people, there is also a rise in the detention of undocumented people. It is difficult to have an exact number of all the individuals who have been detained since the implementation of the IIRIRA of 1996, but there has been a rise in detention. For example, in 1994, approximately 7,000 undocumented people were detained, whereas in 2019, the number grew to over 50,000 people.<sup>31</sup> These trends suggest that legislative frameworks such as IIRIRA produce durable increases in enforcement capacity. This growth an indication that detention became a normalized component of immigration procedures rather than an exceptional practice.

There have been legislative and policy changes since the passage of these state and federal bills. First was the introduction of the Life Act of 2000, which provided a limited time only for undocumented people to receive green cards. Next, the Real ID Act of 2005 imposed stricter standards for undocumented people to receive driver's licenses and ID cards. It also broadens authority to the Department of Homeland Security. Also, the Secure Fence Act of 2006, which provided more security fences along the Mexican and US border, and finally, the "One Big Beautiful Bill" of 2025, which provided more funding, authority, and detentions to immigration enforcement agencies.<sup>32</sup> These policies demonstrate the persistence and expansion of the enforcement design which was established in the 1990s, constantly blurring the lines of criminal justice and immigration procedures.

#### PAROLE BOARD HEARING CASE STUDY: JORGE VILLAVICENO

The goal of the Parole Board Hearing (BPH) is to show the experience of an incarcerated individual and the transformative power of their rehabilitation experience, and

29 Paul Klenowski, 2023. "Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRAIRA) | EBSCO." EBSCO Information Services, Inc

30 Alex Nowrasteh, 2019. "Deportation Rates in Historical Perspective." Cato Institute. September 16, 2019.

31 Detention Watch Network. 2018. "Immigration Detention 101." Detention Watch Network. July 12, 2018

32 "What's in the Big Beautiful Bill? Immigration & Border Security Unpacked - American Immigration Council." 2025. American Immigration Council. July 14, 2025.

what changes education, vocation, and self-help groups do to rehabilitate a person, even if there is still a punitive aspect to the experience. In relation to this paper, the review of the BPH process is to better understand CDCR's current model of rehabilitation for an individual, to prepare them for society. One will see the questions the BPH asks and what the conversation consists of to assess whether a person still poses any threat to the community. This then poses the question, why do undocumented people who have gone through rehabilitation still have to go through a deportation detention center and another court process?

Once an incarcerated person went to a BPH hearing, the conversation between the person and the commissioners focused on determining if the person is ready to be placed back into society. In the formal language of the California Board of Parole hearings (BPH), a prisoner must demonstrate that he or she no longer poses an unreasonable risk to public safety.<sup>33</sup> The Parole Board conversation includes, but is not limited to, behavior pre, during, and post-incarceration, rehabilitation programs, and parole release preparation.<sup>34</sup> In addition, emerging models of rehabilitation within the incarceration system were considered, like implementing restorative approaches, but did not highlight the slow shift from retribution to rehabilitation that one is seeing in the current carceral climates today.

In 1995, Jorge Villavicencio was sent to California State Prison and was sentenced to life with the possibility of parole for conviction of Robbery as a third strike and being an ex-felon in possession of a weapon.

On March 22, 2024, at 8:30 am, Jorge Villavicencio has a scheduled BPH hearing to prove to the BPH commissioners that he is no longer a threat to public safety and ready to return home to family and community. Through a review of Jorge Villavicencio's BPH transcripts, one can see what the BPH conversation is like for someone who was sentenced to life with the possibility of parole. What the BPH decision was and the uncertainty of Jorge Villavicencio's future regarding his status of remaining in the United States after he is found suitable for release by the BPH commissioners.

Here is the beginning of Jorge Villavicencio's BPH hearing — the assessment:

**PRESIDING COMMISSIONER BARTON:** *That's okay. Well, your education score is listed as 12.9, so you must be able to read and write in English, correct?*

**INMATE VILLAVICENCIO:** *Yes, I do, according to my essay.*

After the BPH commissioner has confirmed that Villavicencio can properly communicate and understand the expectations of the BPH hearing, the Commissioner will review his c-file (known as the 10-day file). This is where Villavicencio has submitted his insight and remorse letter, as well as what he has learned from his self-help groups, and any support letters and job offers.

**PRESIDING COMMISSIONER BARTON:** *I know we went through this last time. I also have, um, all your writings starting at page 21 of the 10-day file. There's a table of contents. You submitted letters of remorse. You submitted an essay on the 12 steps. You submitted an insight statement, Parole Plans, um, relapse plans for domestic violence, anger, drugs, criminality, et cetera. You have support letters from your granddaughter, Evelyn, from some other family members. Uh,*

33 Joss Greene and Isaac Dalke, 2020. "You're Still an Angry Man": Parole Boards and Logics of Criminalized Masculinity." *Theoretical Criminology*, April.

34 Jorge Villavicencio, E61119 (2024) Parole Suitability Hearing, State of California Board of Parole Hearings, [cdcr.ca.gov](http://cdcr.ca.gov).

*Alan, uh, let us see, uh, a job offer. It looks like Mr. Segro, Mr. Hernandez, your grandson Gabriel, your son. Evan. So you've got family support out there, and you have Amity that came to us in the email and acceptance from Amity. So we have all of that. It appeared that most of that was written by you. Is that correct?*

**INMATE VILLAVICENCIO:** *Yes, sir.*

After the assessment, there are no communication issues, and everything is in Villavicencio's file, and he does not have any medical or mental health conditions that would interfere with the hearing. The Commissioners can move forward with the parole hearing. This is where the commissioners can ask questions, hear from his attorney, and decide about his release.

**PRESIDING COMMISSIONER BARTON:** *We're gonna ask you questions at the end. There's gonna be a statement by your attorney. You'll be allowed to give a statement and then we'll decide your case.*

Now they will ask about his history of criminality and how he has spent his time in prison. This conversation is to help determine if he can be found suitable for release from incarceration. Depending on his answers will determine the outcome of the hearing.

**PRESIDING COMMISSIONER BARTON:** *Okay. Well last time you told me that you've been clean since May of 2017. Have you used since then?*

**INMATE VILLAVICENCIO:** *May — no, I haven't used drugs, I've been clean for six years and nine months right now.*

Since Substance abuse was one of the core factors in the reason he committed his crimes, this shows the BPH commissioners that his focused-on sobriety, which means he was taking his rehabilitation seriously. In fact, Commissioner Barton comments on this in the hearing.

**PRESIDING COMMISSIONER BARTON:** *Well, last time you said it wasn't the reason, it wasn't the only reason you committed your crimes, but you said it had a lot to do with your robberies, was supporting your drug habit, right?*

In this conversation, the BPH commissioner is connecting Villavicencio's crime and substance abuse. Since Villavicencio went to his group therapy and worked on his addiction, he could now focus on a critical issue: his criminal thinking. This is another aspect of the hearing to ensure he no longer thinks like a criminal. Here is the question from Commissioner Barton about his criminal thinking.

**PRESIDING COMMISSIONER BARTON:** *Okay. Well, what do you think you — you have this paper you submitted to us about criminal thinking. What do you think criminal thinking is?*

Given Villavicencio's work towards his rehabilitation and the work he has done through self-help groups on his substance abuse and criminal thinking, it is now time to talk about his parole plans. However, this is difficult for Villavicencio to do since there is a possibility that he will be deported to another country. This is brought up by the Deputy Commissioner:

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEAL:** *Do you have any more plans, uh, other than what you've written already, regarding how you might support yourself in Cuba?*

Here lies an issue with the deportation process for Jorge Villavicencio, the fact that he does not have any support in Cuba, and the possibility that Cuba will not accept him

because he left the country and immigrated to the United States. Therefore, he might be forced to be transported to another country, where he has zero support. Here is Villavicencio's response about his deportation status and Cuba:

**INMATE VILLAVICENCIO:** *Uh, I — I wrote a plan and I — I don't have no contact — contact with Cuba. The only one that have is my sister, I wrote a couple of letters, I didn't get no response from her. I really worried her about it. I don't know, I — I don't know what happened. She hasn't wrote me back. I haven't (inaudible) her. And, uh, one thing that I went mention I wrote a Parole Plan because, uh, I was asked to do it, but really to be realistic is — is (inaudible) Cuba as, you know, Cuba's a human country. It's not human right. That's why United States got (inaudible). President Obama trying to open the relationship with Cuba and shut it down because it stopped human rights. They don't wanna respect people rights. They don't — or — or nothing over there. So, I don't have no idea what's gonna happen over there.*

This brings up another issue: If the United States does not have a relationship with the country of origin for the individual who is experiencing deportation, then they will be sent to another country. This is known as third-country removal. If it is “impracticable, inadvisable, or impossible” to remove someone to **any** of the countries to which they have ties, the government is legally authorized to deport them to another country that will accept the deportee into their territory<sup>35</sup>. This puts individuals experiencing deportation in an unknown country, where the person has zero ties or support after the deportation process is complete.

**INMATE VILLAVICENCIO:** *And they're sending people —they're sending people from Cuba to go to Russia right now.*

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NEAL:** *Sending them to Russia? Since BPH commissioners are not trained or experts in immigration law and deportation practices, they do not have all the updated information about where one could be deported to or how long the process is.*

**PRESIDING COMMISSIONER BARTON:** *Your Parole Plans, we understand you can't really make Parole Plans for Cuba. I don't know what the odds are that you're gonna get sent back or stay. I have no idea what they're doing these days, it changes from administration to administration, from month to month, from year to year. So, um, that's gonna be something out of our control.*

The focus of the BPH commissioner is to assess if the individual is a threat to public safety. This decision comes after a series of questions about his criminal thinking, family history, personal relationships he has had, release prevention plans, parole plans, and work opportunities have been addressed, and Villavicencio has answered all the questions that the commissioners have asked; it is time to determine if he is suitable for release and no longer a threat to public safety.

**PRESIDING COMMISSIONER BARTON:** *That we felt was relevant today or necessary for our decision based on the legal standards and evidence considered we find that he no longer pos an unreasonable risk to public safety, and we are finding him suitable for parole.*

The decision the BPH commissioner makes regarding suitability is based on a framework called the Structured Decision-Making Framework (SDMF), which assists them

<sup>35</sup> American Immigration Council, 2025

with their conclusion regarding a person's suitability. Rather, the SDMF provides decision makers with a holistic analysis to make an "informed and empirically supported final release decision that is easily defensible and transparent."<sup>36</sup> Through this framework, the BPH commissioners can measure the risk the individual can pose if released through a series of questions to the individual who is going through the parole board process. This final layer to the process provides all the necessary protection regarding public safety in releasing an individual into society. However, this is not the case for Jorge Villavicencio; he still must undergo a deportation hearing and ICE detention before he knows if he can be released back to his community and family.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of incarceration in California is to rehabilitate and prepare an individual for reintegrating into society as a productive member. This is done through prison educational programs, vocational programs, self-help groups, release preparation programs, BPH hearings, and restorative practices initiatives, which all prepare an individual to return to society. Under the current system, this is not always a reality for undocumented individuals who have committed a crime despite their rehabilitation efforts while experiencing incarceration. They are often sent to ICE detention and scheduled a court hearing to once again prove to a judge that they are no longer a threat and get permission to remain in the country. Individuals like Jorge Villavicencio, who have been deemed "No longer a threat to public safety" by CDCR, could use alternative pathways to remain in the United States. Alternatives to detention and deportation after incarceration would reduce taxpayer costs but also create a fair pathway for individuals to remain in the United States. Some alternatives are, but not limited to, waivers on criminal conviction pre-release and restorative practices, which could be implemented to replace the punitive system that is currently used today.

It is difficult to determine the exact cost of this practice in transferring undocumented individuals to ICE detention for removal. In a Sacramento Bee article published in 2018, estimated that in 2017 CDCR spent 22 million dollars of taxpayer money to transfer people from state prisons to ICE detention.<sup>37</sup> In addition, ICE spent on average, \$187.48 for each adult, per bed, each day in the 2023 fiscal year, according to documents from ICE.<sup>38</sup> This unnecessary expense could be eliminated in exchange for more pre-release support for the undocumented individual. For instance, having the individual submit their C-file to the immigration courts six months before release for review, like the BPH process, can show the rehabilitative efforts of the incarcerated person. This process could be completed before the individual's release from incarceration and transfer to a detention center. For example, nearing the end of the individual's sentence, they are prepared for release by a case manager who identifies the individual's release needs.<sup>39</sup> This way, CDCR's California model of rehabilitation can be addressed,

36 M.M McAskill, 2020, p.19, Serin et al., 2020;

37 Mathew Miranda, 2023. "California Lawmaker Trying Again to Limit Prison Transfers of Non-Citizens to Federal ICE." Sacramento Bee. April 20, 2023.

38 Janet Nguyen. 2025. "What Is the Daily Cost of Detaining Someone Arrested by ICE?" Marketplace.org, 2025.

39 During the pre-release phase of an incarcerated individual's incarceration period, they will meet with DAPO staff that administers a COMPAS reentry assessment focused on criminogenic needs of those in post-incarceration. At this time, DAPO in-1 prison staff will work to refer incarcerated individuals to programming addressing any unmet criminogenic needs directly following incarceration. Once in the community, DAPO parole agents work closely with DRP to get supervised persons into available community-based services, including treatment, employment, transitional housing, and other community services needed to best effectuate an incarcerated individuals successful reentry into society (Division of Rehabilitation Programs, CDCR.ca.gov).

and the individual can be released back into society and continue the reintegration process without fear of deportation.

Another alternative to deportation stems from restorative practices as an alternative to the punitive aspects of deportation. One example is the Vera Institute Appearance Assistance Program (AAP), which helps individuals after arrest or incarceration through the deportation proceedings. This program has seen success in other states like New York, which was looking for alternatives to detention programs due to overcrowding in the detention centers.<sup>40</sup> This type of assistance can work alongside parole to ensure they complete all the necessary steps after incarceration to remain in the country. Like parole, there would be a timeframe set, and once the individual completed both parole and AAP, they could start the process for their citizenship, like someone requesting their Certificate of Rehabilitation.<sup>41</sup> These two alternatives to the detention and deportation process would not only save money for California taxpayers but also create a system that would no longer need to have CDCR and ICE authorities working in tandem with each other. Eliminating the practice of criminalization that one is currently seeing in California today.

This paper has shown that California's prison system is supposed to rehabilitate people for reintegration, but deportation can block that process for undocumented individuals. Through educational opportunities, vocational training, self-help groups, mental health services, pre-release case managers and preparation, BPH hearings (if indeterminate sentenced) and finally parole services, which are all kept in the individual's c-file. This is used to assess the individual's rehabilitation while incarcerated. In addition, it assigns numerical weight to a specific list of factors that the agency can use to qualify flight risk and danger for purposes of bond, supervision, and other release determination.<sup>42</sup> Depending on the sentence, either determinate or indeterminate, there is a clear pathway to assess if the person is rehabilitated and no longer a threat to public safety. Either through initiatives like the California model or an alternative to deportation like AAP, the need for CDCR and ICE to collaborate in post-release would not be necessary. The continuance of this dual system raises a fundamental question: whether rehabilitation can meaningfully exist in a system where legal status, rather than demonstrated transformation, ultimately determines belonging.

40 Oren Root, n.d. "The Appearance Assistance Program: An Alternative to Detention for Non-Citizens in US Immigration Removal Proceedings."

41 A Certificate of Rehabilitation is a court order that says someone who was (1) convicted of a felony and (2) served time in state or local prison, has been rehabilitated. The period of rehabilitation is the 5 years of California residency, plus an additional few years based on your conviction. Generally, it's 2 to 5 additional years. The period of rehabilitation starts when you're released from jail, prison, probation, or parole (whichever happens first) (California Courts Self-help guide, [selfhelp.courts.ca.gov](http://selfhelp.courts.ca.gov))

42 Alina Das. 2013. "Immigration Detention: Information Gaps and Institutional Barriers to Reform." *The University of Chicago Law Review* 80 (1): 137-64.

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# World-Systems Theory and the Small Island Developing Nations of Fiji and The Maldives

KYLE STANNER

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## ABSTRACT

This paper will examine the climate adaptation policies of small states against the backdrop of World Systems and Dependency Theory. Climate change poses unique challenges for the developing world. This paper examines coping methods of small states, particularly small island nations, those that are most vulnerable to sea level rise and other impacts on human driven climate change and pollution. I plan to review these issues through the lens of dependency theory and the world system theory popularized by Wallerstein, Chase-Dunn, and others. The theory examined discusses a world system, whereas the capitalist system drives outcomes due to inherent inequality. The theory envisions a core, semi periphery, and periphery where core- hegemonic states have competitive advantage and exploit the periphery. In the context of emissions, I argue that essentially the core exports emissions to the periphery, where effects of global warming are more severe than other places.

## INTRODUCTION

The world is warming, and the climate is changing. Earth's climate has evolved dramatically over the eons, from ice ages, hot, humid periods, and temperate eras. Changing temperatures are largely attributed to greenhouse gases, and most of all, CO.<sup>1</sup> The pace of change we see today poses significant challenges globally. Sea-level rise, along with more severe and frequent extreme weather events such as hurricanes, droughts, floods, and heat waves have begun to wreak havoc on communities across the world. High intensity storms damage critical infrastructure and threaten low lying coastal areas. Warming seas pose threats to entire ecosystems and fisheries, and warmer climate affects crops on land as well. As wealthy and developed nations struggle to adapt, risks facing Small Island Developing Nations (SIDS) in the Pacific are especially acute, with threats not only to the physical characteristics of the islands, but to the economic drivers of such places that support subsistence and tourism. For example, warming oceans can cause coral reef die-offs that can affect fisheries.<sup>2</sup> This paper examines the coping mechanisms of Small Island Developing States through the lens of Dependency Theory and World Systems Theory. As small States struggle to adapt and implement policies to mitigate "climate related disasters," they face an uphill battle with respect to continued exploitation from the core.

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1 United States EPA. 2025. Overview of Greenhouse Gasses. January 16. <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/overview-greenhouse-gases#carbon-dioxide>.

2 Walter Leal Filho ed. 2017. *Climate Change Adaptation in Pacific Countries: Fostering Resilience and Improving the Quality of Life*. Springer International Publishing

This paper examines the case studies of Fiji, and the Maldives and review the coping mechanisms and strategies that each employ to combat global warming. When it comes to extreme responses to climate change, such as population relocation, local governments' responses will shape and drive public perceptions and influence the success of that strategy.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the scholarship surrounding international relations focuses on power dynamics and instruments of power, particularly in Realist circles. Principal actors are states who act in a rational manner in a zero-sum game. This system is considered self-help as states vie for power to move up or down in a hierarchy. There are winners and there are losers in a global system where coalitions form out of necessity and self-interest. Liberal theories, on the other hand, frequently champion concepts such as democratic peace and argue that free exchange of goods and ideas leads to a more progressive and just society. Liberal trade and institutions are the cornerstones of this theory. Constructivists and others often look to more nuanced issues such as gender and shared histories to explain interstate interaction. Laura Sjoberg, for example, makes a credible argument about the role of gender hierarchies that influence state decisions<sup>3</sup> while Michael Ofori discusses colonial trauma and its impact on social structures, which in turn affect governance in Africa.<sup>4</sup>

World Systems theory critiques capitalist production and draws from Marxism. First popularized by Immanuel Wallerstein and later built on by Chase-Dunn and others, World Systems theory describes a global capitalist system in which hegemonic states exploit resources in weaker states to pursue their own interests. Economists and theorists have long championed free trade and promotion of international markets to generate wealth. As capital flows inbound and outbound, nations will benefit from what Liberal thinkers describe as a positive-sum game.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Wallerstein's description of the capitalist system is can be essentially summarized as a world economy driven by a capitalist mode of production. Here the world economy can be considered a single division of labor consisting of multiple cultures a world system.<sup>6</sup> These multiple cultures, or states do not share in a global political structure but do share a capitalist economic system where wealth is distributed or redistributed. This world economy generates inequalities and a hierarchy emerges.<sup>7</sup> Within the hierarchy of states, a hierarchy of specialization occurs- with the core focusing on development, and the periphery relegated to low wage goods and labor resulting in unequal exchange.<sup>8</sup> For example, firms from Western countries might extract resources and use local labor. Once those goods are extracted and transformed into final products, they can be resold to weaker states for a higher price, leading to a cycle of exchange that perpetuates inequality.

3 Laura Sjoberg. 2012. "Gender, structure, and war: what Walz couldn't see." *International Theory* (Cambridge University Press) 4 (1): 1-38. doi:doi:10.1017/S175297191100025X.

4 Michael Ofori. 2024. "The Brunt of the Colonial Yoke Continues to Weigh on Us" *Understanding Africa's Geopolitics as Decolonial Struggle.* *Communication Studies* (Taylor & Francis) 76 (3): 237-255. doi:10.1080/10510974.2024.2408049.

5 Robert O'Brien, and Marc Williams, . 2020. *Global Political Economy: Evolution and Dynamics*. 6. London: Bloomsbury Academic

6 Immanuel Wallerstein. 1976. "A World-System Perspective on the Social Sciences." *The British Journal of Sociology* (Wiley) 27 (3): 343-352.

7 Ibid

8 Felipe Antunes de Oliveira, Felipe, and Ingrid Harvold Kvangraven. 2023. "Back to Dakar: Decolonizing international political economy through dependency theory." *Review of International Political Economy*. 30 (5): 1676-1700. doi:10.1080/09692290.2023.2169322.

Chase-Dunn built on this principle arguing that hegemonic states maintain a competitive advantage and continue to promote free trade and reinforce the capitalist system. Smaller and weaker states on the periphery form dependent relationships and these hierarchical relationships reinforce the system.<sup>9</sup> Chase-Dunn also introduces the semi-periphery to the world system. Those on the semi-periphery are still dependent on hegemonic powers, however, being more of a middle power the semi-periphery can vie for position by using protectionist or other measures to intervene in the economy.<sup>10</sup> In the world system, no single state can unify the system to form a world government and shifting alliances disrupt the balance of power when semi peripheral states rise.<sup>11</sup> What the system does however is reinforce inequalities with continued exploitation of the periphery. Others have also noted the role of hegemons who exercise leadership roles in the international system and mold the system to their advantage.<sup>12</sup> One way this is achieved is through international organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, and similar institutions. Those on the periphery are systematically disadvantaged and face impediments to development.<sup>13</sup> Other scholars have noted that countries on the global periphery, namely the global South, remain dependent on imperial powers because it is the large and powerful hegemons that have imposed an international economic order upon them.<sup>14</sup> This leads to uneven development and can also affect dependent nations internally.<sup>15</sup>

While emissions are not capital in a traditional sense, the redistribution of negative externalities, in this case emissions, from wealthy and traditionally Western powers to a periphery state amounts to the uneven growth and development as predicted by theory. The lopsided nature of the effects of sea level rise on the more vulnerable and poorer nations amount to exploitation. Wealthy nations can continue to export these externalities while investing at home in infrastructure, technology and other coping mechanisms that small island developing nations are unable to access. SIDS continue to remain reliant on these nations for economic activity but do not draw equal benefits from trade and globalization.

Small Island Developing States span geographic regions, from the Caribbean Sea, Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans. Some are tiny and wealthy such as Aruba, others are larger and have underdeveloped economies such as Papua New Guinea. There is no universal definition of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), though they share commonalities of being vulnerable to climate change. Many SIDS are also isolated geographically and are economically and environmentally unstable. They have difficulty

9 Christopher K. Chase-Dunn. 1982. "A World System Perspective On Dependency And Development in Latin America." *Latin American Research Review* (The Latin American Studies Association) 17 (1): 166-171.

10 Ibid.

11 Christopher Chase-Dunn. 1981. "Interstate System and Capitalist World-Economy: One Logic or Two?" *International Studies Quarterly*. 25 (1): 19-42.

12 Daniel H Nexon, and Iver B. Neumann. 2018. "Hegemonic-order theory: A field-theoretic account." *European Journal of International Relations*. 24 (3): 662-686. doi:10.1177/1354066117716524.

13 Julianne Stewart, Bruce Horsfield, and Peter G. Cook. 1993. "Television and Dependency: A Case Study of Policy Making in Fiji and Papua New Guinea." *The Contemporary Pacific* 5 (2): 333-363.

14 Felipe Antunes de Oliveira, Felipe, and Ingrid Harvold Kvangraven. 2023. "Back to Dakar: Decolonizing international political economy through dependency theory." *Review of International Political Economy* 30 (5): 1676-1700. doi:10.1080/09692290.2023.2169322.

15 Ibid.

in accessing finance and other resources, as well as general disadvantages in the international markets.<sup>16</sup>

Following disasters, SIDS are constrained in their ability to respond to crises. For example, during the 2017 hurricane season, several Caribbean Island nations undertook mass evacuation, including the complete evacuation of some islands. Displaced residents were in some cases relocated to nearby islands, only to be evacuated again few weeks later following subsequent storms.<sup>17</sup> Adaptation strategies also face hurdles. Top-down approaches by national governments and NGOs may not be effective in areas where much of the population is spread out in rural or remote regions. Meanwhile community-based measures depend heavily on the adaptive capacity of those local communities.<sup>18</sup>

Following storms, remote SIDS experience delays in receiving aid, with outside responders reliant on limited logistics to bring both personnel and supplies.<sup>19</sup> Although the effects of climate are often gradual, the increasing frequency of severe storms highlights the need for SIDS to become more disaster-resilient. However, even in instances when resilience measures are undertaken, they are not always positive and often have deleterious effects.<sup>20</sup> For instance, coastal armoring such as seawall construction may preserve property immediately behind it, but can accelerate beach erosion and inhibit sediment replenishment.<sup>21</sup> Both Fiji and the Maldives exhibit characteristics that limit their ability to deal with external shock.

## Case Studies

### FIJI

Fiji is a small archipelago nation consisting of over 330 islands in the South Pacific, with a population of roughly one million inhabitants. While human settlements have long flourished, the British established a colony in 1874 that lasted until 1970. During the colonial era the British established sugar plantations, and other crops. They indentured servants and imported Indian labor. Following independence in 1970, Fiji has had democratic rule with three military coups d'état, in 1987, 2000, and 2006. The economy remains largely subsistence in nature, with tourism a major economic driver. Diving, surfing, beach activities, and other nature related activities drive the tourism economy.

As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), Fiji is considered physically vulnerable to climate change and also suffers from a lower capacity to adapt. They have enacted a climate emergency declaration (CED), illustrating that the nation takes this threat

16 Vizaad Ali, Rowena Cullen, and Janet Toland. 2015. "ICTs and Tourism in Small Island Developing States: The Case of the Maldives." *Journal of Global Information Technology Management* 18 (1): 250-270. doi:10.1080/1097198X.2015.1108095.

17 James Shultz et al. 2018. "Risks, Health Consequences, and Response Challenges for Small-Island-Based Populations: Observations from the 2017 Atlantic Hurricane Season." *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*. 13 (1): 5-17. doi:10.1017/dmp.2018.28.

18 L.C. Hagedoorn, et al. 2019. "Community-based adaptation to climate change in small island developing states: an analysis of the role of social capital." *Climate and Development*. 11 (8): 723-734. doi:https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080/17565529.2018.1562869

19 James Shultz et al. 2018. "Risks, Health Consequences, and Response Challenges for Small-Island-Based Populations: Observations from the 2017 Atlantic Hurricane Season." *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness* 13 (1): 5-17. doi:10.1017/dmp.2018.28.

20 Denise D.P. Thompson. 2022. "Compounding challenges for disaster resilience in small island developing states." Edited by Jie Li and Jia-Xin Zhang. *Disaster Prevention and Resilience* 1- doi:https://dx.doi.org/10.20517/dpr.2021.04.

21 Arlan Brucal, and John Lynham. 2021. "Coastal armoring and sinking property values: the case of seawalls in California." *Environmental Economics and Policy Studies* 23 (1): 55-77. doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10018-020-00278-3.

seriously.<sup>22</sup> While Fiji is relatively better off compared to its neighbors, it remains a developing country and reliant on a service-based economy nearly 40% of which is tied directly or indirectly to tourism. The Fijian economy has several critical vulnerabilities including labor shortages, lack of tourism related infrastructure, and threats of climate change to infrastructure.<sup>23</sup> 2024 saw over 982,000 visitors to the islands with over 89.8% of the tourism stemming from Australia, New Zealand, United States, China, the European Union, Canada, and the United Kingdom.<sup>24</sup> These countries can generally be classified as highly developed countries, and all but China is considered Western. In 2023, Fiji produced 1.15 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, compared with New Zealand 30.12 million tons and China's 11.90 billion tons. Collectively, Fiji's top source markets accounted for roughly 53% of the world's total emissions that year.<sup>25</sup> The imbalance shows the dependency relationship between core and peripheral states as described in World System Theory. Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, with top destination for exports to Tonga, and Samoa.<sup>26</sup> When adjusted on a per capita basis, only Samoa emits less with all other countries having significantly higher emissions.<sup>27</sup>

This relationship of exploitation by the core can be seen in other areas, as well. During the 1980s when Fiji underwent modernization in the telecommunications sector, policies surrounding broadcast television were heavily influenced by foreign companies, with little influence from domestic actors. Television expansion into Fiji during this time was driven by Australia, a significantly stronger power to drive its export market. Profits from the venture to Fiji were limited, with most going back to Australia.<sup>28</sup> Here, the allure of increased revenue led the government to adopt policies favorable to foreign corporations, even though gains are minimal and capital flows back to the hegemonic power.

We can draw parallels here with the tourism sector in Fiji. Following the dip in tourism from the Covid-19 pandemic, 2022 saw \$148.4 million USD in tourism revenue.<sup>29</sup> In 2017, the World Bank projected that due to climate weather events, Fiji was in need of \$4.5 billion over 10 years or \$450 million per year to build capacity to adapt. This figure amounts to almost the entire country's GDP for a single year.<sup>30</sup> Here, dependency and exploitation play out at an exaggerated rate. Tourism dollars are needed, but they only amount to a nominal amount compared to the problems that Fiji faces. Considering that most of the travelers into Fiji are from states that are more wealthy, powerful, and generally sit higher on the global hierarchy we can describe this inequality

22 Mely Caballero-Anthony. 2024. "Climate security in Southeast Asia: navigating concepts, approaches and practices." *Third World Quarterly* (Routledge) 45 (14): 2047-2064. doi:10.1080/01436597.2024.2370353

23 Fiji Ministry of Finance. 2024. Tourism fact sheet. Fiji Ministry of Finance. Accessed April 26, 2025. <https://www.finance.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Fact-Sheet-Tourism.pdf>.

24 Fiji Bureau of Statistics. 2024. Provisional Visitor Arrivals - 2024. Government Report, Suva: Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 1-10. Accessed April 26, 2025. <https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/statistics/social-statistics/tourism-and-migration-statistics/#42-262-wpfd-2024>.

25 Our World in Data. 2025. Our World in Data. April 26. [https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/annual-co2-emissions-per-country?country=USA-OWID\\_WRL-AUS-CHN-European+Union+%2828%29-GBR-FJI-CA+N~NZL](https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/annual-co2-emissions-per-country?country=USA-OWID_WRL-AUS-CHN-European+Union+%2828%29-GBR-FJI-CA+N~NZL).

26 Observatory of Economic Complexity. 2025. OEC - Fiji. April 26. <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/fji?selector343id=Export>.

27 Our World in Data. 2025. Our World in Data. April 26. [https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/annual-co2-emissions-per-country?country=USA-OWID\\_WRL-AUS-CHN-European+Union+%2828%29-GBR-FJI-CA+N~NZL](https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/annual-co2-emissions-per-country?country=USA-OWID_WRL-AUS-CHN-European+Union+%2828%29-GBR-FJI-CA+N~NZL).

28 Julianne Stewart, Bruce Horsfield, and Peter G. Cook. 1993. "Television and Dependency: A Case Study of Policy Making in Fiji and Papua New Guinea." *The Contemporary Pacific* 5 (2): 333-363.

29 Our World in Data. 2025. Our World in Data. April 26. [https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/annual-co2-emissions-per-country?country=USA-OWID\\_WRL-AUS-CHN-European+Union+%2828%29-GBR-FJI-CA+N~NZL](https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/annual-co2-emissions-per-country?country=USA-OWID_WRL-AUS-CHN-European+Union+%2828%29-GBR-FJI-CA+N~NZL).

30 World Bank Group. 2017. World Bank - New Report Projects \$4.5 billion Cost to Reduce Fiji's Vulnerability to Climate Change. November 10. May 2, 2025. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2017/11/10/new-report-projects-us45-billion-cost-to-reduce-fijis-vulnerability-to-climate-change>.

as the exploitation of the periphery by the core and semi-periphery – in line with the theories above.

Fiji has developed a National Action Plan (NAP) in 2018 that cites 160 adaptation measures involving public, private, and societal stakeholders in a broad range of solutions to address emergent threats from global climate change.<sup>31</sup> The document references systematic adaptation strategies, including food security, health, human settlements, infrastructure, and biodiversity efforts.<sup>32</sup> Focusing on human settlement and relocation, the government of Fiji has promoted this form of climate mitigation since around 2014 when they moved a village 2 kilometers inland.<sup>33</sup> This drastic solution has been met with mixed results, as Fijians share strong emotional and cultural attachments to the land and movement to new locales have led to disputes over access with other groups.<sup>34</sup> Charan et. al, write that the land is the foundation of identity “a place that defines them as rightful owners of their land, closely associated to the natives’ wealth, status, and placement in their respective mataqalis (a clan or landowning unit.)”<sup>35</sup>

## THE MALDIVES

The Republic of Maldives is also an archipelagic state in South Asia in the Indian Ocean, is the smallest country in Asia, with only 115 square miles of land. It is also among the most geographically dispersed nations with a population of roughly 537,000 citizens. In the 1500s the islands were a Portuguese protectorate and saw Dutch colonizers in the 17th century. Later, the Maldives saw oversight from the British from 1887 to 1953 with official independence in 1965. Like Fiji, Maldives is a SIDS nation both physically vulnerable to climate change and ill equipped to adapt to climate related issues. Like Fiji, the state faces labor shortages, and vulnerable infrastructure, with tourism serving as its primary industry.

Tourism is the largest industry and a major footprint in the overall economy with 24.7% reported in 2024 Q1.<sup>36</sup> 1,878,543 people visited the Maldives in 2023 with the top countries as India, Russia, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, the United States, and France as its top share of tourists.<sup>37</sup> Among emitters of CO<sub>2</sub>, the Maldives, emitting just over 2 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub>, does not come close to its nearest source market of France, emitting nearly 272 million tons, or the highest source market of the United States with 4.91 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Collectively these markets account for 11.31 billion of the 37.79 billion tons spewed annually or 29.9% of the global totals.<sup>38</sup>

The Maldives top importers are Oman, China, India, Malaysia, and the United Arab Emirates, with top export markets of Thailand, Germany, United Kingdom,

31 Minister of the Economy, Republic of Fiji. 2021. Briefing Note: The National Adaptation Plan. Minister of the Economy, Republic of Fiji. <https://fijiclimatchangeportal.gov.fj/ppss/the-national-adaptation-plan-briefing-note/>.

32 Ibid.

33 Dhrishna Charan, Manpreet Kaur, and Priyatma Singh. 2017. “Customary Land and Climate Change Induced Relocation - A Case study of Vunidogola Village, Vanua Levu, Fiji.” Chap. 2 in *Climate Change Adaptation in Pacific Countries: Fostering Resilience and Improving the Quality of Life*, edited by Walter Leal Filho, 19-33. Hamburg: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-50094-2\_2.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Maldives Bureau of Statistics. 2024. Quarterly National Accounts: Maldives. Quarterly National Accounts, 2024, Q1, Bureau of Statistics, Male: Maldives Bureau of Statistics, 1-12. <https://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/mbs/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/QNA2024Q1.pdf>.

37 Ministry of Tourism: Republic of Maldives. 2024. *Tourism Yearbook 2024. Annual Report, Male: Ministry of Tourism, 1-55.*

38 Our World in Data. 2025. Our World in Data. April 26. [https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/annual-co2-emissions-per-country?country=USA-OWID\\_WRL~AUS-CHN~European+Union+%2828%29~GBR-FJI-CA N~NZL](https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/annual-co2-emissions-per-country?country=USA-OWID_WRL~AUS-CHN~European+Union+%2828%29~GBR-FJI-CA N~NZL)

Mauritius, and India.<sup>39</sup> Here, too, we see major imbalances of emissions with all trade partners emitting more than the Maldives.<sup>40</sup> When adjusted on a per capita basis, Thailand, Mauritius, and India emit less, with all others emitting more, though a noticeably smaller spread, perhaps owing to its larger geographically dispersed area. Like Fiji, there is clear evidence of uneven burdens of climate change on the island nation.

Similar issues have played out in other sectors in the Maldives. Notably, the Information and Communications Technology Sector (ICT) as related to tourism. As a remote island nation that wants to promote tourism, a strong robust communications and information technology system is needed. Researchers have found that in the hotel sector, luxury resorts are unable to keep up with the demand for high functioning ICT, in part because while significant for the Maldives, they do not meet economies of scale for installation of costly infrastructure. Further, there are limitations with human capital, both in terms of the number of staff and adequately trained staff. The result is the import of labor from other nations.<sup>41</sup>

Like the case of Fiji, tourism dollars are insufficient to offset costs needed to repair damage from sea level rise and climate disasters. While it has seen more tourism dollars than Fiji, over \$285 million in 2022, costs associated with flooding alone are estimated to be between \$2 and \$4 billion alone, and there is already evidence that damage to coral reefs and fisheries is occurring. In fact, damage to coral and impediments to coral formation may, in the short term, be worse than other effects of climate change, as coral reefs help stabilize sand. Degraded reefs mean more erosion and a loss of land.<sup>42</sup> Loss of the reefs also lead to loss of bait fish, and loss of larger fish that people depend on for their livelihoods and sustenance.<sup>43</sup>

The Maldives' coping mechanisms are minimal: Sea walls have been constructed to absorb storm surges, and there have been efforts to build artificial islands to house the population.<sup>44</sup> Like Fiji, population consolidation, and internal migration are likely. Government officials in the Maldives have expressed this as a reality and policy makers have suggested that the number of inhabited islands should be reduced by roughly 50%.<sup>45</sup> Johannes Luetz conducted a study where locals perceived internal migration as a net positive, with better access to education, and healthcare, among other benefits.<sup>46</sup> In fact, studies have shown that while there is concern for climate change, other social considerations are at the forefront of decision making. With the government undertaking

39 World Bank. n.d. WITS: World Integrated Trade Solution. Accessed May 11, 2025.

[https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/MDV/Year/2022/TradeFlow/Export/ Partner/by-country](https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/MDV/Year/2022/TradeFlow/Export/Partner/by-country).

40 Our World in Data. 2025. Our World in Data. April 26. [https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/annual-co2-emissions-per-country?country=USA~OWID\\_WRL~AUS~CHN~European+Union+%2828%29~GBR~FJI~CAN~NZL](https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/annual-co2-emissions-per-country?country=USA~OWID_WRL~AUS~CHN~European+Union+%2828%29~GBR~FJI~CAN~NZL).

41 Vizaad Ali, Rowena Cullen, and Janet Toland. 2015. "ICTs and Tourism in Small Island Developing States: The Case of the Maldives." *Journal of Global Information Technology Management*. 18 (1): 250-270. doi:10.1080/1097198X.2015.1108095.

42 Walter Leal Filho, ed. 2017. *Climate Change Adaptation in Pacific Countries: Fostering Resilience and Improving the Quality of Life*. Springer International Publishing.

43 Ibid.

44 The Economist. 2000. "Not Sinking by drowning." *The Economist*, May 11. Accessed May 6, 2025. <https://www.economist.com/moreover/2000/05/11/not-sinking-but-drowning>.

45 Johannes Luetz. 2017. "Climate Change and Migration in the Maldives: Some Lessons for Policy Makers." In *Climate Change Adaptation in Pacific Countries: Fostering Resilience and Improving the Quality of Life*, edited by Walter Leal Filho, 35-69. Hamburg: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-50094-2\_3.

46 Ibid.

reclamation projects in the capital region for economic reasons, some internal migration seems likely in a more stable climatic scenario.<sup>47</sup>

## ANALYSIS

Scholarship on dependency theory provides an explanation of interstate behavior. The findings here are not all that surprising: Small states that are geographically isolated, with small populations, and disproportionate reliance on single sectors will be affected disproportionately as compared to larger, more established powers. The question here is how the environmental impacts fit into a history of global inequality and if we can draw this into the overarching theme of world systems and dependency theory.

The case studies demonstrate that both countries of Fiji and Maldives are, indeed, dependent states. Their coping mechanisms are similar, however, locals' reception to the major strategy of relocation is divergent. Fijians, especially older generations, are more resistant to relocation whereas Maldivians seem more open to movement.<sup>48</sup> What is interesting here, is that the people of the Maldives have faced two large scale disasters that caused seawater inundation to the islands, one in 1987, and another following the tsunamis of 2004.<sup>49</sup> These disasters had already forced internal migration. Coupled with economic incentives in the form of better employment, and education opportunities, the people of the Maldives seem to perceive relocation as more positive.

Fiji appears to face more resistance to relocation. Although villagers acknowledge rising sea levels and the resulting hardship, many remain reluctant to move. Their resistance is rooted in the desire to preserve traditional lifestyles and maintain deep cultural connections to their ancestral land.<sup>50</sup> This issue does not seem unique to Fiji: Kiribati has moved or discussed moving populations. However, movement of communities can take away self-determination and lead to a loss of culture and community that are important for long established indigenous populations.<sup>51</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Small Island Nations sit at the forefront of the climate crisis. Due to their geographic vulnerability, small size, limited economic capacity, and lack of technical expertise, they often must rely on the very actors that have contributed most to the ecological disasters they now face. Possible solutions typically involve major investments in adaptation or even involve the relocation of entire populations. As seen in this limited case study, culture and access to services and education seem to be major factors in the likely outcome of moving villages. Governments should adopt incentives to relocate people, while acknowledging cultural concerns. Some nations may not have the ability to relocate people internally, owing to small size and resources. In these cases, the international community and stable hegemonic powers should adopt policies to accept and assist these displaced people.

47 Laurens H. Speelman., Robert J. Nicholls, and Ricardo Safra de Campos. 2021. "The role of migration and demographic change in small island futures." *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 30 (3): 282-311

48 Dhrishna Charan, Manpreet Kaur, and Priyatma Singh. 2017. "Customary Land and Climate Change Induced Relocation - A Case study of Vunidogola Village, Vanua Levu, Fiji." Chap. 2 in *Climate Change Adaptation in Pacific Countries: Fostering Resilience and Improving the Quality of Life*, edited by Walter Leal Filho, 19-33. Hamburg: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-50094-2\_2.

49 Geronimo Gussmann, and Jochen Hinkel. 2020. "What drives relocation policies in the Maldives?" *Climatic Change* 163 (1): 931-951. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-020-02919-8.

50 Celia McMichael, Carol Farbotko, and Annah Piggott-McKellar. 2021. "Rising seas, immobilities, and translocality in small island states: case studies from Fiji and Tuvalu." *Population and Environment*. 43 (1): 82-107. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s11111-021-00378-6.

51 Virginia De Biasio. 2024. "Not Just 'Sinking Islands': Climate Change and Adaptation in Small Island Developing States." *Political Studies* 0 (0): 1-22. doi:10.1177/00323217241298848.

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# Tourism Ties Between East Asia's Big Three: A Diplomatic Tool After a Turbulent Past

XIULI TONG

## ABSTRACT

East Asia's enduring historical animosities coexist with dense cross-border travel and cultural programming, suggesting that people-centered diplomacy may help bind the region despite periodic shocks. Yet IR scholarship has rarely measured these effects systematically, leaving a gap between narrative accounts and empirical evaluation. To what extent, and under what conditions, does tourism diplomacy among China, Japan, and South Korea (2014–2024) increase regional cooperation, as indicated by trade flows, joint statements, and policy shifts? This study integrates soft power and economic statecraft to model tourism as both an attraction and an instrument, by comparing tourist flows, visa regimes, formal tourism initiatives, and cultural events against cooperation outcomes (trade, joint statements, and policy shifts). Results indicate that tourism diplomacy is most effective when (1) bilateral mobility is sustained, (2) state policy is facilitative, and (3) joint cultural initiatives are visible, helping to mitigate tensions and consolidate regional stability.

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism diplomacy has emerged as a subtle but effective tool for fostering regional cohesion among China, Japan, and South Korea, or Republic of Korea (ROK), from 2014–2024. Drawing on soft power and economic statecraft frameworks, this study uses official tourism, trade, and cultural-exchange indicators to assess whether people-to-people travel, joint cultural events, and visa policies function as mechanisms of soft power that build regional trust and support diplomatic engagement. First, I review the literature on tourism diplomacy and soft power to motivate testable expectations. Second, I present three empirical lenses: (1) scale and economic relevance, (2) security events (THAAD, the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, a U.S.-made missile defense platform designed to intercept and destroy short- and medium-range ballistic missiles during their terminal flight phase), and (3) cooperative initiatives (Culture City of East Asia and visa facilitation), to evaluate whether sustained mobility and facilitative policy co-move with cooperative outcomes, before concluding with scope conditions and policy implications.

East Asia is home to complex and dynamic trilateral relationships among China, Japan, and South Korea; despite persistent historical grievances and political tensions, the region has witnessed remarkable levels of people-to-people interaction through tourism. This observation motivates the central inquiry: how does tourism diplomacy influence regional relations in East Asia, and why do Asian states use tourism to cultivate diplomatic relationships?

To address these questions, the study evaluates quantitative indicators like tourist flows, exchange programs, and visa policies over 2014–2024 and interprets them alongside salient political events to test whether tourism diplomacy plays a stabilizing role

in regional affairs. The conclusion distills policy implications and outlines avenues for comparative research on the durability and limits of tourism-driven cooperation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A growing body of literature examines tourism as a form of soft power, but most studies remain qualitative and conceptually abstract. Kelechi investigates the intersection of public diplomacy and nation branding, arguing that states can enhance their international image through targeted communication strategies.<sup>1</sup> While the study provides valuable theoretical insight by applying stakeholder and social identity theories, it lacks specific focus on East Asia. Kelechi highlights the gap between public diplomacy strategies and measurable branding outcomes and emphasizes the role of digital platforms and cultural exchange.<sup>2</sup> However, the study is more concerned with image-building than with bilateral relations or policy outcomes.

Casado Claro, Pastrana Hugueta, and Saavedra-Serrano offer a more relevant contribution by examining Japan's use of public diplomacy and destination branding to promote its global image.<sup>3</sup> The article situates tourism within the broader soft power strategy of Japan, emphasizing cultural exports through initiatives like "Cool Japan" and events like the 2020(21) Tokyo Olympics.<sup>4</sup> The authors argue that Japan leverages tourism for economic and political gain while projecting a peaceful national image, especially in the absence of coercive tools.<sup>5</sup> However, the article focuses heavily on Japan's internal strategies and marketing narratives and lacks a regional perspective on diplomacy.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, it provides a strong case study of how tourism can be used for foreign policy objectives in the absence of hard power.

Rookwood and Adeosun analyze Japan's hosting of the 2019 Rugby World Cup and the delayed 2020(21) Tokyo Olympics as exercises in sport-driven tourism diplomacy.<sup>7</sup> They assert that mega-events serve as tools for nation branding and economic recovery, especially during global crises like COVID-19.<sup>8</sup> Although the authors emphasize how these events promote Japan as a progressive and peaceful state, their analysis remains descriptive and narrowly focused.<sup>9</sup> Their qualitative methodology, based primarily on interviews and branding discourse, limits its applicability for broader regional comparisons. However, their work underscores the importance of cultural symbolism and event diplomacy in national soft power strategy.

Sari and Uygur conduct a bibliometric review of tourism diplomacy studies and conclude that tourism is a multifaceted tool of soft power, particularly through bilateral

1 Whitney Kelechi, "Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding," *Journal of Public Relations* 3, no. 1 (2024): 40–51, <https://doi.org/10.47941/jpr.1774>.

2 Kelechi, "Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding," p.44.

3 María Francisca Casado Claro, José Pastrana Hugueta, and María Concepción Saavedra-Serrano, "Tourism as a Soft Power Tool: The Role of Public Diplomacy in Japan's Country and Destination Branding," *Journal of Tourism, Sustainability and Well-being* 11, no. 2 (2023): 66–80, <https://doi.org/10.34623/snwy-ec89>.

4 Casado Claro, Pastrana Hugueta, and Saavedra-Serrano, "Tourism as a Soft Power Tool", p.66.

5 Casado Claro, Pastrana Hugueta, and Saavedra-Serrano, "Tourism as a Soft Power Tool", p.67, p.77.

6 Casado Claro, Pastrana Hugueta, and Saavedra-Serrano, "Tourism as a Soft Power Tool", p.74.

7 Joel Rookwood and Kola Adeosun, "Nation Branding and Public Diplomacy: Examining Japan's 2019 Rugby World Cup and 2020(21) Olympic Games in the Midst of a Global Economic Downturn and the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Global Sport Management* 8, no. 3 (2021): 573–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24704067.2021.1871860>.

8 Rookwood and Adeosun, "Nation Branding and Public Diplomacy," 580.

9 Rookwood and Adeosun, "Nation Branding and Public Diplomacy," 580.

cooperation.<sup>10</sup> Their analysis reveals that most tourism diplomacy research focuses on China and remains qualitative in nature. They also highlight the economic and cultural functions of tourism, suggesting that tourism helps nations enhance their international image, attract foreign capital, and build cooperation.<sup>11</sup> While the study remains theoretical, it contributes significantly to our understanding of the sectoral and institutional actors involved in tourism diplomacy, including national tourism organizations, civil society, and private stakeholders.

Zhu et al. make a more assertive argument by presenting tourism diplomacy as a key aspect of China's outbound strategy.<sup>12</sup> They identify four defining features: its economic power, the state's control over outbound tourism, its low political sensitivity, and its capacity for cultural signaling.<sup>13</sup> The study emphasizes how China has used tourism as both reward and sanction in diplomatic disputes, such as the THAAD controversy with South Korea and the Diaoyu Islands issue with Japan.<sup>14</sup> While Zhu et al. introduce a compelling framework that connects tourism with strategic statecraft, the article is largely theoretical and lacks rigorous data to support its claims. Yet it provides valuable insight into how China's authoritarian model shapes tourism flows as a tool for economic leverage and political signaling.

Together, these works highlight the emerging recognition of tourism as a component of soft power and economic diplomacy. However, their limitations such as narrow national focus, lack of regional comparison, and limited empirical analysis underscore the need for a broader, data-driven study that evaluates tourism diplomacy across multiple East Asian states.

## EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Tourism plays a pivotal role in the economic landscape of East Asia. In the short term, it delivers significant economic benefits through job creation, foreign exchange earnings, and infrastructure development. For instance, as illustrated in Figure 1, China generated approximately \$300 billion in international tourism revenue in 2018, making it one of the top tourism earners globally.<sup>15</sup> Despite the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism continued to contribute billions of dollars annually to the economies of China, Japan, and South Korea, demonstrating the sector's resilience and strategic value.

10 Ömer Sari and Selma Meydan Uygur, "Tourism Diplomacy as Soft Power," in *Advances in Managing Tourism Across Continents*, vol. 4 (Ankara: Detay Publishing, 2024), 251–66, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/384068040\\_Tourism\\_Diplomacy\\_as\\_Soft\\_Power](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/384068040_Tourism_Diplomacy_as_Soft_Power).

11 Sari and Uygur, "Tourism Diplomacy as Soft Power," p.252.

12 Jinsheng (Jason) Zhu, Aranya Siriphon, David Airey, and Mei-lan Jin, "Chinese Tourism Diplomacy: A Chinese-Style Modernity Review," *Anatolia* 33, no. 3 (2022): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2021.1978515>.

13 Zhu et al., "Chinese Tourism Diplomacy," 5.

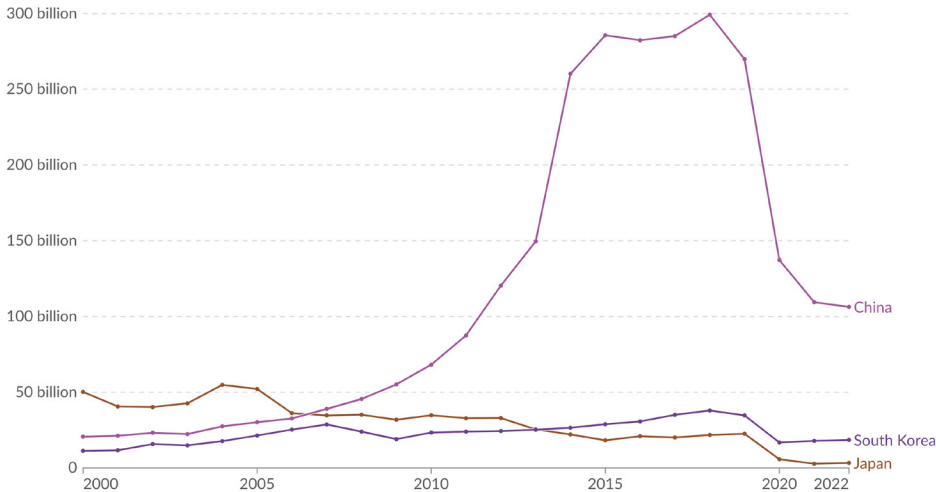
14 Zhu et al., "Chinese Tourism Diplomacy," 5.

15 UNWTO (2024); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2025) — processed by Our World in Data. "International tourist expenditure abroad" [dataset]. UNWTO, "145 key tourism statistics"; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "US consumer prices." Accessed November 12, 2025. <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/average-expenditures-of-tourists-abroad>.

## International tourist expenditure abroad, 2000 to 2022



This data is expressed in constant US dollars. It is adjusted for inflation but does not account for differences in the cost of living between countries.



Data source: UNWTO (2024); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2025)

OurWorldinData.org/tourism | CC BY

Note: This data is expressed in constant 2021 US\$. Transactions associated with all types of foreign visitors considered, including students or seasonal workers, which can be significant in certain countries.

Figure 1

In China, tourism accounted for 11% of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2017,<sup>16</sup> highlighting its integral role in driving domestic and international economic activity. Similarly, in South Korea, the tourism industry contributed around 4.2% to the GDP in 2019,<sup>17</sup> underpinning its importance in services and cultural exports. In Japan, tourism has become the third-largest industry in 2023, following electronics and automobiles.<sup>18</sup> This ranking clarifies the critical position that the tourism sector holds in the national economy, not only as a revenue generator but also as a facilitator of public diplomacy, cultural exchange, and regional integration. As such, the economic magnitude of tourism in East Asia extends beyond immediate fiscal gains, positioning it as a core component of national development and international engagement strategies.

16 Wikipedia contributors, "Tourism in China," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tourism\\_in\\_China&oldid=1291191114](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tourism_in_China&oldid=1291191114) (accessed May 21, 2025).

17 Wikipedia contributors, "Tourism in South Korea," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tourism\\_in\\_South\\_Korea&oldid=1288054943](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tourism_in_South_Korea&oldid=1288054943) (accessed May 21, 2025).

18 JETRO, "Overview | Tourism and Hospitality – Industries – Investing in Japan," last modified 2024, [https://www.jetro.go.jp/en/invest/attractive\\_sectors/tourism/overview.html](https://www.jetro.go.jp/en/invest/attractive_sectors/tourism/overview.html).

Year	Inbound Tourism – Top Source Countries	Outbound Tourism – Top Destinations
2018	Myanmar, Vietnam, South Korea, Japan, USA, Russia, Mongolia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, India, Canada, Thailand, Australia, etc.	Thailand, Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, USA, Cambodia, Russia, Philippines
2019	South Korea, USA, Japan, India, Germany, Malaysia, UK, Australia, Thailand, Singapore	Vietnam, Thailand, Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Philippines, Cambodia, Macau
2020	Myanmar, Vietnam, Philippines, Mongolia, South Korea, Russia, Japan, USA, India, Indonesia	Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan (Asia = 95.45% of all outbound tourism)
2021	South Korea, Japan, Russia, USA, Vietnam, Malaysia, Mongolia, Philippines, Singapore, Australia	Macao, Australia, USA, Hong Kong, France, Japan, Thailand, India, New Zealand, Myanmar
2022	Recovery strongest in Europe & Middle East; slower in Asia-Pacific	(No specific data available)
2024	Japan, South Korea, Southeast Asian countries (noted for fast recovery)	Southeast Asia, Italy, UK, Spain (reached near 2019 levels)

Table 1: China Tourism Trends (Inbound vs. Outbound, 2018–2024)

(Table 1 presents China’s tourism trends from 2018 to 2024. The author compiled and organized data from the source TravelChinaGuide.com.)

The table on China’s Tourism Trends (Inbound vs. Outbound, 2018–2024) reveals that despite persistent historical grievances between China and Japan, as well as global health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism between the two countries has remained fairly consistent. The steady flow of tourists suggests a sustained mutual interest in cultural exchange and travel. Key factors contributing to this trend include geographical proximity, which facilitates easier travel, and deep cultural familiarity, which enhances the appeal of each destination. Shared historical heritage, popular cultural products, and well-developed tourism infrastructure further support this ongoing bilateral engagement. This resilience in tourist flows underscores the strength of people-to-people connections, even when official diplomatic relations face challenges.

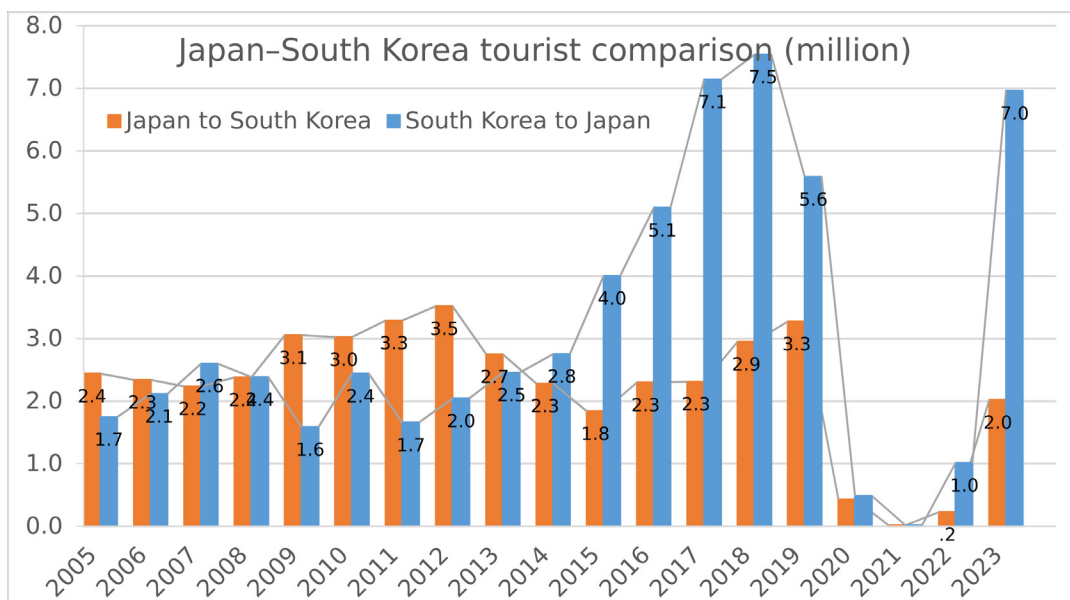


Figure 2  
(Source: Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO))

Although Japan and South Korea are geographic neighbors, diplomatic tensions between the two countries remain persistent due to unresolved historical grievances stemming from World War II. Nonetheless, Figure 2 illustrates a striking contrast between political estrangement and public behavior: millions of Japanese citizens travel to South Korea annually, and even more South Koreans visit Japan each year.<sup>19</sup> This trend persisted consistently from 2005 to 2023, only experiencing a temporary halt due to COVID-19-related travel restrictions. These figures display the enduring appeal of cultural exchange and the strength of people-to-people relations, even amid diplomatic frictions.

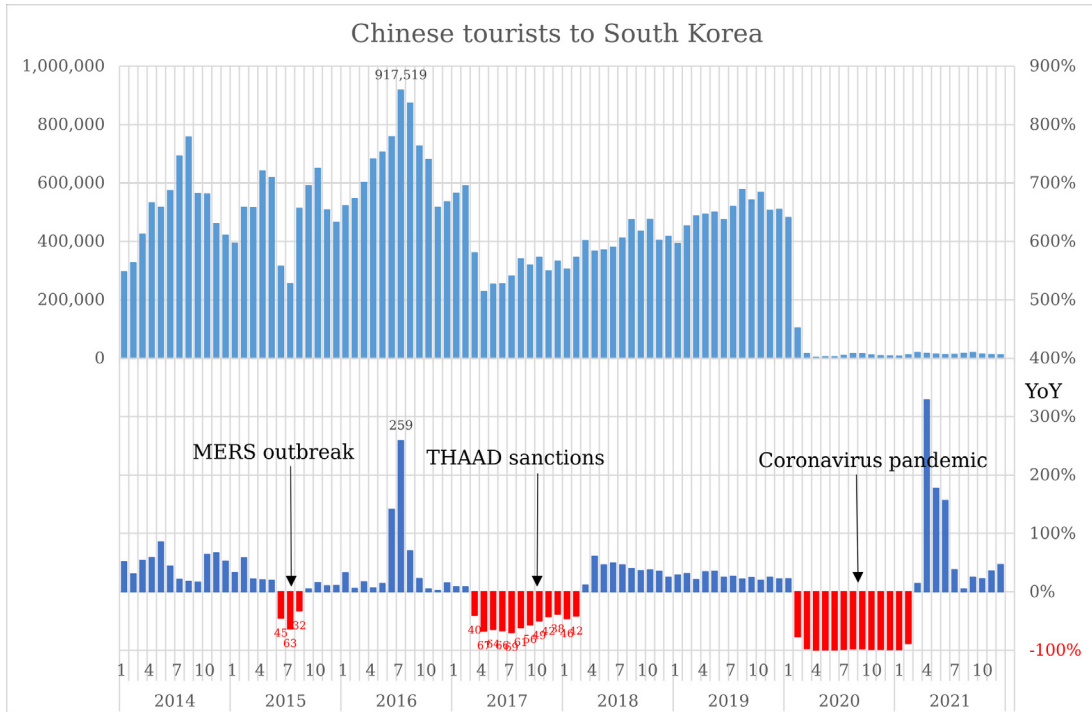


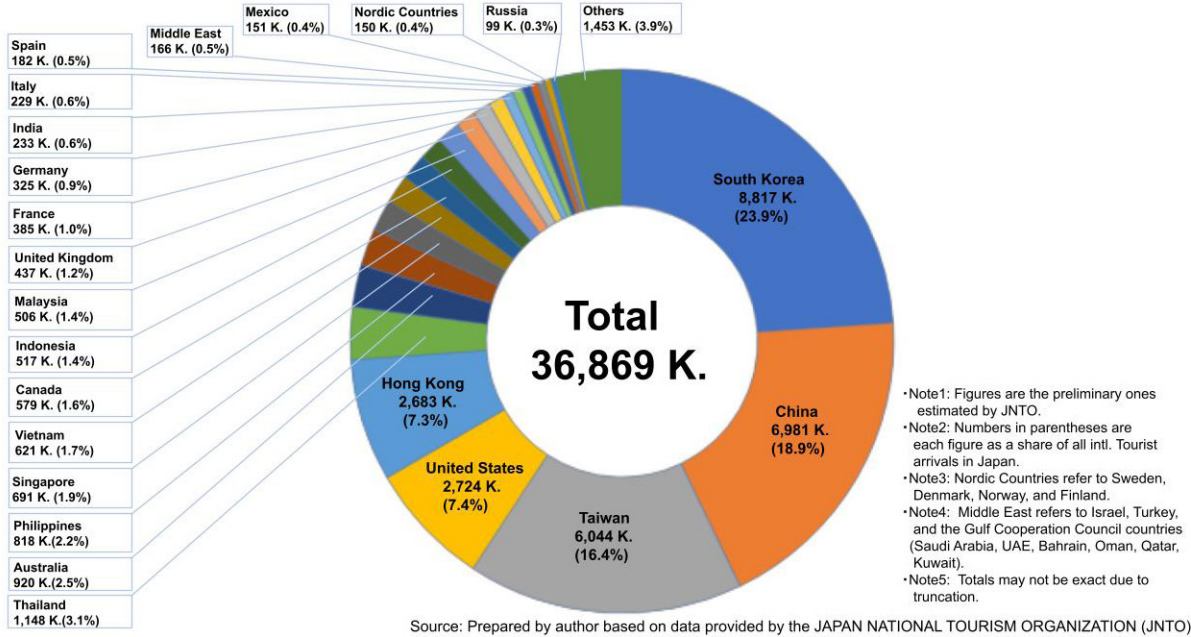
Figure 3  
(Source: Wikipedia – Tourism in South Korea)

While Table 1 does not list South Korea among the top 10 destinations for Chinese outbound tourism, it does not necessarily reflect a lack of interest among Chinese travelers. As shown in Figure 3, hundreds of thousands of Chinese tourists have visited South Korea each year since 2014.<sup>20</sup> Although political disputes such as those surrounding the deployment of the THAAD missile defense system and public health crises have temporarily suppressed travel flows, the data suggests that tourism between China and South Korea is resilient. Visitor numbers typically rebound after such blips, indicating the consistency in South Korea’s attractiveness as a destination for Chinese travelers and the broader durability of regional tourism diplomacy.

19 Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), “Breakdown by Country/Area,” Japan Tourism Statistics, accessed October 19, 2025, <https://statistics.jnto.go.jp/en/graph/#graph--breakdown--by--country>.

20 Wikipedia contributors, “Tourism in South Korea.”

### Breakdown of International Tourist Arrivals to Japan by Country/Region in 2024



**Figure 4:**  
 (Source Japan International transport and tourism institute)

Figure 4 illustrates that China and South Korea consistently rank as the first and second largest source countries of international visitors to Japan.<sup>21</sup> This trend highlights the strong tourism ties that Japan maintains with its East Asian neighbors, despite periodic diplomatic tensions, and reflects the cultural, economic, and geographic proximity that drives sustained travel between these nations.

In addition to quantitative tourism trends, regional cooperation initiatives and policy measures further demonstrate the strategic use of tourism diplomacy in East Asia. The Culture City of East Asia program, launched in 2014, exemplifies sustained trilateral cultural engagement among China, Japan, and South Korea. This initiative includes joint arts festivals, tourism campaigns, and cultural exchange events hosted annually in designated cities across the three countries.<sup>22</sup> Notably, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the program adapted to virtual formats, underscoring the commitment of all three governments to maintaining people-to-people connectivity and cultural diplomacy in times of crisis.

Moreover, recent policy developments illustrate the use of tourism as a diplomatic signal. For example, on November 30, 2024, China resumed its unilateral visa-free policy for short-term Japanese visitors, allowing stays of up to 30 days.<sup>23</sup> This move is widely

21 Haruhiko Koyama, "Tourism in Japan: A Look at the Numbers from 2024 and the Outlook for 2025," The JITTI Journal (Japan International Transport and Tourism Institute, USA), March 2025, <https://www.jittiusa.org/jittijournal-1/tourism-in-japan%3A-a-look-at-the-numbers-from-2024-and-the-outlook-for-2025>.

22 Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat. 2019. "Culture City of East Asia 2019: Xi'an City, Incheon Metropolitan City, Toshima Ward, Tokyo Metropolis." Last modified 2019. [https://tcs-asia.org/en/cooperation/database\\_view.php?id=19&pNo=3&topics=31](https://tcs-asia.org/en/cooperation/database_view.php?id=19&pNo=3&topics=31)

23 Kyodo News, "China to Allow 30-Day Visa Exemption for Japan Visitors from Nov. 30," November 22, 2024, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2024/11/5feb4d2e71c-update1-china-to-resume-unilateral-visa-exemption-for-japan-travelers.html>.

interpreted as an effort to boost inbound tourism and promote trade amid domestic economic slowdown. Beyond economic motives, such a policy also serves as a gesture of goodwill and normalization, indicating how visa liberalization can function as a tool of soft signaling and regional reconciliation.

These examples highlight the multifaceted nature of tourism diplomacy, which extends beyond tourist numbers to include cultural initiatives and policy shifts that shape the broader diplomatic atmosphere in East Asia.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that tourism diplomacy plays a vital role in shaping regional dynamics in East Asia. Despite longstanding political and historical tensions, China, Japan, and South Korea continue to invest in tourism as a pathway to peace and cooperation. Tourism serves as a practical and symbolic tool that enables interpersonal exchange, fosters mutual understanding, and promotes regional integration.

Tourism diplomacy is a powerful mechanism of soft power. By enhancing national image, promoting cultural attraction, and building emotional and social bonds across borders, tourism cultivates a foundation for cooperation and mutual trust. Programs such as the Culture City of East Asia and student exchanges illustrate how tourism contributes not only to cross-cultural familiarity but also to long-term people-to-people engagement. These forms of attraction-based diplomacy can shape perceptions, reduce prejudice, and even influence foreign policy over time by building a favorable national brand and deepening regional interdependence.

It should be noted, however, that tourism flows and cooperation are not immune to political volatility. As observed in cases like the THAAD deployment or pandemic-related restrictions, diplomatic conflicts and public health crises can swiftly disrupt tourism relations. Yet, historical patterns show that tourism flows are often resilient and tend to recover, reflecting its deeper social and cultural roots that transcend temporary political frictions.

Beyond soft power, tourism also operates within the framework of economic statecraft. Governments can leverage tourism as both a reward and a sanction, using access, restrictions, and targeted policies to influence the behavior of other states. China's control over outbound tourism, including suspensions and visa restrictions in response to diplomatic disputes, illustrates how tourism can be strategically instrumentalized. Thus, tourism diplomacy not only fosters cooperation and attraction but can also serve as a calibrated tool of pressure or encouragement, aligning economic influence with foreign policy goals.

In conclusion, tourism diplomacy in East Asia illustrates how people-centered engagement can complement and sometimes outperform formal diplomacy in building lasting peace and cooperation. As regional and global challenges continue to evolve, tourism may emerge not only as a source of income and cultural pride but also as a foundational pillar of international relations in the 21st century.

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