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of
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Editorial Policy

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 paring 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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Author Biographies

RODOLFO REVELO FLORES

Rodolfo Revelo Flores is a second-year international relations graduate student at San Francisco State University. Before attending San Francisco State University, Rodolfo received an undergraduate degree in international studies from California State University, Long Beach. While at Long Beach, he studied the relationships between culture, gender, and the global system. Rodolfo's research interests include the relations between the Global North and the Global South, the environment, the global experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals, immigration, and economic development.

MARTHA GABRIELA HERNÁNDEZ

Martha Gabriela Hernández is an international student from El Salvador, currently in her second year of the master's program in International Relations at San Francisco State University. As a "Latina", she prioritizes migration and human rights in her academic and professional pursuits. Her experience as a consulate assistant at the Embassy of Mexico in El Salvador fueled her advocacy for human rights and immigrant issues, allowing her to engage with high-impact scenarios. Martha's research sheds new light on Salvadoran migration policy, particularly the challenges and needs faced by returning migrants. Her position as an international student in the United States gives her a unique perspective on the complexities of migration and reintegration, deepening her understanding of the broader issues at hand. In addition, Martha's academic interests extend to contemporary populism, with a focus on El Salvador's current political leader and the shift in her country's international relations. Her work led to her participation in the ISA West Conference in Pasadena in Fall 2024, where she presented her research, "Populists Can Repair," representing El Salvador on a high-level platform.

TARA SHAFIE

Tara Shafie is a senior at San Francisco State University, majoring in International Relations, with a minor in Persian Studies. Her interest in the Balkans grew out of her participation in the State Department YES program, where she visited North Macedonia, studied Macedonian language and culture, and met the President of North Macedonia. She attended the London School of Economics summer program in International Relations in summer 2024. Her publications have focused on public diplomacy, political activism, and national identity, encompassing multiple regions. Shafie intends to continue her IR studies in graduate school, focusing on diplomacy and national identity. She has been accepted into the doctoral program in International Relations at UC Irvine.

KAYLA N. CARLSON

Kayla Carlson is an emerging scholar in the field of International Relations, currently pursuing a Master's degree in International Relations at San Francisco State University. With interests in populism, global health, and environmental policy, Kayla aims to contribute to the understanding of how populism impacts international institutions.

Preference Based on Origin: The Lived Experiences of Latin American Immigrants in Spain

RODOLFO REVELO FLORES

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the lived realities of Latin Americans in Spain. Historically, Spain was a country of emigrants who sought a better life in Northern Europe and South America. In the 21st century, this trend reversed. The Spanish economy boomed, leading the country to be the primary destination for immigrants from Latin America due to their shared language and culture. Academic literature and data have shown that Latin American immigrants more easily immigrate and integrate into Spanish society than other immigrant groups, especially since Law 36/2002 went into effect, which made their acquisition of Spanish nationality much easier. However, while Latin American immigrants benefit from their shared history and language with Spain, they often experience discrimination based on race. Racialized prejudice affects their career goals, living situations, and acceptance into Spanish society. Meanwhile, more “Europeanized” Latin American immigrants experience less discrimination as they fulfill Spanish ideals in terms of appearance and culture. This research aims to foster a conversation about how Spain can become more accommodating to Latin American immigrants and, by extension, all newcomers. It is important to note that Latin American immigrants contribute significantly to the Spanish economy by filling lower-paid jobs that the native population generally avoids. Therefore, it is essential to discuss the potential of and issues surrounding Latin American immigration in Spain in greater detail.

BACKGROUND

Historically, Spain was a country with a population primarily consisting of emigrants. This is mainly due to the majority of the Spanish population leaving for the New World or Northern Europe during the early to late twentieth century.¹ This emigration wave resulted from the Francisco Franco regime, which controlled Spain from 1939 until 1975.² After Franco’s death, Spain underwent democratization and an economic modernization process that allowed it to enter the modern world economy.³ By the

1. Raymond Carr, Catherine Delano Smith, Joseph F. O’Callaghan, Helmut Georg Koenigsberger, María J. Viguera, Richard John Harrison, Vicente Rodríguez, John S. Richardson, Adrian Shubert, Juan Vernet Ginés, “Spain,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed September 25, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Spain>

2. Catherine Delano Smith, “Spain - Franco’s Spain, 1939–75,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (2019), <https://www.britannica.com/place/Spain/Franco-Spain-1939-75>

3. Eugenio Bregolat, “Spain’s Transition to Democracy,” *SAIS Review* 19, no. 2 (1999): 149–55, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.1999.0029>

beginning of the twenty-first century, Spain had become a hotspot for immigrants. A sizable portion of this population came from Spain's former colonies in the Americas. Initially, immigrants were asylum seekers looking to escape dictatorships in their home countries in Latin America. However, the flow of immigrants grew with the evolution of Spain's nationality law, Law 36/2002. This law went into effect in January 2003 and amended the Civil Code. With Law 36/2002, nationals of certain Latin American countries and the Philippines can gain Spanish citizenship through an expedited process.⁴ Article 22 of the 2002 Spanish nationality law grants Spanish citizenship to Latin American nationals after having legally resided in the country for two years.⁵ This provision also allows people with direct third-generation connections to Spain to gain nationality after one year,⁶ benefiting those who have Spanish parents or grandparents because they can now legally immigrate to Spain. Migrants from other regions, on the other hand, do not enjoy this privilege. Non-Latin American immigrants do not qualify under Law 36/2002 because they are not from Spain's former colonies. Therefore, immigrants who do not come from this region must wait ten years before gaining Spanish nationality.⁷

Although Latin Americans may immigrate to Spain more easily through jobs, entrepreneurship, or family ties, as defined in Article 22,⁸ many challenges remain. This study investigates the benefits of Article 22, the obstacles Latin Americans face in Spain, and the outcomes of their immigration journeys. I argue that Latin American immigrants can migrate more easily and integrate into Spanish society than other immigrant groups due to the historical, cultural, and linguistic ties between Spain and Latin America.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the beginning of the new millennium, much has been written about Latin American immigrants in Spain. The arrival of Latin American immigrants in Spain began during the 1980s due to the region's poor economic conditions and autocratic governments. At the time, Spain was a relatively poor country, much of whose population had emigrated to Northern and Central Europe for better economic opportunities and sought refuge in Latin America to escape the Francisco Franco regime.⁹ After the death of Franco in 1975, Spain went through a process of democratization and economic modernization. One of the first building blocks of the modern Spanish state was its integration into the European Economic Community (ECC) in 1986.¹⁰ Once Spain was accepted into the ECC, significant treaties allowed European Common Market (EC) access.¹¹ Eventually, Spain signed the Maastricht Treaty, making it a member of

4. PAgencia Estatal Boletín Oficial del Estado, "Ley 36/2002, de 8 de octubre, de modificación del Código Civil en materia de nacionalidad," October 9, 2002, <https://www.boe.es/cli/es/l/2002/10/08/36>

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Emma Martín Díaz, Francisco Cuberos Gallardo, and Simone Castellani, "Latin American Immigration to Spain: Discourses and Practices from 'La Madre Patria,'" *Cultural Studies* 26, no. 6 (2012): 814–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2012.669774>

10. Charles Powell, "Fifteen Years On: Spanish Membership in the European Union Revisited," *Center for European Studies Working Papers Working Papers*, no. 89 (2003).

11. Ibid.

the European Union (EU).¹² This inclusion brought an abundance of new economic possibilities to Spain and made its market more dynamic. As a result, Spain became a relatively wealthy country and an attractive place for immigrants.¹³

The first people to migrate to Spain were intellectuals and professionals who were political dissidents from various ideological backgrounds. During the 1970s and 1980s, Latin America was dominated by right-wing dictatorships¹⁴ that thrived off the fear of communism reaching Latin America.¹⁵ Since Spain had undergone many democratic reforms, it would become a haven for the newly arriving immigrants. Initially, people in Spain were sympathetic to these new arrivals because they felt indebted to Latin America for accepting Spanish refugees during the Franco years.¹⁶ Nowadays, the experiences of Latino immigrants in Spain remain primarily positive. However, negative experiences shaping the lives of many must be addressed, too.¹⁷

In her article, “The Third Vertex of the Latin American Triangle: Latin America and the Repopulation of Rural Spain,” author Raquel Vega Duran explains that a small town called Aguaviva tried to repopulate its region by incentivizing Argentinians with EU citizenship to immigrate.¹⁸ The migrants were offered free housing, healthcare, childcare, and good jobs. However, this came with a cost. These newcomers could not live anywhere outside of the town of Aguaviva for five years. Further, Argentines were made to work in the city, offering only a few white-collar jobs that did not meet the skill set of all immigrants.

It must be noted that the immigrants who reached Aguaviva from Argentina were of European descent, which made it easier for them to integrate into Spanish society. However, even under these circumstances, they faced discrimination because some native Spaniards viewed them as a problem or a threat. Vega Duran cites a Spanish native in the village, who said, “They give little life to the town, so if these towns are meant to die, they will die... They should stop coming to Spain; there are enough of us already.”¹⁹ This demonstrates how some Spaniards, especially of older generations, may have xenophobic views of Latin American immigrants, even though they share ethnic and cultural bonds.

Nevertheless, for the most part, Latin American immigrants develop a much deeper sense of belonging than non-Latino immigrants. In his article, “Postcolonial Bonds? Latin American Origins, Discrimination, and Sense of Belonging to Spain,” Josep Lobera compared Latin American immigrants to other immigrant groups, such as EU internal migrants, the sub-Saharan diaspora, and the North African population in Spain. He found that residential satisfaction strongly impacts their sense of belonging.²⁰ In the

12. William Chislett, “Spanish Economy after EU Membership: Transformed but Vulnerable,” *The Corner*, November 16, 2018, <https://thecorner.eu/news-spain/spain-economy/spanish-economy-after-40-years-democracy-economy-transformed-but-vulnerable/>

13. *Ibid.*

14. Blanton Museum of Art, “Period of the Military Dictatorships (1960s-1980s),” *The Cold War in Latin America: Art and Politics*, accessed October 23, 2024, <https://blantonmuseum.org/the-cold-war-in-latin-america-art-and-politics/period-of-the-military-dictatorships-1960s-1980s>

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. Raquel Vega-Durán, “The Third Vertex of the Latinx Triangle: Latin America and the Repopulation of Rural Spain,” *Cultural Dynamics* 36, no. 1–2 (2024): 203–18. <https://doi-org.jpilnet.sfsu.edu/10.1177/09213740231223818>

19. *Ibid.*, 210.

20. Josep Lobera, “Postcolonial Bonds? Latin American Origins, Discrimination, and Sense of Belonging to Spain,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 65, no. 9 (2021): 1222–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764221996757>

article, Lobera interviewed 2,648 immigrants, of which 34% were of Latin American descent. Of those, 57% of respondents felt as if they belonged to Spain, but only 35.2%²¹ expressed residential satisfaction. Lobera's findings were based on the 4th Survey on Intercultural Coexistence on the Local Level in Spain 2017 conducted by IMEDES-UAM.²² Furthermore, Lobera's methods include interviews of immigrants from various backgrounds. The interviews took place in 26 locations in Spain with high levels of diversity. Finally, 70% of interviews occurred in households, whereas 30% were street interviews.²³ Lobera's research demonstrates that immigrants' residential satisfaction was lower than their Spanish identity. According to Lobera, Latin American immigrants generally had higher levels of residential satisfaction, experienced less discrimination, and had more significant ties to the local community.

The findings of Lobera's research demonstrate a positive outlook for Latin American immigrants in Spain. However, this does not mean that these immigrants in Spain have an easy time achieving their goals and aspirations. This is due to the present problem of racism and xenophobia in Spain. For example, in the article "Stereotypes, language, and Race: Spaniards' Perception of Latin American Immigrants," authors Whitney Chappell and Sonia Barnes state, "When European and Southern Cone immigrants acculturate, they report little racial discrimination, which suggests that whiteness facilitates cultural integration in Spain."²⁴ Argentinians, Uruguayans, and Chileans are accustomed to Spanish society more quickly due to their European descent. Immigrants who do not fit the physical traits and cultural ideals within Spanish society tend to experience more challenges throughout their immigration journey. For example, in an article in the *Washington Post*, Ramón González Ferriz demonstrates how racism and xenophobia shape immigrants' experiences in Spain. Ferriz explains that immigrants of darker complexion are more likely to be tracked and stopped by the Spanish police.²⁵ Latin Americans are more likely to be stopped by the police during traffic controls and have higher levels of incarceration than native Spaniards.²⁶ For example, Colombians and Dominicans are 34% and 36%, respectively, more likely to be incarcerated in Spain.²⁷

Moreover, the media often highlights Latino immigrant gangs, referred to as "Bandas Latinas," in news coverage. This creates fear in middle-class neighborhoods and promotes the rejection of dark-skinned Latin Americans in Spain.²⁸ Despite these findings, many Spaniards have tried integrating the Latin American community into Spanish society.²⁹ In 2020, a grassroots movement was initiated to help legalize half a million undocumented immigrants. This #RegularizaciónYa initiative has received over 600,000 signatures and gained support from the current government of Pedro Sánchez while

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Whitney Chappell and Sonia Barnes, "Stereotypes, Language, and Race: Spaniards' Perception of Latin American Immigrants," *Journal of Linguistic Geography* 2, no. 1 (2023): 106, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jlg.2023.5>

25. Ramón González Ferriz, "Opinión: Tras 20 Años de Inmigración, España Sigue Sin Saber Debatir Sobre Su Racismo," *The Washington Post*, June 10, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/es/post-opinion/2021/06/10/espana-racismo-migracion-campana-correos-derecha/>

26. bid.

27. Luis Cano, "Los Extranjeros En Prisión Crecen Un 16% Desde 2020 Frente al 3% De Españoles," *Diario ABC*, September 10, 2024, <https://www.abc.es/espana/extranjeros-prision-crecen-2020-frente-espanoles-20240909185815-nt.html>

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

supporting the legalization of undocumented immigrants.³⁰ However, in 2024, this campaign is currently being attacked by the right-wing party. Despite the party's relative significance in Spain and its anti-immigrant message, it has not yet gained traction among a more significant segment of the public.³¹ Therefore, many undocumented immigrants, especially those from Latin America, will benefit from this initiative.

In addition, having greater economic upward mobility compared to other immigrants has allowed some Latin American immigrants to make deeper connections within their communities. A study by Maria Hierro indicates that Latin American immigrants are more likely to be accepted into the Spanish workforce due to their shared language and cultural similarities. Approximately 80% of Latin Americans are employed in Spain. However, their unemployment rate is higher than that of native Spaniards, which is 20%,³² whereas the Spaniards experience 12.29% unemployment.³³ This reality makes the transition into naturalization smoother because jobs and higher upward mobility facilitate connections with native Spaniards, generating more workforce and community opportunities.

In chapter 8 of the book *Introduction to International Migration*, authors Terri Givens, Ayca Arkilic, and Elizabeth S. Davis discuss the different modes of immigrant integration into host societies and their impact. Various models include assimilation, multiculturalism, segmented assimilation, and structural assimilation.³⁴ The authors define integration as “the process of mutual adaptation between the host society and the migrants themselves, both as individuals and as groups.”³⁵ This definition of integration provides a bigger picture of what is needed to integrate migrants into a host country: the adaptation of immigrants and native citizens. For example, immigrants can learn the language of their host country, assimilate into their culture, and build ties with the native community. Spaniards assimilate to Latin American immigrants by enacting social policies that privilege these immigrants in this count, as it is with Article 22. Moreover, integration is complex in Spain because of the country's decentralized immigration system. Spanish provinces have significant power in integrating newcomers.³⁶ In Spain, integration processes have been multicultural, allowing immigrants to maintain their cultural identity in their host country. Latin Americans in Spain have benefited because they can apply their cultural skills, such as their religious traditions and language. This makes it easier to adapt to Spanish society. The multicultural approach is a two-way system that encourages the host society and newcomers to adapt to each other's cultures. This is different from the modes of integration in other countries. For example, the United States (U.S.) has an integration process that encourages newcomers to leave

30. Fernando Heller, “Spain Takes First Step to Regularise Half a Million Migrants,” Euractiv, April 10, 2024, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/spain-takes-first-step-to-regularise-half-a-million-migrants/>

31. Ibid.

32. Carlos Martín Urriza, “The Impact of Immigration on the Spanish Labour Market (ARI),” Elcano Royal Institute, posted May 9, 2008, <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/the-impact-of-immigration-on-the-spanish-labour-market-ari/>

33. World Bank Group, “Unemployment, Total (% of Total Labor Force) (National Estimate) - Spain,” accessed November 16, 2024, accessed November 15, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.NE.ZS?locations=ES>

34. Jeannette Money and Sarah P. Lockhart, eds., *Introduction to International Migration: Population Movements in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2021), 178.

35. Ibid.

36. Mazza, Jenna. “Spain's Decentralized Immigration System Allows Local Integration Policies to Lead the Way,” Migration Policy Institute, October 18, 2022, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/spain-immigration-integration-multilevel>

their home culture behind and become as American as possible.³⁷ This integration mode can be problematic because only certain groups reach the preferred level of assimilation. Groups that do not reach the level of assimilation necessary are forced to live in the shadows of the host society.

BENEFITS OF LAW 36/2002

Latin American migration to Spain is a recent phenomenon because Spaniards used to immigrate to Latin America for political and economic reasons. In the twenty-first century, this trend reversed, as Latin Americans were leaving their homelands to seek a better future in Spain. Most immigrants are economic migrants, but some are political refugees, mainly from Venezuela. The central sending countries for economic migrants are Ecuador, Colombia, Argentina, Peru, and Bolivia.³⁸ Before Law 36/2002, most Latin American immigrants who immigrated to Spain were professionals.³⁹

Once Law 36/2002 was enacted, the number of economic migrants coming from the Latin American region began to increase. This increase was due to Article 22, which allowed immigrants from Spain's former colonies to naturalize after two years of living in Spain. Most immigrants were low-skilled workers searching for better opportunities outside their homeland. However, one must find permanent employment in Spain to qualify for the law. Therefore, immigrants who cannot find a job, lack professional skills or have no familial relation to Spain do not qualify for the program. Because the immigration process for Latin Americans is more comprehensive than for immigrants from other regions, the Latin American community has thrived and acquired the same rights as native Spaniards in just two years. Article 22 has offered a path to a better life for many trying to escape poverty or violence in Latin America. Furthermore, given that Spain is part of the European Union (EU), those successful at attaining nationality through Law 36/2002 have the right to live and work legally in 26 additional countries.⁴⁰ Immigration to Spain may be a good choice for Latin Americans due to its welcoming policies, but the realities of living in Spain pose many new challenges.

THE REALITIES OF LIVING IN SPAIN FOR LATIN AMERICANS

Once Latin American immigrants reach Spain, their lives change significantly. Spain may not provide the same social environment as their home countries, which is one of the contributing factors to that shift. One of the main obstacles Latin Americans face in Spain is discrimination and xenophobia. Although the rise of xenophobia has not been taken to the levels of other European countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Hungary,⁴¹ in recent years, the rise of racist and xenophobic attacks has been reported in Spain.⁴² The effects of these attacks have been felt throughout the Latin American community in this country. For example, in 2017, 347 cases of discrimination towards

37. Ibid.

38. Ruta Yemane, and Mariña Fernández-Reino, "Latinos in the United States and in Spain: The Impact of Ethnic Group Stereotypes on Labour Market Outcomes," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47, no. 6 (2019): 1–21, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2019.1622806>

39. Santiago Pérez-Nievas, Guillermo Cordero, and Marie L. Mallet-García, "A Tale of Two Countries: The Sociopolitical Integration of Latino Immigrants in Spain and in the United States," *American Behavioral Scientist* 65, no. 9 (2021): 1131–1145, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764221996750>

40. Agencia Estatal Boletín Oficial del Estado, "Ley 36/2002."

41. Ibid.

42. Alyssa Mcmurtry, "Hate Crimes in Spain Continued to Increase in 2022: Report," Anadolu Agency, May 7, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/hate-crimes-in-spain-continued-to-increase-in-2022-report/2937883>

Latinos were reported in Spain, which poses an increase of 66% from 524 in 2021.⁴³ Additionally, of all reported cases, 185 were related to institutional racism, while some were related to accessing public and private services.⁴⁴ These attacks hurt the mental and physical well-being of the victims.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Latin American immigrants may lack the familial connections that native Spaniards do. This makes it more difficult for these immigrants to build networks, leading them to depend on other immigrants from their home country, which negatively impacts what kind of employment Latin Americans have access to in their new host country. Since many Latin American immigrants fill low-skilled jobs, they earn 37% less than their native counterparts.⁴⁶

Poverty is another phenomenon that affects the Latin American community in Spain, with 53%⁴⁷ of Latino immigrants being women who work in low-skilled jobs that do not provide financial security. As a result, children of immigrants are often forced to attend lower-quality schools.⁴⁸ Being disadvantaged, they are more likely to commit crimes than their native counterparts.⁴⁹ This is not to say that Latin American immigrants are more violent than others, but unfavorable conditions lead to higher crime rates among these communities. Often, Latin American youth in Spain join street gangs to form a community, but this comes at a cost. Once these children are adults, they face many obstacles when entering the workforce. They experience discrimination due to their nationality but also because they fit the stereotype of a criminal. Another obstacle Latin American immigrants faced was the global financial meltdown of 2007–2008, which caused a significant economic crisis in Spain. This period and its aftermath significantly affected Latin Americans' living and economic standards in Spain. Most Latin American immigrants live in large metropolitan areas like Madrid and Barcelona.⁵⁰ Moreover, many lost their jobs because they were primarily concentrated in the service and construction sectors,⁵¹ which were highly impacted by the recession. The national unemployment rate reached 27% in 2008, but it reached 40% for foreign-born individuals.⁵² This led to a 12% internal migration rate in Spain, which was around 30% for the foreign-born.⁵³ However, this was a temporary phenomenon because, in 2009, these levels began to fall.

43. European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, "Discrimination Against Latinos Grows in Spain," last modified October 26, 2023, <https://www.eidhr.eu/discrimination-against-latinos-grows-in-spain/>

44. Ibid.

45. María José Da Silva Rebelo, Mercedes Fernández, and Carmen Meneses-Falcón, "Chewing Revenge or Becoming Socially Desirable? Anger Rumination in Refugees and Immigrants Experiencing Racial Hostility: Latin-Americans in Spain," *Behavioral Sciences* 12, no. 6 (2022): 180, <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs12060180>

46. González Enríquez, Carmen, "Immigration, Employment, Productivity and Inequality in Spain," *Elcano Royal Institute*, February 27, 2024, <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/immigration-employment-productivity-and-inequality-in-spain/>

47. Liliana González-Juárez, Ana Lucía Noreña-Peña, and Luis Cibanal-Juan, "Immigration Experience of Latin American Working Women in Alicante, Spain: An Ethnographic Study," *Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem* 22, no. 5 (October 2014): 857–65, <https://doi.org/10.1590/0104-1169.3559.2490>

48. The Borgen Project, "Latin American Poverty in Spain: Causes & Information - Global Poverty," last updated October 4, 2020, <https://borgenproject.org/latin-american-poverty-in-spain/>

49. Ibid.

50. Jordi Bayona-i-Carrasco, Jenniffer Thiers Quintana, and Rosalia Avila-Tàpies, "Economic Recession and the Reverse of Internal Migration Flows of Latin American Immigrants in Spain," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43, no. 15 (2017): 2499–2518, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2017.1296354>

51. Yemane and Fernández-Reino, "Latinos in the United States and in Spain."

52. Bayona-i-Carrasco, Thiers Quintana, and Avila-Tàpies, "Economic Recession."

53. Ibid.

Latin Americans can regularize their legal status in Spain more quickly than other immigrant groups, but they still face significant challenges once in that country. As stated earlier, Latin Americans in Spain make significantly less than their native counterparts, primarily because many Latin American immigrants do not possess the skills necessary to secure higher-salary jobs. It also bears repeating that the 2008-2009 global financial crisis remains a critical point of reference for understanding the challenges faced by Latin Americans, as it was one of the most challenging times for Latin Americans. This crisis disproportionately affected Latin Americans in Spain, where they often work in the domestic, service, and construction industries, which were significantly affected by the economic meltdown.⁵⁴ This crisis resulted in Latin American immigrants having to relocate within Spain, immigrate to other EU countries with better economic conditions, or return to their home country. The realities of Latin American immigrants in Spain are diverse and have different effects on the immigrants depending on their nationality or professional skills. Overall, Latin Americans in Spain have a more positive experience than those in other countries in the EU or North America. This is because of the shared similarities and relatively welcoming policies the Spanish government has enacted.

OUTCOMES OF MIGRATION TO SPAIN

Latin American immigrants can experience primarily positive outcomes when immigrating to Spain. This is because they are entering a country similar to their homeland, and some Latin American immigrants have familial connections to this country, which improves their experience. Furthermore, Spain's well-established welfare system allows newcomers to quickly adjust to their new country. Given that most Latin American immigrants speak Spanish, they have better access to services, such as economic aid and educational benefits that help them assimilate into Spanish society. Unfortunately, the social environment in Spain can be challenging, primarily when someone is classified as "other." This "otherness" is often experienced by immigrants who have been racialized. Moreover, Spain is a diverse country with various regional languages, which can be a challenge for certain Latin American immigrants.

Latin Americans have a more effortless time in Spain, but they still face several obstacles when they arrive there. For example, highly skilled Latin American immigrants have difficulties obtaining jobs matching their skills because of the highly educated native population in Spain.⁵⁵ Therefore, they are often forced to get low-paying jobs to regularize their status. Some return to school to gain skills that will make them stand out, but the Spanish workforce is highly competitive. In the global context, this country is considered a wealthy country, but in comparison to other EU and North American countries, Spain has less favorable economic conditions, as its GDP per capita is \$35,790,⁵⁶ which is lower than the EU average of \$43,350.⁵⁷ Therefore, immigrants often reach Spain as their first destination to regularize their status within the EU and then transit to other countries with better economic conditions.

54. Noelia Araújo-Vila, Jose Antonio Fraiz-Brea, and Arthur Filipe de Araújo, "Spanish Economic-Financial Crisis: Social and Academic Interest," *Journal of Business Cycle Research* 16, no. 2 (2020): 135-49, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41549-020-00045-z>

55. Cristóbal Mendoza, "Illuminating the Shadows of Skilled Migration: Highly Qualified Immigrants from Latin America in Spain," *International Migration* 60, no. 5 (2022): 60-73, <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12936>

56. International Monetary Fund, "GDP Per Capita, Current Prices," accessed November 8, 2024, <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPDPC@WEO/EU/ESP>

57. Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Latin American immigrants in Spain are favored over other immigrant groups because they significantly benefit from Law 36/2002. This law offers an express option to obtain legal status in that country. Furthermore, Spain is more welcoming to Latin Americans than other European and North American countries. However, when these immigrants arrive in Spain, they may face obstacles not experienced by the native population. Some of these obstacles are higher levels of unemployment, having a difficult time accessing public service, experiencing discrimination, high incarceration rates, and higher levels of poverty. The economic outcomes of Latin American immigrants are less favorable than those of Spaniards. This can affect where people work, their children attend school, and their future perspectives.

This paper has analyzed the benefits of Law 36/200 for Latin American immigrants, highlighting the realities this population faces in Spain and demonstrating the outcomes of their journeys. Latin American immigrants have an easier time accommodating to Spanish society than other immigrant groups due to their cultural, linguistic, and historical proximity. Unfortunately, negative experiences continue to shape many immigrants' lived experiences in Spain due to xenophobia and racism.

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Home Not–So–Sweet Home: Challenges of Returnee Migrants in El Salvador

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ABSTRACT

Migration between the United States and Central American countries has long been a persistent phenomenon, driven by deep-rooted cultural and commercial ties. In response to a massive wave of migration, Central American countries have had to adopt new processes and strategies to address this challenge while safeguarding the human rights of those in need. This paper investigates how effectively El Salvador's Human Mobility Policy supports the reintegration of returning migrants, addressing the question: How successful is this policy in providing the employment, social services, and community support needed for effective reintegration? With a particular focus on reintegration challenges, this study highlights the complex social and economic adjustments faced by returning migrants. Although some progress has been made, critical gaps remain, including insufficient economic reintegration, inadequate psychological support, and heavy reliance on international aid. By analyzing these issues, this paper assesses these shortcomings and offers recommendations for policy improvement, emphasizing the need for a more holistic approach that includes mental health services and expanded vocational training opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

Migration between the United States and Central American countries has been a persistent phenomenon, driven by cultural and commercial ties. Decades of violence and unemployment in Central America have fueled migration to the U.S. In 2019, a migration crisis emerged, largely due to governments' inability to address these issues. This led to a surge in attempted border crossings by Central American migrants,¹ as many sought safety and better opportunities amid growing social and political insecurity. This compelled the government to implement new processes to manage human mobility, aiming to dissuade repeated attempts at migration. This study investigates how El Salvador's government has adapted migration policies and practices to aid the reintegration of returned migrants navigating identity shifts, socioeconomic reintegration, and cultural adaptation upon returning to El Salvador.

This research argues that while some policies and practices show efforts towards aiding reintegration, shortcomings persist, hindering the successful reintegration of

1. Jeffrey M. Jones, "Immigration Surges to Top of Most Important Problem List," Gallup, February 27, 2024, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/611135/immigration-surges-top-important-problem-list.aspx>

returned migrants. There exists a critical gap in the effectiveness of returned migrants' reintegration throughout the Salvadorean Human Mobility Policy. This paper analyzes the experiences of returned migrants, their access to employment, social services, and community support networks, evaluating the impact of this policy on their reintegration process. By examining the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of the current policy, this paper provides a set of recommendations to enhance the policy's efficacy and better support returned migrants in their reintegration process based on the experiences of returned migrants, their access to employment, social services, and community support.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Decades of high violence and unemployment in Central America have significantly provoked migration to the United States driven by cultural and commercial ties.² When Donald Trump became President of the United States in 2017, the government of El Salvador prepared its state institutions and policies for the impact that mass deportations would have on the country.³ By the end of 2018, social and political insecurity escalated into a surge in migration levels, with many departing the Isthmus in search of a better future. The migration crisis compelled the government of El Salvador to implement new processes for human mobility management, with an aim to dissuade repeated attempts at migration.

Migration policies are critical in shaping a country's social, economic, and political landscape, ensuring a safe, prosperous, and inclusive society. These policies provide the regulatory framework for the movement of migrants from their home countries to their destinations. By fostering diversity and inclusion, these policies facilitate international collaboration to address migration challenges and promote human rights. Integration policies are essential to achieve inclusive and sustainable economic growth in host states and contribute to the well-being of their incoming and long-term migrants.⁴ Furthermore, migration policies are crucial in supporting individuals' navigation of identity shifts, socioeconomic reintegration, and cultural adaptation upon returning to their origin country. These policies enable returning migrants to reinsert themselves into the life they once knew, contributing to society's overall stability and cohesion.

Many governments, especially from the Global South, have instituted policies or programs to encourage the return of their citizens. Globally, 72% of governments have implemented a variation of these policies. The share of governments seeking to encourage the return of their citizens is the highest in Latin America and the Caribbean (88%), followed by Africa (78%).⁵

A large body of research studies and academic literature has shown migration tends to be temporary rather than permanent, and those who return often have high rates of success with their recently acquired skills. This creates a new population of emerging

2. Nicole Ward and Jeanne Batalova, "Central American Immigrants in the United States," Migration Policy Institute, May 10, 2023, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states-2021>

3. CISPES - Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, "El Salvador Crea Registro Para Personas Deportadas Con Récord Criminal," 2017, accessed March 13, 2024, <https://cispes.org/article/el-salvador-crea-deportee-criminal-registry?language=es>

4. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *International Migration Policies: Data Booklet (ST/ESA/SER.A/395)*, 2017.

5. Ibid.

entrepreneurs and a new perspective in common trade skills.⁶ Thus, the underlying behavioral mechanisms of return migration are an important topic to explore further empirically, as different migration theories offer radically opposed interpretations of return migration.⁷ While neoclassical migration theory associates migration with the failure to integrate at the destination, the new economics of labor migration sees return migration as the logical stage after migrants have earned sufficient assets and knowledge and to invest in their origin countries.⁸

However, the possession of skills by returnees is not always recognized as beneficial to their home country. Returnees also must compete in employment markets that are saturated with low prospects and in a competitive arena where it would be more beneficial if they held entrepreneurial skills to establish a business in the private sector.⁹ Thus, the likelihood that return migration would spur immediate “brain gain” from returnees’ cumulative efforts should be subjected to more rigorous empirical analysis. Hence, it follows that migration policies must take into account the multidimensional skills and knowledge of returnees, as well as the conditions under which these can be integrated into the labor market.

Additionally, the focus of international organizations on the connection between migration and development has underscored the necessity of reassessing approaches to return migration. In El Salvador, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has worked to promote social cohesion, reduce violence, and encourage inclusive socioeconomic development in both origin and return communities. Likewise, it has facilitated the sustainable reintegration of migrants and affected populations, and has enhanced the respect, protection, and fulfillment of their rights, in addition to aiding those who are vulnerable to violence, exploitation, and abuse.¹⁰

Despite the preponderance of return in migration policies, little is known about returnees’ experiences and how they manage to build up their lives after return,¹¹ also questioning the evidence basis of governmental discourses on return programs.¹² Similarly, it is essential to explore the challenges, experiences, and narratives of returning migrants, which allows us to assess the effectiveness of the policies implemented by a state’s government.

Drawing upon insights from Richard Black et al., who identify sustainability, voluntariness, and assistance as key factors influencing the effectiveness of migration policy,¹³ we assert that the success of the migration policy hinges on three main factors: the sustainability of returnee programs, the voluntary nature of return, and the

6. J. William Ambrosini, Karin Mayr, Giovanni Peri, and Dragos Radu, *The Selection of Migrants and Returnees: Evidence from Romania and Implications*, NBER Working Paper No. 16912 (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.3386/w16912>

7. Hein De Haas, Tineke Fokkema, and Mohamed Fassi Fihri, “Return Migration as Failure or Success?” *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 16, no. 2 (2015): 415–429, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-014-0344-6>

8. *Ibid.*, 420.

9. Mojubaolu Olufunke Okome, “Thinking about Return Migration: Theories, Praxes, General Tendencies & African Particularities” *Africa Migration* 7 (June 2014): 1, https://africamigration.com/issue/june2014/okome_editorial.pdf

10. International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Informe de Resultados 2021: OIM El Salvador (2021)*, https://nortedecentroamerica.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1276/files/documents/informe-de-resultados-2021-oim-el-salvador_0.pdf

11. Ine Lietaert, Ilse Derluyn, and Eric Broekaert, “Returnees’ Perspectives on Their Re-Migration Processes,” *International Migration* 52, no. 5 (2014): 144–158, <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12052>

12. *Ibid.*, 146.

13. Richard Black, Khalid Koser, Karen Munk, Gaby Atfield, Lisa D’Onofrio, and Richmond Tiemoko, “Understanding Voluntary Return,” *Home Office Online Report* 50, no. 04 (2004).

support within the returnee community. In this sense, this study examines three crucial dimensions—employment, social services, and community support—that are imperative for assessing the efficacy of the Salvadoran migration policy.

When considering the two variables identified by Black et al. crucial to the sustainability of return: the voluntariness of return and the provision of reintegration assistance,¹⁴ it's important to clarify that “voluntary” return refers to a deliberate choice made by migrants, distinct from “involuntary” or “forced” return scenarios, as defined by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).¹⁵ Additionally, another factor that affects return sustainability, according to Black et al., is the availability of support programs for returnees,¹⁶ which encompass support across psychological, social, and cultural dimensions.¹⁷ It is noteworthy that governmental discourses often interpret “sustainable return” as the absence of re-emigration, indicating an emphasis on the successful removal of unwanted migrants.¹⁸

Thus, this research analyzes the effectiveness of the Salvadorean Human Mobility Policy by examining the policy's strengths, weaknesses, and challenges, illuminating the multifaceted needs of returned migrants, and pinpointing areas for policy improvement. This paper contributes significantly to scholarly literature by critically analyzing the Salvadorean Human Mobility Policy, and its effects on returned migrants. Additionally, the study expands existing literature by focusing on three key dimensions—employment, social services, and community support—and their role in assessing migration policy efficacy. Drawing from insights by Black et al., this study identifies sustainability, voluntariness, and assistance as critical factors influencing policy effectiveness.¹⁹ By integrating these dimensions and factors into the analysis, the paper provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating policy success in facilitating returned migrant reintegration.

To develop the subsequent sections of this investigation:

Firstly, a comprehensive examination of the background information surrounding the policy will be provided. This will elucidate the historical context, objectives, and key stakeholders involved in the formulation and implementation of the policy. Secondly, the evaluation of the policy will be conducted, considering the factors and dimensions selected: employment, social services, and community support/sustainability, voluntariness, and assistance.

Following the evaluation, policy recommendations will be presented based on the findings of the investigation. These recommendations will aim to address any shortcomings identified in the policy and propose strategies for enhancing its efficacy in achieving its intended objectives. Finally, the investigation will conclude by synthesizing the key insights gleaned from the analysis of the policy. This will include a summary of the main findings, implications for policy and practice, and potential avenues for future research in this area.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE HUMAN MOBILITY POLICY

In 2019, the government launched a new strategic plan known as Plan Cuscatlán, outlining strategic actions across eight specific areas: social welfare, migration and labor,

14. Black et al., “Understanding Voluntary Return.”

15. Lietaert, Derluyn, and Broekaert, “Returnees’ Perspectives,” 146.

16. Black et al., “Understanding Voluntary Return,” 50, no. 04.

17. Lietaert, Derluyn, and Broekaert, “Returnees’ Perspectives,” 146.

18. *Ibid.*, 146.

19. Black et al., “Understanding Voluntary Return.”

security, industry, production and technology, social benefits of the economy, promotion and public works, and territorial development.²⁰ The Human Mobility Policy is closely linked to Axis 3 of the Cuscatlán Plan, focusing on diaspora and human mobility. This axis aims to enhance support for the migrant population by coordinating measures to foster political, economic, cultural, and social inclusion.

According to data from the Cuscatlán Plan, 13,088 Salvadorean deportees arrived in the country in 2017. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs then allocated a budget of only USD 488,795 for their assistance, amounting to approximately USD 37 per person.²¹ This allocation was insufficient to meet their basic needs. In response to such challenges, the Human Mobility Policy includes a component dedicated to reintegrating returned individuals. By addressing the needs of returnees and promoting their successful reintegration, the policy aims to prevent irregular migration.

In November 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs collaborated with the IOM to create El Salvador's Institutional Policy on Human Mobility.²² This policy addresses the complex challenges faced by migration from a systemic and humanitarian perspective. It is grounded in a broad vision of migration governance, emphasizing public administration and support networks to formulate strategies that respond to the needs and demands of the migrant population.²³ Additionally, the policy seeks to promote safe, orderly, and regular migration, recognizing the importance of reinforcing the political, economic, cultural, and social inclusion of migrants.

However, the policy document forming the basis of this analysis, the Salvadorean Human Mobility Policy, has not been publicly released or made accessible through traditional means of publication. Despite diligent efforts to procure the official document, it remains unavailable to external parties. However, the official websites of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the IOM provide pertinent information regarding the policy's objectives, scope, and implementation strategies. While direct access to the policy text would have enriched the analysis, reliance on official statements, press releases, and documentation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other institutions responsible for migration provides a credible foundation for this study.

The initiative establishes a comprehensive framework for attention and protection that encompasses the Salvadorean diaspora, individuals in vulnerable situations in transit abroad, asylum seekers, refugees, stateless persons in the country, and returnees. Furthermore, it focuses on preventing irregular migration through a human rights approach, grounded in fundamental principles, the Human Mobility Policy focuses on people, promoting international cooperation, sustainable development, respect for the rule of law and procedural guarantees, defending human rights, and promoting the well-being of infants, children, and adolescents.²⁴ The approaches guiding this policy

20. Plan Cuscatlán, Política Exterior, Un Nuevo Gobierno para El Salvador (2019), <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1XycLXKC63iTsZMIsd9ryJRE0jl2k1k0p>

21. Ibid.

22. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador, "Ministry of Foreign Affairs Enables Technical Training for Returned Migrants in Usulután, Alongside Gerardo Barrios University and Swisscontact," November 27, 2023, <https://rree.gob.sv/cancilleria-posibilita-formacion-tecnica-a-personas-migrantes-retornadas-en-usulután-junto-con-la-universidad-gerardo-barrios-y-swisscontact/>

23. International Organization for Migration (IOM), "La OIM Apoya la Creación de la Política Institucional de Movilidad Humana en El Salvador," International Organization for Migration, March 9, 2024, <https://nortedecentroamerica.iom.int/es/news/la-oim-apoya-la-creacion-de-la-politica-institucional-de-movilidad-humana-en-el-salvador>

24. IOM, "La OIM Apoya la Creación."

are rooted in recognizing human rights, sustainable development, social participation, human security, intergovernmental coordination, and social inclusion.

Additionally, the policy in the matter was built through consultation with different actors, including the United Nations Network on Migration, ensuring diverse perspectives and being as comprehensive as possible in the search for solutions to migration issues. Strategic partners such as the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration of the United States Department of State, the Regional Migration Program, and other relevant stakeholders were involved in the development process.²⁵

This instrument establishes specific strategic lines to guide resources towards critical priorities, including the integration of the Salvadoran diaspora into development processes, strengthening knowledge and information on human mobility, positioning the country internationally and regionally on this issue, comprehensive care for people in mobility, and modern and efficient consular diplomacy.²⁶ With a validity of 5 years from its approval, the Institutional Policy on Human Mobility represents a solid commitment by the government of El Salvador and the IOM to address migration challenges comprehensively and humanely, guaranteeing the protection and well-being of all individuals involved in migration processes.

POLICY EVALUATION

For over 40 years, the Salvadorean government has not prioritized the consequences of returned individuals in their reinsertion process. In some cases, returned migrants struggled to adapt to the life that they once knew and ended up turning to crime. However, the state of exception bolsters and reinforces this migration policy. As the government continues to combat criminal groups, returning migrants are increasingly motivated to engage with governmental processes. In this context, it is imperative to consider the legal framework that enables the Human Mobility Policy to achieve its goals effectively.

In order to integrate the diaspora, efforts have been made to create initiatives that promote opportunities for investment and business partnerships with local companies.²⁷ Moreover, through the “Transforming Lives” Program, an initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, supported by the Swiss Foundation for Technical Cooperation and Gerardo Barrios University, initiatives for development are being promoted in all departments of the country, aiming to bring opportunities closer to the returned population.²⁸ As a first active result, 25 people defended their business models and received seed capital to finance and implement their entrepreneurial initiatives in food and construction.²⁹

Given the substantial influx of migrants into El Salvador each year, equipping them with the tools and knowledge necessary for successful economic reintegration is imperative. In January 2024 alone, 1,137 individuals were deported, with 72.1% citing ‘economic reasons’ for their migration.³⁰ In addition to economic factors and insecurity, other elements, such as the desire for family reunification and environmental conditions, also contribute to people leaving El Salvador.

25. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador, “Ministry of Foreign Affairs Enables Technical Training.”

26. IOM, “La OIM Apoya la Creación.”

27. International Organization for Migration (IOM), IOM’s Strategy for El Salvador (2023), https://nortedecentroamerica.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11276/files/inline-files/strategy_2023-2_1.pdf

28. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador, “Ministry of Foreign Affairs Enables Technical Training.”

29. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador, “Ministry of Foreign Affairs Enables Technical Training.”

30. International Organization for Migration (IOM), Informe sobre las tendencias de migración en El Salvador, enero 2024, 2024, https://infounitca.iom.int/uploads/ENG/es/2024/1/SV_January2024_ENG.pdf

Central to the effectiveness of the Salvadorean Human Mobility Policy is its emphasis on reintegration into the labor force through comprehensive programs. These initiatives represent the cornerstone of the policy, providing returning migrants with essential support and opportunities to become active economic contributors in their home country.

However, the unavailability of the policy document for analysis, even three months after its enactment, raises questions about institutional readiness and efficacy in implementation. Without accessible documentation, migration institutions tasked with enforcing the policy may face challenges in carrying out their responsibilities effectively. Additionally, there is a need for clear parameters and objectives to improve the ability of international actors to assess the policy's progress and impact. This lack of transparency undermines accountability and inhibits the evaluation of the policy's effectiveness in addressing migration challenges comprehensively. As such, the inaccessible nature of the policy document may signify an institutional crisis in governance and implementation within the migration sector. Thus, it is essential to note that the policy's failures will be analyzed after several months of publication and clear implementation. This time-frame presents a constraint for this research but also highlights an important topic for future investigation.

Furthermore, the policy does not fully consider the active involvement of non-governmental alliances and civilian groups dedicated to creating more opportunities for returned migrants. The fact that employment opportunities rely solely on international aid underscores the urgency for sustainable economic development initiatives. It will take more than the government's cooperation with international actors to address the multifaceted challenges of migration and reintegration. It is equally crucial for the government to collaborate closely with non-governmental associations that are more closely connected to communities and understand their needs on a grassroots level. These organizations often possess valuable insights and resources that can complement governmental efforts and enhance the effectiveness of policies.

For instance, Alsare, a non-governmental organization established in 2015 and legally recognized in 2018, focuses on the comprehensive reintegration of returned individuals into their home territories.³¹ Unlike the policy under discussion, Alsare has developed a mental health program informed by the experiences of its members, all of whom are returnees.

Indeed, the absence of a focus on the psychological realm within the policy underscores a deficiency in its human rights approach setting aside the importance of social services that returnees should receive besides economic financial aid. Neglecting the mental health and well-being of returned migrants represents a significant oversight that undermines the policy's comprehensive nature. Addressing this gap is essential to uphold the fundamental rights and dignity of migrants, and integrating mental health support into migration policies is imperative for promoting holistic reintegration efforts.

By fostering partnerships with such associations, the government can ensure that its policies are more inclusive, responsive, and tailored to the needs of the migrant population. Moreover, this collaborative approach can promote social cohesion, empower local communities, and contribute to the country's sustainable development. In this sense, community support becomes the main pillar to prevent remigration.

31. Forbes Staff, "Organización ALSARE de El Salvador Logra Que Migrantes Retornen," *Forbes Centroamérica*, April 16, 2021, <https://forbescentroamerica.com/2021/04/16/organizacion-alsare-de-el-salvador-logra-que-migrantes-retornen>

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to prioritizing sectors like investment, business, and tourism for economic development, it is advisable to diversify opportunities to include sectors suitable for individuals with lower skill levels, such as mechanics, manufacturing, and garment production. The nature of the skills of most migrants requires more vocational training programs to equip them with the necessary skills for employment in these sectors.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador should focus on closely led collaboration with municipal offices to generate employment opportunities. Given the challenges of starting a business, especially in economies like El Salvador who are facing the rising prices of international debt, the resources needed to succeed in entrepreneurship is vital. In 2018, according to a survey by the Inter-American Development Bank, returnees expressed difficulties in accessing bank loans to start their business ideas or expand their ventures.³² By expanding economic opportunities across various sectors and enhancing support for entrepreneurship, the government can effectively address employment challenges and contribute to sustainable economic growth and development in El Salvador.

Additionally, the policy must incorporate psychological programs to address traumatic episodes experienced by migrants. Trauma-informed care and counseling services should provide support for the mental health and well-being of returned migrants, acknowledging the psychological impact of migration and ensuring holistic support for their reintegration process. Thus, prioritizing mental health would reinforce community support and create a sense of “belonging,” which most migrants lose from the moment they flee their country.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided a comprehensive analysis of the Salvadorean Human Mobility Policy and its implications for addressing the challenges of migration and reintegration in El Salvador. Despite the unavailability of the official policy document, insights from official sources and relevant data have facilitated a nuanced understanding of the policy’s objectives, scope, and implementation strategies.

The analysis revealed both strengths and weaknesses of the policy, highlighting its emphasis on promoting safe and regular migration, protecting the rights of migrants, and facilitating their reintegration into Salvadorean society. However, challenges remain, including the need for local and non-governmental institutions that guarantee sustainability of long-term employment, social services that provide mental and psychological health promoting support within the returnees’ community.

Moving forward, it is imperative for the government of El Salvador, in collaboration with international partners and relevant stakeholders, to address these challenges and capitalize on the opportunities presented by the Human Mobility Policy. By prioritizing economic reintegration, expanding support for entrepreneurship, and fostering collaboration between governmental and municipal offices, El Salvador can effectively address the needs of returned migrants and promote sustainable development.

The Salvadorean Human Mobility Policy represents a significant step toward addressing migration issues in El Salvador. However, continued efforts are needed to realize its full potential and ensure the protection and well-being of migrants in the country.

32. Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (BID), *Personas retornadas, género y acceso a servicios sociales en El Salvador* (June 2018).

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What Makes a Nation? North Macedonia and its National Identity

TARA SHAFIE

ABSTRACT

Exploring the contours of national identity in North Macedonia reveals uncertainty that has an impact on international relations. This study first attempts to unpack the concept of national identity. Then it contextualizes North Macedonia's identity crisis with milestones for North Macedonia: the Skopje 2014 project, joining NATO in 2020, the 2024 elections, and ongoing EU accession talks. It analyzes data from North Macedonia polls (2010–2023) of public opinion toward joining the EU. There have been many challenges to North Macedonia's efforts to establish a national identity. The present study demonstrates how its controversial identity is related to internal, international, geographic, and linguistic issues, such as: internal conflict between the Macedonian majority and Albanian minority; North Macedonia's bid to join the EU; tensions with Greece; the status of Lake Ohrid; and conflict with Bulgaria over the Macedonian language. Finally, the study offers broader implications for the future of North Macedonia's identity, stability, and role in the region.

INTRODUCTION

National identity is a vital element of a nation's stability. With the state and its people in incongruence, instability and insurrections are more likely to occur. A distinct national identity also makes a state a "meaningful actor in international relations."¹ So, for those states who have had their history stifled and their cultures suppressed, how do they define themselves? One such example is that of North Macedonia. The aim of this paper is to examine North Macedonia's national identity and evaluate its progress toward nation building in terms of milestones such as joining NATO and the EU, and its security. The first section is a literature review on nationalism and national identity, analyzing how core IR theories view both topics. The second section examines challenges to North Macedonia's current identity from a Macedonian perspective. The third section examines its efforts to establish one, and features a section on security, specifically regarding the Albanian insurrection of 2001. The fourth section discusses what North Macedonia will do in the future with its national identity, and the final section concludes the paper.

1. Paul A. Kowert, "Foreign Policy and the Social Construction of State Identity," Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.397>

LITERATURE REVIEW

The origins of national identity lie within nationalism as a concept. First emerging from post-Westphalian notions of a nation-state, nationalism itself developed between the 18th and 19th centuries, following revolutions in the U.S. and France.² Nationalism is characterized by a shift in loyalties from collective ethnic or religious identity to that of the state itself, as a common identity is forged for the modern state through the process of “nation-building.”³ The liberal camp of scholarship views national identity and nationalism itself as deeply rooted in history, as opposed to contemporary economic systems. Functionalists, however, see nationalism through the lens of a shared system of economic policies, such as various forms of capitalism and other economic models. There is a significant gap in the literature about nationalism and national identity in the neorealist camp. This is confirmed by John Mearsheimer, who asserts that nationalism is not a significant part of any realist theory.⁴ However, I argue that if neorealists place so much emphasis on security, why have they not drawn a correlation between national identity and a state’s security? Without a cohesive national identity, states are vulnerable to both internal and external threats. If we hold the Hobbesian view of human nature to be true, and humans are perpetually in a state of war, then it should be clear that in cases when states have a clear national identity, there is less conflict.

This is where classical realism can provide more clarity, with its roots in human nature as the theoretical backing for the approach. Morgenthau argues that there is an inherent desire to define oneself in the broader context of the international system, to achieve security.⁵ This can be done through collective identities such as an ethnic, or religious, or even nationalistic ones, where a greater sense of security can be found in numbers. Morgenthau argues that this is due to the love that humans as a species feel, where the desire for power is merely motivated by the desire for love. Thus, an identity is constructed out of this desire, which can serve to protect the members of this identity.⁶ Security, is then motivated by the desire to preserve and protect this identity from constructed threats, which can also be seen in the structural realist view. Structural realists claim that groups attack each other to increase their likelihood of survival, as seen through sub-groups in nation-states and their quests for self-determination.⁷ Sub-states are often composed of ethnic or religious minorities within a “host” state, or the officially recognized sovereign state. These groups will often advocate for policies that place emphasis on their language, more representation in the government, and constitutional changes, which Morgenthau would observe to be motivated by *love*.⁸ This struggle between a sub-group and the state is exactly demonstrated by the Albanian Insurrection of 2001, discussed later in the paper.

2. Stephen Tierney, “Theories of Nationalism and National Identity,” *Constitutional Law and National Pluralism*, December 15, 2005, 20–45. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298617.003.0002>

3. *Ibid.*, 24.

4. John Mearsheimer, “Kissing Cousins: Nationalism and Realism,” May 5, 2011, https://www.sneps.net/t/images/Articles/11Mearsheimer_nationalism%20and%20realism.PDF

5. Hans J. Morgenthau, “Love and Power,” *Commentary Magazine*, March 1962. <https://www.commentary.org/articles/hans-morgenthau/love-and-power/>

6. Ty Solomon, “Human Nature and the Limits of the Self: Hans Morgenthau on Love and Power,” *International Studies Review* 14, no. 2 (June 2012): 201–24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2486.2012.01109.x>

7. Mearsheimer, “Kissing Cousins,” 6.

8. Tierney, “Theories of Nationalism”, 38.

NATIONAL IDENTITY

A national identity is formed through the process of nation-building, which refers to the balance between the state, national identity, people, and culture.⁹ States will often go through processes and projects in hopes of building an identity for themselves. An example of a state currently going through this process is North Macedonia—once under Ottoman control for over 500 years, which then became a part of Yugoslavia until it declared independence in 1991. For a land so ancient, it does not have as clear of an identity as its neighbors.

This lack of identity has nearly led to a civil war, and years of internal discord between peoples. Without a cohesive national identity, a state is more vulnerable to insurrections by people who are treated worse compared to the majority. If a country's national identity was inclusive, then its people would be less likely to come into conflict. Furthermore, it is ideal for a state to have less internal conflict for its foreign policy to be more meaningful. It is difficult for a state to be taken seriously on the global stage if its own territory is wrought with conflict.

THE CASE OF NORTH MACEDONIA

Challenges to Identity

In Macedonia, the current attitude about identity is that “the Albanians took the lake, the Bulgarians took the language, and the Greeks took the name. What's left for Macedonians?”¹⁰ The first aspect of this statement involves Lake Ohrid, an ancient lake that sits on the border of North Macedonia and Albania. Lake Ohrid is a World Heritage Site, and the lake itself is over three million years old. The town next to the lake is also the site of one of Europe's earliest human settlements, and it is also North Macedonia's biggest tourist attraction. Lake Ohrid is the national pride of North Macedonia, and to have it partially fall into a neighbor's territory, especially a neighbor with which it has a tense relationship, hurts their national pride. However, it is important to note that UNESCO expanded Lake Ohrid's World Heritage Site boundaries to include Albania's portion in 2019 because of the abysmal state it was in. Despite how important the lake is to Macedonian national identity, for decades it was extremely polluted, and nothing was done about it. With UNESCO including Albania, it has begun a project to preserve Lake Ohrid, increasing conservation efforts to fight against pollution and overfishing.¹¹ With the Albanian government using its resources together with UNESCO and the North Macedonian government, more progress towards conservation has been made.

The second aspect of the challenges to identity statement refers to a conflict originating from North Macedonia's bid to join the EU. Many protests occurred over the summer of 2022 in response to this situation, where Bulgaria vetoed negotiations before they could even begin.¹² Bulgaria wanted North Macedonia to acknowledge that the Macedonian language originated from Bulgarian, a claim they have been pushing for years. France, as the president of the EU, drafted a proposal in which North Macedonia would recognize a Bulgarian minority in their constitution, to appease Bulgaria. However, the proposal does not require Bulgaria to recognize a Macedonian minority,

9. Margaret Moore, “The Ethics of Nation-Building,” in *The Ethics of Nationalism*, (Oxford University Press, 2001): 103.

10. Ivana Stark, personal communication with author, Struga, North Macedonia.

11. UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region,” UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed October 29, 2024, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/99/>

12. Tara Shafie, personal observation, July 2022.

further demonstrating how Bulgaria holds the power in this situation. Macedonians did not take well to this proposal, with the leader of the majority party saying that practically giving up ownership of their language is contrary to their identity.¹³ Bulgaria refuses to acknowledge a Macedonian minority in their country, claiming that Macedonians are just “Western Bulgarians” who speak a dialect of Bulgarian, not Macedonian. Although the Macedonian and Bulgarian languages are similar, as with most languages spoken in the Balkans, saying that Macedonian is a dialect of Bulgarian is a politically charged statement.

The last aspect of the statement refers to the name dispute between North Macedonia and Greece. Greece has a province called Macedonia and claims that historical figures such as Alexander the Great hailed from their province, not the country of North Macedonia. Greece blocked North Macedonia’s bids to join both NATO and the EU for years until the name of the country was finally changed from Macedonia to North Macedonia, with the signing of the Prespa agreement. However, Macedonians once again were not happy about this. Nobody in North Macedonia adds “North” to the name. There are also countless statues of Alexander the Great, who they claim is North Macedonian, not Greek.

From the Macedonian perspective, with their nation’s prize—the lake, shared, the language under attack as not their own, and their name being forcibly removed from them, it further underscores the question in their minds: what is left for Macedonians?

EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH AN IDENTITY

In the center of Skopje, there is a copy of the Parisian Arc de Triomphe, but with “МАКЕДОНИЈА” in the center, and engraved with cultural symbols. That was part of a campaign called “Skopje 2014,” financed by the majority party, to both help build an identity and to spruce up downtown Skopje. The most noticeable aspect of it is the giant statue of Alexander the Great on a horse in the center. The National Archaeological Museum was also established, with bridges leading to it that are filled with a multitude of statues of important Macedonian figures, both historical and fictional. One such bridge is the “Eye Bridge,” which features figures relating to Macedonian history, as well as mythological figures. Some mythological figures include the hero Perseus, and he, like all figures of Greek origin, have been defaced, while the Macedonian ones (including Alexander the Great), remain untouched.

The goal of Skopje 2014 was to connect the current state with that of classical, or ancient Macedonia, which would give North Macedonia a claim to its history and identity in the face of its neighbors who deny it. However, one of the critiques of the Skopje 2014 project is that it is very ethnocentric and not inclusive. It idealizes North Macedonia’s history, but only for ethnic Macedonians. Ethnic Macedonians only make up around 58% of the country, with the largest minority group, Albanians, being around 24% of the population.¹⁴ Despite being a significant part of the population, Albanians still have little to no representation. The mistreatment and lack of representation nearly led to a civil war with the Albanian Insurrection of 2001.

13. Fatos Bytyci, “Protests block North Macedonia’s capital over Bulgaria, EU compromise,” Reuters, July 8, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/protests-block-north-macedonias-capital-over-bulgaria-eu-compromise-2022-07-08/>

14. Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa, “North Macedonia, the census does not quell the controversy,” OBC Transeuropa, accessed November 26, 2022, <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/North-Macedonia/North-Macedonia-the-census-does-not-quell-the-controversy-217397>

ALBANIAN INSURRECTION

Many scholars have argued that the “Skopje 2014” project was in response to the Albanian Insurrection in 2001.¹⁵ Occurring shortly after the Kosovo Conflict, the National Liberation Army, a group of Albanian insurrectionists from Kosovo, came into conflict with Macedonian forces. In response to ongoing mistreatment of ethnic Albanians by Macedonian society, the Albanian forces had demands which would improve conditions for ethnic Albanians. The Albanians wished for an amendment to the constitution formally acknowledging the Albanian language. Throughout the negotiations, there were many “close calls” to an all-out civil war. The open conflict ended with amnesty being granted and the signing of the Ohrid Agreement, where both sides’ demands were not fully satisfied.¹⁶ It averted bloodshed at the time, but tensions between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians still linger. Without a cohesive and all-encompassing national identity, a state is more vulnerable to insurrections such as this one.

As seen in the previous theoretical section on sub-groups in nation states, this follows the pattern exactly. It even agrees with the realist view that groups attack each other to increase their survival. In this sense, we can see both the realist view of national identity (a security issue) and the liberal view of national identity (more active representation and self-determination) converge. The ethnic Albanians demanded a modification to the constitution, which did not result in exactly what they wanted, but the constitution was amended. The Ohrid Agreement codified in the constitution that any language spoken by at least 20% of the population shall be a national language of North Macedonia, though Albanian was not directly named to satisfy Macedonian nationalists.¹⁷ The strong connection between national identity and security is often ignored in realist literature, as national identity is seen as more of a “liberalist” or “constructivist” issue. However, liberalism and constructivism do not emphasize security to the degree that realism does, leading to a gap in both the literature, and the very theories themselves. If North Macedonia had a cohesive national identity, then, even the prospect of civil war would have been avoided. Though actual war was in fact avoided (in part through the intervention of NATO), tensions remain between ethnic Albanians and Macedonians, and general confusion surrounding the state’s identity persists for all.

LOOKING FORWARD

North Macedonia joined NATO in 2020, after decades of being blocked by Greece. To join, they had to change their name per Greece’s demands. North Macedonia had been a candidate for NATO membership since 2008, and was set to join in 2009, but had to resolve the name issue with Greece first. The Prespa Agreement, where North Macedonia officially changed its name, was signed in 2018.¹⁸ Being a member of NATO comes with many benefits, the most prominent of which being its collective security policy. Article V of NATO’s treaty states that if one of its members is attacked, the rest of the members will come to its aid. This is particularly desirable for countries in Europe in the face of Russian aggression. Although North Macedonia had to sacrifice its name

15. Aleksandar Sazdovski, (2015). “Nation-building Under the Societal Security Dilemma: the Case of Macedonia,” *Journal of Regional Security* 10, no. 1 (2015): 53-78.

16. James W. Pardew, *Peacemakers: American Leadership and the End of Genocide in the Balkans*, (The University Press of Kentucky, 2018).

17. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ohrid Framework Agreement, August 13, 2001, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/8/100622.pdf>

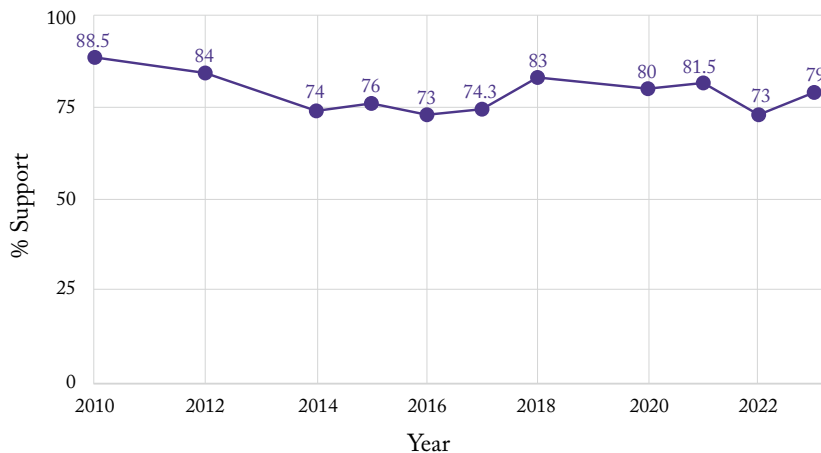
18. Committee on Foreign Relations, Hearing on NATO Expansion: Examining the accession of North Macedonia, 2019.

for NATO membership, it now has good diplomatic relations with Greece and is reconnecting with its history and culture through initiatives such as the Skopje 2014 project.

As North Macedonia continues its bid to join the EU, they continue to face opposition based on their identity. North Macedonia has been an EU candidate since 2005, and the EU has invested a lot into North Macedonia's development for it to meet the EU's requirements to join. The EU is North Macedonia's biggest trading partner, and its second biggest is Germany.¹⁹ Some benefits of EU membership include easier access to trade with its member states, and lasting peace. For countries in the Balkans, lasting peace is desirable. Countries looking to join the EU must meet certain requirements, which include being a stable democracy, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities. The EU's promotion of democratization sometimes conflicts with issues in Balkan countries, stemming from ethnic conflict and national identity.²⁰ Thus, the EU must work harder and invest more effort into programs and conflict management in countries such as North Macedonia. Conditions have improved greatly since they first became eligible for membership, but they still have quite a way to go to perfectly meet the EU's standards.

Figure 1²¹

PERCENT IN FAVOR OF NORTH MACEDONIA JOINING THE EU BY YEAR



19. The European Union and North Macedonia, The European Union and North Macedonia | EEAS Website, August 9, 2019, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/north-macedonia/european-union-and-north-macedonia_en?s=229

20. Nenad Markovikj and Ivan Damjanovski, "The EU's Democracy Promotion Meets Informal Politics: The Case of Leaders' Meetings in the Republic of Macedonia," *Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* 7, no. 2(2018): 71–96. <https://doi.org/10.1353/reg.2018.0017>

21. International Republican Institute, "National Survey of North Macedonia: April - May 2023," July 10, 2023, <https://www.iri.org/resources/national-survey-of-north-macedonia-april-may-2023/>. Data from years such as 2011, 2013, and 2019 have been omitted where no survey was conducted. Years such as 2014 that have multiple values have been averaged to create a singular value.

Public opinion polls conducted by the International Republican Institute (a world-wide non-partisan organization) show support within North Macedonia for joining the EU falling in general. As seen in Figure 1, the highest value was in 2010, at 88.5% support for joining the EU. It then decreased to a low at 73% support in 2016. Support increased in 2018, falling again in 2022. The most recent data available from 2023 shows support at 79%, prior to elections in April 2024. The most recent fall in 2022 coincides with resumed talks to join the EU, and Bulgaria's subsequent blockage.²² As previously mentioned, Bulgaria blocked North Macedonia's EU bid with the claim that Macedonians are just "Western Bulgarians." The subsequent agreement proposed by France in 2022 would force North Macedonia to acknowledge Bulgaria, but not the other way around. This sparked nationalist protests in Skopje over EU membership, once again causing support to plummet.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The results of the 2024 presidential election in North Macedonia further highlighted some of the domestic and international challenges of EU membership that are outlined above. At the inaugural address, president elect Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova omitted the word "North" from the country's name, either inadvertently or directly taking a stance on the name issue in opposition to Greece; this statement could be perceived by many as anti-Greek.²³ As previously mentioned, nobody in North Macedonia actually says the "North" part of the name in daily conversation; it exists for political purposes. While it could have been a slip of the tongue, since people in the country do not say "North" Macedonia, the fact that she is a member of the VMRO-DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity), makes the omission seem intentional. This is the dominant right-wing, conservative, and nationalist party that caused issues during the Albanian Insurrection when diplomats were penning the Ohrid Agreement. Thus, the name omission could potentially be viewed as a nationalist move, to provoke Greece or Bulgaria.

The Prespa Agreement was only passed in 2018, still fresh in public memory. Siljanovska-Davkova's omission of "North" provoked a response from not just Greece and Bulgaria (which was expected), but the EU itself. Greece's response was to resume blocking North Macedonia's entrance to the EU, with the Greek Prime Minister calling Siljanovska-Davkova's statement "unlawful and unacceptable," as it violated the Prespa Agreement.²⁴ Bulgaria, not missing the opportunity to call North Macedonia out on the world stage, responded with a statement from its president, "Bulgaria does not accept statements and behavior that contradict both the 2017 Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation, as well as other international treaties that the Republic of North Macedonia has signed. Bulgaria has repeatedly and clearly stated its position that the contracts must be implemented."²⁵ The president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, tweeted what appears to be a warning in response, "For North

22. Fatos Bytyci, "Thousands protest as North Macedonia readies to vote on EU deal with Bulgaria," Reuters, July 14, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/thousands-protest-north-macedonia-readies-vote-eu-deal-with-bulgaria-2022-07-14/>

23. Renee Maltezou, "North Macedonian president's inauguration revives name dispute with Greece," Reuters, May 13, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/north-macedonian-presidents-inauguration-revives-name-dispute-with-greece-2024-05-13/>

24. Ibid.

25. Georgi Gotev, "North Macedonia president stokes controversy at inauguration," Euractiv, May 13, 2024, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/north-macedonia-president-stokes-controversy-at-inauguration/>

Macedonia to continue its successful path on EU accession it is paramount that the country continues on the path of reforms and full respect for its binding agreements.”²⁶

The international community thought the name dispute ended with the Prespa Agreement (even if custody of Alexander the Great is still up in the air), but by omitting the “North” in North Macedonia, the new president has effectively revived the name dispute. Though North Macedonia might now be a member of NATO due to the Prespa Agreement, the chances of joining the EU are looking grim. The popularity of EU membership has risen in the past two years, but that was before VMRO-DPMNE won the presidency. Whether it was a genuine slip of the tongue or a nationalistically charged statement, Siljanovska-Davkova cannot be aware of its repercussions. Greece and Bulgaria are capable of blocking North Macedonia’s entry into the EU, and if that happens, then what has everyone been working towards? Joining the EU has been a clear goal of North Macedonia’s (even if it is unpopular amongst the conservative nationalists), so to have this progress interrupted by a resumption of the name dispute is disappointing to all sides. Now that North Macedonia is a member of NATO, it has experienced the benefits that come from membership in the world’s top IGO, and it knows that EU membership would be beneficial for both its economy and global status. Siljanovska-Davkova’s nationalist party may continue to have an impact on North Macedonia’s EU bid.

Ironically, part of the goal of the Skopje 2014 project seems to be bringing North Macedonia closer to Europe (Western Europe, that is), by directly copying classical architecture and even iconic structures such as the Arc de Triomphe. Skopje 2014 was heavily spearheaded by VMRO-DPMNE, the current president’s party. By further alienating North Macedonia from Europe, Siljanovska-Davkova seems to be going against the goals of the Skopje 2014 project and even her party to some degree. Though VMRO-DPMNE’s vision for the Skopje 2014 project seems to be anti-European by claiming classical Greek architecture as Macedonian (obviously angering Greece in response), the copy of the Arc de Triomphe would claim otherwise.²⁷ This contradiction further exemplifies North Macedonia’s identity crisis—are they pro- or anti-European? Most Macedonians might want EU membership, but how far will the conservative nationalists go to claim ownership of their “identity,” when this stolen identity is not even theirs? Alexander the Great notwithstanding, the public architecture of the Skopje 2014 project undoubtedly links North Macedonia to Europe and can also be viewed as claiming ownership of culture that is not Macedonian. 2024 IRI North Macedonian public opinion polls will provide more clarity as to how the electorate’s view of EU membership has changed since VMRO-DPMNE took power and the revival of the name dispute. As it stands, only one thing is clear: North Macedonia will not be joining the EU anytime soon.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, without an inclusive and cohesive national identity, North Macedonia is more vulnerable to internal and external conflict. With the revival of the name dispute, EU membership remains problematic. Minority groups feel mistreated and underrepresented, and neighboring countries attempt to claim aspects of their culture as their own.

26. Maltezou, “North Macedonian president’s inauguration.”

27. Christopher M. Jackson and Jelena Subotic, “The Ontological Security-Seeking Paradox: Domestic and International Effects of Public Architecture in North Macedonia’s ‘Skopje 2014’ Project.” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, April 9, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298241231742>

North Macedonia has been struggling for decades to identify itself as a unique country, separate from its neighbors, since it became independent. It faces internal conflict from minority groups due to a lack of national identity and faces external conflict from its neighbors who claim aspects of their identity as their own. Public opinion remains another hurdle. North Macedonia launched initiatives such as the Skopje 2014 project in hopes of building and defining a Macedonian identity for themselves, but the results have not yet been achieved. However, progress is surely being made, and North Macedonia remains a candidate for EU membership. If North Macedonia ends up joining the EU soon, it will speak to their nation building initiative's success.

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Anti-Global Governance: Populism and the Erosion of Trust in the World Health Organization (WHO) During COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

In the past five years, research on the effects of right-wing populism on democratic norms, institutions and rights has significantly increased. Research has shown that populist leaders often erode domestic civil rights and social policies as well as international norms (democracy, human rights, human security, migration, climate protection) and the international institutions that promote them. My current project aims to investigate how populism impacts global governance, with an emphasis on global health. To what extent do populists erode and undermine global governance institutions such as the World Health Organization? I examine the impact of the right-wing populist response to COVID-19 on the reputation, effectiveness, and financial stability of the World Health Organization, and investigate how the nationalist-type of reaction exhibited by right-wing populists in response to the COVID-19 pandemic informs future solutions to global commons issues.

INTRODUCTION

Rapid globalization has brought untold changes to the world. Through globalization, humanity has experienced advancements in technology, profound economic expansion, and rich cultural exchanges, ushering in a new era where global interconnectivity is now the cornerstone of mankind. Progress made through globalization has encouraged the development of human rights, leading to an increase in immigration which has sparked a new wave of nationalist politics within once relatively open and diverse states. With these changes, the reemergence of right-wing populism has proliferated in democratic nations around the world, fueling the erosion of trust in the collaborative nature of international institutions. As the world seeks to move forward into a new era of increased interdependence, right-wing populists seek to isolate themselves and their states from the perceived threats of a globalized world. This is shown time and again in the isolationist policies by leaders such as Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Viktor Orban, and Javier Milei, who all share a strong anti-establishment rhetoric, emphasizing nationalism and often appealing directly to the emotions of their supporters while challenging mainstream political norms.

In October of 1945, following the tragedies that occurred during World War II, world leaders came together to form the United Nations. With the goal of establishing peace, security, and international cooperation, the formation of the United Nations was paramount to progression in the aftermath of a devastating war, and from its creation, other such institutions were established. International institutions such as the

International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Health Organization allowed global leaders to stay connected on issues that impacted every nation, therefore, creating a greater sense of global community. Through international, regional, and domestic conflicts, these international institutions have stood the test of time and have proven that global collaboration is a necessary function in establishing peace. Right-wing populists, however, do not share the view that these institutions promote a better global standard. Through isolationist policies, right-wing populist leaders seek to undermine the progress of international institutions, or completely withdraw from them. The right-wing populist agenda is typically averse to trade agreements, staunchly opposed to unfettered immigration, and in favor of socially conservative views that are partisan to their own personal beliefs.¹

In this paper, I seek to examine the effects of right-wing populism on international institutions, specifically reviewing the impact of the first Trump administration's response to the World Health Organization's handling of COVID-19. This includes his criticism and subsequent withdrawal from the World Health Organization, and how his rhetoric and actions impacted the reputation and efficacy of the World Health Organization. I will begin with a brief literature review, where I will discuss past literature, relevant terms, and examine any gaps in existing literature. I will then review my methodology, where I will discuss my method of quantitative and qualitative data collection, as well as my metric for analyzing this data against my research question. My case analysis section will explore the timeline, response, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as Donald Trump's 2020 response and how this affected the World Health Organization. In this section, I will discuss the social, financial, and political implications of right-wing populism on the World Health Organization and, following my case analysis, I will examine how this relates to the impact of right-wing populism on international institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The examination into the effects of right-wing populism is a burgeoning field of research, attracting the attention of many scholars since Donald Trump's initial election in 2016 and the rise of populist leaders across Europe and Latin America. As such, there is extensive literature regarding the effects of right-wing populism on the global community. For the purposes of this paper, I choose to focus on broader literature involving the definition, analysis, and implications of right-wing populism on international institutions, with my case study focusing on how right-wing populism affected the World Health Organization following the spread of COVID-19. I will begin with providing a brief overview on the definition of populism and discuss what makes a populist agenda "right-wing," then I will provide an overview of academic analysis on this topic and its relation to other important terms and end the literature review with evaluating any gaps in existing literature.

Populism is defined as a political method that leaders use to engage "ordinary" people who believe their opinions and way of life is disregarded by the political or social elite.² The term 'populism' became prevalent in the late-nineteenth century in the United States; the Populist Party manifested in response to growing concerns from the agrarian

1. Harold James. "Populism." In *The War of Words: A Glossary of Globalization, 183–94*. Yale University Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1vbd1ht.13>.

2. Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, "Populism: A Very Short Introduction," essay, in *Populism a Very Short Introduction* (Johanneshov: MTM, 2019).

community of the rural south.³ Despite its early origins, populism is currently experiencing a resurgence in global politics today. A wildly effective political strategy, many left-wing and right-wing leaders employ populist methods to rally support from the masses, with many utilizing tools such as social media and inciteful rhetoric or phrases to garner support from their voters. Populists are typically charismatic, and frequently make grandiose promises to their supporters that are rarely carried out. While right-wing and left-wing populism differ in terms of political views, both maintain a certain distrust of the perceived “elite class,” with whom they believe do not represent the majority interests. Populist politicians build their platform around this narrative, and the increasing frequency of populist politics shows that this methodology is becoming notably more frequent.⁴

Right-wing populism and left-wing populism, while similar in their mistrust of the “elite class,” differ extensively in the content of their messaging. Left-wing populism commonly focuses on aspects of social justice, such as minority rights and the redistribution of wealth. Conversely, right-wing populism centers around preserving national identity through strict immigration policy, protectionist economic measures, and the execution of traditional values. As scholars Robert A. Huber and Christian H. Schimpf have astutely described it, “Left-wing populist parties define the people on a class basis, referring mostly to the poor. In contrast, right-wing populist parties define the people on a cultural, nativist base.”⁵ Despite the stark differences in core values, the outcome of populist politics has proven similar. This was seen in the 2016 election, where both Bernie Sanders, a left-wing populist, and Donald Trump opposed the adoption of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which ultimately led to the downfall of the agreement.

In the face of rapid globalization, right-wing populism has become of consequential influence. Globalization refers to the increase in interdependence between nations who rely on each other economically, socially, and politically.⁶ Globalization intertwines countries, which has been allowed through the exchange of commerce, ideas, and migration, largely due to technological advancements. Through globalization, significant achievements have been made, and an increase in international collaboration is rising due to international institutions that have appeared from global interconnectedness. Thus, populism is the antithesis to globalism, as it generally favors focusing policy on a domestic scale that includes an aversion to international collaboration.

Economist Dani Rodrik postulates that globalization fuels populism, and states that globalization shocks, economic anxiety, and cultural factors may be contributors to the recent rise in populism.⁷ Rodrik views this question from a purely economic lens - mainly focusing on how globalization shocks impact economic conditions, and how economic conditions drive voters to adopt protectionist and nationalist viewpoints. In Rodrik’s 2021 analysis on why globalization fuels populism, Rodrik examines the

3. John D. Hicks. “The Birth of the Populist Party.” *Minnesota History*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1928, pp. 219–47. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20160737>. Accessed 7 Aug. 2024.

4. Shawn C. Smallman and Kimberley Brown, “FOUR Political Globalization,” essay, in *Introduction to International and Global Studies*, Third Edition (University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

5. Robert A. Huber, and Christian H. Schimpf. “On the Distinct Effects of Left-Wing and Right-Wing Populism on Democratic Quality.” *Politics and Governance*, vol. 5, no. 4, 29 Dec. 2017, pp. 146–165. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v5i4.919>.

6. Hanne Van Cappellen, Peter-Jan Engelen, and Danny Cassimon, “Globalization,” essay, in *Encyclopedia of Law and Economics* (New York, NY: Springer New York, 2019).

7. Dani Rodrik, “Why Does Globalization Fuel Populism?” (n.d.). Retrieved from https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/dani-rodrik/files/why_does_globalization_fuel_populism.pdf

correlation between previous Obama voters (2012 election) who have transitioned to Trump voters, and those who have remained Republican voters.⁸ The empirical evidence from this survey suggested that economic stressors, including racial and social attitudes, were the primary concerns for Trump voters.⁹ However, upon further investigation of the data, Rodrik claims that while social and racial factors play a role in decision of Trump voters, ultimately globalization shocks of the economic variety contribute to Trump votes both directly and indirectly. This data, while telling, does not explain the significance of cultural or social factors in the rise of populism. Rodrik notes that no single piece of work provides a comprehensive analysis of all factors (social, political, and economic) that contribute to the rise of populism, and as such he does not attempt to explain how these causal pathways intersect.¹⁰

According to economic historian Harold James, having populist tendencies is sometimes considered synonymous with being anti-globalist, as populist politicians believe in the clear separation between the “us” of their state and everyone else.¹¹ This can result in anti-capitalist and anti-socialist policy, which causes inexplicable harm to ongoing international collaboration. Many right-wing populist politicians perceive globalization as an existential threat to the foundations of national security and prosperity, and, therefore, enact policy decisions that remove their state from such threats. Anti-globalization has become the unconscious goal of right-wing populist leaders, which is demonstrated through their oftentimes unilateral decision-making and rhetoric aimed at states who pose a danger to their nationalistic agenda. While the goal of anti-globalization is not explicitly expressed by right-wing populist politicians, policies that favor the erosion of democratic norms and lack of collaboration with international institutions points towards the goal of economic and social isolation. Despite this, populist leaders often believe themselves to be more democratic than other leaders.¹² James posits that populist leaders can lead to “illiberal democracies,” — a term coined by American journalist Fareed Zakaria that refers to technically democratic institutions and societies that do not operate in a truly democratic fashion, leading to unfair election results and in some cases, authoritarian regimes.¹³

Right-wing populist leaders who staunchly favor anti-globalization render the risk of not only isolating themselves from the world but undermining liberally functioning international institutions. Following World War II, international institutions became a salient part of the global political landscape. The global community, traumatized by the events of the war, came together to create both the United Nations and the International Criminal Court of Justice, and a bevy of other such institutions followed. The construction of a more intertwined international community, coupled with proliferating democratic values and a rise in technological interconnectivity, led to the development of the world as we see it today. A significant rise in nationalism, spurred mainly through a rise in immigration, caused an increase in populist regimes that threaten the continued operation of international institutions.¹⁴ The impact of contemporary populism on

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Harold James. “Populism.” *The War of Words: A Glossary of Globalization*, Yale University Press, 2021, pp. 183–94. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1vbd1ht>.13. Accessed 7 Aug. 2024.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Francesco Flaviano Russo, essay, in *Immigration and Nationalism: The Importance of Identity*, 2021.

international institutions is a growing field of study that requires an in-depth analysis of how these institutions operate, and how populist policy denigrates the functions of such institutions.

The primary objective of international institutions is to maintain relative peace and security, and to deter threats to the international liberal order. Through international institutions, states operate diplomatically to find solutions to pressing problems, be it global financial crises, threats of war, the spread of disease, or other matters. John Duffield extensively defines the characteristics of international institutions and describes them as “relatively stable sets of constitutive, regulated, and procedural norms and rules that pertain to the international system and their activities.”¹⁵ Duffield suggests that not all institutions must possess each of these characteristics but must consist of at least one of the aforementioned qualities to be defined as an international institution.¹⁶ Adopting these specific attributes of Duffield’s definition, this paper defines international institutions as rational global entities that operate diplomatically to uphold international norms and laws while simultaneously supporting individual state sovereignties.

A key feature of populism is the acute disinclination towards a pluralistic society. Right-wing populists typically harbor a disdain for multilateral relations that borders on xenophobic, oftentimes preaching rhetoric that depicts foreign entities as untrustworthy. Wary of the so-called global “elite,” right-wing populists promote themselves as stewards of the working and middle class “average Joe” citizens, who have felt wronged either through their own personal economic predicaments, or through their contempt for heterogeneity. Consequentially, right-wing populists have the proclivity to express skepticism towards international institutions. Copelovitch and Pevehouse predicate that populist movements are not only confined to developed states but can appear across the gamut.¹⁷ They suggest that the contemporary wave of populism has unique characteristics, mainly consisting of geographic focus, the demand for national sovereignty, and anti-immigrant sentiments.¹⁸ The authors review empirical studies that suggest themes such as nationalist, nativist, and economic self-interest factors were present in issues such as the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union, known as Brexit, and from Donald Trump’s withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and threatened withdrawal from NATO. Copelovitch and Pevehouse present a typology on how nationalism and populism influence international collaboration based on various dimensions of public sentiment and political dynamics.¹⁹

The existing literature presented by various authors shows a well-rounded approach that depicts the importance of cultural, societal, and economic factors respectively. Although these elements clearly contribute to the rise of populism and its effects on international institutions, there is no singular piece of literature that explores how populism, influenced by social, cultural, and economic factors along with advancements in technology and the growing influence of social media, impacts the efficacy and reputation of international institutions. These gaps in literature present a problem while attempting to understand the full magnitude of populism’s impact on the global

15. John Duffield. “What Are International Institutions?” *International Studies Review*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2007, pp. 1–22. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4621775>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2024.

16. Ibid.

17. Mark Copelovitch and Jon C. W. Pevehouse. “International Organizations in a New Era of Populist Nationalism.” *The Review of International Organizations*, Springer US, 5 Apr. 2019, <link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11558-019-09353-1>.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

liberal order, as only a surface level explanation of populist rhetoric is discussed in each piece of literature. While this paper examines only one case study, I will use the example of the first Trump Administration's withdrawal from the World Health Organization to explain how populist rhetoric, along with social, cultural, and economic elements, can have a severe impact on global governance and democratic norms and values. This question, while large in undertaking, is essential when viewing populism through the contemporary lens of an increasingly globalized world.

METHODOLOGY

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic, I utilized both quantitative and qualitative data to craft my analysis. The quantitative data was imperative to my examination of the impact of populism on the World Health Organization, and most of the data used is from readily available public sources, such as the World Health Organization website itself.²⁰ This data specifically covered the financial status of the World Health Organization during the first year of COVID-19, and it shows the financial loss taken by the World Health Organization when Donald Trump withdrew from the organization in 2020. Additionally, survey results from the Pew Research Center provides insight into quantifiable data regarding public opinion on the World Health Organization, which supports the hypothesis that the reputation was indeed declining globally during the pandemic.

The most important pieces of quantitative data were manually extracted from both Instagram and UC Santa Barbara's "The American Presidency Project."²¹ While both these data were originally qualitative in nature, I established a formula to convert the sentiment expressed in Instagram comments into numeric values. Each comment was assigned a base sentiment score, where negative comments were scored as -1, neutral comments as 0, and positive comments as 1. To adjust these scores based on user engagement, I incorporated comment likes adjustment factor: each like contributed positively to positive sentiment scores (adding 0.1 per like) and decreased negative scores by 0.1 per like. For neutral comments (0), likes added a smaller positive adjustment of 0.05 per like. This adjustment allows for refined understanding of how public sentiment surrounding the World Health Organization's communications via social media, especially in relation to Donald Trump's statements about the organization, correlates with the data obtained from Instagram. All numerical data were then aggregated to facilitate statistical analysis, including the examination of correlations between sentiment changes and the timing of Trump's public statements.

Qualitative data, largely taken from primary sources such as news media outlets and social media, was paramount to my analysis. Exploring social media allowed me to interpret public opinion without conducting my own survey, although these findings may be slightly skewed without further insight into the variables. Along with primary sources, an in-depth review of academic papers covering anti-globalization, populism, and international institutions needed to be consulted to provide a breadth of understanding for the topic.

My rationale for utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data stems from the complexity of examining the relationship between populism and the World Health Organization to interpret the impact of populist policy on international institutions. The

20. "Coronavirus," World Health Organization, accessed April 17, 2025, https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1.

21. The American Presidency Project is located at <https://presidency.ucsb.edu>

quantitative data offers insight into the public response parallel to Trump's statements, which demonstrates how his populist rhetoric both resonates with his constituency and subsequently harms the reputation of the WHO. The data also reveals significant trends in the financing of the World Health Organization, notably following the withdrawal of funding from the United States. The qualitative data provides context to the numerical findings, which make up the bulk of my argument. Through meticulous examination of both quantitative and qualitative analysis, I was able to craft a narrative surrounding the World Health Organization's reputation.

CASE STUDY

Shortly after the United Nations was formed, world leaders determined that an international health organization should be created to address major global health crises. The World Health Organization (hereby referred to in this essay as its acronym, the WHO) was founded on April 7th of 1948, a day now celebrated as World Health Day, and today the organization is comprised of 194 member states. The main objective of the WHO is to promote public health, mitigate the spread of infectious diseases, and provide assistance to underserved communities. Since their founding in 1948, the WHO has advocated to provide the general public with the knowledge and tools needed to handle both existing diseases and public health emergencies. The WHO is the directing and coordinating authority on international health within the United Nations system, and it functions to collaborate with other UN-run organizations to increase public health awareness.²²

On July 6th, 2020, the United States administration under President Donald Trump announced the decision to withdraw from the WHO.²³ The press release put out by the U.S. Department of State described the WHO as "badly failing" on measures taken to support its core purpose, and stated, "When President Trump announced the first U.S. withdrawal from that organization, he made clear that we would seek more credible and transparent partners."²⁴ The political implications of this unprecedented decision were significant and ignited international discussions about the legitimacy of Trump's withdrawal from the WHO, as well as his handling of the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States. Some international leaders expressed concern regarding Trump's actions, while others showed sympathy for his decision and echoed his criticism of the WHO's statements that endorsed China's efforts to manage the initial outbreak in Wuhan. While world leaders grappled with Trump's decision, discussion ensued among both Trump's supporters and opponents, leading to a broader conversation regarding the efficacy of the World Health Organization and of international institutions.

Globally, there were mixed reactions to Donald Trump's first withdrawal from the WHO. Some right-wing populist leaders agreed with his decision. For example, the former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, also widely regarded as a right-wing populist, said in response to Trump's withdrawal, "I'm telling you right now, the United States left the WHO, and we're studying that, in the future. Either the WHO works without

22. United Nations. "World Health Organization." United Nations, www.un.org/en/academic-impact/who#:~:text=The%20World%20Health%20Organization%20is,within%20the%20United%20Nations%20system. Accessed 18 Aug. 2024.

23. The second Trump administration would proceed to withdraw from the WHO again on January 21, 2025.

24. Morgan Ortagus. "Update on U.S. Withdrawal from the World Health Organization." U.S. Department of State, 3 Sept. 2020, 2017-2021.state.gov/update-on-u-s-withdrawal-from-the-world-health-organization/.

ideological bias, or we leave, too.”²⁵ Bolsonaro also stated, “The US withdrew from the WHO, and we are working on it,” Bolsonaro told reporters in front of the presidential palace where supporters gathered, according to local media. “Either the WHO works without an ideological party, or we withdraw from this organization.”²⁶ Others, such as Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison sympathized with Donald Trump’s withdrawal from the WHO but acknowledged that the organization was imperative to global health governance. Morrison stated, “We are not going to throw the baby out with the bathwater here, but they are also not immune from criticism and immune from doing things better.”²⁷

Most leaders reacted with concern to Trump’s withdrawal. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of the World Health Organization said in response to the U.S. withdrawal, “The U.S. government’s and its people’s contribution and generosity toward global health over many decades has been immense, and it has made a great difference in public health all around the world. It is WHO’s wish for this collaboration to continue.”²⁸ Other leaders were outright critical of Trump’s decision; Moussa Faki Mahamat, former Prime Minister of Chad, stated that Trump’s choice to leave the WHO was “deeply regrettable,” and that the world had a collective responsibility to assist the WHO during the COVID-19 crisis.²⁹ On the global stage, most world leaders condemned Trump’s decision to leave the WHO, with only a few expressing their support or understanding. Within the United States, the already politically polarized population of voters was deeply divided regarding Trump’s decision.

The WHO’s management of COVID-19 in 2020, coupled with Trump’s withdrawal from the organization, undeniably changed the way other countries viewed the WHO. A study done in November 2020 by Pew Research Center gauges the opinions of 14 economically advanced countries, and how their citizens viewed the WHO’s initial response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The survey conducted in June through August evaluates the opinions of citizens in Denmark, Australia, Canada, Germany, Netherlands, South Korea, Italy, Sweden, Belgium, France, Japan, Spain, the US, and the UK. The results were mixed, with most believing that their own country handled the pandemic better than the WHO.³⁰ In the United States, however, this was flipped – with only 47% believing that the United States handled the pandemic well, and 53% believing that WHO handled it better than the US government. Coincidentally, another survey done in the spring of 2020 (around the time that Donald Trump withdrew from the WHO) showed that only 46% of people thought the WHO had done a good job in handling the pandemic. The data also breaks down favorability by political affiliation; seven-in-ten Democrats said the WHO had done an acceptable job dealing with the outbreak, compared with only 32% of Republicans respondents.³¹ Of course, this variation in political affiliation is telling as most Republicans would be more inclined to agree with Donald

25. Al Jazeera. “Bolsonaro Threatens WHO Exit as Brazil’s Coronavirus Toll Soars.” Al Jazeera, 6 June 2020, www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/6/6/bolsonaro-threatens-who-exit-as-brazils-coronavirus-toll-soars

26. Ibid.

27. Al Jazeera. “World Reacts to Trump Withdrawing WHO Funding.” Al Jazeera, 15 Apr. 2020, www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/4/15/world-reacts-to-trump-withdrawing-who-funding.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Mara Mordecai. “How People Around the World See the World Health Organization’s Initial Coronavirus Response.” Pew Research Center, 12 Nov. 2020, www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/11/12/how-people-around-the-world-see-the-world-health-organizations-initial-coronavirus-response/.

31. Ibid.

Trump, while most Democrats would disagree with him and favor the opinion of the WHO. A myriad of other such surveys exists, but the most convincing data regarding Trump's denigration of the WHO can be gleaned from written public opinion found on social media.

Social media was awash in both criticism and support for Donald Trump, with many of his voters taking to X (then called Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok to flood the comment sections of World Health Organization accounts. While many social media users expressed support for the WHO, many others, particularly Trump supporters, left comments ridiculing the organization and accusing them of creating the virus or covering up for China's handling of the outbreak. The opinions on social media were effectively split, which was reflective of the polarization taking place within the United States between the deeply divided political parties.

Criticism of the World Health Organization was present on all social media platforms, but was most recurrent on Instagram, which is the account the WHO posts the most frequently on.³² Before the nationwide lockdown in the United States on March 15th, the WHO had posted regular updates regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. The first post about COVID-19, posted on January 10th, received relatively few comments, with most Instagram users expressing their gratitude to the WHO for the updates and with some users commenting weeks after the post was made, chastising the organization for not posting about the virus sooner. As January and February went on, the WHO continued to routinely post about COVID-19, often sharing scientific infographic updates on the virus and advice for avoiding contagions. Come March, the WHO had begun posting nearly every day, providing vital updates on the spread of the virus. At this time, most of the comments under these posts garnered positive or neutral responses from the public.

By April and May, the WHO's Instagram posts began receiving increased criticism. The majority of the comments posted under WHO posts either focused on the WHO's response to the initial outbreak in China, condemning the WHO for not appropriately warning the public about the virus or for covering up China's mistakes for their handling of the outbreak, or these comments consisted of users claiming that the WHO was lying about the virus as a whole, and some even accusing the organization of manufacturing the virus themselves.

While criticism was pouring in across the gamut of political parties, by far most of the commenters appeared to be from supposed pro-Trump users. Many people left comments calling the WHO the "World Hoax Organization," or the "China Health Organization," with many using pro-Trump hashtags or tagging Donald Trump's Instagram account in the comment sections.³³ These types of comments dramatically increased after the announcement of Trump's withdrawal from the WHO, and they proliferated as the months went on. Other users posted comments such as "You want me to believe that u dont have a solution for this virus? We are not stupid we know this is ur plan to change the world!" and "the only virus we need to defeat is you and the WHO minions."

Some users have continued to post negative comments on WHO posts regularly, even after the organization declared that the Public Health Emergency (PHE) for the COVID-19 Pandemic was officially over in May of 2023. Months after the announcement regarding the end of the COVID-19 related PHE, the WHO posted on

32. <https://www.instagram.com/who/?hl=en>

33. https://www.instagram.com/p/Cftkg_rN7BF/?hl=en&img_index=1

Instagram discussing an emergency preparedness plan for potential future pandemics. Many Instagram users expressed their disdain in the comment section of the WHO following this announcement, with many recalling the COVID-19 pandemic under the original post. These comments included users saying things like, “WHO is preparing for the next level scale genocide on innocent people. Wake up people. They’re not out to help you. They’re out to control you and kill you,” and “You’ve lost the trust of the people.” Despite the WHO’s post only discussing potential future global health disasters, many Instagram users found the post threatening and proceeded to accuse the WHO of various atrocities in the comments.

The WHO responded to the criticism through various press releases and statements from WHO officials. While the WHO has not been immune from criticism in the past, namely regarding their handling of the swine flu in 2009 and Ebola in 2014, they had yet to receive something akin to the tidal wave of backlash that came following the outbreak of COVID-19.³⁴ At the center of the international criticism was the WHO Director-General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, an Ethiopian biologist who has served as the WHO’s Director-General since 2017. Despite widespread criticism and accusations against the WHO Director-General Tedros, including the claim that Tedros’ relationship with the Chinese government impacted the WHO’s initial response to COVID-19, Tedros has remained steadfast in his conviction that only through global cooperation could the spread of the virus be mitigated.

These trends on social media continue today. On August 14th of 2024, the WHO declared the MPOX outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) a “public health emergency of international concern.”³⁵ This, coming over four years after their emergency declaration on the spread of COVID-19, was also posted on various WHO social media accounts. The comment section of the emergency declaration of MPOX shows that the reputation of the WHO has not improved – if anything, its reputation continues to trend downward. One comment under the post sums up the sentiments from most users perfectly, it reads – “Absolutely no credibility with the WHO any longer.” The comment has 520 “likes,” with others commenting underneath expressing their agreement.

To quantify the impact of Trump’s populist rhetoric on his voter base at the time, I analyzed publicly available data found on Instagram. To accurately measure this, I set up a criterion to measure the public’s response to the WHO on Instagram and compare it in a dual-axis time series parallel to Trump’s public statements on the WHO. My criteria were set up to ensure my analysis was accurate and unbiased. The WHO first began posting about COVID-19 in January of 2020 – based on this, I chose to analyze posts from January of 2020 through December of 2020. I chose these dates based on a timeline that covered the initial outbreak of COVID-19 in the United States, the evolution of Trump’s opinion on the WHO, and the presidential election. I plan to analyze every post the WHO makes regarding COVID-19 and review the most “liked” 4–10 comments under each post. Each Instagram comment is assigned a numerical sentiment score: negative comments received a score of -1, neutral comments were assigned a score of 0, and positive comments were given a score of 1. To quantify user engagement, likes were factored into the scores, with each like contributing an additional 0.1 to positive

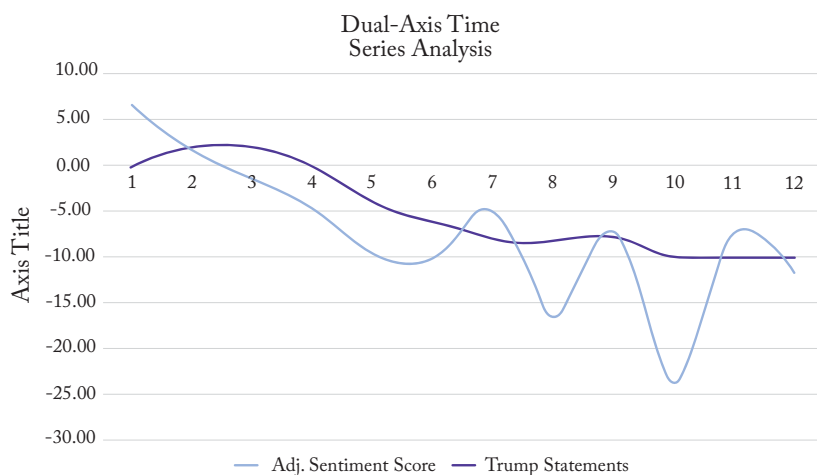
34. Salvatore Babones. “Yes, Blame WHO for Its Disastrous Coronavirus Response.” *Foreign Policy*, 27 May 2020, foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/27/who-health-china-coronavirus-tedros/.

35. <https://www.who.int/news/item/14-08-2024-who-director-general-declares-mpox-outbreak-a-public-health-emergency-of-international-concern>

sentiment scores. For negative comments, each like reduced the score by 0.1, while neutral comments received a smaller adjustment of 0.05 per like. To quantify the overall adjusted sentiment score, I applied the formula $A = \begin{cases} 1 + (L \times 0.1) & \text{if } S = 1 \\ -1 - (L \times 0.1) & \text{if } S = -1 \\ 0 + (L \times 0.05) & \text{if } S = 0 \end{cases}$, where (S) represents the sentiment score (1 for positive, 0 for neutral, -1 for negative) and (L) represents the number of likes, allowing for a quantified adjustment of sentiment based on user engagement. This data was then graphed in a dual-axis time series that tracked the public response alongside Trump's public statements, which were assigned an unweighted score between -5 and 5.

The results from this study are varied and ongoing. Due to the incredible time commitment needed to manually pull data from Instagram without using a data scraping tool, the results from this study below are tentative. However, preliminary data collected shows a significant trend in public sentiment expressed on Instagram in relation to Donald Trump's public statements. For the purposes of this paper and its presentation, I am choosing to instead focus on a shorter timeframe to express the overall findings of the study. I will be presenting 2020 data from March 20th, approximately one week after the global lockdown and June 3rd, exactly one after Donald Trump announced his intent to withdraw from the WHO.

Figure 1



Social media, while progressively more relevant in society, does not represent an accurate depiction of the majority of attitudes towards the WHO. However, it is important to note that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and Trump's withdrawal from the WHO, the social media accounts of WHO received very limited criticism. This could convey a plethora of different things – perhaps more pro-Trump users are taking to social media to show their opinions, or maybe it does represent an accurate portrayal of the decline in the WHO's reputation. While there is no way to precisely quantify this information on a grander scale beyond manually scraping data from a select number of Instagram posts, the criticism on social media does coincide with right-wing populist disapproval of the WHO, proving at least that populist rhetoric affects the opinions and ideas of the populist supporting class.

Other than relying on public sentiment to support its mission, the WHO relies on the assessed contributions of its member states to make up the bulk of the organizations' funding, along with portion of voluntary contributions given by "Member States as well as from other United Nations organizations, intergovernmental organizations, philanthropic foundations, the private sector, and other sources."³⁶ Given that the majority of the WHO's budget comes directly from its members, it is imperative that the WHO maintains good relations with its' member states. According to data published by the WHO for the 2021 fiscal year, assessed contributions made up 12.6% of the budget, voluntary contributions (specified) accounted for 76.8%, voluntary contributions (thematic) accounted for 6.77%, core voluntary contributions accounted for 3.12%, and PIP contributions accounted for 0.68% of the total operating budget.³⁷ This same report attributes approximately 7.15% of its budget from both the assessed and voluntary contributions of the United States, which is listed as the third overall largest contributor after Germany and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.³⁸

The United States has historically been the second-largest member state contributor of the World Health Organization — having provided the organization up to \$107–\$119 million per year for the last ten years according to available public data. During the 2019 funding cycle, the United States contributed a total of \$893 million to the WHO, accounting for more than twice the contributions of most other member states that year. According to the 2020 Report to Congress on U.S. Contributions to International Organizations, the United States contributed a total of \$144,512,594 to the World Health Organization in the 2020 fiscal year and contributed a grand total of \$15,355,388,072 to all international institutions.³⁹ The United States withdrawal from the WHO, therefore, held major financial implications for the organization's operating budget.

At the time that Donald Trump announced his intention to withdraw from the WHO, COVID-19 had already spread rapidly in the United States, with approximately 787,000 active COVID-19 cases and 42,000 COVID-19 related deaths.⁴⁰ Trump's insistent vilification of the WHO up until May finally manifested in his administration's announcement that the United States would withdraw from the organization, which sparked the backlash that was covered in the previous section. In June of 2020, the Trump administration officially made the withdrawal announcement, however, due to the nature of the agreement between the United States and the WHO, the withdrawal would not become official until July 2021. At the time of the United States withdrawal from the WHO, the United States owed approximately \$200 million in assessed contributions and additional amounts in unpaid dues.⁴¹

The divisive and inflammatory rhetoric touted by Donald Trump regarding the WHO had notable impacts on the reputation and efficacy of the WHO itself. As the data suggest, Trump's supporters, both domestically and internationally, deeply resonated with his negative sentiments about the WHO. World leaders aligned with his policies

36. <https://www.who.int/about/funding>

37. <https://open.who.int/2024-25/contributors/by-fund-types/vcs>

38. Ibid.

39. U.S. Department of State. Budget of the U.S. Government, 18 Jan. 2022, www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/budget_fy2024.pdf.

40. KFF. "Global COVID-19 Tracker." KFF, 9 Sept. 2024, www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/global-covid-19-tracker/.

41. WHO https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1

tended to also harbor disdain for the WHO, while his constituency within the U.S. also began to incessantly criticize an organization that otherwise would likely have remained on the periphery of the broader discussion surrounding the spread of COVID-19. The data suggests that the opinion of the WHO declined notably due to Donald Trump's rhetoric, at least proving that his aversion to international collaboration was widely understood and accepted within his voter base. His animosity towards the WHO and its perceived elite was ultimately detrimental to the WHO's overall reputation, causing not only a loss of moral support from the public, but also a significant loss of financial support.

CONCLUSION/ANALYSIS

International institutions are an indispensable part of the global community. The job of international institutions is multifaceted — on the surface, these organizations address pressing contemporary global issues that threaten the international community. However, externally, their purpose is much more meaningful. International institutions, such as the World Health Organization, provide the opportunity to the global community to work together to create a better way of life for humanity. The proliferation of these institutions was born from a time of untold devastation, with the idea that rebuilding the world as a stable and interconnected community would prevent further such catastrophes from happening again. The liberal values embedded in these institutions have stood the test of time, and international institutions are widely regarded as custodians of a peaceful society.

Right-wing populism is an interminable threat to these institutions. This was proven time and again during the first Trump presidency, with unilateral decisions that undermined multilateral agreements, ultimately eroding trust and cooperation on the global stage. Such efforts successfully damaged the reputation of the WHO, proving that one populist's rhetoric has the power to permanently alter the perception of a global institution. While the case of the WHO is but one example of how populism can impact the liberal international order, it follows a concerning pattern that has emerged in global politics today. As more populist leaders materialize, we are witnessing a trend towards nationalism, the erosion of democratic norms, and increasing hostility toward international collaboration. Indeed, this threatens the invaluable work done by international institutions to create a safer world.

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