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Editorial Board

Letter from Co-Editors in Chief

Dear Reader,

As we present the fourth volume of the *Stanford Journal of International Affairs,* we have spent a lot of time reflecting on what it means to write about the world today, given current global affairs. This past year has been hard to witness and even harder to understand to say the least. Conflicts in the Middle East and Eastern Europe continue, and in other places, communities face political uncertainty, economic challenges, and the steady pressures of climate change and other global problems.

In these times, writing sometimes feels almost powerless. It can't stop wars or fix everything wrong in our world. Yet, our team still thinks it matters. To us, writing helps us understand what's going on, both out in the world and within ourselves. It lets people share their stories and reminds us to listen to those who see things from a different perspective.

And that is exactly why this journal exists. We hope to gather perspectives that don't always agree, but together, create a fuller picture of our world than any single voice could ever address. The articles in this volume attempt to do exactly that. Each piece grows out of its author's own questions, uncertainties, and hopes about our world today.

With that being said, we want to take a moment to thank our editors, managing editors, and outreach and designers, for their contributions to the volume this year. Without your work, this volume would not have been possible. Our immense gratitude goes to your time, commitment, and efforts in presenting the world with more perspectives.

Lastly, we want to end on a simple note. We may not have answers to the conflicts and crises we are currently witnessing. But we do believe that trying to understand still matters, and that it starts with individual engagement. If this volume does anything, we hope it encourages that kind of attention and openness. And like many others, we continue to wish for a more just and peaceful future.

We hope you enjoy this volume and that it offers, however small, something insightful for how you see the world.

Sincerely yours,

Lianren Li & Zoya Fasihuddin

COMPARATIVE GOVERNANCE & DEVELOPMENT

Regimes on Trial: Courts, Parties, and the Fear of Backlash

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Abstract

Why do courts ban extremist parties in some contexts but not others? Building on militant-democracy theory, this paper argues that judicial capacity enables party bans, but their political meaning depends on two forms of accountability – legal/institutional and political/public – and the fear of backlash. In democracies, accountable courts act cautiously, grounding proscription in tightly reasoned law to avoid martyring extremists or delegitimizing institutions. In non-democracies, the same tools become instruments of regime protection. Drawing on a cross-national dataset (202 countries, 1945-2023) and case studies of Greece, Germany, and Turkey, the paper shows that the key divide is whether capable courts operate where backlash meaningfully constrains their use.

I. Introduction

On October 7th, 2020, after a five-year trial, Greece's Golden Dawn was officially ruled a criminal organization. In the words of prosecutor Thanassis Kampagiannis, it was "the biggest trial of fascist criminality since Nuremberg" (Horner 2016). What made the case remarkable was not only that a sitting parliamentary party was dismantled, but how it happened. The Greek judiciary neutralized an extremist party through ordinary criminal law. Without any constitutional party ban clause, the Greek judges reclassified Golden Dawn as a criminal organization "operating under the cover of a political party" and used the penal code to remove it from democratic competition (Psarras 2015).

Legal instruments produce strikingly different outcomes across countries. In Turkey, courts have closed Islamist and pro-Kurdish parties under a militant constitutional clause that authorizes the dissolution of parties that threaten secularism or territorial integrity (Can 2021). In principle, these bans are presented as defending democracy, but in practice they effectively serve regime maintenance. In Germany, by contrast, the Federal Constitutional Court has twice refused to ban the far-right NPD despite a strong militant-democracy clause, citing both tainted evidence and the party's limited threat (BBC 2017).

These contrasts raise a broader question: *Under what institutional conditions do states ban parties?* I argue that judicial capacity enables courts to act, but its democratic consequences depend on two forms of judicial accountability — legal/institutional accountability, meaning compliance with rule-of-law norms and procedural constraints, and political/public accountability, meaning exposure to electoral and reputational costs — and the attendant fear of backlash. In democracies, high-capacity and accountable courts use party bans and criminalization as instruments of democratic self-defense. In contrast, in hybrid or authoritarian regimes, high capacity without accountability turns the same tools into mechanisms of regime protection. According to Bernatskyi (2024), democracies exhibit different doctrinal orientations regarding democratic self-defense: procedural (liberal), institutional, militant. However, that typology is primarily descriptive, as it just refers to what tools exist, not when and how they are deployed in practice. My paper proposes that the key lies in the interaction between regime type, judicial capacity, and accountability, operating through one common mechanism: *the fear of backlash*. In democracies, proscribing a popular extremist party is a high-stakes decision, as courts and governments fear that a failed or inadequately justified ban will martyr the party, delegitimize institutions, and erode civil liberties. Consequently, democracies resort to party bans or criminalization of parties only when courts are both capable of assembling complex evidence, and accountable enough to justify their decision to the public. In contrast, in authoritarian or hybrid regimes, leaders are far less constrained by fears of public backlash or judicial legitimacy, so the same legal instruments are more easily weaponized against opposition.

To evaluate this argument, I use a mixed-methods design. At the cross-national level, a new party-ban dataset (202 countries, 1945-2023) combined with V-Dem indicators shows that judicial capacity increases the likelihood of formal bans, while accountability shapes whether that capacity is deployed defensively or repressively. Three case studies — Greece, Germany, and Turkey — trace the mechanism of backlash in practice, examining how courts have used ordinary criminal law, militant constitutional clauses, and selective dissolution to navigate the tension between self-defense and democratic legitimacy. Together, these findings reframe democratic self-defense theory by showing that the key divide is not constitutional doctrine, but whether capable courts operate in regimes where backlash meaningfully constrains their use.

II. Theoretical Framework

This section develops the framework that links regime type, judicial design, and the management of extremist parties. Theoretically, the study expands on Bernatskyi's

(2024) and Loewenstein's (1937) models by distinguishing procedural and militant legal pathways of self-defense and introducing the mechanism of backlash (Loewenstein 1937). It bridges comparative judicial politics and the literature on *militant democracy* by demonstrating the interaction between judicial capacity and regime type provides a new framework for explaining why some states use courts to criminalize or ban extremist violence while others weaponize courts to suppress legitimate opposition. Building on the notion of democratic self-defense, I argue that the decision of courts to defend democracy procedurally or suppress it politically depends on the interplay of judicial capability, accountability, and regime type, conditioned by backlash as a constraint.

II.I Democratic Self-Defense and the Role of the Courts

At the heart of constitutionalism lies a paradox: democracies sometimes need to act illiberally to survive. This paradox was first theorized by Loewenstein (1937), whose concept of militant democracy holds that democratic systems may legitimately defend themselves against movements that seek to abolish the democratic order. Subsequent literature has debated how and through which institutions this self-defense should occur so as not to violate the democratic order itself. Bernatskyi (2024) provides one of the most comprehensive contemporary classifications of democratic self-defense models. He distinguishes three orientations according to how states balance freedom and self-protection (liberal/procedural, institutional, militant). For this paper, we will focus on the following two;

A. Liberal (Procedural) Model: countries restrict only violent or criminal activity, emphasizing due process and ordinary law rather than ideological conformity.
B. Militant Model: authorizes bans on parties deemed anti-democratic in purpose or doctrine, even without direct criminal attacks.

While these orientations adequately describe what legal tools exist, they do not explain when and why states deploy them. For instance, Greece, operating without a militant clause, used ordinary criminal law to dismantle Golden Dawn after years of inaction; Turkey, endowed with a militant clause, used it to constrain legitimate opposition; and Germany, under the same doctrinal model, applied it sparingly. In order to explain these contrasts, a framework that connects militant-democracy theory with the comparative politics of courts is needed.

II.II Managing Extremist Parties in Democracies: The Limits of the *Cordon Sanitaire*

Much of the comparative literature on how democracies manage extremist parties focuses not on formal bans but on soft containment, or cordon sanitaire — mainstream parties' refusal to cooperate with or legitimize extremist actors in order to isolate them electorally (Downs 2006). Yet this strategy frequently backfires; stigmatized parties capitalize on victimhood narratives and radicalize further, a paradox that pushes democracies to use more powerful tools when soft constraints fail (Heinze 2018). Party bans and criminal prosecutions represent the most coercive end of the self-defense spectrum, but they are politically risky. Since in open societies, banning an elected or popular party can backfire, democracies only resort to bans when they have high-capacity and accountable courts able to justify these actions under ordinary law, insulating them from charges of politicization. In contrast, authoritarian regimes, unconstrained by backlash or accountability, can deploy the same legal instruments, alongside other informal coercive tactics (i.e., intimidation and harassment of party leaders, manipulating electoral thresholds, etc.) opportunistically to silence legitimate opposition.

II.III Judicial Capacity and the Politics of Self-Defense

While Bernatskyi's typology classifies state orientations, it does not fully explain the variation within them. I introduce judicial capacity and accountability as key variables. Judicial capacity refers to courts' ability to interpret and apply the law independently, encompassing institutional autonomy, professional expertise, and enforcement authority. Accountability operates along two dimensions: legal/institutional accountability, meaning compliance with rule-of-law norms and procedural constraints that ensure judicial decisions are transparent, justified, and reviewable; and political/public accountability, referring to exposure to electoral and reputational costs that arise when judicial decisions fail to command public legitimacy. Together, these dimensions determine not only whether courts can act, but whether they have the incentives to act cautiously.

The interaction of these two variables with regime type determines whether judicial intervention defends or suppresses democracy. In democracies, high capacity allows a court to act, but high accountability determines whether they can do so legitimately, despite the fear of backlash. In authoritarian or hybrid regimes, capacity without accountability enables legalistic repression, also known as autocratic legalism (Scheppele 2018).

Regime Type	High Accountability	Low Accountability
High Judicial Capacity	Procedural or militant self-defense (e.g., Greece, Germany): courts use law to uphold democracy	Regime protection / authoritarian legalism (Turkey): courts use law to eliminate opposition
Low Judicial Capacity	Judicial restraint or inaction	Arbitrary repression or paralysis

This framework generates a clear prediction; judicial capacity determines whether courts can act, but accountability — both legal/institutional and political/public — determines whether they act in defense of democracy or in service of the regime. Where both are high, courts are constrained to use militant tools sparingly and procedurally; where capacity is high but accountability is low, the same tools become instruments of authoritarian legalism.

II.IV Backlash as a Constraint

The link between regime type, judicial design, and party proscription operates through a common mechanism: the risk of political backlash. Backlash is distinct from accountability, albeit related to it. Accountability describes the structural conditions courts operate under: the rules, oversight mechanisms, and reputational stakes built into the institutional environment. Backlash is the dynamic consequence: the negative political and societal reactions that materialize when courts act in ways that fail to command public legitimacy. It can be electoral (voter mobilization, increased support for the targeted party), elite-based (legislative retaliation, executive interference), or international (criticism or sanctions from actors like the EU or Council of Europe). Political/public accountability is what makes backlash costly and therefore what makes courts cautious.

Courts fear backlash for two reasons. First, banning a party can martyr extremists, turning them into symbols of resistance, a risk that is especially acute when the targeted party retains significant electoral support. Second, an inadequately justified ban can undermine judicial credibility by exposing courts to charges of political motivation (Malkopoulou 2021). These risks are unevenly distributed: in democracies with competitive elections and independent media, courts face intense public scrutiny, making backlash a real constraint on judicial behavior. In non-democratic regimes, controlled media and weak opposition minimize these costs, allowing the same legal instruments to be deployed with little reputational consequence. The backlash constraint is therefore strongest where political/public accountability is high, and weakest where courts operate within an autocratic legalism machinery.

Judicial capacity and judicial accountability condition how courts navigate this constraint. Strong judicial capacity allows courts to build strong cases, supported by clear evidence and well-developed reasoning, allowing their decisions to withstand political backlash. High accountability raises the reputational stakes of failure but also gives courts incentives to act cautiously and procedurally. In democracies, party bans thus tend to be delayed, tightly reasoned, and anchored in ordinary criminal or constitutional law aimed at minimizing backlash. In non-democracies, high capacity without accountability allows executives and allied courts to weaponize militant-democracy tools with little fear of electoral or normative costs.

II.V Institutional Preconditions for Party Bans

Banning a political party is one of the most intrusive forms of state intervention and requires more than constitutional authorization. Democratic courts can only undertake such actions when specific judicial and institutional preconditions are met, conditions that determine *whether* a ban is feasible, legitimate, and resilient against public or political challenge. Three factors are especially consequential: the procedural difficulty of establishing coordinated wrongdoing, the degree of political insulation judges enjoy, and the standards courts apply when calibrating the severity of extremist threats.

A. Procedural Difficulty

Banning a political party or classifying it as a criminal organization requires aggregating evidence across incidents and overall establishing coordination. As Mersel (2006) emphasizes, dissolution is a “legally complex, institutionally demanding procedure.” High-capacity judiciaries can meet these demands. In democracies, overcoming procedural difficulty is not only a technical problem but a way to prevent backlash as strong evidentiary records and clear command structures make it harder for extremists to claim that they were arbitrarily targeted.

B. Political Insulation

Independence shields judges from backlash and enables them to target powerful actors. In states where courts are captured/highly politicized (e.g., Turkey) judicial decisions reflect regime priorities (Esen 2024).

C. Threat Calibration

Courts assess the magnitude of threat and act proportionally. Finn (2000) warns that proscription decisions determine who can participate in the political sphere and so it must be reserved for threats to democracy that are immediate and existential. Miscalculated decisions on bans i.e., too early, too broad, or based purely on ideological grounds, are why backlash is triggered and undermines the legitimacy of militant democracy.

These mechanisms operate differently across regime types. In democracies, the fear of public and political backlash makes courts cautious and evidence-driven, whereas in autocracies, that constraint is absent, allowing for selective repression.

At the same time, non-democratic regimes can use the judiciary as a means of providing legal justification for banning opposition parties due to the lack of independence. It is also important to note that beyond judicial interventions, autocracies have the means to suppress political parties through informal means, including administrative obstruction, selective enforcement, intimidation and harassment, etc. such mechanisms achieve the functional equivalent of a ban without invoking the courts. Any repression that occurs outside legal channels does not appear as a formal party-ban in datasets.

II.VI Hypotheses

H1 (Capacity): Higher judicial capacity increases the likelihood that a regime will formally ban or criminalize an extremist party in a given country-year.

H2 (Accountability): Judicial accountability increases the likelihood of party bans in democracies but has weaker or negative effects in non-democracies.

H3 (Orientation): In high-capacity democracies, party proscription targets violent or criminal organizations (procedural or militant self-defense and fear of backlash); in high-capacity non-democracies, they target non-violent opposition (regime protection and lack of fear of backlash).

III. Empirical Design

This study uses a mixed-methods design combining a new cross-national dataset with qualitative case studies to evaluate how judicial capacity and accountability shape party proscription across regimes. At the quantitative level, I extend Bernatskyi's (2024) party-ban data with V-Dem indicators for 202 countries (1945–2023), estimating two-way fixed-effects linear probability models to isolate within-country variation over time. At the qualitative level, case studies of Greece, Germany, and Turkey trace how judicial reasoning, institutional design, and the fear of backlash interact in practice. The two stages are complementary: the statistical models establish systematic patterns, while the case studies uncover the mechanisms behind them.

III.I Data Construction

To evaluate the argument, I merged Bernatskyi's (2024) party-ban dataset with V-Dem (v15) indicators capturing judicial capacity, accountability, and broader political context for 202 countries (1945–2023). I supplemented Bernatskyi's original data with Wikipedia's "List of Banned Political Parties." This increased the share of country-years recording at least one ban event from 0.28% to 0.48% (Fig. 1) — a 71% relative increase driven largely by broader inclusion of cases in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia. The persistently low overall incidence confirms that party bans are rare events globally, while the expanded variation in judicial and regime contexts strengthens the robustness of the statistical tests.

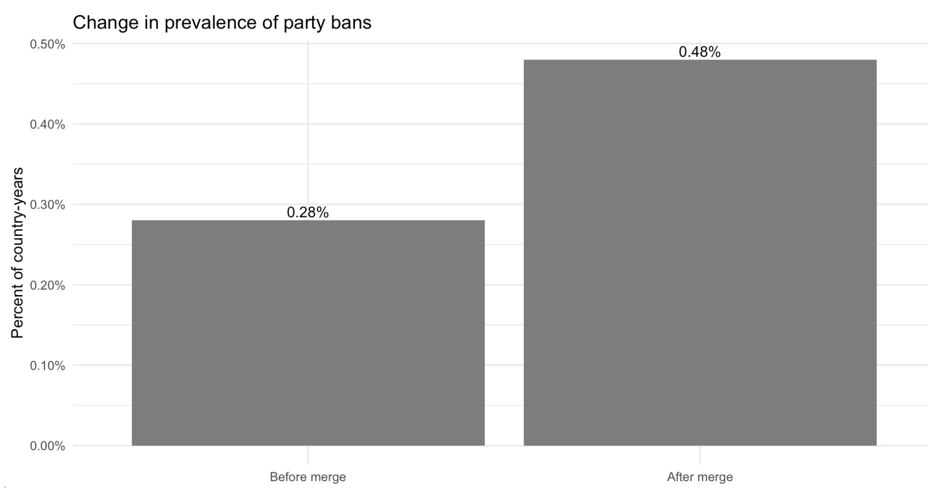

Figure 1: Change in Recorded Ban Events After Merging Datasets

III.II Variables

The Dependent Variable (DV) is a binary indicator coded 1 when a party ban or dissolution occurred in a given country-year. Key independent variables measure judicial capacity and accountability using V-Dem indicators.

A. Judicial accountability (v2juaccnt): the degree to which judges are answerable and disciplined under the rule of law.
B. Judicial capacity (index); since there is no judicial capacity variable in the codebook, I operationalized it through a four-item index constructed from: judicial constraints on the executive (v2x_jucon), high-court independence (v2juhcind), high-court compliance (v2juhccomp), and judicial corruption (v2jucorrdc, reverse-scaled so that higher values indicate cleaner courts).

The judicial capacity index averages four min-max normalized components — judicial constraints on the executive, high-court independence, high-court compliance, and reverse-coded judicial corruption — producing a continuous 0-1 measure that treats each component as equally weighted. The principal limitation is that judicial capacity correlates strongly with regime type, since democracies systematically exhibit higher judicial independence, compliance, and lower corruption than autocracies (Fig. 2). This overlap raises multicollinearity concerns and limits the number of cases that genuinely combine democratic institutions with low judicial capacity. I therefore treat the index as capturing structural judicial strength, while acknowledging that its empirical distribution partly reflects broader regime differences rather than purely judicial variation.

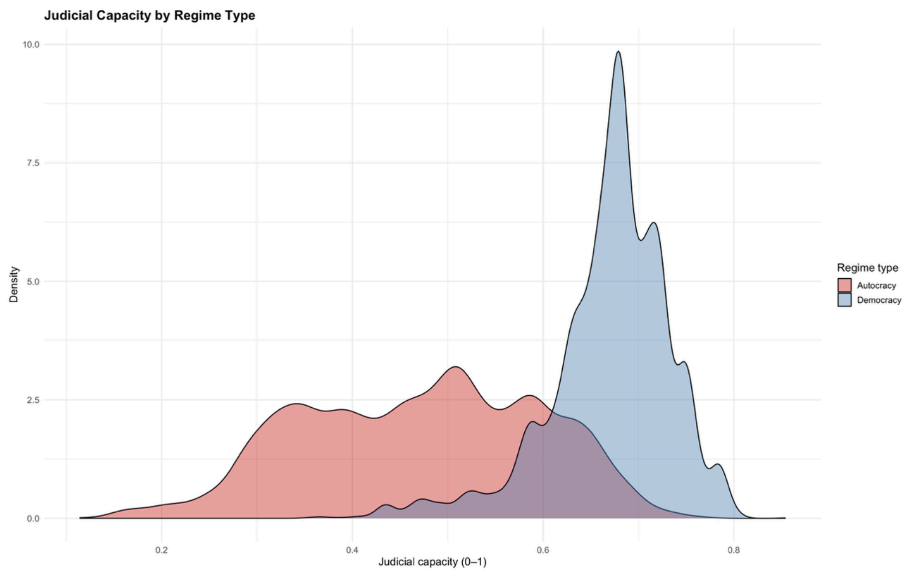

Figure 2: Judicial Capacity by Regime Type (0-1 Index)

Controls include rule of law (v2xcl_rol), electoral democracy/polyarchy (v2x_polyarchy), and freedom of association (v2x_frassoc_thick). I estimated two-way fixed-effects linear probability models with robust standard errors to isolate within-country change over time.

III.III Results

Figure 2 plots the judicial capacity index separately for autocracies and democracies, confirming that democratic regimes cluster at substantially higher capacity levels than autocracies. This reinforces the theoretical claim that robust judicial capacity is a structural feature of democratic systems and the precondition for the judicial interventions analyzed in the subsequent models while also underscoring the multicollinearity limitation noted above.

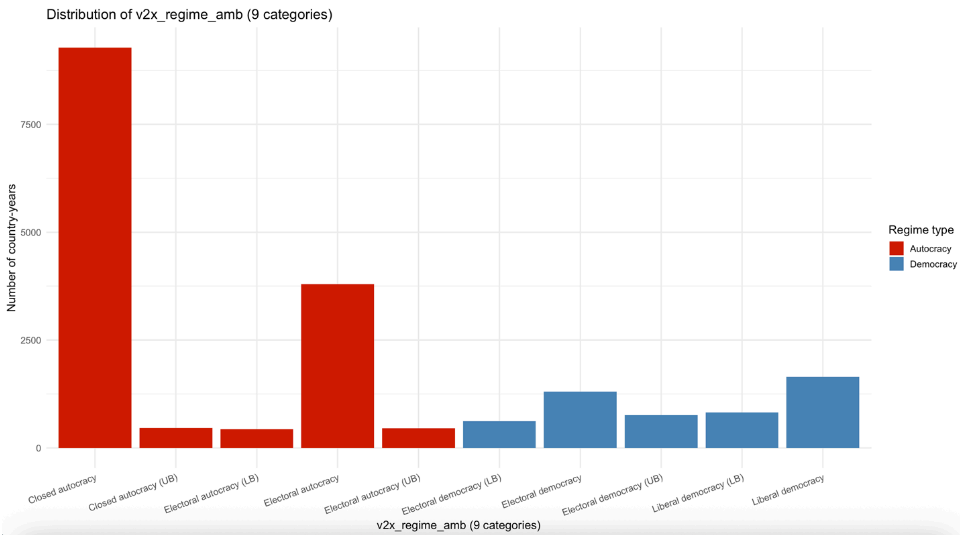

Figure 3: Global Regime Landscape Using the Nine-Category Ambiguous Regimes of the World Measure

Furthermore, Figure 3 shows the distribution of country-years across nine regime types, revealing that autocracies constitute the majority of global observations while liberal democracies represent a relatively small share. This matters for interpretation: because democracies are fewer, even a modest number of bans produces a higher ban rate proportionally.

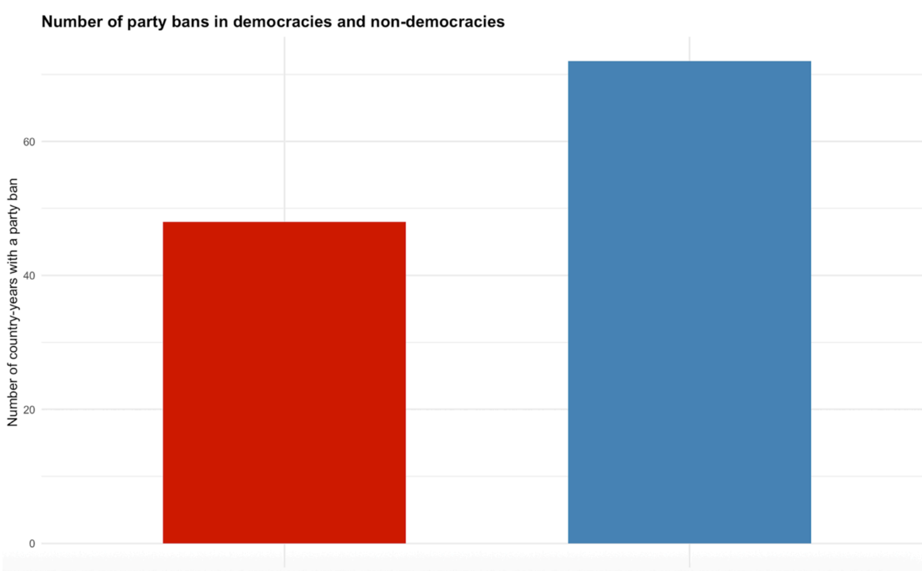

Figure 4: Number of Party Bans in Democracies and Non-Democracies

Figure 4 confirms this pattern, showing that democracies register the highest formal ban rates while autocracies record extremely low ones. At first glance, this might suggest that democracies are more prone to suppressing political actors. Figure 5, however, reveals that the disparity is largely an artifact of how bans are recorded across regime types.

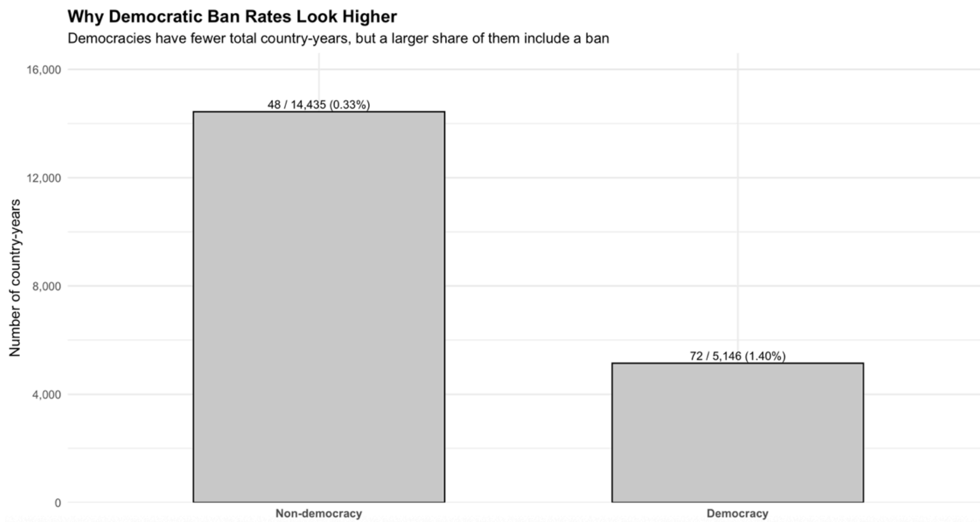

Figure 5: Why Democratic Ban Rates Appear Higher

In the raw data, democracies register 72 ban-years out of 5,146 total country-years (1.40%), compared to only 48 ban-years out of 14,435 (0.33%) in non-democracies. This disparity reflects two features of the data: democratic regimes make up a smaller share of total country-years, so a modest number of bans translates into a higher ban rate; and autocracies frequently repress opposition through informal or administrative means that never appear as formally coded ban-years, whereas democracies document proscription through judicial procedures. The higher democratic ban rates therefore reflect variations in institutional documentation rather than a greater innate tendency to suppress political actors.

III.IV Hypotheses Testing

Table 1 presents five two-way fixed-effects models evaluating how judicial capacity and judicial accountability, along with their interaction with democracy, shape the probability that a country formally bans a party. The models increase in complexity from a baseline specification (M0) to full interaction models (M3-M4). Several important patterns emerge.

A. Judicial Capacity: M0 and M4

In Model 0, the judicial capacity index has a strong, positive, and statistically significant association with the likelihood of a ban ($\beta \approx 0.019$, $p < 0.001$). Substantively, this signals that as we go from the lowest to highest observed levels of judicial capacity, the probability that a party is formally banned increases by almost two percentage points, a meaningful increase given how rare party bans are (0.48%). This aligns with H1, as countries that have autonomous and less corrupt courts are better equipped to make the complex and high-stakes decision to proscribe a party.

Model 4 introduces the interaction between capacity and democracy, demonstrating that the effect of judicial capacity varies systematically across regime types. The interaction coefficient is large and statistically significant ($\beta \approx 0.088$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that judicial capacity matters most in democracies, where strong courts are more likely to enact formal party proscriptions. In contrast, in non-democratic regimes, even when courts are institutionally strong, they rarely translate that capacity into formal bans, as executives can also resort to informal or administrative tools (consistent with H3).

B. Judicial Accountability: M1-M3

Across Models 1-3, judicial accountability is consistently positive and statistically significant. This means that courts that are more transparent, reviewable, and procedurally constrained are more likely to carry out bans, suggesting that accountability helps courts defend and justify politically sensitive decisions.

Model 3 estimates the interaction between judicial accountability and democracy, revealing a positive and highly significant effect ($\beta \approx 0.014$, $p < 0.001$). The results suggest that accountability enhances the likelihood of party proscription primarily in democratic contexts, where courts operate under robust standards of oversight and institutional legitimacy. In contrast, accountability exerts little to no positive influence in non-democratic regimes and may even be weakly negative, consistent with settings in which judicial autonomy is constrained, and accountability mechanisms are selectively deployed as tools of political control.

C. Controls: Polyarchy, Rule of Law, and Association Rights

Controls are acting as expected. When included alone, polyarchy is positive (M2), suggesting that democracies appear to ban more parties, a pattern driven by how bans are recorded and the larger number of parties operating in democratic systems. Moreover, rule of law is weak and marginally negative, and freedom of association is consistently negative, indicating that courts may be less willing to take the extraordinary step of party proscription, as high rule-of-law and civic environments encourage proceduralism and raise the political and legal costs of banning a party, consistent with the mechanism of backlash.

Table 1: Regression Table Demonstrating the Effects of Judicial Capacity, Accountability, and Their Interaction with Democracy on Party Bans

	M0: Capacity index	M1: Key vars	M2: + Controls	M3: + Accountability × Democracy	M4: + Capacity × Democracy
Judicial capacity (index)	0.019*** (0.005)				0.048 (0.034)
Capacity × Democracy					0.088*** (0.026)
Judicial accountability		0.006*** (0.001)	0.006*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)	0.007*** (0.001)
Accountability × Democracy				0.014*** (0.002)	
Polyarchy			0.012* (0.006)	−0.019* (0.007)	−0.054** (0.020)
Rule of law			−0.009+ (0.005)	−0.004 (0.005)	−0.006 (0.005)
Freedom of association			−0.011* (0.005)	−0.002 (0.005)	−0.005 (0.005)
Num.Obs.	27616	23719	23307	23307	23307
R2	0.090	0.094	0.096	0.097	0.096
R2 Within	0.001	0.003	0.004	0.006	0.005
Std.Errors	IID	IID	IID	IID	IID
FE: Country	X	X	X	X	X
FE: Year	X	X	X	X	X

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; + $p < 0.10$

Figure 6 illustrates the effects of judicial capacity and judicial accountability on the probability of a party ban change across levels of democracy. The results reflect the interaction coefficients reported in Table 1, where the effect of judicial capacity increases sharply as regimes become more democratic, as illustrated by the purple line. Judicial accountability has a consistently positive but much smaller effect, rising gradually with democracy.

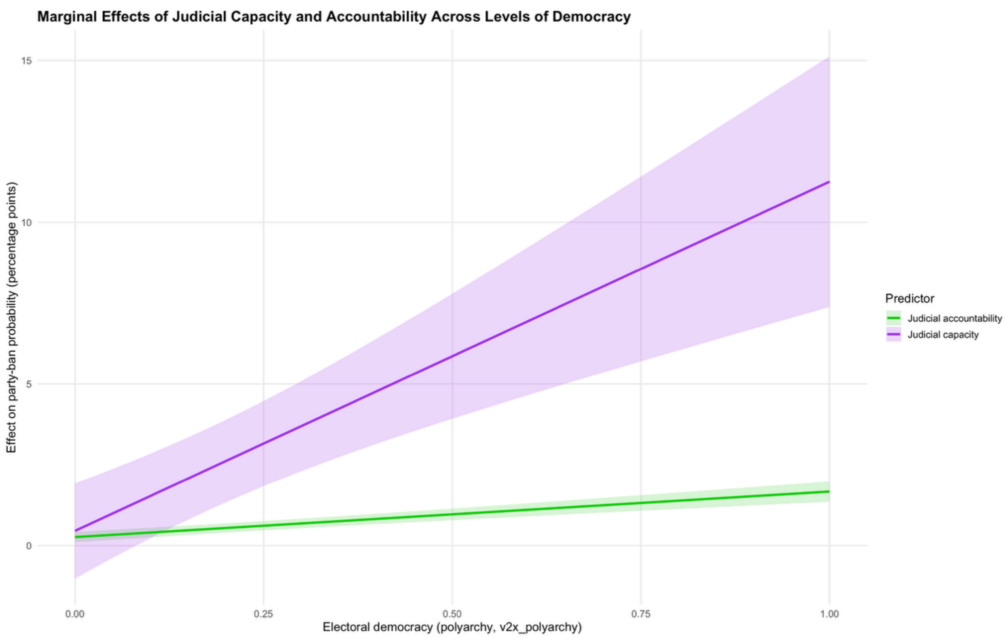

Figure 6: Marginal Effects of Judicial Capacity and Judicial Accountability Across Levels of Democracy

Together, all the above models provide strong support for both Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2. Most importantly, the findings show that capacity gives courts the ability to act, while accountability and democracy determine when and how they choose to use this power. High-capacity courts in democracies are the most likely to implement formal bans; weak or unaccountable courts in autocracies rarely do so and instead rely on extra-legal repression, consistent with Hypothesis 3.

IV. Qualitative Evidence: Greece, Germany, and Turkey

Following the quantitative analysis, qualitative case studies of Greece, Germany, and Turkey, further examine the mechanisms linking judicial design to party ban orientation. These countries, while different in doctrine and/or regime type, share the common outcome of courts deciding the limits of extremist political participation. Greece is an example of a procedural democratic model, as the judiciary neutralized an extremist party through ordinary criminal law rather than constitutional banning provisions. Germany represents a classic militant-democracy model, in which party bans are rare and invoked only when anti-democratic threats are clearly substantiated and proportionate. Turkey, by contrast, showcases authoritarian legalism; powerful yet unaccountable courts routinely dissolve opposition parties to bolster executive dominance. Together, these case studies reveal how judicial authority over party regulation operates across distinct political systems and institutional arrangements.

V. Greece: A Case of Procedural Democratic Self-Defense

V.I Legal Context and Judicial Tradition

The current constitution of Greece (post-1975) supports pluralism. Notably, Article 29 recognizes parties as “free citizens’ associations contributing to democratic pluralism” (Tourkochoriti, 2013). Unlike other countries, Greece does not have a constitutional clause allowing party proscription on ideological grounds. As Psarras (2015) writes, this absence was deliberate, and the constitution “prohibits the banning of political parties for reasons of ideology.” The reason is rooted in memories of the 1967-1974 military junta, which fostered a deep aversion to outlawing parties (Hellenic Parliament, The Constitution of Greece, 2008). Consequently, due to the absence of a militant party-ban clause, courts and governments had to adhere to the principle that “democracy prosecutes deeds, not beliefs.” (Psarras, 2015). This legal and normative restraint created space for extremist actors to exploit formal legality while engaging in systematic violence, as demonstrated by the Golden Dawn Party (Greek: Chrisi Avgi).

V.II The Golden Dawn Case

Golden Dawn was founded in the 1980s as a neo-Nazi movement and entered parliament in 2012 amid Greece's economic and refugee crises (Human Rights First, 2015). Its leadership's decision to register as a parliamentary party was strategic: by “assuming the form of a political party,” it gained constitutional protections and immunities that complicated prosecution (Psarras, 2015). Over the following years, members committed hundreds of assaults against immigrants and people of color, culminating in the 2013 murder of rapper Pavlos Fyssas. The killing triggered a massive investigation, and after a five-year trial, Areios Pagos ruled in 2020 that Golden Dawn constituted a criminal organization operating under the cover of a political party, finding evidence of hierarchical command, battalion troops, and systematic violent campaigns (Malkopoulou, 2021).

The case illustrates all three elements of the theoretical mechanism. First, the backlash constraint was acute; for seven years, public debate centered on whether prosecuting an elected party with 7-8% of the vote would martyr Golden Dawn and undermine democratic legitimacy (Malkopoulou, 2021). It was widely argued that a pluralist democracy could hardly block the road to a popularly elected party, making an outright ideological ban politically untenable. This gave the judiciary strong incentive to ground its intervention in something harder to challenge than ideology. Second, high judicial capacity was essential: courts assembled over 400 documented incidents to establish hierarchical coordination, while navigating the formal parliamentary immunities that initially shielded party leaders, precisely the kind of institutionally demanding task that only a capable judiciary could credibly undertake. Third, legal/institutional accountability shaped the court's reasoning throughout: grounded in Articles 187 and 187A of the Penal Code, the verdict emphasized "specific and reasoned justification" (ειδική και εμπεριστατωμένη αιτιολογία), as articulated in Supreme Court Decision 620/2021. By convicting Golden Dawn for orchestrated crimes rather than ideology, the court left little room for charges of partisan motivation.

The trial also unfolded across multiple governments without political interference, reflecting strong judicial independence. This procedural integrity extended beyond the original verdict: following the ruling, Areios Pagos barred successor parties — including "National Party: Greeks" from the 2023 general elections and "Spartans" from the 2023 EU elections — citing continuity with a convicted criminal organization (Stamatoukou, 2023; Reuters, 2024). Once more, the judiciary grounded its decisions in prior criminal judgments rather than political evaluation, demonstrating that procedural self-defense can be both durable and self-reinforcing.

Critics may argue the response came too late, given years of unchecked violence before the trial began. But this delay is consistent with the logic of procedural self-defense: by waiting to assemble an airtight criminal case, the Greek judiciary ensured that proscription rested on legal rather than ideological grounds, minimizing the risk of backlash and preserving institutional legitimacy in the process.

VI. Turkey: Legalism and Regime Protection

VI.I Constitutional Foundations of Party Closures; Capacity without Accountability

Turkey's judiciary is institutionally strong; it has the capacity to dissolve governing parties, annul laws, and dismiss members of parliament. Yet, its accountability to rule of law norms is weak. Article 69 of Turkey's 1982 Constitution grants the Constitutional Court the authority to dissolve parties whose activities contradict the "independence of the State, its indivisible integrity, secularism, or democratic principles" (Çakmak and Dinç, 2010). Between the 1960s and 2000s, Turkish courts have closed more than 27 political parties in an attempt to target opposition, not extremism, including Islamist and Kurdish movements. The two most frequent grounds are threats to secularism (Islamist parties like Refah and Fazilet), and threats to territorial unity (pro-Kurdish parties like HDP, HADEP, DTP) (Celep, 2014). Notably, after the 2016 coup attempt, more than 2,000 judges were purged as the council of Judges and Prosecutors was placed under executive control (Esen, 2024). Combined, these factors produce a judiciary with high capacity but low accountability. As Esen (2024) argues, Turkey's "judicial transformation" produced a system of competitive authoritarian legalism, where courts "retain formal independence but substantively operate in the service of executive consolidation." Thus, while the judiciary's capacity enables it to apply militant-democratic tools, its lack of accountability transforms these tools into instruments of repression.

VI.II Selective Proscription of Parties and Legal Authoritarianism

Party proscription in Turkey is asymmetric. Islamist parties like Refah and Fazilet have been dissolved for violating secularism, yet the Justice and Development party (AKP), which also has Islamist roots, survived a 2008 closure attempt. Moreover, Kurdish parties (HADEP, DTP, HDP) face continuous prosecution, often followed by immediate successor formations (Celep, 2014). More specifically, in 2009, the Constitutional Court unanimously dissolved the Democratic Society Party (DTP) for "activities contrary to the indivisible unity of the State," banning 37 politicians (Celep, 2014). The same pattern reappeared in the recent indictment against the People's Democratic Party (HDP), as the government accused it of being "a front for the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)" (Al Jazeera, 2021). This pattern confirms that capacity without accountability allows courts to act selectively with the purpose of targeting opposition instead of defending pluralism. As Casal Bertoa and Bourne (2017) note in their cross-national study, Turkey demonstrates how proscription "functions not as a democratic protection but as a mechanism of party system engineering."

In contrast to democracies, Turkey's political and media environment largely eliminates the *backlash constraint* that restrains courts elsewhere. Because elections are neither fully competitive nor supported by independent media and civil society, the government faces lower reputational or electoral costs for outlawing opposition parties. Notably, party closures in Turkey rarely generate societal backlash beyond the groups affected (Esen, 2024; Celep, 2014). Usually, the government presents each dissolution as necessary to defend secularism or national unity, knowing that courts will provide legal justifications and government-controlled media will support this framing. As Esen (2024) writes, the judiciary constructs "legal rationalizations for executive preferences" under the shield of constitutional duty. Therefore, in the absence of widespread public scrutiny, courts invoke democratic principles to restrict democracy through autocratic legalism (Scheppele, 2018).

It is worth noting that formal party closures represent only a fraction of Turkey's broader toolkit of political suppression. High electoral thresholds, media marginalization, and the arrest of party leaders can neutralize opposition without ever triggering Article 69 or producing a formally coded ban-year (Szymański, 2019; Bozkurt, 2023). This helps explain why Turkey's formal ban rate may understate the true extent of party repression in the dataset.

VII. Germany: Militant Democracy with Safeguards

VII.I Constitutional Design and Judicial Tradition

The German case refines the theoretical argument by showing how judicial accountability and political backlash interact to discipline militant-democratic tools. Germany's approach demonstrates that militant clauses can be democratically legitimate when they are embedded in a high-accountability judicial system. In consolidated democracies, public scrutiny constrains government overreach, therefore such militant instruments can only be used sparingly and only when the evidentiary threshold is overwhelming. This comes into sharp contrast with non-democratic regimes like Turkey, where weak accountability allows for the same legal instruments to become tools of regime oppression.

Article 21(2) of the German Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) explicitly authorizes the Federal Constitutional Court (*Bundesverfassungsgericht*) to declare any party unconstitutional if it "seeks to impair or abolish the free democratic basic order" (*Bundesverfassungsgericht - Proceedings for the Prohibition of a Political Party, n.d.*). For a ban to be pursued, a party must "actively and systematically advocate its [unconstitutional] aims," and there must be specific indications of the possibility that "the party's activities will be successful" (Asgeirsson, 2017.) Unlike Turkey's politically driven practice, Germany's militant democracy clause is narrowly defined and procedurally constrained. Only the Bundestag, Bundesrat, or federal government may petition the court, and the standard of proof is exceptionally high. These safeguards reflect Germany's postwar experience and a sensitivity to the dangers of politicizing power.

VII.II The NPD Cases and Cautious Militant Democracy

Historically, Germany has relied primarily on cordon sanitaire to contain extremist parties. More specifically, mainstream parties have refused to cooperate with the far-right in an attempt to isolate them electorally (Downs, 2002). The NPD cases exemplify this cautious militancy. In 2003, the German court rejected a ban request citing tainted evidence, after it was discovered that state informants had infiltrated the party. Fifteen years later, it rejected a second ban because it was believed that the far-right, anti-democratic ideology did not pose a real threat to the democratic order (Bundesverfassungsgericht, Judgment of 17 January 2017). Germany thus demonstrates both judicial accountability and an acute awareness of political backlash. In the NPD cases, political and judicial actors repeatedly argued that an unsuccessful or overly broad ban would "victimize" the party and damage the credibility of militant democracy itself (Tanno, 2025). The Court's restraint aimed to prevent the state from appearing repressive or transforming the NPD into a martyr of free speech, as a result of ideological policing. In this way, the German judiciary preserved the legitimacy of democracy. In this sense, Bernatskyi's (2024) view of Germany as a model of "militant democracy with liberal safeguards" underscores that militant clauses need not threaten democracy when they operate within a system defined by accountability, transparency, and sensitivity to public scrutiny.

VII.III The AfD Debate and Contemporary Backlash Constraints

The renewed debate over whether to ban far-right AfD similarly centers on the risk that prohibition could backfire electorally or be perceived as an illegitimate attempt to suppress a major opposition party. The Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has surged in electoral strength and, in 2025, was formally classified by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) as a "right-wing extremist organization." As CNN reports "the party claimed a significant 20.8% of the vote in February's national election, the best performance by a far-right party in the country since World War II" (Tanno, 2025). The debate on whether to ban the party highlights the same interaction between regime type, judicial capacity and accountability, and the fear of political backlash that characterizes German militant democracy (Conesa, 2025). On one hand, the constitutional and procedural framework remains strict, and the evidentiary standard is exceptionally high. On the other hand, the AfD's growing influence has reignited calls for proscription as a result of widespread concerns regarding threats to democratic values and public safety. However, Germany's continuous use of cordon sanitaire, and an active civil society signal that the backlash constraint remains powerful. Before a ban could proceed, both the courts and the government must weigh not only legal sufficiency, but also the legitimacy costs of proscription.

VIII. Conclusion

This paper set out to answer a central question: *Under what institutional conditions do states ban parties?* Across democratic, hybrid, and authoritarian contexts, banning a political party is one of the most extreme choices a regime can make to protect itself from internal threats. I argued that this decision cannot be understood solely through constitutional doctrine or regime type; rather, it depends on the interaction between judicial capacity, judicial accountability, and the political context in which courts operate.

The theoretical framework advanced in this paper reinterprets classic models of democratic self-defense through the lens of comparative judicial politics. It proposed that the same legal power to proscribe parties takes on opposite meanings across regimes because of differences in accountability and the fear of political backlash. In democracies, party bans are rare and are employed only when courts are, firstly, capable of building a strong evidentiary record and, secondly, accountable enough to justify their actions to the public. By contrast, in non-democratic regimes, the absence of accountability and public backlash removes these constraints, allowing militant-democratic tools to become instruments of authoritarian control.

The cross-national analysis confirmed this logic. Judicial capacity played a foundational role in shaping when and how states were able to pursue party bans. Across the models, higher judicial capacity consistently increased the likelihood of proscription, especially within democracies, demonstrating that courts must first be institutionally strong, independent, and professionally competent before they can undertake the legally complex task of party dissolution. Moreover, judicial accountability significantly increased the probability of party bans within democracies but had weaker or even negative effects in authoritarian contexts.

Normatively, the results reaffirm the paradox of democracy's self-protection. Democracies cannot indefinitely rely on *cordon sanitaire* and informal isolation of extremists. When these fail, judicial intervention becomes necessary. This poses a significant challenge as democracies are called to act strongly enough to defend the institution of democracy without eroding it from within. This study suggests that the solution lies not in militancy itself but in accountable institutions that ensure militant tools are exercised only under the strictest procedural safeguards.

The case studies of Greece, Turkey, and Germany revealed these dynamics in practice. In Greece, high-capacity and accountable courts cautiously reclassified Golden Dawn as a criminal organization. In Turkey, a powerful but unaccountable judiciary used its militant clause to dissolve opposition parties in the name of democracy. Germany, by contrast, showed how militant-democracy provisions can coexist with liberal safeguards, especially under strong public scrutiny. The key pattern that emerges is that regimes enact party bans when they perceive existential threats to the political order, but the timing, justification, and democratic quality of these interventions depend on the presence or absence of backlash. Democracies act defensively, constrained by the rule-of-law and vibrant public spheres, whereas autocracies act preemptively, using law as a tool of repression. It is this fear of backlash, present in democracies and absent in autocracies, that divides procedural self-defense from authoritarian legalism.

Of course, the present analysis has limits. The party-ban data remain sparse, modelling rare events can have statistical challenges, and the case studies focus on a small number of prominent examples in Europe. Other contexts and continents, such as Latin America or the Middle East may reveal additional mechanisms or boundary conditions. Future research could extend the dataset to include softer restrictions short of bans and prosecutions of individual leaders, and examine the role of elite opinion in shaping judicial risk perceptions and how emerging democracies adjust their own backlash thresholds.

Appendix

Appendix A: Table A1. Summary of Key Variables

Variable	Description	Source
Party ban (DV)	Binary indicator coded 1 if a party was banned or dissolved in a given country-year	Bernatskyi (2024); Wikipedia List of Banned Political Parties
Judicial capacity index	Average of four components (all rescaled 0–1): judicial constraints on the executive (v2x_jucon), high-court independence (v2juhcind), high-court compliance (v2juhccomp), and reverse-coded judicial corruption (v2jucorrdc).	V-Dem v15
Judicial accountability (v2juaccnt)	Degree to which judges are answerable under the rule of law and subject to oversight and disciplinary channels	V-Dem v15
High-court independence (v2juhcind)	Extent to which the highest judicial body operates free from political influence	V-Dem v15
Judicial constraints on the executive (v2x_jucon)	Judiciary's formal ability to limit executive actions	V-Dem v15
Judicial corruption (v2jucorrdc)	Prevalence of bribery and favoritism in judicial rulings; reverse-coded in capacity index	V-Dem v15
High-court compliance (v2juhccomp)	Frequency with which political actors comply with high-court decisions	V-Dem v15
Rule of law (v2xcl_rol)	Quality, consistency, and impartiality of the legal system	V-Dem v15
Polyarchy (v2x_polyarchy)	Overall level of electoral democracy	V-Dem v15
Freedom of association (v2x_frassoc_thick)	Degree to which individuals and organizations can freely form associations	V-Dem v15

Appendix B: Party Ban Statistics by Regime Type

Party Ban Statistics by Regime Type

Regime_Type	Country_Years	Ban_Years	Ban_Rate	Ban_Events	Countries_Ever_Banning	N_Countries
Non-democracy	14,435	48	0.33	48	17.50	177.00
Democracy	5,146	72	1.40	72	33.30	6.00

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GLOBAL PEACE & SECURITY

What were Russia's political objectives with the annexation of Crimea in 2014?

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Abstract

This piece examines Russia's political objectives during the 2014 annexation of Crimea through three theoretical frameworks: realism, nationalism and irredentism, and diversionary war theory. Drawing on speeches, government archives, polling data, and scholarship by historians including Serhii Plokhy and Timothy Snyder, the analysis argues that realism — centered on securing the Black Sea Fleet, countering NATO expansion, and controlling critical maritime chokepoints — offers the dominant explanation. Nationalist narratives functioned as ideological tools to legitimize the annexation domestically, while diversionary war theory captures incidental political gains rather than primary motives.

I. Introduction

In late 2013, mass protests set fire to Maidan Nezalezhnosti, the central square of Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. The series of demonstrations, termed Euromaidan, sparked due to the Ukrainian president's last-minute decision not to sign the European Union (EU)-Ukraine Association Agreement. This agreement fell under the larger Eastern Partnership program, an initiative aimed at strengthening diplomatic and economic ties between the EU and six Eastern European countries, all of which formerly were part of the Soviet Union until 1991 and currently share borders with present-day Russia (Interfax Ukraine). Although the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament, voted heavily in favor of European Integration, President Viktor Yanukovych ultimately scrapped the deal under pressure from Russia (Hubert). These protests soon erupted into political violence, known as the Revolution of Dignity, which led to the ousting of Yanukovych and his government, who fled to the eastern city of Kharkiv. On February 22nd, 2014, a pro-Western coalition of political opposition seized control of Kyiv and commenced organizing an interim government. The consequence of this dramatic toppling of the Ukrainian government and a transition towards a West-leaning regime meant a major potential geopolitical defeat for Moscow, which faced a loss of influence in its closest cultural, geographical and strategic neighbor.

Over the next two days, Russian armed soldiers and vehicles left their military bases and stationed near the Kerch strait between Russia and Crimea, a peninsula lying between the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, located in the south of Ukraine (Kofman 5-7). The city council of Sevastopol, Crimea's largest city and the home of Russia's Black Sea fleet, saw the resignation of their head of administration Volodymyr Yatsuba and the election of a Russian citizen as mayor. On February 27th, "local self-defense militia" took over the Supreme Council of Crimea and raised a Russian flag over the parliament, demanding a special session to decide the region's future. This led to administrative deputies voting, although reportedly through coercion and force, to hold a regional referendum in March aimed at discussing the region's accession to the Russian Federation. Despite active and vehement denials of involvement by Vladimir Putin, it was clear that Russian forces had 'infiltrated' Crimea, occupying the region's airports, buildings, roads and other key infrastructure in the subsequent days. In the matter of a week, Russia had successfully annexed Crimea in a "remarkable, quick and bloodless coup d'etat" (Salem).

On March 16th, the region held a referendum where they were offered two choices: to return to Crimea's 1992 constitution, granting them significant autonomy, or to accede to Russia. With local authorities reporting a voter turnout of 83.1%, an overwhelming majority of 97% of the population voted to join the Russian Federation (Morello). Although the referendum was illegal under the Constitution of Ukraine and heavily condemned by the international community and native Crimean Tatars, the *Treaty of Accession* was ratified on March 18th by the Russian Federation Council (Marxsen).

The annexation of Crimea is a pivotal case for understanding state behavior in contemporary international relations. It challenges scholars to unravel why Russia acted with such speed and decisiveness, despite significant geopolitical and economic risks. Perhaps it is this very ambiguity that makes the case so critical, forcing us to confront the possibility that the most decisive actions on the world stage are often those cloaked in uncertainty. This case is not only historically significant but also a crucial "test" of competing theoretical frameworks for explaining state action. Was the annexation primarily driven by a realist pursuit of strategic military territory and a response to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expansion? Did nationalist and irredentist ideologies compel Russia to reclaim a region perceived as historically and culturally integral to its identity? Or was it a diversionary tactic aimed at bolstering domestic political support amidst waning approval ratings?

This essay seeks to answer this question: "What were Russia's political objectives during the annexation of Crimea in 2014?" By evaluating competing explanations—realism, nationalism and irredentism, and diversionary war theory—this analysis aims to play attorney, judge and jury on which framework provides the most compelling case for Russia's actions. Yet, even as we seek to uncover the driving forces behind Russia's strategy in Ukraine in the past, present and future, the true motives may remain partially obscured, intertwined with layers of strategic calculation, ideological fervor, and opportunistic maneuvering. Each theoretical lens offers fragments of the picture, yet none can claim a monopoly on the truth.

II. Methodology

To assess the motivations behind Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, this analysis evaluates competing theoretical explanations to identify the most compelling account of the event. The research draws on diverse sources, including speeches, historical accounts, government archives, polling data, and academic literature. Recognizing the polarizing nature of the conflict, perspectives from Western, Ukrainian, and Russian scholars are incorporated to minimize bias and provide a balanced evaluation of evidence.

This study employs both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative analysis includes examining key speeches, such as Vladimir Putin's public addresses, and historical accounts by scholars like Serhii Plokhy and Timothy Snyder, to explore ideological and strategic narratives. Quantitative methods focus on polling data, including approval ratings and public opinion surveys from the Levada Center, to analyze domestic political contexts.

The analysis is organized around three central theoretical perspectives:

- **Realism**: This perspective argues that the annexation was primarily driven by strategic imperatives, such as securing military assets in Crimea and countering NATO's expansion.
- **Nationalism and Irredentism**: This theory posits that Russia's annexation of Crimea was driven by ideological motivations, combining nationalism's emphasis on cultural and historical ties to the call to reclaim "lost" territories. The protection of ethnic Russians and the restoration of historically Russian lands were central to justifying the annexation.

- **Diversionary War Theory**: This hypothesis posits that domestic political pressures, particularly declining approval ratings and economic stagnation, pushed the Kremlin to annex Crimea as a means of consolidating public support.

Each theory offers distinct causal explanations, built on assumptions about how states behave in the international system, and is tested against empirical evidence to assess its ability to explain the timing, method, and broader implications of the annexation. The analysis aims to highlight the strengths and limitations of each perspective, considering where evidence aligns with or challenges their core assumptions. **Realism** is ultimately judged as having the most dominant explanatory power. However, no single view fully addresses the geopolitical complexities and imperatives driving the timing, scope and consequences of Russia's actions. The paper also argues that nationalism and diversionary war theory address important gaps that realism alone fails to fully explain, offering a perhaps more deliberate caricature of the cultural narratives and domestic dynamics involved.

By focusing on Crimea as a discrete and well-documented case, this analysis avoids the complexities of interpreting an ongoing conflict. While the current Russia-Ukraine war presents a wealth of material, its rapidly changing dynamics and incomplete data make rigorous analysis difficult. In contrast, the 2014 annexation offers a pivotal and self-contained moment in modern geopolitics, enabling a robust examination of Russia’s strategic calculus. Moreover, this case serves as a foundation for understanding broader patterns in Russian foreign policy, offering insights that may inform interpretations of the ongoing conflict.

III. Literature Review

Scholarly perspectives on Russia’s annexation of Crimea predominantly focus on three theoretical frameworks: realism, nationalism and irredentism, and diversionary war theory. Each lens provides valuable insights into the motivations behind this pivotal event, yet significant gaps remain. This study positions realism as the dominant explanatory framework, while adopting a hybrid view that acknowledges the complementary roles of nationalism and diversionary war theory in addressing the limitations of realism.

Realism emphasizes the strategic and security-driven imperatives behind Russia’s actions. Scholars such as J.J. Mearsheimer and Stephen Kotkin argue that

NATO's eastward expansion and Ukraine's pro-Western orientation posed existential threats to Russia's regional dominance, compelling it to act decisively. Crimea's military significance as home to the Black Sea Fleet and its economic resources further underscore its strategic value. While realism effectively explains the timing and strategic execution of the annexation, it often underplays the ideological and domestic dimensions that shaped Russia's broader calculus.

Nationalism and irredentism offer insights into the ideological motivations behind the annexation. Historians such as Serhii Plokhy and Timothy Snyder highlight how Putin leveraged historical and cultural narratives to frame Crimea as an inseparable part of Russia, using these narratives to justify the annexation as a moral obligation to protect ethnic Russians and reclaim "lost" territory. These ideological arguments resonated domestically, bolstering popular support for the move. However, while nationalism and irredentism contextualize the cultural and identity-based drivers of Russia's actions, they fail to adequately address the geopolitical timing and strategic execution that realism captures more effectively.

Diversionary war theory focuses on the domestic political pressures that shaped Russia's decision-making. Scholars like Amy Oakes argue that external conflicts are often used to consolidate public support during periods of internal instability. In Russia's case, declining approval ratings and economic stagnation created conditions where annexing Crimea served as a rallying point for national unity. Polling data from the Levada Center shows a significant increase in Putin's approval ratings after the annexation, lending support to this perspective. However, critics such as Timothy Frye note that the domestic context in 2014 was not dire enough to fully explain such a high-risk foreign policy decision, suggesting that diversionary war theory may reflect an ancillary rather than a primary driver.

While the annexation of Crimea as well as the ongoing invasion of Ukraine are extensively covered in international affairs and security studies academia, few play the role of analyzing competing motivating theories on explaining specificities of how, what, when, where and why the operation took place. That being said, the paper takes a hybrid lens, recognizing that no single theoretical framework can sufficiently explain complex geopolitical decisions, often based on more than just rational decision-making. This underscores the importance in studying where each theory falls short, and how they collectively create a slightly more nuanced understanding of the war room in the Kremlin.

IV. Empirical Study: Exploration of Russia's political objectives

Realism

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 can be understood through the realist lens, which emphasizes the strategic and security imperatives driving Russia's actions. Realism posits that states operate within an anarchic international system, prioritizing power and security to counter potential threats. In the case of Crimea, the consolidation of military assets, protection of vital trade routes, and preemptive responses to NATO's expansion were central to Russia's strategic calculus.

With respect to the political and military shifts in Crimea, it is clear that Russia benefitted from a strategic capture of territory, especially the crucial military resources that stand on it. Apart from the ideological battle between Russia and West-backed Ukraine, it is likely that Putin had a realpolitik objective, which was to simply gain strategic territory. In a publication by the Center of Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), control of Crimea gives Russia unfettered and continual access to the city of Sevastopol's naval base, which is home to its Black Sea fleet. Furthermore, it gives Russia's navy strategic access to the Mediterranean Sea, which gives them crucial economic and military access.

While Russia held a lease of the naval base till 2042 in an agreement signed in the *Kharkiv Pact* of 2010, safeguarding the naval base and consolidating strategic territory during political instability in 2014 was likely a key objective. Although the Black Sea base does not hold the military force that it once did during the Soviet Union, it is still a vessel to project power around the Black Sea. It was vital to the establishment of the 'Mediterranean Task Force', (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation) a unit of 15 warships designed to "extend Russia's reach" in the Middle East (RIA Novosti). This squadron was used to "deliver military equipment and remove chemical weapons in Syria", and since the annexation of Crimea, has played a pivotal role in supporting Russian troops during its military intervention in the Syrian Civil War, 2015 (Delanoë). Since Russia's absolute control of the Sevastopol base, its Naval strength there has grown to "45 submarines and 7 warships", and provides Russia with considerable defense capabilities such as "advanced supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles, air defense systems, and torpedoes" (Schneider).

Russia also depends on the Black Sea region to instrument the trade of its largest export commodities, hydrocarbons and grains. The warm-water port (which does not freeze in the winter) of Sevastopol gives Russia the ability to control its "open and littoral waters" and an advantage in its geopolitical ventures in the Black Sea, such as power projections, sea commerce or multilateral agreements (Chauhan 60). This consolidation of influence in the Black Sea region, along with Russia's *Novorossiysk* economic port, facilitates greater economic output. The majority of exports of fuels and grain to other European and Central Asian countries happen via the Black Sea. In fact, the countries surrounding the Black Sea, including Ukraine and the borders of Russia, are known as the 'breadbasket of the world' for their favorable conditions for growing grains. As of 2020, Russia exported $10.1 billion of wheat and $74.4 billion of crude petroleum, largely due to their ease of access to trade channels in the Black Sea (World Bank). With a cargo turnover of nearly 105 million tonnes in 2021, Russia's economy is greatly dependent on its largest port in *Novorossiysk* (which lies in the Black Sea basin) (Ulyett). Therefore, the output of this warm-water base is dependent on the Sevastopol base's ability to protect maritime space in the Black Sea. As a result, the annexation of Crimea is likely to have been motivated by the potential of material gains, particularly military and economic resources, which in turn enables Russia to exercise control, display power, and facilitate economic activity in the region.

In 2004, the US-spearheaded NATO signed treaties with seven former Soviet nations, guaranteeing closer military ties with the West. This accession of the Baltic and neighboring states to the NATO alliance was a "diplomatic failure for Russia", according to R. G. Gidadhubli in *Economic and Political Weekly* (Gidadhubli 1885–1887). In fact, from 1999 to 2009, twelve Eastern European nations joined the alliance during NATO's three rounds of expansions.

Stefan Meister, European Council on Foreign Relations, argues that the NATO expansion through the early 21st century "meant for Russia that it lost influence in the region. This explains the feeling of insecurity in Russia, of NATO coming closer" (Fritsche). Russia was gradually losing influence in Ukraine, as evidenced by the Ukrainian people's insistence to economically and politically align with the West, and later the ousting of the president and Russian-ally Viktor Yanukovych. Soft power, a tool to influence other nations with cultural and political values, was no longer working in Ukraine, leading Putin to take coercive measures. These claims are not mere speculation, as Vladimir Putin has explicitly justified his regime's actions in Crimea as "partly due to" the Western military alliance expansion. He stated that "NATO ships would have ended up in the city of Russian navy glory, Sevastopol" (Reuters Staff), indicating that Russia felt a security threat as a result of

Western expansion and co-optation of Russia's closest geopolitical and historical neighbors. Ukraine first engaged with NATO in 1997, signing a charter laying the foundation for cooperation and synergy between the two. During the NATO summit of 2008, former Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer announced that Ukraine would "be a part of NATO" (Brunnstrom and Cornell). In 2013, Ukraine became the first partner country to contribute to a NATO Response Force after it pledged a ship to a counter-piracy operation off the Horn of Africa.

Control over Crimea enabled Russia to establish itself as a dominant actor in the Black Sea, effectively marginalizing NATO's influence in the region. According to a RAND Corporation analysis, the annexation allowed Russia to reinforce its "anti-access/area denial" (A2/AD) capabilities, which are critical for deterring Western naval and air operations in the Black Sea and nearby territories (RAND 2015). By consolidating its presence in Crimea, Russia strengthened its ability to monitor and control sea traffic, giving it both a tactical and strategic advantage in any potential conflict scenarios involving NATO.

Moreover, the annexation bolstered Russia's long-term ability to engage in regional power projection. Beyond the Black Sea, Crimea's infrastructure supports operations that extend into the Mediterranean and even the broader Middle East. The Mediterranean Task Force, enhanced after 2014, has played a central role in operations like the Syrian Civil War, demonstrating the global implications of Russia's consolidation of Crimea. This strategic positioning not only reinforces Russia's regional hegemony but also amplifies its voice in international negotiations, from arms control agreements to energy diplomacy.

An often-overlooked element of the realist argument is the annexation's impact on Russia's control over the Kerch Strait, a critical chokepoint connecting the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov. By annexing Crimea, Russia gained full control over this maritime passage, effectively restricting Ukraine's access to the Sea of Azov and disrupting its economic activities. The construction of the Kerch Strait Bridge further entrenched Russian dominance, serving both a symbolic and practical purpose by linking Crimea directly to the Russian mainland. As maritime security expert James Kraska notes, this control has significant implications for Ukraine's sovereignty and economic stability, underlining the annexation's multifaceted strategic benefits (Naval War College Review 2018).

The timing of the annexation was equally critical to its success. The political vacuum created by the ousting of Viktor Yanukovych provided a rare and immediate opportunity for Russia to act without encountering significant resistance. The interim Ukrainian government, preoccupied with stabilizing the country, lacked the capacity to mount an effective response. Additionally, the international community was caught off-guard by the speed and decisiveness of Russia's actions, leaving Western powers scrambling to react after the fact. As Trenin observes, Russia's timing was a calculated move to exploit the West's initial hesitancy, securing Crimea before NATO or EU forces could intervene (Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story 2014).

While critics argue that Russia's lease on the Sevastopol naval base provided sufficient security until 2042, this view underestimates the volatility of international agreements during periods of geopolitical instability. The Revolution of Dignity and Ukraine's pivot toward the West rendered the existing lease politically tenuous. Moscow could not afford to gamble on the goodwill of a pro-Western Ukrainian government, particularly given the escalating tensions with NATO.

Others suggest that economic motivations, such as securing trade routes, might suffice as an explanation for the annexation. However, this perspective overlooks the fact that economic considerations are inextricably linked to strategic imperatives. Control over Crimea's ports and waterways is not merely about facilitating trade; it is about maintaining the leverage and security necessary to sustain economic dominance in the region. The realist lens integrates these factors into a cohesive explanation that accounts for both material and geopolitical priorities.

By consolidating its control over military assets, maritime chokepoints, and economic infrastructure, Russia not only safeguarded its immediate interests but also reinforced its position as a regional hegemon. The preemptive nature of the annexation, driven by a calculated response to NATO's expansion and Ukraine's political realignment, underscores realism's explanatory strength. While the below frameworks, such as nationalism and diversionary war theory, may offer complementary insights, the realist perspective remains the most complete in capturing the timing, method, and scope of Russia's actions.

Nationalist and Irredentist motives

Putin's motive to respond to Western expansion does not only stem from a national, geopolitical, and economic security concern but also from a battle of influence and ideology. According to Stephen Kotkin, Putin believes that Russia rightfully deserves a sphere of influence in its "near abroad" (Kotkin 2–9). Consequently, the hostility towards Ukraine's pro-Russian government and with it, a possibility of 'the West' gaining control and influence in Eastern Europe likely prompted immediate military retaliation from Moscow. While the extent to which Putin had imperialist motives, to acquire territory and control to increase national power, behind annexing Crimea is unclear, his attempts to quell nationalistic sentiments in Ukraine and denounce Western expansion are evident. In a research report by the Air University, when Ukrainians flooded the streets protesting for a more "European way of life", Moscow interpreted it as a threat to their long-standing influence in Ukraine (Moschella 19). As reported by former Ukrainian parliament member Mykola Tomenko, the implantation and growth of "liberalism in the political and economic life" in Ukraine is "in substantial measure encouraged by domestic state structures." As Russia has transitioned to an alleged "regime of autocracy" (Hassner 5-15), restrictions on democracy such as banning free and fair elections, stifling dissent and controlling domestic media have been placed (Tomenko). In a publication by the American Foreign Service, former diplomat Ken Moskowitz reports that in Russia, a country that releases official "propaganda that excoriates Western institutions and influence", Putin holds the belief that if "Russia cannot control Ukraine, then the West will" (Moskowitz). Thus, it is highly plausible that the Crimean peninsula's annexation was motivated significantly by the need to maintain a prominent influence over Ukraine's politics, culture, identity, and economic decisions.

In an address by Vladimir Putin after Crimea's referendum on March 18th, 2014 to all members of Russia's Federal Assembly, local leaders and civil society representatives, he claimed that "Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia", citing the "shared history and pride" between both regions. Similarly, in 2021 and early 2022, prior to Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, Putin maintained this stance in his 5000-word article 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians.' In what Anne Applebaum, a historian of Eastern Europe, labeled "a call to arms", Putin expanded on his denial of Ukrainian sovereignty, insisting on a deep-rooted Russo-Ukrainian "common" history, and the "mistakes" of past Soviet leaders like Lenin, Stalin and Gorbachev in separating Ukraine with their "historical Motherland" (@anneapplebaum). Furthermore, in the initial remarks during his speech on the 21st of February 2022 announcing the 'special military operation' in Ukraine, he argued that Ukraine was "entirely created by Russia, more precisely, Bolshevik, communist Russia." (Putin "Address by the President of the Russian Federation" (2022)).

These claims are met with bewilderment from the West, along with swiftly dismissing them as a way of "weaponizing history" by spreading "layers of historic disinformation" (Dickinson). Regardless of this response from inside Ukraine and the international community, strong irredentist rhetoric continues to hold pedigree in shaping Putin's foreign policy and military objectives. Irredentism is defined as a claim to a territory or an attempt of reunification, based on historical, national ,and ethnic ties. From this pattern of articles, speeches, and addresses across a greater part of the 21st century, it can be inferred that the Kremlin holds the belief that Ukraine is a historically Russian territory, and the shared culture, language and traditions are evidence of the Russians and Ukrainians being "one people."

Moreover, Russian nationalism–-specifically the desire to reunite and defend historically, ethnically, and culturally "Russian" people– has been stated as an explicit motive in Crimea too. According to historian Zenon Kohut's *Unity Paradigm*, the long-held "grand narrative" of combined "dynastic, religious, imperial, and Russian national history" since the seventeenth century is the reason Ukraine is "treated as offshoots" of the same people sharing a common legacy (Kohut 70-76). Vladislav Surkov, Putin's former advisor and the main ideologist of the Kremlin, stated in an interview that "there is no Ukraine. There is Ukraine-ness" (Surkov). This imperialist 'All-Russian' nation concept has also been alluded to and referenced by Russia's leadership and Putin, while citing the common lineage of *Ancient Rus* in his several addresses about Ukraine. In his speech after Crimea's referendum, Vladimir Putin claimed Russia's obligation to "defend the rights of the 1.5 million Russians living in Crimea." This principle is similar to that of Russia's justification for their military intervention in Georgia, as the Kremlin contended that it fell under their 'responsibility to protect' (R2P) obligation (Evans).

While it is clear that nationalist and irredentist motives were key justifications to Russia's annexation of Crimea, the roots and legitimacy of the Kremlin's historical claim to Ukraine, Crimea and their people must be explored. In an interview with Serhii Plokhy, a scholar of Ukrainian history, "historically both groups have a lot in common" as the central and eastern factions of Ukraine were long part of the Russian empire starting in the mid-seventeenth century. In his book *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*, he considers Putin's justification for claiming territories in Eastern

Europe and argues for Ukraine's complex and unique history since the fifteenth century. He details how the Russian victory in 1709 over Sweden, known as the battle of Poltava, led to the first labeling of Ukraine's eastern region as "Little Russia" (Plokhy). Additionally, Plokhy's accounts elaborate on the significant influence of Ukrainian rulers and thinkers on Russian culture. For example, the *Pechersk Lavra* or cave monastery in Ukraine helped establish Kyiv as the first capital of the tsarist *Muscovy* empire, "the myth still accepted by most Russians today about the Kyivan origins of their nation." Although the "Little Russia" legacy was an important "prelude to Ukraine's nation-building" and the two nations have dynastical, religious, and lingual connections that are deep-rooted in history, the development of Ukraine's own cultural, religious and political identity since the 20th century cannot be ignored (Kohut 559–76).

In specific to Crimea, Putin's address in 2014 claims historic ownership of the peninsula as the location where Prince Vladimir was baptized, and his adoption of Christian Orthodoxy serves as the basis that "united the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus." This historical claim is widely contested by historians like Timothy Snyder, who suggests that "The Crimean Peninsula has been around for quite a long time, and Russia is a recent creation." He dismisses the "timeless continuum of power" that the baptism holds, while even offering a contrarian account that Prince Vladimir "was not a Russian." Snyder contends that Russia as a state and identity did not exist then, rather Prince Vladimir led the *Kievan Rus*, a group of "Scandinavian warlords who had established a state in Kyiv" (Snyder). To accept Vladimir Putin's version of Crimea's history would mean overlooking the 'Cossack entities' that occupied southern Ukraine and the Crimean Khanate, a state that existed before any in Moscow. While the accounts of history differ from the Kremlin's and those of historians like Kohut, Plokhy and Snyder, it is clear that nationalist and irredentist ideology was a key factor in Putin's foreign policy objectives in Crimea, offering insights into how historical narratives and identity politics are used to justify territorial claims and rally domestic support.

This school of thought, while compelling, is limited by its narrative focus, which risks conflating the means of justification with the ends of motivation. Nationalism and irredentism illuminate how historical myths and cultural identity are weaponized to legitimize actions like the annexation of Crimea, but they do not necessarily drive those actions. These frameworks are necessary for understanding the emotional and symbolic dimensions of Russian behavior, particularly in rallying domestic support and projecting moral authority on the global stage. However, they are insufficient to explain the deeper strategic calculus, as they often treat ideology as an endpoint rather than a tool employed to achieve broader geopolitical or domestic goals.

One critical oversight in nationalism and irredentism is their inability to address the dialectic between ideology and pragmatism. For example, while these frameworks explain the rhetoric of "reuniting Russian lands" and "protecting Russian speakers," they fail to account for how such narratives are deliberately constructed to obscure material objectives, such as securing military dominance in the Black Sea or preempting Ukraine's integration into Western alliances. Similarly, they cannot fully explain the instrumental timing of the annexation, which was less about the culmination of cultural unity and more about responding to an emergent threat to Russian influence after the Euromaidan protests.

Diversionary Measure

According to literature by traditional realists, like J.J. Mearsheimer and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, a state's domestic factors have a minimal effect on its foreign policy and the outbreak of wars. In De Mesquita's *The War Trap*, he ignores the role of domestic political factors entirely and rather proposes a utility-risk model of conflict decision-making. Mearsheimer, similarly, argues that "structural factors such as anarchy and the distribution of power...are what matter most for explaining international politics" (De Mesquita 156-177). JS Levy challenges this proposition in *Domestic War and Politics*, drawing a correlation between domestic factors and foreign affairs. He argues for the diversionary theory of war: where "political elites can use a foreign war to divert popular attention from internal social, economic and political problems" (Levy 653–73). Leaders will attempt to gather mass support and foster nationalism as a means of directing the nation's anger away from the regime and towards a common enemy. Amy Oakes offers an example of a diversionary conflict, citing Argentina's 1982 invasion of the Falkland Islands as an "archetypal case of diversionary war". She expands on the theory by stating that the government reacted to economic turmoil, political unrest and nationwide protests by launching a "wildly popular mission to regain historical territory" (Oakes 75–99).

Did Russia annex Crimea in a similar vein, to quell unrest and divert the public attention away from their political and economic shortcomings? A study in

2017 by Security Studies points to the surveys and polls that indicate Putin's high approval rates post the annexation in March, claiming that "the Crimea conflict boosted national pride among Russians" (Theiler 318–34). According to other researchers, the Kremlin has long been unable to cope with its economic, political, and demographic vulnerabilities while its democratic legitimacy dwindles. Alexei Malashenko, a security expert at the now-dissolved Carnegie Moscow Center, stated that Putin's motive was to "strengthen his position back home", substantiated by his all-time high approval rating of 90% shortly after the annexation. While it may be the case that Crimea acted as a catalyst for a rise in Putin's popularity, a closer look at economic indicators and comparisons to previous diversionary conflicts reveals a contrarian perspective (Gerstel 31–36).

When examining statistics before and after the annexation, there is a lack of definitive or convincing evidence to support the claim that the annexation was a diversionary tactic. The World Bank reported that although Russia experienced slow GDP growth prior to 2014, it still maintained a stable relative tax collection rate. Conversely, the government of Argentina was unable to sustain economic policies and collect taxes months prior to the Falkland War in 1982. In addition, the Kremlin had the financial strength and flexibility for economic stimuli, with nearly $500 billion in federal reserves in 2013. The oil and gas sector, accounting for around 50% of Russian federal revenue in 2014 (Sabitova and Shavaleyeva 423-428), was not in a state of crisis either. Crude oil was traded at $102.82 per barrel on the day of Crimea's annexation (MacroTrends), which was nearly the optimum price level for Russia to meet its national budget. Due to sufficient reserves, stable revenue, and tax collection, Russia did not face imminent fears of economic destabilization.

Nevertheless, while Vladimir Putin's approval ratings were not near low enough to indicate political turmoil, his public image saw a significant rise shortly after Crimea's accession to Russia. In a survey conducted by the Levada Center, a nongovernmental polling organization in Moscow, Putin fell from a historically high popularity of 90% in 2007-08 to the "low to mid-60s" during the Russian political protests between 2011 and 2013. In January 2013, the Russian public displayed 62% approval of the president's actions, the lowest recorded since 2000 (Reuters Staff 2020). Subsequently, the president enjoyed a "just below 80%" approval immediately after Crimea's annexation in late March 2014. Lev Gudkov, sociologist at the Levada Center, suggests that "the Olympics have added slightly to his popularity, but the actions against Ukraine added another 8 percent to him" (Levada Center). Although political scientist Timothy Frye scrutinizes the validity of Russian polls and concludes that citizens "hide their opposition to Putin" which skews poll data by at least 6% (Frye 1–15), it remains the strongest existing barometer of popular opinion. While these political patterns indicate that the war led to a massive spike in public popularity, Putin still always maintained a majority of the Russian public since his reign began in 2000. Therefore, it is likely that the administration gained popularity as a result of the Crimean annexation but, as data illustrates, it is unlikely that Russia was in a state of socioeconomic and political turmoil and resorted to diversionary conflict. Approval ratings may have been a direct consequence, but not a primary objective of the annexation.

While the diversionary war theory provides valuable insights into the political benefits accrued by Putin following the annexation of Crimea, it falls short as a primary explanation for Russia's actions in 2014. The theory hinges on the premise that states engage in external conflicts to distract from acute domestic crises. However, the evidence suggests that Russia was not facing the level of economic or political instability typically associated with diversionary conflicts, as seen in cases like Argentina's Falkland War. Stable economic indicators, robust federal reserves, and the absence of significant unrest undermine the argument that the annexation was a reaction to domestic vulnerabilities. Although Putin's approval ratings soared after Crimea's annexation, the data indicates that he already commanded substantial popular support, and his political position was far from precarious. Thus, while diversionary war theory may help explain the incidental political gains following the annexation, it is insufficient to account for the timing, method, and broader strategic context of the event.

V. Comparative Analysis

The annexation of Crimea demonstrates a convergence of strategic imperatives, ideological narratives, and domestic political considerations. Among the competing explanations for Russia's actions—realism, nationalism, and diversionary war theory—realism emerges as the most comprehensive and compelling framework. While nationalism and diversionary war theory play secondary roles, they operate as essential complements, reinforcing and legitimizing the realist motivations at the core of Russia's foreign policy decision.

At its foundation, realism explains the timing and strategic rationale behind the annexation. The geopolitical landscape in 2014 created a security dilemma for Russia. Ukraine's Euromaidan protests, the subsequent ousting of a pro-Russian government in Kyiv, and the country's pivot toward NATO and the European Union threatened Russia's influence with its neighbours, exacerbating an already-disappearing strategic depth. The annexation of Crimea secured Russia's critical Black Sea Fleet base in Sevastopol and reinforced its dominance in the region, countering Western encroachment. Realism's emphasis on power dynamics and state survival captures the essence of this decision, framing it as a calculated response to external threats. The strategic urgency and material interests involved align closely with the core principles of realist thought, making it the dominant explanation.

However, realism's focus on material and strategic factors leaves gaps that nationalism fills by providing the ideological framework to legitimize the annexation. Putin's speeches invoked Crimea's historical and cultural ties to Russia, emphasizing the peninsula's role in the narrative of Russian identity. These nationalist narratives framed the annexation as a reclamation of lost heritage and a protective measure for Russian-speaking populations, tapping into deep-seated cultural pride and historical nostalgia. While nationalism was not the primary motivator, it was instrumental in framing a justification, rallying domestic support and deflecting international criticism. By reasoning the annexation as a moral and cultural imperative, nationalism amplified the legitimacy of a fundamentally strategic move, serving as a critical complement to realist objectives.

Diversionary war theory, though secondary, adds another layer to the explanation by addressing the domestic political benefits of the annexation. Following significant unrest during the 2011–2012 protests and declining approval ratings, Putin leveraged Crimea as a rallying point to consolidate domestic support. The patriotic fervor generated by the annexation bolstered his popularity, with approval ratings surging to unprecedented levels. While this suggests that domestic considerations influenced the Kremlin's decision-making, diversionary motives function more as a reinforcing mechanism than a driving force. The annexation's domestic impact underscores how external actions can stabilize regimes, but the timing and geopolitical focus remain better explained by realism.

The interplay between these theories reveals a hierarchical relationship: realism serves as the core driver, nationalism as the ideological justification, and diversionary war theory as the domestic reinforcement. Each theory contributes to a fuller understanding of Russia's actions, but their roles are distinct. Realism explains why and when the annexation occurred, nationalism explains how it was framed and legitimized, and diversionary war theory explains how it bolstered domestic stability. Together, they form a multi-dimensional explanation that aligns strategic imperatives with ideological and political considerations. Nevertheless, the exploration also highlights the tensions between these frameworks. Realism, for instance, prioritizes material interests and largely dismisses ideological motivations, while nationalism emphasizes identity-based goals that realism tends to overlook. Similarly, diversionary war theory assumes domestic political coalitions play a central role, a factor realism often excludes. This goes to illustrate that state decision-making and motivations are rarely singular or neatly categorized, rather they reflect a confluence of practical, ideological, and domestic factors that interact irregularly and dynamically.

VI. Conclusion

The convergence of realist, nationalist, and diversionary motivations behind the annexation raises the critical question: to what extent has Russia actually achieved its objectives — in Crimea and in Ukraine more broadly? While Russia has successfully maintained control over Crimea since 2014, largely due to a lack of decisive action by the West and NATO, the broader invasion of Ukraine has highlighted the significant limitations of its strategy. The contrasting outcomes of Crimea's annexation and the broader invasion of Ukraine highlight the fundamental differences in their geopolitical contexts and logistical complexities. While Crimea's annexation in 2014 was a relatively swift operation supported by covert military tactics and the perceived acquiescence of the West, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine exposed the inherent challenges of achieving such goals through conventional warfare. Unlike the annexation, which required less resistance and exploited a geopolitical vacuum, the invasion necessitated sustained operations against a well-prepared and resilient adversary and allies, amplifying the complexities of logistics, coordination, and diplomacy.

This divergence underscores a broader ideological conflict. Russia's irredentist ambitions to reclaim "lost" territories clash with Ukraine's firm national identity and its embrace of Western values. The annexation appeared to validate Moscow's narrative of reuniting "Russian" peoples, but the invasion unraveled this ideology, galvanizing Ukrainian nationalism and consolidating Western alliances. Western support, both military and economic, has played a pivotal role in enabling Ukraine's counter-offensives and resilience, marking a critical distinction between the two episodes. The logistical and ideological simplicity of annexation sharply contrasts with the multifaceted and protracted nature of a full-scale invasion.

As the war persists, the outcomes remain uncertain, but the enduring narrative is one of unintended consequences for Moscow. The invasion has not only failed to reunify allegedly "Russian" peoples but has also diminished Russia's geopolitical influence and weakened its global standing. Ukraine's defiance, supported by Western unity, has shifted the balance of power in the region, exposing the limits of Moscow's ambitions. Yet, the war's fluidity demands caution in drawing definitive conclusions. As Russia battles with a headstrong Ukraine military for territorial control, more camouflaged objectives of Moscow will reveal themselves. So will their ability to achieve them.

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Strategic Ambiguity and Diplomatic Language as Soft Balancing Tools in Asia (2016-2025)

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Abstract

This study examines how small states respond to US-China rivalry without alignment. Two cases from 2016 to 2025 are analyzed: ASEAN's diplomatic language in South China Sea disputes and the Taiwan Assurance Implementation Act (2025). The central claim is that weaker actors treat ambiguity and statutory entrenchment as tools for managing asymmetric power. Qualitative discourse analysis and process-tracing are the primary methods. Findings suggest institutional rhetoric enables collective resistance, and codification converts executive discretion into something harder to reverse. Neither case fits comfortably into existing soft balancing frameworks.

I. Introduction

The most consequential question facing smaller states in the Indo-Pacific today is not whether to choose between Washington and Beijing. That framing, however intuitively appealing, misrepresents the actual range of options available. States and institutions across Southeast Asia and the Taiwan Strait have spent the better part of a decade demonstrating that there is considerable space between alignment and submission, and that this space can be occupied strategically.

This paper is an attempt to take that space seriously. It examines two cases from 2016 to 2025 that are rarely analyzed together but share a common underlying logic. The first is ASEAN's evolving diplomatic rhetoric on the South China Sea. Over nine years, the language in ASEAN communiqués and summit statements shifted in measurable and consequential ways: from the cautious avoidance of any reference to the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling, to increasingly direct invocations of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and expressions of what the organization's statements began calling, by 2021, grave concerns. That this shift was gradual, uneven, and heavily dependent on which state held the chair is not evidence that it was accidental. It is evidence that it was strategic.

The second case is the transformation of US-Taiwan relations from an arrangement resting almost entirely on executive discretion into something approaching a statutory framework. The Taiwan Assurance Implementation Act, signed by President Trump on December 2, 2025, is the latest and most significant step in a legislative trajectory that includes the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 and the Taiwan Assurance Act of 2020. Each piece of legislation narrowed the room for future administrations to quietly scale back the relationship. That narrowing was entirely intentional, and it was not driven primarily by the executive branch.

What connects these cases is a shared logic of institutional constraint as foreign policy tool. ASEAN uses the rhetorical output of its consensus process to signal concern to Beijing and reassurance to claimant members, without committing to anything enforceable. Taiwan and its congressional allies use the legislative process to bind future US administrations to a degree of consistency that informal guidelines simply cannot provide. Both strategies are, in a meaningful sense, forms of soft balancing, but they work through mechanisms that the soft balancing literature has not examined with much care.

This study asks how these mechanisms operate, what determines their effectiveness, and what explains the variation between the two cases tells us about small state agencies in a period of intensifying great power competition. This paper proceeds through a theoretical framework, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion.

II. Theoretical Framework

Soft balancing, as Pape and Paul developed the concept in the mid-2000s, refers to the use of nonmilitary instruments to complicate or constrain the behavior of a dominant power (Pape 7; Paul 58). Diplomatic coordination, institutional signaling, and economic statecraft are all examples. The concept was developed to explain how states responded to American unipolarity, but it has since been applied, with varying success, to responses to a rising China.

Critics have questioned whether soft balancing deserves to be called balancing at all. Brooks and Wohlforth argue that without a military component, these behaviors amount to little more than ordinary diplomatic friction and cannot meaningfully check a great power's strategic options (Brooks and Wohlforth 90). This is a fair challenge and this paper does not attempt to refute it entirely. What it does argue is that the critics have drawn the category too narrowly. The question is not whether soft balancing replicates the effects of military balancing, which it obviously does not, but whether it produces real costs and constraints for the target state. In the case of the South China Sea, the evidence suggests that it does, at least at the margins.

Hedging theory provides a more granular vocabulary for the strategies this paper examines. Goh's foundational work on Southeast Asian security strategies identifies what she calls indirect balancing, meaning the cultivation of countervailing relationships and institutional ties that preserve options without triggering confrontation (Goh 5). Kuik extends this by distinguishing between risk-contingency motivations, which are essentially insurance against worst-case scenarios, and return-maximization motivations, which seek to benefit from engagement with a rising power (Kuik 500). Both motivations are present in ASEAN's South China Sea posture. The communiqué language hedges against the possibility that China consolidates effective control over disputed features, while ASEAN's simultaneous maintenance of trade and diplomatic ties with Beijing reflects an effort to maximize returns from that relationship regardless of how territorial disputes eventually resolve.

For the Taiwan case, the more useful theoretical framework comes from the legislative politics literature. Martin's work on democratic commitments establishes that legislative involvement in foreign policy enhances the credibility of international commitments precisely because it raises the domestic political cost of defection (Martin 3). Pierson's account of increasing returns and path dependence explains why each legislative addition to the US-Taiwan framework makes future retrenchment more costly: constituencies form around existing commitments, institutional procedures generate their own momentum, and reversal requires overcoming accumulated political inertia (Pierson 252). Together these frameworks explain why codification is not merely a legal technicality but a strategic resource.

III. Literature Review

The scholarship on ASEAN and South China Sea diplomacy has long struggled with a binary that does more harm than good. On one side are the institutionalist skeptics: Jones and Smith argue that ASEAN's consensus norm is structurally incapable of producing collective action because any member with reason to obstruct can do so at minimal cost (Jones and Smith 162). Emmers makes a related point about the limits of ASEAN's leverage over China, noting that the organization's preference for process over outcomes has allowed Beijing to delay and dilute any multilateral response to its territorial claims (Emmers 545). There is truth in this. The 2022

Cambodia chairmanship, which ended without a joint communiqué for only the second time in ASEAN's history, is hard to explain any other way.

On the other side are the constructivist defenders of ASEAN's normative role. Acharya emphasizes the organization's function as a norm entrepreneur, arguing that ASEAN's diplomatic culture has gradually enmeshed China within expectations of multilateral consultation that constrain, even if they do not eliminate, unilateral behavior (Acharya, Constructing a Security Community 12). Ba similarly reads ASEAN's engagement with China as a process of socialization that has real, if slow-moving, effects on Chinese foreign policy behavior (Ba 6). This view is probably too optimistic about how much ASEAN's norms actually shape Chinese calculations in the South China Sea specifically.

This paper takes neither position fully. What the existing literature misses is that the weakness-agency binary assumes ASEAN's rhetorical output is incidental to its real function. This study treats the output as the mechanism. The communiqué language is not a residue of diplomatic process. It is a product that ASEAN's members negotiate carefully and that carries real information to multiple audiences simultaneously.

The Taiwan literature has a somewhat different center of gravity, organized largely around debates over strategic ambiguity as a feature of US policy. Bush's classic treatment argues that deliberate ambiguity about US military commitments deters both Chinese military action and unilateral Taiwanese moves toward formal independence, by ensuring that neither side can calculate the American response with confidence (Bush 76). More recent critics, surveyed usefully in Ratner's Foreign Affairs piece, argue that China's growing military capacity has eroded whatever deterrent value the ambiguity once provided. The Taiwan Assurance Implementation Act of 2025 is in some ways a legislative response to this debate, though its architects framed it primarily in terms of consistency and credibility rather than deterrence per se.

The principal-agent framework from Lindsay's work on Congress and foreign policy is underused in the Taiwan literature (Lindsay). Most accounts of US-Taiwan relations focus on executive branch signaling and treat congressional activity as background noise. This paper inverts that assumption and argues that the legislative trajectory is the primary story, at least for the 2020 to 2025 period.

IV. Methodology

The study uses a qualitative comparative case design, drawing on discourse analysis for the ASEAN case and process-tracing for the Taiwan case. The two cases were selected because they vary in mechanism while sharing context. Both involve weaker actors navigating US-China competition during the same period, but they use strikingly different institutional tools. Holding the context roughly constant while varying the mechanism allows for more precise claims about what each tool actually does.

For the ASEAN case, the primary corpus consists of all ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting joint communiqués and summit chairpersons' statements from 2016 through 2025, twenty-three documents in total. These were coded using NVivo for four variables: word count allocated to South China Sea passages, adjective intensity on a five-point scale from zero (no mention) to four (expressions of grave or serious concern with explicit legal grounding), frequency and specificity of UNCLOS citations, and whether responsible actors were named or left anonymous. Inter-coder reliability was established at Cohen's kappa of 0.87 across a random subsample of six documents, which is acceptable for this kind of qualitative content analysis.

The process-tracing component of the ASEAN analysis traces the mechanism from Chinese provocations through member-state diplomatic pressure to rhetorical output, with chairmanship alignment as the key moderating variable. Alternative explanations, including US diplomatic pressure on ASEAN members and domestic political cycles within claimant states, were considered and found to account for some residual variation but not for the primary pattern of escalation and moderation.

For the Taiwan case, primary sources include the legislative texts of the Taiwan Relations Act, the Taiwan Assurance Act of 2020, and the Taiwan Assurance Implementation Act of 2025, together with relevant congressional hearing transcripts, State Department policy guidelines from successive administrations, and official statements from the Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Chinese Foreign Ministry. Process-tracing here focuses on the ratchet mechanism through which executive liberalization followed by rollback generates congressional codification.

The study has real limitations. Its qualitative design does not permit statistical generalization. Reliance on public documents likely understates the role of back-channel diplomacy in both cases. The post-2025 timeframe is too short to assess the Implementation Act's long-term effects with any confidence. These constraints are acknowledged not as boilerplate but because they matter for how the findings should be read.

V. Results and Findings

ASEAN's Rhetorical Soft Balancing, 2016-2025

The most striking finding from the ASEAN document analysis is not that the rhetoric changed, but that it changed in such a patterned way. The evolution tracks Chinese provocations closely, but it is consistently filtered through the chairmanship variable in ways that reveal deliberate institutional management rather than simple stimulus-response.

In 2016, ASEAN's response to the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling was, to put it plainly, a failure of nerve. The ruling invalidated China's nine-dash line claims under international law in terms that were about as clear as international adjudication ever gets. ASEAN's joint communiqué that year devoted roughly 150 words to South China Sea matters and used language coded at level zero and one: phrases like "noted" and "took note of that" register awareness while signaling the absolute minimum of concern. The communiqué contained no reference whatsoever to the arbitration ruling. This omission was not accidental. China had made clear, through direct diplomatic pressure on Cambodia and Laos, that any ASEAN endorsement of the ruling would have economic consequences. The silence was the price of consensus.

Between 2018 and 2020, the language shifted. Word counts for maritime passages crept upward, reaching 250 to 400 words by 2020. UNCLOS references began appearing with some regularity, establishing the legal framework that would become more prominent later. Vietnam's chairmanship in 2020 was particularly consequential: Hanoi had experienced direct confrontations with Chinese coast guard vessels in its exclusive economic zone that year and used its chair prerogative to push for language that named international law as the applicable standard. The adjective intensity reached level two and three during this period.

The sharpest shift came in 2021. The Whitsun Reef incident, in which over two hundred Chinese maritime militia vessels anchored at a contested reef feature within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ) for weeks, generated the first ASEAN statement using level-four language. The phrase grave concerns, paired with specific

UNCLOS article citations, appeared in the communiqué from that year's foreign ministers' meeting. This was notable not just for its content but for what it revealed about the conditions under which ASEAN's rhetorical floor rises. A sustained, visible provocation that embarrassed a claimant member was necessary to push the language past the level of indirect concern.

The Second Thomas Shoal confrontations of 2023 and 2024, in which Chinese coast guard vessels repeatedly used water cannons against Philippine resupply missions to a grounded naval vessel, sustained the elevated rhetorical register. Word counts in South China Sea passages stabilized between 400 and 600 words. The legal referencing became, for the first time, genuinely specific rather than formulaic.

The chairmanship variable moderated all of this. Cambodia's 2022 chairmanship is the cleanest natural experiment available. Despite the ongoing Whitsun Reef and related tensions, that year produced no agreed communiqué at all. The second such failure in ASEAN history, and the second under Cambodian chairmanship, is difficult to read as coincidence. By contrast, Indonesia's 2023 chairmanship, combined with active Philippine and Vietnamese pressure, produced the strongest language of the decade.

The Myanmar contrast deserves a note. ASEAN's rhetorical response to the February 2021 military coup, which represented a far more direct violation of ASEAN's own stated norms than anything in the South China Sea, was noticeably weaker than the maritime language from the same period. This asymmetry is instructive. It suggests that ASEAN's rhetorical escalation is not driven by norm violation per se but by the specific configuration of great power economic dependencies and claimant state interests that the South China Sea generates. The organization is not simply responding to Chinese behavior. It is managing a complex set of internal and external political calculations.

Legislative Ratcheting in US-Taiwan Relations

The Taiwan case unfolds differently but the underlying logic is related. Where ASEAN exploits the productive ambiguity of a consensus process, Taiwan and its congressional allies have spent the past five years methodically reducing the ambiguity available to US executive branch actors.

The Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 (TRA) is the essential baseline. Enacted in the context of Carter administration normalization with the People's Republic, the TRA was a genuinely creative legislative response to diplomatic constraints. By establishing the American Institute in Taiwan as a nominally private entity, mandating continued arms sales, and framing the peaceful resolution of Taiwan's status as a US policy concern, Congress created an institutional infrastructure for the relationship that has proven remarkably durable across eleven administrations. The TRA's durability is itself significant. It has outlasted diplomatic shifts that its authors could not have anticipated.

The first Trump administration's approach to Taiwan was characterized by significant executive liberalization. The Pompeo guidelines issued in January 2021, days before the administration ended, substantially relaxed the contact restrictions that had governed interactions between US and Taiwanese officials for decades. Meetings at senior levels, joint activities, display of Taiwan's flag at official venues: all of these were made more permissible. The Biden administration then partially reversed course, restoring some of the previous restrictions, in a pattern that illustrated precisely the problem that legislative advocates had long identified. Policy set by executive guideline can be changed by executive guideline, and the change does not require public justification or congressional approval.

The Taiwan Assurance Act of 2020 was a first attempt to address this. Enacted as part of the National Defense Authorization Act, it mandated a one-time State Department review of Taiwan contact guidelines. This was a significant step, though a temporally limited one. It could not prevent a subsequent administration from reversing the review's conclusions once the one-time mandate was satisfied.

The Taiwan Assurance Implementation Act of 2025 goes considerably further. The Act mandates five-year statutory reviews of contact guidelines, requires the State Department to report to Congress on implementation, explicitly links policy to the Six Assurances that Reagan communicated to Taiwan in 1982, and creates oversight mechanisms that institutionalize congressional attention to the relationship in a way no previous legislation had. Each element tightens the constraint differently. The review cycle prevents guidelines from calcifying without legislative input. The reporting requirements make quiet reversal politically costly. The Six Assurances linkage elevates what was an informal commitment to a statutory reference point that future administrations will need to engage with directly rather than simply ignoring.

China's response to the Act was the expected protest, but without the specific retaliatory measures that Beijing sometimes uses to signal displeasure. This restrained reaction is worth noting. It suggests that China's leadership made a calculation that overreacting would strengthen the very domestic coalition that produced the legislation. Whether that calculation was correct is a separate question.

The bipartisan support for the Act is probably its most important political feature. In a Congress deeply divided on nearly everything, Taiwan policy has become one of the few areas of genuine cross-aisle agreement. This consensus is a structural asset for Taiwan that extends beyond any single piece of legislation.

VI. Discussion

The findings from these two cases resist easy synthesis, which is part of what makes them interesting to compare. The temptation is to conclude that both ASEAN and Taiwan are engaged in soft balancing and leave it at that. But the mechanisms are different enough that treating them as simple variants of the same strategy obscures more than it reveals.

ASEAN's approach works through the collective credibility of the consensus process. A communiqué that twenty-seven years of diplomatic practice has established as the organization's official voice carries a kind of authority that no single member state could generate unilaterally. When that communiqué uses the phrase "grave concerns" alongside UNCLOS citations, it says something to Beijing that a bilateral protest note from Manila or Hanoi does not. It says that the region is watching, that the legal framework is being invoked, and that the costs of continued provocation include a form of reputational damage with an entire regional institution. Whether Beijing's strategic calculus actually incorporates these costs is genuinely unclear from the available evidence. What is clear is that Chinese diplomatic energy consistently targets ASEAN's consensus process, through chairmanship influence and bilateral pressure on economically dependent members, in ways that suggest Beijing takes the process seriously enough to want to manage it.

Taiwan's legislative approach works through a completely different mechanism. The constraint it creates is domestic American politics, not external diplomatic signaling. The bet, which so far appears to be paying off, is that a congressional coalition supporting Taiwan is more durable than any administration's inclination to adjust policy for diplomatic convenience. This is a sophisticated understanding of how American foreign policy actually works, and it reflects decades of experience navigating the peculiarities of a relationship that has never had the straightforward institutional backing that alliance partners take for granted.

The divergences between the cases matter analytically. ASEAN's approach is inherently adjustable. Rhetorical escalation can be walked back without any formal process. The language of next year's communiqué can quietly soften if the political environment shifts. This flexibility is both a strength and a limitation: it preserves options but also limits credibility. Taiwan's legislative approach trades flexibility for durability. A statute requires a legislative process to reverse, and a legislative process requires political will that a congressional coalition specifically designed to persist through administration changes is structured to resist.

Neither approach is obviously superior. They are adapted to fundamentally different political environments. A multilateral organization with ten sovereign members and a consensus rule cannot operate like a bilateral legislative relationship. The interesting question is not which strategy is better but what structural conditions make each effective. The answer, in both cases, seems to involve the target great power's calculation of costs. ASEAN's rhetoric raises the reputational cost of provocation in a regional multilateral forum. Taiwan's legislation raises the domestic political cost of executive policy reversal. Both mechanisms work at the margins rather than decisively. That is probably the most honest thing that can be said about soft balancing in general.

VII. Conclusion

This paper has tried to take seriously the proposition that diplomatic language and legislative procedure are not merely epiphenomenal to great power competition but can function as genuine tools within it. The evidence from ASEAN's South China Sea rhetoric and Taiwan's legislative institutionalization supports that proposition, with qualifications.

ASEAN's rhetorical evolution from 2016 to 2025 shows a measurable and patterned escalation that tracks Chinese provocations but is consistently filtered through the chairmanship variable. The pattern suggests deliberate institutional management rather than organizational reflex. Taiwan's legislative trajectory over the same period shows a ratchet effect in which each legislative addition raises the political cost of executive reversal in ways that create durable structural support for the relationship regardless of which administration is in office.

The theoretical contribution of the study is, admittedly, incremental rather than transformative. Soft balancing as a concept is well established. What this paper adds is a more precise account of the institutional mechanisms through which it operates in two specific cases that the existing literature has not compared in this way. The comparison between consensus-based rhetorical hedging and bilateral legislative codification as distinct institutional strategies is, as far as this author can determine, an original contribution.

There is a lot that this paper cannot answer. The long-term effects of the Taiwan Assurance Implementation Act will not be assessable for years. The relationship between ASEAN communiqué language and actual Chinese strategic behavior is, on the basis of available evidence, uncertain. Future research that uses computational text analysis to examine a larger corpus of ASEAN documents would help establish whether the patterns identified here generalize beyond the South China Sea context. Comparative work on Japan and South Korea's legislative and institutional responses to China's rise would extend the framework in useful directions.

What the study can say with some confidence is that the states and institutions operating in the shadow of US-China competition are not simply passive objects of great power rivalry. They are agents pursuing strategies that, while constrained by the structural conditions of asymmetric power, are real strategies nonetheless. Understanding those strategies more precisely seems like useful work for scholars of international relations to be doing right now.

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INTERNATIONAL HISTORY & CULTURE

Football Diplomacy in South America: Cultural & Political Implementation of Football and its Impact on Non-Traditional Diplomacy

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Abstract

In December of 2022, four million fans wore their national team's jersey and took to the streets in celebration. In 2025, thousands of Brazilians wearing the Brazilian national team's jersey came out to São Paulo for a different reason: to protest against their country's supreme court. To understand how football became a cultural cornerstone in Argentina, and a political symbol in Brazil, this essay argues that football retains the identity of the body that first introduced it into each country. However, it also looks at club-level football as an edge-case to this rule due to its strong community-level ties.

I. Introduction

The *Estatuto da Confederação Brasileira de Futebol* and the *Estatuto de la Asociación del Fútbol Argentino* are the statutes that respectively define the role and identity of the Brazilian (CBF) and Argentinian (AFA) football associations. According to article 11 of the CBF's statute, "the CBF will not exercise partisan politics nor religious activities" (Confederação Brasileira de Futebol 6). Likewise, clause 1 of Article 3 of the AFA's statute establishes that "the AFA is neutral towards any political or religious belief" (Asociación del Fútbol Argentino 5). However, while the institutions present themselves as non-partisan, history shows that the identity of South American football teams are not fully controlled by their federations. Given the importance of football in South American diplomacy and outward-facing identity, this essay underscores the importance of identifying the parties in charge of defining a team's identity. Using the Argentinian and Brazilian national teams as case studies, I explore how differences in the inception of the sport in each country can influence who sets its identity.

This essay is divided into three main sections. The first dives into Argentina's football history, showing the natural adaptation of British footballing culture into its own national identity. The second discusses the strategy taken by the Getulio Vargas dictatorship to promote a footballing culture in Brazil. Unlike Argentina's bottom-up approach, Brazil's top-down application placed *futebol* into its political identity rather than its national one. While both are internationally recognized as expressions of a state's cultural identity (and can therefore be used in diplomatic contexts), the key distinction between them lies in their scope. National identity is non-partisan and defined collectively by a country's citizens, whereas political identity shifts with each regime and can therefore reflect the views of a political minority in power. The third section breaks from the national focus of the first two. Instead, it closes in on club-level teams, showing that even without the backing of a state's government or a majority of its citizens, it can still conduct non-traditional diplomatic efforts effectively.

II. Football in Argentina's National Identity

Following the 2022 Argentinian World Cup victory, it was reported by local media that at least four million fans flooded the streets of Buenos Aires to welcome home their national team ("World Cup Homecoming"). This is a million more than the population of the entire city and a third of the greater metropolitan area. In Argentina, football is a large part of the country's cultural identity. In Buenos Aires, multiple murals of Lionel Messi, widely regarded as one of the best players of all time, can be found throughout the city (Mantilla "Messi in Buenos Aires"). But this influence goes beyond the borders of Argentina. Diego Armando Maradona Stadium, named after the Argentinian football legend, is not located in Argentina; it is the home field of Napoli, a football club in Italy where he played. When Messi was announced to play for Inter Miami, an American club, a remix of the Argentinian football anthem "Muchachos" was used to introduce him (La Mosca Tsé - Tsé). But this internationally recognized close cultural connection was not always present in the

Figure 1: Messi in Buenos Aires

country's identity. In fact, during the 1800s, football in Argentina had very little to do with the South American country.

During the early years of the sport, its development was greatly influenced by English immigrants and expats living in the country. Many of them had moved to Argentina due to the Mitre Law of 1907, which simplified the process for foreign investments into Argentina's railroad industry ("Ley Sobre Concesiones de Ferrocarriles"). In fact, by 1937, British corporations owned and operated 66% of Argentina's 40,000-kilometer-long railroad system (Duncan 1). This factor significantly contributed to Argentina having the largest British population of a country that was not part of the empire by 1880 (Wilson 9). This immigrant diaspora gradually influenced Argentinian society, with one major cultural export being football.

Britain had a head start on the rest of the world when it came to the organized practice of football. On October 26, 1863, representatives from numerous British amateur football clubs met with the purpose of "forming an Association with the object of establishing a definite code of rules for the regulation of the game" ("The history of the FA"). Thus, the English Football Association (FA) was born. It only took four years for the game to make it across the Atlantic and into the port of Buenos Aires, where the first match on Argentinian soil was played in the city's Cricket Club on June 20, 1867. Although the match was played in Argentina, it would still be some time before the locals adopted the sport. This inaugural game was played between sixteen players, all born in the UK except for one born in Saint Lucia (Wilson 9). The practice of football remained in the hands (or feet) of the British even as the sport began to set deeper roots in Argentina. The first football league in the world outside of the UK was the Argentine Association Football League (AAFL), founded by Alec Lamonc, a Scottish immigrant, in 1891 (Wilson 9). Only two years later, the league had gone bankrupt and was bailed out by Alexander Watson Hutton, a Scottish immigrant and founder of the Buenos Aires English High School. Hutton is known today in Argentina by the hispanicized name "Alejandro" ("Historia"). The spelling of Hutton's last name is an example of what Jonathan Wilson refers to as the *criollisation* of football into South America in his book *Angels with Dirty Faces: the Footballing History of Argentina*.

In Spanish, the word *criollo* refers to "a person of pure Spanish descent born in Spanish America" ("Criollo definition & meaning"). According to Wilson, two main social factors led to the *criollisation* or rebirth of British football into Argentinian *fútbol*. The first was the Argentinian government's support for physical education, which was made mandatory in all schools in April 1898 (Wilson 10). This allowed for the sport to spread rapidly across the Argentinian youth. Secondly, mass urbanization and electrification in the early 20th century created a "yearning for a sense of identity" in these newly established communities, one that was found through local football clubs (Wilson 11). This close local connection to a football team can be found today in La Boca, a barrio (neighborhood) in Buenos Aires where Boca Juniors Football Club is based (Mantilla "Fútbol in La Boca"). Only after football was firmly established in Argentina's cultural identity did its national identity begin to take shape.

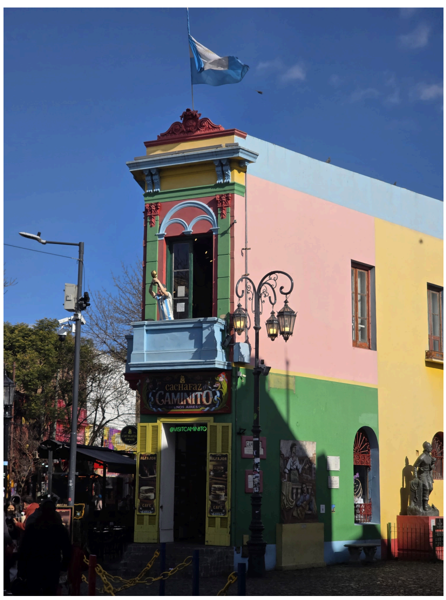

Figure 2: *Fútbol* in La Boca

Unlike cultural identity, which is limited to within Argentina's borders, national identity is used on the international stage as a representation of the country itself. For Argentina, I mention national identity rather than political identity because football in Argentina today is not a partisan tool. For Argentines, football is a source of national pride at the international level and local pride at the club level.

A handy way of keeping track of the adoption of football into Argentina's national identity is the changes to the name of the organization. As previously mentioned, the first iteration of an organized football league was the Argentine Association Football League (AAFL), established in 1893. This is not a translation from a Spanish name; the association's name was in English to reflect the nationalities of the players that made it up. Corresponding with the growth of the sport's popularity due to urbanization, the name was changed in 1912 to *Asociación Argentina de Football*. A direct translation of the 1893 name, the 1912 edition retained the English spelling of "football" ("Historia"). Due to an internal schism within the federation about whether to remain at the amateur level or switch to professional, the organization had split into the A*sociación Amateurs Argentina de Football* and the *Liga Argentina de Football by 1919* ("Historia"). Both organizations maintained the "football" name and spelling. However, in 1934, the two merged back into the *Associación del Football Argentino*.

The *Memoria y Balance General* (Memory and General Balance), which detailed the topic of discussion of the 1934 annual meeting where the merger was announced issued a warning to future generations: "football did not benefit from any of these divisions," and reminded them that "sports should be promoted for the sake of the State's physical culture, without exclusions or preferences that deteriorate the organization's moral or patriotic ends." In a short paragraph of the 1939 *Memoria y Balance General* record, the federation announced that "on the 9th of October, 1939, by unanimous decision, the assembly manifested their wish that the word 'football' be substituted for the word that corresponds to the national language: 'fútbol'." The wish of the AFA for fusing the football bodies and the hispanification of the federation's name showcases the importance of a unified Argentinian federation, which represents the state's national identity as a whole rather than small pockets of its political and cultural identity.

The popularity and national significance of football in Argentina has had more than 130 years to reach the level it has today. Its focus on cultural adaptation during the sport's youth, along with the federation's wish to represent the State as a whole, has allowed Argentinian football to surpass political barriers while still representing the identity of Argentina abroad.

III. *Futebol* in Brazil's National Identity

Figure 3: Obama Receives a Gift From Lula

During a G8 meeting on July 9, 2009, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (better known as Lula) gifted a signed Brazilian national team football jersey to Barack Obama, then-President of the United States (Stuckert). A decade later, a similar image was taken, this time with Jair Bolsonaro gifting Donald Trump a jersey with his last name and the iconic number "10" stamped in the back (Palácio do Planalto). The context for both images is similar: two world leaders meet diplomatically and exchange gifts in a show of friendship. The gifts also remain the same: a football jersey of the Brazilian national team, a symbol of the state's national identity. However, despite these strong similarities, the political significance behind these images could not be more different. How did Brazil get to the point where *futebol's* identity could switch within different administrations?

Figure 4: Trump Receives a Gift From Bolsonaro

By 1930, the year of the first World Cup, *fútbol* in Argentina had already been adapted into its cultural identity and was burrowing itself further into the country's national identity. However, while Brazil also participated, the state of football in the country was very different. Before the tournament was held in Uruguay, the *Confederação Brasileira de Desportos* (CBD) had appealed to the government of President Washington Luís for financial support to send a football delegation to compete in Montevideo. Instead of support, the CBD received indifference, stating that "he was completely indifferent to the Brazilian football delegation" (Bocketti 36). The quick dismissal by the President was actually representative of a larger discussion within Brazil at the time. While the CBD and some factions of Brazilian society, like the journal *Rio Sportivo*, it was imperative to "spread health through the medium of sports and the orderly practice of physical exercise." Over time, these groups grew concerned that Brazil was seen internationally as a "vast hospital," due to their lack of exercise programs (Bocketti 36). But why was this the case?

Brazil was the last country in South America to abolish slavery on May 13, 1888, only fifty-two years before the first World Cup. This short time gap meant that socio-economic and racial divides were still prevalent in Brazilian society. The British editor of the newspaper *Anglo-Brazilian Times* argued in 1965 that Brazil's long history of slavery had degraded manual labor. To the average 1930 Brazilian, to exercise was to degrade themselves to a position of "gentility" (Bocketti 23). If the sport were to develop naturally as it did in Argentina, Brazilians needed to come to terms with their history and acknowledge the racial and social inequality created by slavery. However, they never got the chance.

The *Revolução de 1930* (the revolution of 1930), led by Getúlio Vargas, against the democratically elected Washington Luís, was the fork in the road that led Brazilian *futebol* towards political identity rather than national identity. Although not entirely fascist, the Vargas regime looked towards Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany for inspiration on national control. Xenophobic propaganda with statements like "Brazil for the Brazilians" began to be commonplace in Varga's Brazil (Putnam 100). On April 14, 1941, Vargas established the *Conselho Nacional de Desportos* (CND, National Sports Council). Vargas supported sports, football included, because he believed that they promoted "the harmony of national consciousness" (Bocketti 18). These programs themselves may have been inspired by Germany's physical training programs, like the Hitler Youth and the *Komsomol*, whose goal was to blunt opposition, garner public support, and maintain social control (Keys 396). This connection is made more plausible when considering that the goal of the CND was to nationalize sports within the country, and bring forth what they called a

"Brazilianization" of Brazilian sports (Bocketti 18). This strong shift to a new understanding of Brazilian national identity by the Vargas government was not democratic. While football's place within Brazilian society was still a source of discussion, Vargas used populist tactics to forcibly shape the sport to fit his vision of Brazilian society. However, more importantly, he set a precedent for the use of football as a political tool, placing the sport into Brazil's political identity rather than its national one.

The effects of football's beginnings in Brazil can be seen through the use of the *amarelinha* (little-yellow), the national team's jersey, as a tool for diplomacy and partisan politics. To any *futebol* fan, Brazil's iconic yellow jersey is almost immediately recognizable. It was while wearing this jersey that they won all of their five World Cup titles; the most out of any other nation. These titles link the jersey, the team, and Brazil itself with a history of triumph and greatness. The team's success has made the *amarelinha* an internationally recognized symbol of Brazil, allowing it to be used in diplomatic settings like Lula and Bolsonaro's respective meetings. However, this is where a significant difference in national and political identity kicks in. At the international level, the *amarelinha* maintains the same status and significance across administrations. A tourist visiting Rio de Janeiro can find vendors selling the *amarelinha* in front of the Maracana Stadium and Copacabana Beach and be unaware of its current political significance.

Conveniently, football's role in Brazil's political identity allows those in power to draw on the national team's fame and achievements while continually redefining the reasons why the team (and, by extension, Brazil itself) is considered great. In his essay "Verdeamarelismo na ponta das chuteiras," Flavio de Campos describes the road from the *futebol* pitch to a symbol of neofascism in the 2018 elections. According to de Campos, the *amarelinha* has been used as a symbol of national identity and pride by both the left and the right over the years, adapting the symbol to their own beliefs on what Brazil represents. For instance, when the shirt was used widely during the 1972 celebrations of the 150th year of independence, to the author, the shirt represented a dichotomy of a motherland of "de chuteiras e de coturnos" (soccer cleats and military boots). The significance of the shirt changed again following the 1982 World Cup, after democracy returned to the country in 1985. National team players like Sócrates, along with other players from the Brazilian club Corinthians, widely advocated for the return of democracy to the country.

Figure 5: Protest in São Paulo

While traveling to the Brazilian city of São Paulo, I accidentally experienced firsthand the *amarelinha's* latest significance, one which explains Bolsonaro's gift to Trump. On August 3, 2025, around 57,000 people gathered on Avenida Paulista to protest against the administration of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes. My photo, taken from the balcony of the *Museu de Arte de São Paulo*, shows a sea of *Amarelinhas*, along with multiple Brazilian, Israeli (often supported by the Brazilian right), and American flags (Mantilla "Protest in São Paulo"). But how did we get here? During the 2018 election campaign, multiple Brazilian *futebol* legends like Marcos, Cafu, Rivaldo, and Ronaldinho Gaúcho voiced their support for Jair Bolsonaro, an ex-captain of the military and candidate of the Brazilian right.

Football, as part of political identity in Brazil's diplomatic efforts, is intentionally misleading. Football is used as a tool for diplomacy by Latin American states due to a shared regional culture of what the sport stands for. While the political significance of the *amarelinha* changes over time at the national level, it doesn't at the international level. In Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, or any other Latin American country, the *amarelinha* is not associated with dictatorship, democracy, or fascism. Instead, these countries remember their defeats and all the nail-biting moments of their own national teams playing against this jersey. This way, Brazil can conduct diplomacy abroad and at home, spreading a symbol of national identity that has a widely different significance depending on its audience.

IV. Football and Track II Diplomacy

The understanding of diplomacy as being differentiated by "tracks" was first expressed in Davidson and Montville's "Foreign Policy According to Freud," published in 1981. The authors described traditional diplomatic efforts as Track I diplomacy, among these are policy statements and official visits or meetings, all created under the analysis and guidance of a staff dedicated to this goal (154). On the other hand, Track II diplomacy is "unofficial, nonstructured interactions" that is based upon the "underlying assumption that actual or potential conflict can be resolved or eased by appealing to common human capabilities to respond to good will and reasonableness" (155). According to Davidson and Montville, the most common forms of Track II diplomacy are scientific and cultural exchanges, a definition that fútbol in South America not just falls under, but strongly represents through club-level competitions

Thus far, we have differentiated between football as part of a state's national or political identity, dictating how a state's use of national-team football as a political and diplomatic tool can be limited or facilitated by the sport's history. Therefore, we have only discussed how football fits into traditional forms of "Track I" diplomacy. However, a "Track II" option is led by local clubs, which are not as beholden to the grip the state may have on the national team.

Unlike national teams, whose fans are brought together by the threads that bind national identity, club fanbases are concentrated in the club's base city. This difference can be seen in the location of celebratory parades following a title. When the Argentinian national team won the 2022 World Cup, a large parade was held in Buenos Aires, the country's capital (Burgo). However, when Bucaramanga FC (Colombia) won *Categoria Primera A* (Colombia's national league), celebrations were held in Bucaramanga itself (@ABucaramanga "La Ciudad"). International club competitions like *Copa Sudamericana* and *Copa Libertadores* bring together cities that would have otherwise not been aware of each other. This, coupled with the close connections between a club's identity and its cities, makes for a much more specific level of cultural exchange than Track I diplomacy, which is often held at the national level.

When adding the dimension of time, the importance of international club competitions is made more apparent. Both the *Copa Sudamericana* and the *Copa Libertadores* have taken place annually since 1960 and 2002, respectively. This long history of the competitions has allowed some clubs to build a reputation amongst their opponents. For instance, before the match between Bucaramanga FC (Colombia) and Racing FC (Argentina) in the 2025 edition of *Copa Libertadores*, Bucaramanga's Instagram page posted an image announcing the game. In it, they referenced the biblical story of David and Goliath, comparing them to the Colombian and Argentinian teams, respectively. In the image, the Racing FC Goliath can be seen holding three of their historic trophies: a Copa Libertadores won in 1967, a Copa Sudamericana won in 2024, and a Recopa Sudamericana won in 2025 ("Palmares"). On the other hand, Bucaramanga's David holds only a sling, with his "stone" represented by the star on the club's crest given to them after their 2024 national title @ABucaramanga "Una Estrella". While meant as a message of hope for the Bucaramanga supporters, the image also addresses the history and might of its opponent, showing respect to what will be a tough opponent.

With the cultural importance of the *Copa Sudamericana* and *Copa Libertadores* and their connection to Track II diplomacy in mind, we can better understand the significance of the events that followed the Chapecoense Tragedy.

V. Case Study: The Chapecoense Tragedy

On November 28, 2018, LaMia Flight 2933 crashed near its destination of Medellin, Colombia. The flight carried seventy-seven people, mainly players and staff from the Brazilian club Chapecoense (from the city Chapecó), which had been heading to Colombia to face Colombian club Atlético Nacional (from the city Medellín) in the first leg of the *Copa Sudamericana* final. Seventy-one people died, with three of the six survivors being players of the club (Kraul).

Following the accident, statements poured in from Colombian and Brazilian politicians alike, opening traditional Track I diplomatic channels. The Colombian president, Juan Manuel Santos, pronounced himself on Twitter (now known as X), stating that the country was in "mourning" and called for solidarity with the family of the victims and Brazil (@juanmansantos). On his end, Brazilian president Michel Temer declared three days of mourning in the country, and thanked the Colombian President and people for their support and prayers (Soares). Track II diplomacy channels were also opened, drawing from the shared symbolic importance of the *Copa Sudamericana* by the two countries. Atletico Nacional released a statement the day after the accident, directed to the *Confederación Sudamericana de Fútbol*

(CONMEBOL), South America's football governing body. In it, they asked to award the Copa Sudamericana to Chapecoense as an "honorary laurel for their great loss and in posthumous tribute to the victims of the tragic accident that mourns our sport." They closed the statement with the message "From us, and forever, Chapecoense, 2016 Copa Sudamericana Champion" ("Atlético Nacional"). The use of the term "our" sport shows a cultural connection that transcends state borders. The gesture only works because of the shared history and significance the two states give to the sport and competition.

As a result of Track I relations, the Brazilian government awarded the Medal of Merit of the Armed Forces to Colombian military personnel who played a key role in the rescue efforts. The Order of Rio Branco was also awarded to Medellín mayor, Federico Gutiérrez Zuluaga, and other politicians and reporters who aided were also part of the diplomatic communications between the two states ("Brazil honours Colombians").

By coincidence, Atlético Nacional and a rebuilt Chapecoense team met on the pitch again, five months after the incident, to compete for the *Recopa Sudamericana*, a final played between the winner of the Copa Libertadores (won by Nacional in 2016) and the *Copa Sudamericana* (awarded to Chapecoense in 2016). The Colombian team was welcomed in Chapecó with "a human tunnel, lined with flags of both clubs," and were paraded through the streets of Chapecó on a fire truck, and applauded all the way to their city hotel." Billboards could be found in the city that read "When a brother visits, the whole city overflows with emotion" (Savarese).

It is impossible to compare the importance of the medals awarded by the Brazilian government in honor of the rescue efforts and the welcome that Chapecó gave to Nacional for awarding them the title. Both events served their own purpose. However, one can note the participants of each event. Where the first was attended by high-ranking government and military officials, the second was celebrated by the everyday people of Chapecó, hailing the Medellín players not just as heroes but as brothers.

VI. Conclusion

In South America, the history and manner of how football was adopted into a country's identity influences how the sport can and has been used diplomatically. If a sport was adopted into a state's national identity through a bottom-up approach, then its representation internationally is accurate to how the sport presents itself at the national level. However, if the sport was forcefully established into a state's political identity through a top-down approach, then it will maintain a uniform significance internationally while simultaneously representing the ideals of the regime in power at the national level. Alternatively, local football clubs retain a level of autonomy in diplomatic efforts from state governments thanks to a tight-knit community created through decades of shared history.

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From Sea to Shining Sea: Navigating the Educational Crossroads of Confucian Virtue, American Meritocracy, and Immigrant Pride

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Abstract

This project examines how Confucian educational philosophy has been transformed within the Chinese-American immigrant experience, shifting from communal moral cultivation to individual achievement. Through analysis of Amy Chua's Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother and classical Confucian texts, the essay traces how Confucian ideals merged with American meritocracy to produce distinctive pressures on second-generation Chinese immigrant students. Drawing on Foucault, Freire, and contemporary research, the project argues that Chinese-American students experience education as family obligation, cultural performance, and institutional compliance, concluding that ultimately, education's purpose lies in cultivating intellectual resources enabling individuals to determine what their learning is for.

I. Introduction

In a living room draped with blankets and family photos, the piano keys glinted in the light of the crackling fireplace. Three-year-old Lulu sat atop the bench, curls falling over her eyes as she slapped at the keys with both hands. Her mother stood beside her, jaw set. What was meant to be a simple lesson—learning how to play quarter notes on the keyboard—had unraveled into shrieks, flailing limbs, and a storm of tiny kicks against the wooden bench.

Minutes stretched into hours as the two sat at the piano, the warm air split by Lulu's cries echoing through the house. Her mother, frustrated but refusing to relent, pulled her toward the back door and swung it open. A violent gust of twenty-degree air swept in, stinging both their faces. "You can't stay inside if you don't listen to Mommy," she said, voice low. "Are you ready to behave? Or do you want to go outside?"

Lulu stepped out. Her sweater and tights did little against the cold, yet she stood still, teeth chattering, staring back with a defiance far larger than her small stature seemed to hold. In that moment, both seemed to recognize something unmistakable about the other: neither would yield easily.

Eventually, Lulu was coaxed back inside and scampered away, feet pattering into the dark hallway. Her mother sat down on the piano bench, face strained with a flat expression—not of triumph or remorse, but of something quieter: determination.

This scene would repeat itself for years following: confrontations that intensified with every practice session, the mother's threats growing more virulent, desperate to mold Lulu into the musical prodigy she had always envisioned. To the mother—Amy Chua, Yale Law Professor and daughter of Chinese immigrants—honing Lulu's musical abilities was not just the polishing of a skill; it was a victory that felt bigger than herself. As she describes in her memoir, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, her confrontation with Lulu was not cruelty, but devotion—"a tie-in to the high cultural tradition of my ancient ancestors," proof that she would "not let [her] family fall" (Chua 12). Chua's defiance was an attempt to follow a moral order rooted in ancient Confucian ideals of discipline, filial duty, and education as the foundation of virtue, sustaining a lineage that she believed was threatened by assimilation and softened by Western permissiveness.

As the oldest daughter of Chinese-American immigrants, I felt intimately familiar with Chua's perspective—I'd also grown up in a lifestyle of perfect academics, controlled schedules, and limited social freedom. Still, as I read about Lulu sitting on the piano bench, I felt admiration for her boldness—and dread, because I knew exactly how a moment like that ended. The lesson continued, and you learned to comply.

Critics seemed to feel the same, as Chua's memoir sparked intense debate upon publication. Scholars, journalists, and parents framed the book as a cultural clash between Eastern and Western values, debating the causes and ethics of Chua's strict parenting style. Some readers felt affirmed by Chua's insistence on excellence for her children—"There's a good take-home message here," said Dorian Traube, professor of social work at the University of Southern California, arguing that Chua's clear-cut expectations for her children reflected a coherent vision of how children should grow up (Brown). Others reacted with alarm; NPR critic Maureen Corrigan wrote, "Amy Chua may well be nuts... [her] voice is that of a jovial, erudite serial killer" (Corrigan). Yet, much of this discourse centered on the morality and severity of Chua's methods rather than the deeper philosophical question her book provoked: what conceptions of learning made such parenting practices appear desirable in the first place?

These motivations, however distorted over time, originate in a philosophy far removed from Chua's American living room. In *The Great Learning*, Confucius writes, "Those of antiquity.... put governing their states well first; wishing to govern their states well, they first established harmony in their households; wishing to establish harmony in their households, they first cultivated themselves; wishing to cultivate themselves, they... extended knowledge to the utmost; the extension of knowledge lies in the investigation of things" (Gardner 5). This passage defines the essence of Confucian ethics: that self-cultivation through knowledge is the foundation of social harmony, where personal virtue must then be extended to the family and ultimately to the state. Placed in conversation with Daniel Gardner's introduction to his translation of *The Great Learning*, Confucius' emphasis on self-improvement becomes even clearer. Gardner explains that for centuries, Chinese students approached learning as a slow inward excavation—reciting the sages' words repeatedly, "rolling them around in the mouth" until the ideas "seem to come from one's own mind" (28), revealing how deeply Confucian education was meant to lead students in a process of intrinsic self-discovery so they could ultimately apply the *most* virtuous version of themselves to serve those around them.

However, in modern immigrant contexts, that inward orientation has become overshadowed by the outward stakes of survival, transforming an ethical practice into an evaluative one. Contemporary Chinese-American households, such as Chua's, inherited the Confucian reverence for discipline and study, but not the social world that originally gave it meaning. The virtue once measured by harmony and social benefit is now measured through individual achievement; self-cultivation has been replaced by self-assertion. For immigrant families, educational excellence has become a means of securing economic stability and social legitimacy in a country that often doubts their belonging.

What remains unclear is how the original moral purpose of Confucian learning was transformed so profoundly that it could justify both parents' genuine care for their children and the crushing pressure to succeed they impose upon them. When a tradition that once located education in "the inner sphere... [of] self-cultivation" (Gardner 25) is transplanted into a society that rewards only outcomes, it becomes unmoored from its philosophical roots, raising the question of what education was *meant* to be before it turned into a vehicle of survival.

Therefore, by combining Confucian philosophy, educational psychology, and the cultural pressures of the American Dream in the context of the Chinese-American diaspora, this project will first examine how Confucian ideas of learning for the collective—centered on moral growth and social harmony—have been reshaped by ideals of independence and success. Then it will consider how these changing values influence the way education is viewed and practiced in the Chinese-American diaspora, where familial expectations and personal goals often conflict. Finally, it will address whether individuals today still learn primarily for the sake of others or themselves, and what that distinction reveals about the true purpose of learning.

II. The Development of Educational Purpose Through American And Confucian Traditions

In classical Confucian tradition, learning was never a matter of intellect alone—it was also an act of morality. The Great Learning opens by asserting that "the Way of great learning is the process of bringing balance, refinement, and clarity to our psychophysical endowments so that the inborn virtue in each of us will be unobscured, becoming fully manifest toward others" (Gardner 4). Here, Confucius places moral cultivation—not the pursuit of technical skill or intellectual mastery—at the very center of education, and goes so far as to establish it as "virtue". Thus, education's task was to refine one's inner virtue so that it could radiate outward into family and society. Later, the text explains that, "[Those] wishing to cultivate themselves... first made their intentions true" (Gardner 5), meaning that the learner must align moral intention with action before knowledge can achieve its true purpose. This emphasis on sincerity shows that for Confucius, learning was meaningful only when it grew out of genuine moral effort.

Yet, as philosophy researcher Ruyu Hung argues in A Critique of Confucian Learning, the same hierarchy of values that elevated virtue also restricted who could attain it. Hung's interpretation of Confucius' educational philosophy classifies learners into categories, from those "born with the possession of knowledge" to those who "have difficulties and also do not learn" (85–86). This ranking raises questions about the nature of learning itself by calling attention to those who are neglected, devalued, or excluded from education by the dominant canonical hierarchy. Ethical knowledge—defined by virtues such as filial piety, respectfulness, and trustworthiness—was placed above all other forms of study, while practical or "laborious knowledge," such as agriculture or manual skill, was "too insignificant to be scrutinised by Confucius" (Hung 89).

Under Hung's analysis, Confucianism transformed education into both a moral and social sorting mechanism. Those who practiced ethical knowledge were considered virtuous, while those who lacked it—or failed to perform it visibly—fell outside that order altogether. Over time, this structure helped shape the idea that education is something that must be demonstrated publicly—a performance of character as much as a practice of learning—an understanding that continues to influence modern meritocratic systems. In this sense, Confucian education began the very transformation this project traces: the shift from learning as a communal virtue to learning as a personal display of worth.

Surprisingly, when these Confucian ideals of discipline and moral refinement encountered Western modernity, they found an unexpected mirror. As sociologist Max Weber explains, the Protestant tradition transformed work into a spiritual calling—a way to prove one's faith through hard work. Ordinary labor became a stage for salvation: through constant effort, individuals could be in right relationship to God (Weber 33). Over time, this religious duty lost its theological roots but retained its moral tone, giving rise to a culture where productivity became a measure of virtue.

This moral framework would later become the foundation of the American Dream, which is a longstanding belief that anyone can rise to success through hard work, discipline, and individual effort (Murtoff). As Weber notes, capitalism inherited Protestantism's ethic of discipline and labor but detached it from religious origins, transforming economic achievement into an independent sign of virtue (Weber 77). This shift in moral meaning made it easy for Confucian ideals to intertwine with American ones. Both systems valued discipline and success—but while Confucius viewed these as steps toward harmony within a collective, the American adaptation made achievement itself the most virtuous result. When Chinese immigrants entered American environments, they discovered an unexpected connection to their ancestral values: hard work as a virtue, study as a duty, and success as a testament to character. The two traditions, though born in different worlds, converged around the same promise: self-mastery could lead to salvation, whether spiritual or social.

Yet, as Michel Foucault observes in Discipline and Punish, modern society's faith in effort and order carries an invisible cost. "The Enlightenment," he writes, "which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines" (222), where "disciplines" were a system of power that produced obedient, self-monitoring subjects. In the context of the American Dream, this means that the drive for success is no longer freely chosen—it is internalized as moral necessity. What began as Confucian cultivation of inner virtue and Protestant devotion to external calling thus merges into a single logical strand: individuals are compelled to perform virtue through constant productivity. The Chinese immigrant student or worker becomes, in this sense, the ideal subject of the American Dream—one who governs themselves through continuous self-surveillance, striving, and comparison.

Through this lens, modern education operates as a site of what Foucault calls "the infinite examination" (Foucault 189), where achievement and morality merge into one. The pursuit of education becomes a tool to gain social legitimacy. For Chinese immigrants and their descendants, this aligns both with the Confucian ethic of self-cultivation and with the American Dream's promise of earned redemption, contributing to contemporary Chinese-American approaches to education.

III. Implications of Educational Attitudes in the Chinese-American Diaspora

Over centuries, the Confucian ideal of moral cultivation and the Western value of disciplined labor have merged into a moral logic that ties virtue to productivity. In contemporary American schooling, this logic no longer appears simply as a cultural inheritance, but also as an institutional structure that shapes how students come to understand themselves. Western schools have become microcosms of this idea, where students are examined, compared, and ranked under the gaze of authority. "Visibility," Foucault writes, "is a trap," referring to a phenomenon where the mere possibility of being watched teaches people to regulate themselves (200).

In this sense, the Confucian idea of respecting authority, which reveres adults and elders as moral benchmarks whose judgment shapes one's character, acts as a cultural form of visibility (Hsu 51). Growing up in a Chinese-American immigrant household, this instinct to self-regulate was already inherent to me long before I encountered its institutional version at school. My parents, my first authority figures, corrected the smallest things—my sitting posture, the way I greeted adults, how I held my pencil—because my behavior influenced the way other adults perceived me, and by extension, them. Entering school felt like a continuation rather than a shift: teachers became the next authority figures whose approval felt just as consequential as my parents'. In that convergence of Chinese and American ideals, one directive governed both spaces: don't embarrass yourself, and don't embarrass us.

This dynamic intensifies in Western 21st-century classrooms, where Foucault's idea of visibility becomes embedded in the architecture of schooling itself. AP and SAT scores circulate as popular metrics of aptitude, college admissions systems reward constant proof of productivity, and students begin to realize that every assignment contributes to a continuous evaluation of their character when grades are released. Educational researchers Torin Monahan and Rodolfo Torres note that this form of visibility is destructive because it internalizes external surveillance—students initially regulate themselves at school because they are aware others are evaluating them, but because institutional norms structure how individuals understand themselves and their places within said institutions, the pressure to appear diligent, capable, or exceptional is absorbed into daily habits (Monahan and Torres 61). In other words, the achievement-oriented culture of modern schools becomes materially enforced through academic structures that require students to constantly demonstrate worth. At this stage, visibility functions as an external demand that gradually reshapes students' routines: they learn to anticipate evaluation before it occurs.

Once this vigilance becomes habitual, students begin to treat learning not as exploration, but as a performance. Psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan describe this as the erosion of intrinsic motivation, where the natural desire to learn out of curiosity, growth, or meaning is replaced by an external drive (Deci & Ryan 3). For students who grow up in cultural contexts shaped by both Confucian duty and American meritocracy, these pressures intensify: the institutional demand for productivity aligns with familial expectations of discipline and excellence, making it difficult for students to distinguish between what they want and what they feel obligated to pursue. Over time, students begin to mistake these external expectations for their own, adopting what Foucault calls "the principles of [one's] own subjection" (Foucault 203). This internalization is not merely psychological, but also moral. When worth is measured through performance, failure does not simply signal a lack of mastery—it threatens one's sense of character. In this way, the cultural logic that began as a historical convergence of Confucian and Western ideals ultimately manifests as a deeply personal form of self-surveillance, completing Foucault's cycle of visibility: external expectations become an intrinsic framework through which students interpret their own worth.

For me, this cycle manifested particularly early. In elementary school, whenever I got a test back, my stomach dropped before I saw the score, knowing that the number on the paper would determine my family's perception of me that evening. Once, after I performed poorly on a vocabulary quiz, I threw it into the trash, knowing I couldn't bring it home. I did this for months until my teacher eventually found one of the tests. "Why'd you throw this away?" she asked.

I froze. In my mind, doing poorly wasn't just failure—it felt like I had disappointed both her effort as a teacher and authority figure, as well as the values of academic success my family had raised me with. I didn't think I had the right to tell her that. Instead, I merely shrugged.

This psychological internalization does not occur in isolation—it interacts powerfully with the familial structures that shape how many Chinese-American students come to understand what achievement means in the first place. Migration studies researchers Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut observe that many intergenerational conflicts "have to do with the [parents'] extraordinary pressure on children to achieve" (Portes and Rumbaut 215). Within these homes, academic achievement becomes a moral currency: the primary way children demonstrate dedication, show honor, and secure social mobility for their parents (Portes & Rumbaut 193). Yet for many immigrant families, the hopes attached to a child's success are also shaped by a sense of generational obligation, tied to opportunities parents had once forfeited. In high school, I'd flinch every time my parents asked about my grades—not because they were bad, but because being scrutinized about them made me feel like my education wasn't fully mine. The learning that would have excited me felt like an obligation, yet I was constantly torn, knowing my parents wanted an educated, accomplished child not only because it reflected well on their parenting, but because it represented everything they had been denied. My mom had always dreamed of getting an accounting degree in America after attending a Chinese university, but she couldn't afford it; instead, while pregnant with me, she worked retail jobs without knowing a word of English just so my dad could attend graduate school. In that way, every question she asked me about school carried a weight I didn't know how to refuse. No matter how my hands cramped after hours of homework, hers had hurt more from lifting heavy boxes of clothes with me in her belly. Under the pressure, I could still feel the hope she never vocalized: that I might achieve the status and stability she never could, that I might prove our family belonged here. In my mind, the logic was simple: if education could give me the life she sacrificed, then I believed I owed it to her to try.

Because of this, for Chinese-American students, education itself becomes reinterpreted through a familial lens. Sociologist Min Zhou identifies this shift clearly: while Chinese adult immigrants' adaptation into American society is evaluated by "occupational attainment and income," their children's adaptation is judged almost entirely by “educational attainment—academic orientation, aspiration, and performance” (Zhou 75). This means that for the second generation, school is not simply a site of learning, but the primary arena where one’s worth is measured. Similarly, Vivian Louie, Urban Policy Professor at Hunter College, finds that educational achievement becomes the means through which immigrant parents transmit expectations and children negotiate identity, turning classrooms into the space where belonging, legitimacy, and obligation converge (4). In this intertwined structure—surveillance at school, obligation at home—students come to monitor themselves as intensely, if not more, than any external authority could.

Eventually, these converging dynamics create a system of expectations that shapes not only how Chinese-American students learn, but how they understand who they can become. This results in a combined system of values: Confucian in its continued emphasis on filial responsibility, American in its fixation on individual achievement, and distinctly immigrant in its belief that a child’s education can redeem the family’s sacrifices—where many children end up compromising their own goals in favor of pursuing more socially admirable futures (Zhou 18). This evolution brings this project’s central question sharply into view: when achievement is shaped simultaneously by family duty, cultural identity, and social mobility, do students—especially those from Chinese-American immigrant families—truly learn for themselves, or for others?

IV. Reimagining Agency in Chinese-American Education

Over time, the convergence of Confucian moral duty and American meritocracy has produced an educational culture where accomplishment becomes a measure of one’s character and value rather than a means of genuinely exploring one’s passions. Psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan address the root of the issue, arguing that intrinsic motivation flourishes only when individuals experience autonomy, competence, and genuine connection. When these conditions are absent, learning becomes driven by one’s desire to fulfill an external consequence (3). For many Chinese-American students, those consequences multiply—each grade becomes a proxy for gratitude and self-worth.

This externally oriented model of learning mirrors what renowned educational philosopher Paulo Freire critiques in his theory of the “banking” model of education. In this system, as he writes, “the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits” (72). He emphasizes that learning becomes something that is done to the student rather than created within them. Specifically, Chinese-American children often learn under a structure where the purpose of knowledge is to meet standards established by others, such as parents, teachers, and institutions. Childhood education expert Alfie Kohn further observes that systems of extrinsic pressure, from rewards to punishments, do more than distort motivation: they undermine people's interest in whatever they were rewarded for doing (350). These insights explain why many Chinese-American students struggle to distinguish between their own aspirations and the expectations placed upon them—because outward pressures cause them to lose interest in the pursuit of education altogether, succumbing to a performance of external validation.

Yet reclaiming one's educational purpose requires recovering precisely what these external systems suppress: the learner's agency. Martha Nussbaum, ethics professor at the University of Chicago, argues that a meaningful education cultivates the capacity to think for oneself, a skill that is essential for developing a dignified, self-directed life. The purpose of schooling is to expand the student's interior world—nurturing imagination, empathy, and critical thinking so that individuals can resist unexamined social pressures (Nussbaum 21). Nussbaum's model, therefore, treats autonomy as something that is intrinsically necessary to personal development: without it, people are more inclined to inherit the values of others rather than define their own. Psychologist John Dewey reinforces this same vision, writing that education must engage students in "the reconstruction of... experience," claiming that learning becomes meaningful only when individuals are empowered to interpret their world and reshape their understanding through active inquiry (68). Together, Nussbaum and Dewey offer a vision of education grounded in autonomy, curiosity, and self-direction rather than compliance. Their insight becomes a crucial intervention in Chinese-American contexts, where the meaning of achievement is frequently externalized through high standards and familial obligation.

However, the question of agency takes on another dimension when placed within the racialized structures of American schooling. For Chinese-American students, the academic standards they encounter at school often echo the hierarchical expectations they experience at home, creating a dual system of evaluation that reinforces the pressure to prove worth through performance. Even when they internalize the values of discipline and excellence encouraged by their families, they also enter classrooms governed by norms that are not culturally neutral. These environments define "good" communication, writing, and thinking through culturally white, historically exclusionary standards. This dynamic becomes especially visible in writing professor Asao Inoue's critique that in Western classrooms, particularly in rhetoric-heavy assignments, students are evaluated not simply on ability, clarity, or reasoning, but on their proximity to "white racial habitus"—the dominant linguistic and rhetorical norms that shape what institutions deem articulate, professional, or academically legitimate (9). These expectations may appear universal, but historically reflect white, middle-class language patterns: a thesis-driven structure, expressive emotional tones, and forms of evidence that privilege Western values and traditions. Students whose home languages or cultural rhetorics differ from these norms must therefore perform an additional layer of translation simply to be perceived as competent (Inoue 163).

Yet, this pressure of conformity is exacerbated for Chinese-American students due to the marginalization they face in American schools. Educational sociologist Stacey Lee finds that Asian American youth are routinely positioned as "model minority" achievers, expected to be disciplined, compliant, and effortlessly high-performing, which pressures them to conform to white, middle-class definitions of academic success regardless of whether these norms align with their own values. This ties them to an expectation of excellence that their white peers may not face: the expectation to outperform (Lee 7). Taken together, these pressures reveal how the meritocratic classroom becomes an extension of the demands Chinese-American students already feel—in both school and home, value is conferred through compliance with external criteria. Rather than developing a sense of ownership over their education, many are pushed into performing an identity that aligns with institutional expectations, constraining their ability to define success on their own terms.

Regardless, recognizing these constraints opens up opportunities to reclaim educational agency. Pedagogical research on alternative academic assessment models—including contract, reflection, or labor-based grading—shows that student autonomy increases when grading decouples from rigid, compliance-based metrics. Inoue further explains that students take more intellectual risks with these kinds of evaluation, since their academic identities are no longer threatened by deviation from the norm (212). Similarly, educational researchers Chris Schinske and Kimberly Tanner demonstrate that grading systems structured around accumulating points or detecting errors reinforce external motivations, while systems that foreground reflection and effort cultivate deeper, self-motivated understandings of academic subjects (165). Among Chinese-American students in particular—who often face intensified pressures from parents and institutions alike—these approaches offer an avenue for separating familial obligation from the learning process. When success is measured through process and growth rather than just surface-level performance, students are less likely to interpret academic struggle as a failure of character and more likely to see it as a natural part of intellectual development. These findings suggest that the work of reclaiming student agency is not only psychological, but institutional: students must be given environments where different forms of expression and interpretation are supported rather than penalized.

For Chinese-American students shaped by intersecting expectations, these educational shifts offer room for ambition to take on new meanings. Instead of learning to fulfill external pressures, education becomes a medium through which students can articulate their own values, explore their interests, and reclaim authority over their futures. In this sense, intrinsic motivation does not require separating from one's cultural or familial background; it requires transforming inherited expectations into personally chosen commitments. When learning is no longer a performance for others but a process of self-discovery, the purpose of education becomes clear: it is not a way to satisfy one's internal or external pressures, but rather, a tool that allows oneself to navigate them.

V. Reimagining Agency in Chinese-American Education

Across history, learning has been repeatedly reshaped by factors larger than the learners themselves. Confucian self-cultivation became a hierarchy of virtue, immigrant sacrifice justified the academic pressure put upon their descendants, and American meritocracy turned schooling into an underlying competition. Yet, running through each of these developments is a collective question: can the student's agency survive beneath these layers of obligation?

Ultimately, education that merely assigns expectations to students reiterates dependence, but education rooted in dialogue and reflection promotes autonomy. For many Chinese-American students, this act of reclaiming purpose involves separating the conditions under which they previously learned from the reasons they choose to keep learning. This ideological shift is reflected in my own journey, where, as I continued to pursue an education, I learned to situate my family's expectations within a broader context. By studying history, economics, politics, and science, I began to understand the world my parents had come from and the one I inhabited, seeing how the tribulation and scarcity they experienced during their immigration journey shaped their urgency and parenting style. I recognized the social and cultural ostracization they encountered, and the linguistic and financial barriers they'd overcome. My life at home gradually appeared more complex; my family's methods were rooted not in an intention to control me, but in fear that I would experience the same hardships they had. That understanding, made possible only through educating myself, gave me the distance and clarity to step away from their expectations. My accomplishments became a means of asserting my own autonomy and pursuing my passions, independent of outward influences. Over time, I realized that the pressures I had inherited might have shaped the beginning of my educational journey—but they did not have to determine its end.

Still, on my first day of class at Stanford, I sent my mother a picture of my introductory economics class. She replied with a voice memo—"you are where I always wanted to be." I think about that whenever I have a bad day of classes, or feel like giving up. I know that my educational journey is mine, but I cannot negate those who traversed the path with me—my parents, who stood still so I could walk forward. This is why, ultimately, the purpose of education cannot be reduced to either for oneself or others. People inevitably learn for both—out of obligation, aspiration, curiosity, gratitude, and desire. But the value of education lies in what it eventually enables: the capacity to decide what one's learning is for. At its best, education does not dictate a single purpose; it establishes the intellectual and social resources that allow individuals to generate their own.

Returning to Amy Chua's living room now becomes an act of clarity rather than criticism. Lulu, sitting at the piano, embodies the educational beginnings of many Chinese-American students: bound by discipline, fear, and expectation. But the meaning of that scene is not fixed. What matters is what happens after the final note is played—whether Lulu remained bound to her family's living room, or learned to act beyond it. As Chua's memoir reveals, she chose the latter—eventually pursuing tennis over music despite her mother's qualms, charting her own future (142). Having graduated from Harvard Law School in 2022 (Jones Day 2025), Lulu clearly maintained her excellence and ambition—but no longer as an extension of her mother's will.

In the end, the real measure of education is not who was pleased or how well one performed, but whether it provided the clarity to step off the piano bench and decide what comes next. When education makes this shift possible, it reveals its most overarching purpose: to give individuals not just knowledge, but the freedom to determine what that knowledge will allow them to become.

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INTERNATIONAL LAW & HUMAN RIGHTS

From Screens to Streets: Analyzing Whether a Statistically Significant Difference Exists Between Mean Protest Mobilization in Iran among the Different Rhetorical Appeals in TikTok Posts

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Abstract

This research works to evaluate whether a statistically significant difference exists in mean protest mobilization in Iran among the different rhetorical appeals—logos, ethos, and pathos—present in TikTok posts within the Women's Rights Movement. Posts were collected and coded based on the presence of the dominant rhetorical appeal, and engagement metrics were analyzed. Pathos-based posts demonstrated the highest average number of protests per post. The results indicate that a statistically significant difference exists across the three groups in mean protest mobilization in Iran.

I. Introduction

Throughout Iran's history, a variety of legal, religious, and societal factors have dictated women's autonomy. For instance, the regulations requiring women to veil have varied over time (Maranlou 2). Reza Shah Pallavhi, who remained shah from 1925 to 1941, pushed for a series of reforms in Iran to modernize the state. One legislation he passed forced all women to unveil. This forced legislation was celebrated amongst some, potentially seen as an act towards an upward progression for women's rights (Sedghi 61). Others, however, opposed the legislation, viewing the veil as integral to cultural identity and daily life, arguing that state-imposed unveiling acts as a form of coercion. In 1979, the Islamic Revolution occurred, overthrowing Reza Shah Pallvi's son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. The Islamic Revolution was framed as a return to traditional Islamic principles. Following the Islamic Revolution in 1979, mandatory veil-wearing was imposed (Loiacano 64). The act of forcing women to veil and also unveil by the state serves to marginalize women and hinder their ability to make choices for themselves. Social behavior in Iran was heavily controlled by the morality police, created by the Islamic Republic to enforce the state's interpretation of Shariah law. On September 13, 2022, Mahsa Amini was detained for not wearing her hijab properly according to the morality police. A few days after her detainment, Amini died in custody, as she was beaten to death by the morality police. Following her death, protests erupted throughout Iran despite strict restrictions on protesting and free expression. The story of Mahsa Amini is widely discussed among the international community, as her death became a symbol of gendered-state violence and restrictive legislation in Iran. Her death also shifted public perception of the veil, with civilians internationally understanding it as a political instrument of state control rather than solely a religious practice. Some scholars also highlight how, rather than for religious purposes, the veil has been used as a "commodity" by the state to control women (Gould 222). Social media was used as a platform to talk about the injustice that Amini and most other Iranian women experience (Naqvi and Zaheer 42). TikTok has emerged as a prominent platform in these discussions, but the potential relationship between engagement on the app and protest mobilization has received little scholarly attention in academia. This current study contributes to the literature on digital activism by examining how differences in rhetorical strategy are associated with variations in protest mobilization. Understanding how rhetorical strategies shape protest mobilization is crucial for scholars and activists as it illuminates mechanisms that may be effective at facilitating collective action under diverse political conditions.

II. Literature Review

A growing body of research has developed to study the relationship between social media, political discourse, and protest mobilization. Recent research within academia, including the work done by Glyn Brennan, explores how social media functions as a site of political discourse by incorporating diverse perspectives into political discussions and reshaping how individuals communicate. Further, Brennan argues that this discourse on social media can create conditions conducive to protest mobilization, given the lower barriers that are required for discourse on social media (Brennan 76). While Brennan argues that social media influences political discourse rather than directly affects mobilization, other research more distinctly highlights the link between social media and mobilization. Some scholars argue that the Tunisian Revolution acted as a case where social media acted as a catalyst for protest mobilization (Breuer et al. 765). Other research complicates this interpretation, highlighting how the role of social media in Tunisia, and in the Arab Spring, more broadly, remains contested within the literature and is the subject of an ongoing debate. For example, Karolak argues that social media should not be understood as a direct cause of mobilization, but rather as a tool whose effects depend on human agency along with other factors (Karolak 200). While empirical research demonstrating a relationship between social media and protests remains limited in academia, existing studies highlight how this relationship seems to be variable.

In addition to examining the link present between social media and mobilization, many scholars have analyzed persuasion and rhetorical appeals within social media posts. For instance, research has focused on how companies market on social media, highlighting how the use of logos, pathos, and ethos affects the way people respond and perceive their relationship with the brand (Panigyrakis et al. 699). Research, though, extends beyond marketing and has examined the use of rhetoric on social media in a variety of different contexts. Hitchcock conducted a rhetorical analysis to assess how social media discourse facilitates protesting (Hitchcock 1). Although rhetorical analysis is a well-established approach, studies applying rhetorical frameworks to protest mobilization on social media remain limited and are often confined to specific movements.

While existing research demonstrates that social media can function as a site of political discourse and, in some cases, help facilitate protest mobilization, no studies examine how the effectiveness of particular rhetorical strategies varies within the context of mobilization efforts. For instance, recent research suggests that TikTok played a significant role in the protests about the women's rights movement in Iran (Walsh 625); however, it does not establish the specific rhetorical appeals that are present in these TikTok posts, highlighting a key gap. Moreover, this research paper works to address this gap, examining the role of rhetorical appeals in protest mobilization within the Iranian context.

III. Methodology

The existing background information described above has led me to my research project, which works to explore the relationship between TikTok posts and protests on a deeper level, specifically by analyzing the dominant rhetorical appeals present in TikTok posts. The procedure used to assess whether there is a statistically significant difference between mean protest mobilization among the different rhetorical appeals (logos, ethos, and pathos) present in TikTok posts about the Women's Rights Movement is outlined below.

First, TikTok's search feature was used to identify posts associated with the Iranian Women's Rights Movement following the death of Mahsa Amini, using the hashtags #MahsaAmini, #WomenLifeFreedom, and #RiseWithTheWomenOfIran.

These particular hashtags were selected due to their prominence within movement-related discourse. Following this, I made a series of choices with the intent of prioritizing meeting the goals of this study. First, I only analyzed posts on TikTok that were posted after Mahsa Amini's death, as analyzing posts prior to her death would not align with the goals of this research. Further, I only analyzed posts that met a certain engagement threshold of at least 500,000 views. The reason for this is that I wanted the research sample to exclude posts with little visibility. Including protests with minimal exposure would introduce noise without meaningfully contributing to the analysis, as such posts are unlikely to be associated with detectable protest activity. After finding all of the posts, I applied the established definitions defined by researchers of ethos, logos, and pathos to ascertain the dominant rhetorical appeal present.

The particular framework used to determine the presence of a rhetorical device in each post was modeled after the rhetorical analysis conducted by Mheidly et al., which examines how health influencers on TikTok use rhetorical appeals to communicate breast cancer information (Mheidly 2). This study offers particular characteristics to help define each rhetorical strategy and establish metrics. The key characteristics for ethos are credibility, reference, and expectation. For pathos, the key attributes are tone, engagement, and emphasis. The components for logos would be arrangement, clarity, and consciousness. Figure 1 illustrates the adapted framework that I utilized to ascertain which forms of rhetoric were present in a particular post. Explanations were also included to clarify how each characteristic was defined and operationalized.

Rhetorical Category	Evidence of the Rhetoric - characteristics	Explanation
Ethos	Credibility	- Credibility is reinforced by showing a specific trademark throughout the video

	Reference	- Where the information in the video is coming from
	Expectation	- The extent to which a viewer predicts the content creator is going to ethically deliver the content in the video
Pathos	Tone	- Presence of music in the video in order to appeal to the audience
	Engagement	- The content creator and the audience is interacting (i.e. through the comments section)
	Emphasis	- Parts of the video are emotional
Logos	Arrangement	- All components of the video (text, graphics, etc) engage the audience
	Consciousness	- Concise and succinct presentation of information - Information is grammatically correct

	Clarity	- Presentation of information about the movement is clear

Figure 1. Framework for Identifying Rhetorical Strategies in Video Content

For each post, I tabulated the presence of each particular characteristic. I then evaluated which rhetorical appeal was more dominant within the post. Posts that did not have a dominant rhetorical appeal and, for instance, may have had an even number of characteristics for more than one appeal, were excluded from the study. The intent behind excluding these posts is that the goal of the study is to focus on posts that have a clear dominant rhetorical device present.

After categorizing the posts into each rhetorical device, I began recording engagement metrics for each post, focusing on comments, likes, and shares. To ensure comparability across rhetorical categories, I ensured that I had a sample of thirty posts for each rhetorical category. If one of the rhetorical devices had over thirty posts analyzed, I performed random sampling to ensure that there were exactly thirty posts within this sample. I intentionally chose the number across the different rhetorical categories to be even, as this is necessary to ensure validity in statistical testing. I also confirmed that all three hashtags were represented in the posts that were selected for each rhetorical category, as maintaining hashtag diversity within each appeal helps reduce sampling bias and improves comparability. After doing these steps, I aggregated the data for each of the three engagement categories for each rhetorical strategy and then averaged the results. To help explain and visualize these steps, Figure 2 illustrates the particular data that I was working to find.

Rhetorical Category	Avg Likes	Avg Comments	Avg Shares
Ethos			
Logos			
Pathos			

Figure 2. Methodology: Average Engagement Metrics Across Rhetorical Strategies

This step is necessary in order to effectively compare the rhetorical devices and their relationships with protest mobilization. I then examined each rhetorical device and all of the posts categorized within the device. I chose a seven-day window from the start day on which the post was posted. The reason for a seven-day period is that most posts are viewed within that timeframe, and having a defined window is crucial for this analysis. The number of protests that occurred within each window for every post was recorded. This data was then aggregated across all the posts for each rhetorical appeal and then averaged. After collecting this data, I began to test whether there was a statistically significant difference among the rhetorical appeals. This could indicate whether one group may potentially be more effective at mobilizing protests. I used the ANOVA testing as it aligns best with the goals of the study, given its power to effectively compare multiple groups and assess whether there are statistically significant differences. ANOVA testing also reduces the risk of Type 1 error that would arise from conducting multiple pairwise tests.

IV. Findings

These results indicate a statistically significant difference between the mean protest mobilization among the rhetorical strategies, ethos, logos, and pathos. To reach this conclusion, I first recorded the engagement rates for each post and calculated the average number of likes, comments, and shares for each rhetorical device, as seen in Figure 3. These results revealed that the average amount of likes, comments, and shares was the highest among pathos compared to the other rhetorical devices. Logos had the second-highest amount of likes and comments, and ethos had the second-highest amount of shares. Figure 4 highlights the significantly higher engagement—particularly with regard to the number of likes—associated with pathos compared to the other rhetorical devices.

Rhetorical Category	Average Likes	Average Comments	Average Shares
Ethos	313,200	697	142,257
Logos	459,000	5,744	9,493

Pathos	974,118	6,188	11,106

Figure 3. Avg Likes, Avg Comments, and Avg Shares Across Rhetorical Strategies

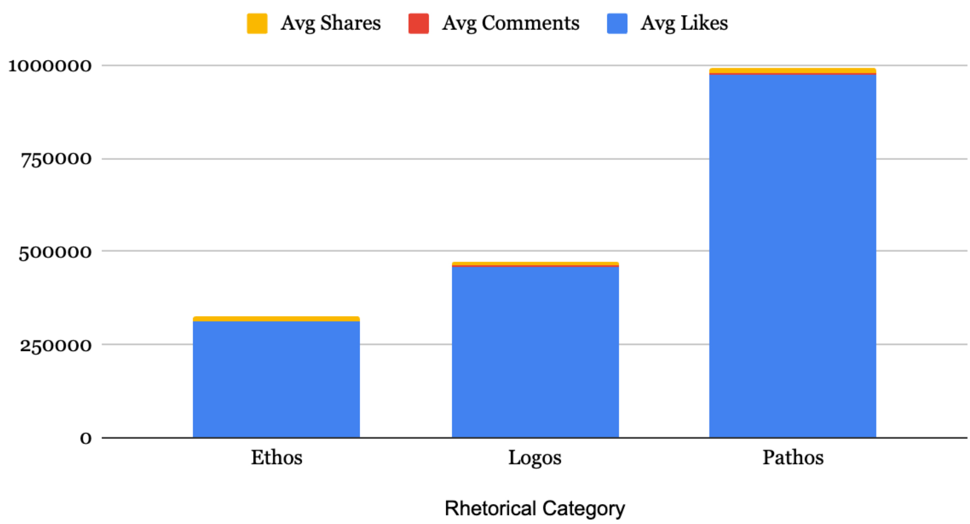

Figure 4. Avg Likes, Avg Comments, and Avg Shares Across Rhetorical Strategies

After finding this data, I examined each particular post to determine how many protests occurred within the seven-day window from the date a particular post was posted. After doing this, I tabulated the data and then found the average number of protests that occurred within the window for each rhetorical device. I used ANOVA to evaluate statistically significant differences between rhetorical devices. To be able to assess this, I examined the variance between each rhetorical device and found the standard deviation. My results for the standard deviation and the average number of protests for each post within the window are showcased in Figure 5. These results are also graphically shown in Figure 6. These results highlight that the average number of protests per post within the window was highest among pathos and lowest among ethos. The standard deviation was also highest among ethos and lowest among pathos.

Rhetorical Category	Sample Size	Avg Protest/Post Within the	Standard Deviation

		Window	
Ethos	30	87	57.5
Logos	30	97	19.52
Pathos	30	133	31.5

Figure 5. Average Protests per Post and Standard Deviation Across Rhetorical Strategies

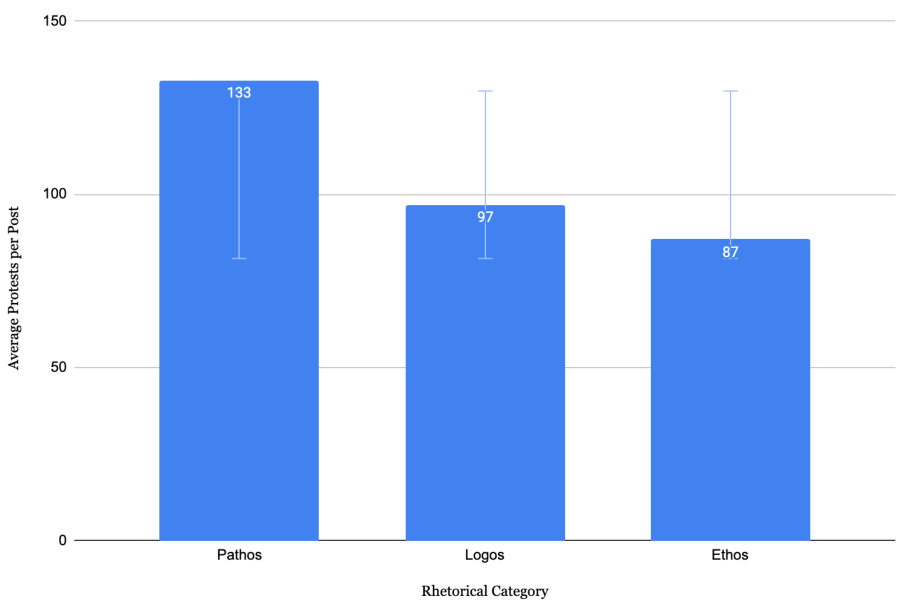

Figure 6. Average Protests per Post and Standard Deviation Across Rhetorical Strategies

I conducted ANOVA testing on this data. Both the sum of squares between (SSB) and the mean square between groups (MSB) were calculated. This step is crucial to help quantify the variation that exists between the group means. The formula that I used to complete the SSB is as follows: $SSB = \sum n_i(mean_i - \text{grand mean})^2$. This produced a result of 10,454 for ethos. For logos, I got around 2,255, and for pathos, I got around 22,407. The sum of these numbers, the SSB, is 35,120.034. To find the MSB, the formula would be the SSB divided by the degrees of freedom between groups. Since the degrees of freedom is 2, MSB = 17560.017. The second step in performing ANOVA testing was calculating the within-group sum of squares (SSE) to help assess the variability within each group. The formula for SSE, $\sum [\sum (X_i - \mathcal{M}_i)^2]$, calculates the sum of the squared differences between each data point and the group mean for the three different rhetorical groups, which yielded a value of 25066.53.

The third step I took when conducting this testing was to find the F-statistic and then to evaluate if a statistically significant difference exists. The F-statistic measures the ratio of variance between group means to variance within the group. This step is key to evaluating whether there is a statistically significant difference between the different rhetorical groups. The F-statistic produced is high, around 12.21. To find the critical F-value, the F-distribution table was assessed to find that a critical F-value might be around 3. Given that the observed F-value is higher than the critical value, the result is a statistically significant difference between the three different rhetorical devices.

V. Discussion

These findings have significant implications for a variety of different groups—including policy-makers, activists, and other stakeholders—as they help illustrate the complex relationship between social media engagement and its potential power to mobilize protests. This research fundamentally adds to the literature by systematically comparing rhetorical devices and expanding scholarly understanding of how rhetorical strategies function within digital activism. It is also relevant to content creators as it reveals the power that they have and the strategies that they can emulate to try to make an impact on issues they care about. Content creators who are able to effectively use rhetorical devices may have a disproportionate influence over discourse. The fact that pathos had the highest average protest mobilization compared to the other rhetorical appeals is notable. Not only does this add to the debate about which rhetorical strategies are most effective, but it also suggests that protest mobilization may be driven by emotionally-charged content rather than appeals to values or reason. This showcases the importance of the way that narratives are portrayed and framed on social media posts. While appealing to pathos may be particularly effective on TikTok, the effectiveness of rhetorical appeals likely varies across platforms and contexts.

While this research was intended to gain insights into how to help advance the struggle for women's rights, it can also be used for negative purposes. For instance, the Iranian government and other oppressive forces could use these insights to further censorship, making it easier to inhibit certain posts through new tactics on all social media forums. This dynamic is already evident in practice. For instance, social media has been censored in Turkey before, following recognition of the role social media was playing in mobilizing protests (Akgül and Kırlıdoğ 10). More broadly, this form of digital repression is not confined to a single country. Using social media to target dissidents and opponents is a well-known tactic that is currently found to be used by thirty countries, including Venezuela and the Philippines (White 19). In the Philippines, both government actors and civilians leveraged social media networks to target opposition figures ("From 'Likes' to Leaders" 1). The same tools that allow for mobilization also allow for suppression. Thus, research that works to illuminate avenues and strategies for collective action may inadvertently inform new mechanisms of suppression.

There are limitations in this study that are critical to consider; one of these is associated with the selection of TikTok posts. When looking at different TikTok posts, posts were selected if they met a certain threshold of 500,000 views. While this was done for the purpose of trying to exclude posts with little visibility, this may have also worked to exclude posts that were less viral, but still influential in certain areas. This also may inadvertently work to repress the agency and power of those who have a smaller following count on TikTok in favor of those who already have established platforms. If the posts that were not analyzed were incorporated into this study, this could have potentially changed the results, resulting in there not being a statistically significant difference between the rhetorical devices.

Another limitation of this study is that, due to time constraints, no inter-coder reliability was conducted when evaluating the particular dominant rhetorical appeal present in TikTok posts. This means that, for certain posts, other researchers may have identified another rhetorical appeal as dominant. This could significantly influence the results of my study. Also, given that my goal was to analyze posts with a dominant rhetorical appeal, I excluded all posts that had even characteristics amongst more than one rhetorical appeal. This increases the sensitivity of the data and may have made the process more susceptible to large changes in the results based on the way that one interprets the post. This step of categorizing different TikTok posts is integral in the research process, and thus, if differences do exist in the way that researchers classify the posts, the results could be significantly altered. Additionally, a key limitation of this study is that I used a seven-day window when exploring the relationship between engagement of viewers and protests in Iran. I chose a seven-day window, given that most views for a post are seen within this period. However, viewers do not always view posts within this window, as they may see the post after the seven days. While some viewers may encounter posts beyond this period, expanding the window further risks adding additional noise into the data, as protest events occurring way after initial exposure are more likely to be influenced by several other factors unrelated to the post. Nonetheless, disregarding these protests could have potentially affected the data and whether there are truly statistically significant differences between the different rhetorical appeals.

Given its significance, future research should be done on this topic. The satellite imagery database shows the size of each particular protest that occurred. Thus, future research could examine whether protest size serves as a significant factor in the relationship between social media rhetoric and protest mobilization. Additional research could replicate this methodology on a different platform, such as Instagram reels rather than TikTok. Other researchers could also apply this same study to other nations outside of Iran. Such studies could help interrogate whether a relationship between rhetoric on social media and protest mobilization holds in other contexts.

VI. Conclusion

Throughout this study, I found there is a statistically significant difference in mean protest mobilization among the rhetorical appeals (logos, ethos, and pathos) present in TikTok posts about the Women's Rights Movement. This challenges the assumption that digital content is uniformly persuasive, highlighting that not all rhetorical strategies are equally effective in digital spaces. Within this study, pathos has the highest average protest mobilization compared to the other rhetorical devices. This could indicate that emotional appeals are more effective at driving collective action universally in digital spaces. It could also suggest that pathos may act as the only rhetorical device capable of penetrating the barriers to engagement and expression in authoritarian environments. Emotional appeals may encourage individuals to mobilize despite the risks associated. In our highly digital society, it is important to recognize the role that social media plays, as it functions not only as a conveyor of information but as a space where rhetoric is continuously produced and shared.

Unlike other platforms, TikTok may be particularly well-suited for pathos-based approaches due to the short-form nature of the videos. This may suggest that emotion-based appeals are particularly suited for platforms where speed and high frequency are prioritized. These findings suggest the complexity of the relationship between social media and mobilization efforts. However, they should be interpreted with caution due to the various limitations. It is also imperative to consider how these findings can be used by governments or other actors adversely, such as to suppress dissent.

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WORLD ECONOMY, ENERGY, & ENVIRONMENT

How Do Different Healthcare Financing Structures Affect the Formation of New Businesses? Evidence from a Cross-Country Analysis and Case Studies of the United States, Italy, and Colombia

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Abstract

This study examines how national healthcare financing structures influence entrepreneurship. Using a panel of twenty-eight countries from 2001–2021, we merge Global Entrepreneurship Monitor microdata with World Health Organization (WHO) public health expenditure indicators. Although cross-country comparisons show a negative correlation, fixed-effects regressions reveal the opposite: a ten-percentage-point increase in public health expenditure share is associated with a 2.62-percentage-point rise in the probability of starting a business. This holds across income groups and gender, suggesting publicly financed healthcare may reduce job lock and financial risk. Case studies of the US, Italy, and Colombia illustrate distinct entrepreneurial incentives across system types.

I. Introduction

Healthcare financing systems have a profound impact on a nation's economic structure, influencing not only public health outcomes but also patterns of entrepreneurship, labor mobility, and small business formation. The design of a country's healthcare system, whether employer-based, universal, or hybrid, creates different levels of financial risk that affect individuals' willingness and capacity to start new ventures. In the United States, health insurance is predominantly tied to employment: employer-sponsored plans via firms are common, meaning that workers often remain in jobs largely to keep those benefits (Blumenthal 86). In contrast, Italy operates a universal, tax-funded National Health Service (Servizio Sanitario Nazionale or SSN). According to the European Observatory, the SSN provides coverage for all citizens, financed through national and regional taxation (European Observatory 4). In this system, regional governments oversee service delivery, while the central government defines the essential benefits and coverage standards. On the other hand, Colombia has a hybrid model within its General Social Security Health System (SGSSS), established by *Law 100 of 1993*. It operates through a contributory regime for formal workers and a subsidized regime for low-income or informal individuals, funded by payroll taxes, general taxation, and solidarity transfers. As of 2022, 99.6% of Colombians were insured, split roughly evenly between the two regimes, though persistent informality and unequal resource allocation pose ongoing challenges for efficiency and access (International Labor Organization 26; Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social).

These gaps in coverage are economically meaningful because when access to healthcare depends on whether an individual works in the formal sector and maintains payroll contributions, the potential loss of insurance increases the cost of leaving wage employment, thereby discouraging transitions into entrepreneurship. Even switching jobs does not eliminate this friction: job searches take time, periods without coverage or continuity of care are common, and new plans often carry different networks, deductibles, or out-of-pocket costs. Such frictions make losing employer-sponsored insurance risky and help explain why people may delay entrepreneurship even when alternative jobs with insurance are available. Conversely, publicly financed systems reduce this barrier by ensuring coverage regardless of employment status. Because countries differ widely in how insurance is financed, comparing these systems helps us understand how health-related financial risk affects entrepreneurial decisions.

II. Literature Review

II.I Job Lock and Health-Linked Employment Constraints

A foundational theory for understanding how healthcare financing shapes labor market behavior is the job lock hypothesis, introduced by Gruber and Madrian (5). This theory posits that when health insurance is tied to employment, individuals face substantial barriers to leaving their jobs, thereby limiting incentives to pursue entrepreneurship. Empirical evidence supports this mechanism in the United States. Using panel data from the Current Population Survey, Fairlie et al. show that this "entrepreneurship lock" is evident when workers approach Medicare eligibility at age sixty-five: business ownership rates increase sharply just after individuals qualify for Medicare, which provides health coverage independent of employment (46). This pattern suggests that many potential entrepreneurs delay leaving their jobs to maintain employer-based insurance and only pursue self-employment once alternative coverage becomes available.

Policy interventions also demonstrate the sensitivity of entrepreneurship to health coverage constraints. Heim and Lurie show that increasing the deductibility of health insurance premiums for self-employed individuals raised the probability of being self-employed by 1.5 percentage points, with entry into self-employment increasing by 0.8 percentage points, indicating that reducing the financial risk associated with health coverage can directly encourage entrepreneurial activity (996). State and federal "continuation of coverage" mandates, which allow individuals to purchase insurance after leaving a job, "caused a significant increase in the job mobility of prime age male workers," showing that a sizeable share of job lock originates from short-run concerns over health insurance rather than long-term constraints (Gruber and Madrian).

II.II Risk Aversion and the Role of Social Safety Nets

A complementary idea is risk aversion theory, which explains how individuals' willingness to engage in risky ventures, such as starting a business, depends on the extent of financial protection available to them. Empirical evidence indicates that social safety nets, particularly universal or broadly accessible healthcare, reduce perceived personal risk (Evans et al. 546). Exposure to risk, such as natural disasters, increases individual risk aversion and negatively affects entrepreneurial activity (De Blasio et al. 17). China's Urban Resident Basic Medical Insurance (URBMI) "reduces the household risk aversion, improves the ability to take risks, and ultimately promotes entrepreneurship" (Liu and Yang 19). Similarly, research by the Becker Friedman Institute suggests that by defining a basic bundle of services that is publicly financed for all, while allowing individuals to purchase additional coverage, policymakers could both expand coverage and maintain incentives for innovation, fostering universal access to innovative care in an affordable system (Baicker et al. 118), indicating that robust social insurance programs can reduce financial risk and indirectly support entrepreneurship. Together, these findings illustrate that universal healthcare financing programs function not only as public health instruments but also as essential financial safety nets that reduce personal risk and encourage entrepreneurship.

II.III Insurance Portability and Non-Employer Coverage

Across financing regimes, entrepreneurship responds to the extent to which health coverage is portable and predictable. In the US, beyond classic job-lock results, access to non-employer coverage affects both entry and persistence: Gumus and Regan show that having one's own or spousal non-group coverage is associated with higher transitions into self-employment, and they document that tax treatment for the self-employed shifts these margins (372). In line with this portability channel, Wellington finds that spousal coverage increases the probability of self-employment (published estimates of roughly +1–4.6 percentage points, depending on the specification) (475–477). Where non-group coverage exists but is expensive, entry is price-sensitive: exploiting variation in Affordable Care Act (ACA) exchanges, Fossen et al. estimate that a $one–hundred–per–month premium increase reduces self-employment entry by ~18% of the average rate (385). Evidence from Fossen and König on Germany shows a parallel pattern in a universal system: when the self-employed face higher health insurance costs than employees, entry into self-employment declines (with estimates of a 1.7% decrease in the annual entry rate per ten euros per month in cost differential) (648).

II.IV Country Mechanisms Focused on the Health Channel

In Italy, the SSN provides universal, employment-independent coverage. As De Belvis et al. document, entitlement is universal, but delivery is highly regionalized, so the insurance-loss barrier to entrepreneurship should be muted, and the binding margin shifts toward effective access (e.g., GP gatekeeping, waiting times) (109). Consistent with this, waiting-time inequalities are linked to differences in how Regional Health Authorities organize services (Landi et al.). This is precisely the kind of health-risk friction that founders may weigh when starting or continuing a venture.

In Colombia, the SGSSS combines contributory (employment-linked) and subsidized (non-contributory) regimes. As subsidized coverage expanded, Camacho et al. provide quasi-experimental evidence of a shift toward informality, consistent with adequate health protection outside formal jobs lowering the insurance value of formality and nudging some would-be entrepreneurs toward informal self-employment (463). Complementing this mechanism, Miller et al. show that the subsidized regime improves risk protection and the appropriate use of services, thereby altering the background health risk that shapes occupational choices (63).

Some scholars also highlight a potential reverse mechanism: employer-sponsored insurance may, in certain contexts, *reduce* downside risk while individuals are still employed, allowing them to accumulate savings, skills, or networks before transitioning into entrepreneurship. This reflects the structural advantages of group plans; "With voluntary groups formed this way, adverse risk selection is reduced … and is also a mechanism for employers to act on their incentives for a healthy and productive workforce" (Mulligan). These features can make remaining in employment temporarily optimal for would-be founders, even if employer-tied insurance ultimately constrains mobility, suggesting that the insurance-entrepreneurship relationship is not strictly one-directional.

II.V Summary of Key Points from the Literature

Across the literature, three consistent threads emerge. First, employer-tied insurance generates job and entrepreneurship lock, imposing implicit costs on leaving salaried work and reducing transitions into self-employment. Second, universal or near-universal coverage lowers individuals' background financial risk related to medical spending, thereby easing liquidity constraints and reducing the economic barriers to starting a business; in these settings, the relevant margin shifts from eligibility to effective access and quality of services. Third, in mixed or hybrid systems, notably those combining contributory and subsidized regimes, research emphasizes how institutional design features, such as contribution thresholds, benefit gaps, and copayment rules, affect formalization choices and informal entrepreneurship.

What remains underexplored in this literature is the broader cross-country dimension: while individual-country studies (especially in the United States, Germany, and China) provide compelling micro-level evidence, few analyses systematically compare how the degree of public healthcare financing relates to entrepreneurship across multiple institutional models and income levels. Existing work rarely integrates both developed and emerging economies within a unified empirical framework.

Our study fills this gap by combining cross-country econometric analysis. Using data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) and the World Health Organization's Global Health Expenditure Database (GHED), we examine whether countries with a higher share of publicly financed healthcare spending exhibit higher rates of entrepreneurship and self-employment. This approach allows us to evaluate whether previously identified mechanisms, mobility constraints from employment-linked coverage, risk smoothing through public insurance, and institutional boundaries between formal and informal sectors, hold globally or vary by system type (employer-based, universal, or hybrid).

III. Data Sources

This study examines how the degree of publicly financed health expenditure influences entrepreneurship across countries. We use individual-level data from the

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Adult Population Survey (APS), a harmonized cross-country dataset that surveys representative samples of working-age individuals each year. The GEM APS provides detailed demographic and socioeconomic information, including age, gender, education, income bracket, and employment status, as well as standardized measures of entrepreneurial activity. In our analysis, we use GEM's existing binary indicator of business creation, derived from the question: "*Are you, alone or with others, currently trying to start a new business, including any self-employment or selling any goods or services to others?*" Respondents who answer "yes" are coded as 1 by GEM, and those who answer "no" are coded as 0, allowing us to directly observe active business formation. These micro-level observations enable us to control for individual heterogeneity while linking entrepreneurship outcomes to cross-country differences in health-financing structures.

To capture the extent of public health-insurance financing, we combine GEM microdata with country-level indicators from the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Health Expenditure Database (GHED). Specifically, we use the variable "Domestic general government health expenditure (% of current health expenditure)," which quantifies the share of total health spending financed through public or compulsory schemes. This serves as our proxy for the share of health insurance publicly funded by government programs. According to the latest data, government sources financed approximately 55% of total health expenditure in the United States, 74% in Italy, and about 65% in Colombia (World Bank). This measure provides a consistent and internationally comparable indicator of public financing in health systems.

After merging GEM APS microdata with WHO GHED indicators, we restrict the sample to countries with at least 15 years of data. This yields a balanced analytic panel of twenty-eight countries from 2001–2021. To illustrate the structure of our analytic sample, Exhibit 1 maps the twenty-eight countries included in the GEM-WHO merged dataset and displays their average share of publicly financed health expenditure over the study period. The figure highlights substantial cross-country heterogeneity. For example, public financing ranges from roughly 30-40% in countries such as India and South Africa to more than 70–80% in much of Western Europe and parts of East Asia. This variation in health-system generosity motivates our empirical strategy as it provides the macro-level financial risk differences needed to examine how insurance structures relate to entrepreneurial activity.

IV. Methodology

Our empirical strategy links individual-level entrepreneurial outcomes (from the GEM APS) to country-level health financing structures (from WHO). We begin by merging GEM respondents with country-year measures of public health expenditure, GDP per capita, and total population, and we restrict the sample to countries that appear in at least fifteen years of the dataset. This yields a balanced analytic sample of twenty-eight countries from 2001–2021.

As an initial step, we estimate a simple ordinary least squares (OLS) regression that relates entrepreneurial activity directly to the public share of total health expenditure. This model provides a baseline descriptive association between public health financing and business formation without adjusting for demographic or macroeconomic controls. The specification is estimated using:

$$Entrepreneurship_{i,c,t} = \alpha + \beta PublicHealthFunding_{c,t} + \varepsilon_{i,c,t}$$

where $Entrepreneurship_{i,c,t}$ is a binary indicator that equals one if individual i in country c and year t reports actively starting a business, and $PublicHealthFunding_{c,t}$ captures the share of total health expenditure that is publicly financed in country c and year t. This regression provides a first descriptive benchmark for the relationship between health-system generosity and entrepreneurship.

We then estimate a more detailed fixed-effects model that incorporates individual-level controls, country-level macroeconomic indicators, and a rich set of fixed effects. The main specification is:

$$Entrepreneurship_{i,c,t} = \alpha + \beta PublicHealthFunding_{c,t} + \gamma X_{i,c,t} + \delta Z_{c,t} + \mu_c + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{i,c,t}$$

where $X_{i,c,t}$ is a vector of individual-level controls (age, gender, education, and income bracket), and $Z_{c,t}$ is a vector of country-level controls (GDP per capita, total population). Country and year fixed effects (μ_c, λ_t) will control for unobserved national and temporal characteristics. Because observations within a country are likely to share correlated shocks or institutional features, we cluster standard errors at the country level in all specifications to ensure valid inference.

These specifications allow us to isolate the association between public health financing levels and the likelihood of engaging in entrepreneurial activity, while holding constant both personal characteristics and macroeconomic conditions. We interpret the coefficient β as the estimated correlation between more publicly funded health systems and higher individual propensity for entrepreneurship. While the study does not claim causal identification, it offers insight into how health-insurance structures, by altering risk exposure and job-lock incentives, shape entrepreneurial choices across different institutional and cultural contexts.

V. Discussion of Results

Our analysis begins with a simple descriptive examination of the relationship between public health financing and business formation. Exhibit 2 plots the country-level averages of entrepreneurship against the average share of public health expenditure. This visualization reveals a negative cross-country correlation: countries with a higher public share of health spending tend to exhibit lower average business start rates. For example, Argentina appears at roughly 30% public health expenditure and a business start rate near 20%, whereas Finland sits closer to 80% public expenditure and a start rate of about 5%. These contrasting points illustrate the negative raw correlation observed in the unconditional scatterplot.

This pattern suggests that countries with more generous public sectors may have lower levels of "necessity entrepreneurship" (self-employment driven by a lack of wage-employment alternatives rather than by opportunity), as stronger welfare states and labor protections make wage employment relatively more attractive than self-employment. However, this pattern is purely descriptive and does not account for demographic or macroeconomic factors. It provides a useful starting point, suggesting that simple cross-sectional comparisons may mask important underlying differences between countries, such as population structure, income levels, or institutional characteristics, thereby motivating our more rigorous econometric approach that controls for these confounding factors.

To contextualize the empirical setting and understand the structure of the analytic sample, Exhibit 3 presents summary descriptive statistics for the 2,041,885 individual observations from the twenty-eight-country balanced panel. On average, 8% of respondents report actively starting a business, a relatively low rate given it typically involves only a small share of the working-age population and is sensitive to macroeconomic conditions, institutional frictions, and individuals' risk tolerance. Additionally, the mean share of public financing in health expenditure is 67.7%, with considerable variation across the sample (SD = 14.36). This variation arises from several factors: in particular, many countries undergo health-system reforms that change the balance between public and private health financing, such as expansions of coverage, changes in contribution rates, or adjustments to subsidized programs. For example, expansions of coverage and public subsidies in Colombia's SGSSS system throughout the 2000s, the rollout of the ACA in the United States after 2010, and gradual increases or retrenchments in public financing across several European health systems in response to the 2008 financial crisis have meaningfully altered the composition of health spending over time. Lastly, countries differ widely in GDP per capita and population size, underscoring the need to include macroeconomic controls and fixed effects in the regression framework. These descriptive patterns reinforce the value of examining within-country variation over time, rather than relying solely on cross-sectional comparisons.

We then turn to the core empirical estimates. Exhibit 4 reports results from individual-level regressions that relate entrepreneurship to the public share of health expenditure, controlling for age, education, income, GDP per capita, population, and country and year fixed effects. Across all specifications, the estimated coefficient on public health financing is positive and statistically significant. In the full sample, the coefficient of 0.262 implies that a ten-percentage-point increase in the public share of national health expenditure is associated with a 2.62-percentage-point increase in an individual's probability of starting a business. Although the baseline probability of entrepreneurship in our sample is relatively low (around 8%), this effect is economically meaningful: moving from, for example, a system where 60% of health spending is public to one where 70% is public corresponds to roughly a 30% increase relative to the baseline entrepreneurship rate. This pattern aligns closely with the theoretical channels outlined in the literature review: greater public financing reduces job lock and lowers background financial risk (Evans et al. 546; Gruber and Madrian 23), thereby expanding individuals' capacity to undertake entrepreneurial risk.

Importantly, the positive association is consistent across income groups and gender subgroups. The income-specific columns exhibit remarkably similar magnitudes. Among individuals in the lowest income tercile, the coefficient is 0.281, only slightly larger than in the full sample. In the middle tercile, the coefficient is 0.251; in the upper tercile, it is 0.237. The narrow range across these groups (0.237–0.281) suggests that the relationship between health financing and entrepreneurship is not driven solely by liquidity-constrained individuals nor concentrated among higher-income respondents. Instead, the stability of the effect across income groups points toward mechanisms related to insurance portability rather than purely financial constraints, echoing evidence from portability-focused studies such as Gumus and Regan (372) and Fossen and König (667).

The gender-specific results exhibit the same stability. For men, the coefficient is 0.289, while for women it is 0.232, both statistically significant. Although the magnitude is slightly larger for men, both estimates indicate that increases in public health financing are associated with meaningfully higher rates of active business formation for both genders. This demonstrates that expanded public financing reduces barriers to entrepreneurship broadly rather than only for particular demographic groups.

The coefficients on the control variables further enrich the interpretation. Age is negative and highly significant in every column (around -0.001), implying that each additional year of age reduces the probability of starting a business by 0.1 percentage points, or roughly a 1-percentage-point decline per decade. Log GDP per capita enters positively in all specifications (between 0.079 and 0.115, with significance strongest in the middle-income group), indicating that higher levels of national economic development are associated with higher entrepreneurial activity, potentially through better access to credit, institutional quality, and economic stability. Population generally has a small negative coefficient (approximately -0.000 to -0.001), suggesting that individuals in more populous countries may be slightly less likely to pursue entrepreneurship, possibly reflecting market saturation or greater competition.

Taken together, these results indicate that once differences in individual characteristics, macroeconomic context, and country institutions are held constant, greater public financing of health expenditure is consistently associated with a higher individual propensity to start a business across all income and gender groups. This stands in sharp contrast to the negative cross-country correlation observed in Exhibit 2, highlighting the importance of accounting for structural and demographic confounders.

VI. Policy Valuation: Cost-Benefit Analysis and Marginal Value of Public Funds

To complement the empirical findings, we conduct a cost-benefit analysis of a hypothetical policy that increases the public share of national health expenditure by ten percentage points. Our regression results indicate that such an increase is associated with a 2.62 percentage point rise in an individual's probability of actively starting a new business. To translate this effect into economic terms, we conduct a simple valuation exercise for a generic mid-sized country with a working-age population of 10 million and assume that early-stage entrepreneurs generate, on average, $24,000 in taxable annual income, equal to the average GDP per capita in our analytical sample.

This benchmark is drawn directly from our data and is consistent with standard welfare analysis practice of benchmarking entrepreneurial output to average national income. We apply an illustrative effective tax rate of 20%, chosen as a conservative round-number approximation for a heterogeneous cross-country sample spanning both OECD and non-OECD economies. This figure lies below the worldwide average statutory corporate income tax rate of 23.58% across 181 jurisdictions and below the OECD average of 24.20% (Enache); since effective rates on entrepreneurial income typically fall below statutory corporate rates – particularly in the lower-income economies that comprise a significant share of our panel – 20% represents a plausible lower-bound for the sample as a whole. We further assume an implementation cost of $1 billion, which, for the representative country described above — with a nominal GDP of approximately $240 billion implied by our sample averages – corresponds to roughly 0.4% of GDP.

This represents a deliberately conservative lower-bound estimate: a full 10-percentage-point shift in the public share of health expenditure would, at current average health spending levels in our sample (~8–9% of GDP), entail a gross fiscal outlay of considerably more. We adopt this conservative figure to demonstrate that positive net returns are achievable even under restrained assumptions about implementation cost.

Additional entrepreneurs created:

$$\Delta E = 10{,}000{,}000 * 0.0262 = 262{,}000$$

Additional taxable income generated (annual):

$$\Delta Y = 262{,}000 * 24{,}000 = 6{,}288{,}000{,}000 = \$6.288 \text{ billion}$$

Additional fiscal revenue (20% revenue rate):

$$\Delta R = 6{,}288{,}000{,}000 * 0.20 = 1{,}257{,}600{,}000 = \$1.258 \text{ billion}$$

Net fiscal balance given one billion USD policy cost:

$$\text{NetFiscal} = 1{,}257{,}600{,}000 - 1{,}000{,}000{,}000 = 257{,}600{,}000$$
$$= \$258 \text{ million surplus}$$

Private economic gains (using the same $24,000 value):

$$\text{PrivateBenefit} = 262{,}000 * 24{,}000 = 6{,}288{,}000{,}000 = \$6.288 \text{ billion}$$

Total social benefit (private + fiscal):

$$\text{TotalBenefit} = 6{,}288{,}000{,}000 + 1{,}257{,}600{,}000 = 7{,}545{,}600{,}000$$
$$= \$7.546 \text{ billion}$$

Marginal Value of Public Funds (MVPF):

$$\text{MVPF} = 7{,}545{,}600{,}000 / 1{,}000{,}000{,}000 \approx 7.55$$

This valuation exercise suggests that increasing the public share of healthcare financing by 10% could generate a substantial rise in entrepreneurial activity: roughly 262,000 additional early-stage entrepreneurs in a representative country of ten million working-age adults. The associated business formation produces about $6.288 billion in new annual gross income and $1.258 billion in additional fiscal revenue. Given an assumed $1 billion implementation cost, the government would observe a modest fiscal surplus of approximately $258 million. When combined with the private income accruing to new entrepreneurs, total social benefits amount to roughly $7.546 billion, yielding a marginal value of public funds (MVPF) of about 7.55. These figures highlight the potentially large economic spillovers of reducing health-related frictions to business creation.

While these estimates point to high social returns, they are sensitive to the assumptions that underpin them. A higher policy cost would reduce, or eliminate, the fiscal surplus, while a lower cost would increase the net return. Likewise, entrepreneurial earnings play a central role: if new ventures generate less than the assumed $24,000 in taxable income, both private gains and fiscal revenue would fall; if they earn more, the benefits would scale accordingly. The valuation also depends on a fixed 20% revenue rate, which may vary with tax compliance, informality, or the country's fiscal structure. All three core parameters – the income benchmark, the tax rate, and the policy cost – should be treated as illustrative round numbers calibrated to the sample averages, not as precise empirical targets. Taken together, the results should be interpreted as illustrative, underscoring that the economic upside of expanding public health financing is potentially large, even if the precise magnitudes depend on policy design and local conditions.

VII. Policy Implications

The patterns we document have important implications for how health-system design can influence economic behavior beyond its direct effects on health. Our findings suggest that greater public financing of healthcare may reduce the financial and institutional frictions associated with leaving wage employment. By lowering reliance on employer-sponsored insurance, publicly financed systems reduce job lock, enhance insurance portability, and provide more predictable access to care. These channels may, in turn, lessen the perceived risks of business creation.

These insights speak directly to current debates around health-insurance reform. In economies where coverage is predominantly tied to employment, such as the United States, policymakers often focus on expanding eligibility or reducing premiums. Our results highlight an additional margin: reforms that expand non-group insurance markets, portable subsidies, or other mechanisms may be associated with broader labor-market dynamism by lowering the opportunity cost of leaving wage employment.

Our cost-benefit analysis reinforces these associations and also introduces an important degree of nuance. On the one hand, an increase in the public share of health spending generates substantial private and social benefits through new business formation, including higher taxable income, greater labor-market dynamism, and the potential for long-run productivity growth. The large MVPF we calculate illustrates that the broader economic spillovers of such policies can meaningfully exceed their direct health benefits. On the other hand, the analysis also highlights the fiscal limitations of expanding public health financing: even with increased entrepreneurial activity and associated tax revenues, policies that raise the public share of health expenditure may not be budget-neutral. Governments must therefore weigh the magnitude of the required fiscal commitment against the expected economic gains.

In hybrid systems such as Colombia's SGSSS, policy adjustments that better align the contributory and subsidized regimes could reduce informality-driven distortions and support higher-quality entrepreneurial activity. Yet, similar to fully public systems, these improvements require stable revenue sources and careful consideration of distributional trade-offs.

More broadly, our findings reinforce the idea that healthcare policy also operates as labor-market policy. The structure of health-system financing influences workers' willingness to take risks, change jobs, or start new firms, factors central to innovation and economic mobility. Policies that ease the financial uncertainty of leaving wage employment may therefore contribute to a more dynamic labor market, though their effectiveness ultimately depends on fiscal feasibility and the broader institutional environment.

VIII. Limitations & Directions for Future Research

Several limitations to our analytical strategy should be acknowledged. First, our estimates are associational rather than causal. Although country and year fixed effects, along with extensive controls, reduce important sources of confounding, unobservable institutional factors may still influence both health-system design and entrepreneurial activity. The direction and magnitude of any remaining bias are uncertain. Second, cross-country comparisons risk overlooking institutional and cultural nuances that affect both healthcare financing and labor-market behavior. Although our panel design mitigates some of these concerns, measurement differences across countries may still be present.

Our data sources also present a few practical limitations. The WHO GHED indicators occasionally contained missing values for certain country-year combinations, particularly in earlier years, which required restricting the analysis to countries with at least fifteen years of continuous data. While the WHO GHED is internationally harmonized, its aggregate "public share of health expenditure" measure can mask institutional differences across systems. On the microdata side, GEM APS provides repeated cross-sections rather than a longitudinal panel and relies on self-reported entrepreneurship, which may vary across cultural contexts. In addition, GEM's binary start-up indicator does not distinguish between opportunity-driven and necessity-driven entrepreneurship, formal and informal activity, or early-stage ideation and formal firm creation, thereby limiting the granularity of our outcome measure.

One implication of this is that our estimates may partly capture a shift toward informal self-employment rather than opportunity-driven venture creation – a mechanism consistent with evidence from Colombia's subsidized regime, where expanded non-contributory coverage was associated with increased informality

(Camacho et al. 463). However, this channel would predict the effect to be concentrated among lower-income respondents and in hybrid-system countries, whereas our income-group results show a stable coefficient across all three terciles (0.237–0.281), suggesting informality-driven transitions are unlikely to be the sole or dominant explanation. These limitations do not undermine the core patterns we document, but they help frame the scope of our interpretation.

Future research could explore whether public financing differentially affects high-growth, opportunity-driven ventures versus subsistence self-employment. Building on our cross-national evidence, future work could leverage policy reforms, such as the US Affordable Care Act, changes to Colombia's SGSSS, or European healthcare financing reforms, to obtain sharper causal identification. Examining intensive margins of entrepreneurship, including business survival, growth, and employer hiring, would also provide a richer understanding of how health financing influences economic outcomes. Finally, distinguishing outcomes between formal and informal sectors, particularly in mixed-regime countries, could reveal important heterogeneity masked by aggregate measures of business formation.

IX. Conclusion

This study set out to examine whether the structure of national healthcare financing influences individuals' decisions to start new businesses. Using a balanced panel of twenty-eight countries over two decades, compiled from GEM APS microdata and WHO GHED indicators, we find consistent evidence that the public share of health expenditure is positively associated with entrepreneurial activity once individual characteristics, macroeconomic conditions, and country- and year-level heterogeneity are taken into account. While a simple cross-country comparison shows a negative unconditional correlation between public financing and business formation, our fixed-effects regressions reveal a very different picture: after adjusting for confounders, individuals in countries with more publicly financed health systems are significantly more likely to start a business.

Across the full sample, a ten-percentage-point increase in the share of public health expenditure is associated with a 2.62-percentage-point rise in the probability of initiating a new business, an economically meaningful effect given an average entrepreneurship rate of 8%. The relationship is remarkably stable across income groups and between men and women, suggesting that the influence of public financing is broad-based rather than concentrated in specific demographic or socioeconomic segments. Control variables behave as expected: older individuals are less likely to pursue entrepreneurship, higher GDP per capita is associated with increased business formation, and larger populations show slightly lower entrepreneurship rates.

These findings align with a growing body of research documenting the labor market consequences of health insurance design. After controlling for demographic, macroeconomic, and institutional factors, health-system generosity, by reducing background financial risk, lowering dependence on employer-sponsored coverage, and improving predictability of care, appears to support higher rates of business formation. In this sense, our cross-country results echo micro-level evidence from single-country studies showing that job lock, insurance portability, and access to non-employer coverage meaningfully shape entrepreneurial behavior.

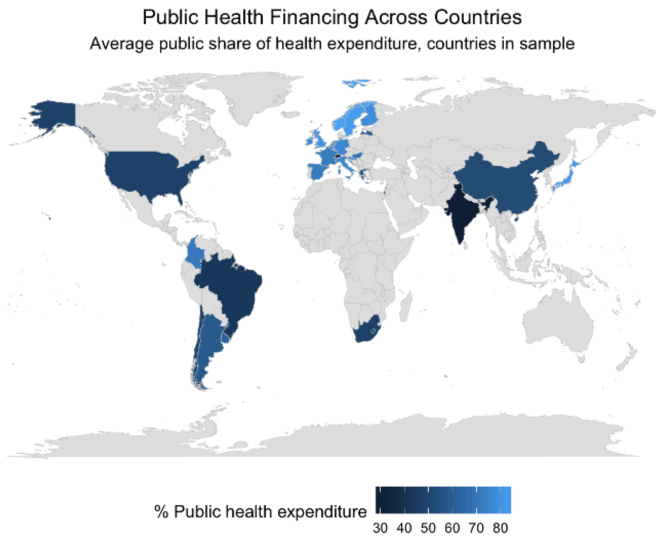
At a broader level, our findings suggest that health-insurance policy may influence economic dynamism through channels not traditionally emphasized in policy debates. Countries that rely more heavily on public financing may directly or indirectly lower the opportunity cost of leaving wage employment, thereby fostering an environment more conducive to new firm creation. These insights are particularly relevant in economies where employer-tied coverage remains the dominant model, as they highlight how institutional features of health systems can spill over into entrepreneurship, innovation, and labor-market mobility.

Additionally, in some contexts, generous public coverage may reduce the economic pressure to enter self-employment, especially of a necessity-driven kind. This is consistent with the negative raw cross-country correlation we observe, in which countries with more generous public financing tend to exhibit lower average business start rates before adjusting for structural differences. Our cost-benefit analysis also underscores this ambiguity: although increased public financing can generate sizable social returns through higher-quality entrepreneurial activity, its fiscal effects depend critically on policy cost and the types of ventures created, meaning that not all expansions of public spending would yield the same net gains. The net effect on entrepreneurship is therefore an empirical question, one that depends on fiscal feasibility, the composition of ventures, and the broader institutional environment.

Ultimately, the estimates should be interpreted as associations rather than causal effects, and unobservable factors may still influence both health-system design and entrepreneurial activity. Although our estimates are not causal, the direction and stability of the coefficients, combined with theoretical predictions, suggest that reducing health-related financial risk is consistent with expanding the feasible set of occupational choices. Even small changes in perceived risk or insurance loss can produce disproportionately large behavioral responses, consistent with the nonlinear structure of household utility under uncertainty. Future work could leverage policy reforms, stronger identification panel methods, or within-country institutional shifts to isolate causal mechanisms more precisely. Nonetheless, our results offer robust cross-national evidence that health-system financing is meaningfully associated with entrepreneurial choices, underscoring the economic significance of how societies organize and fund access to healthcare.

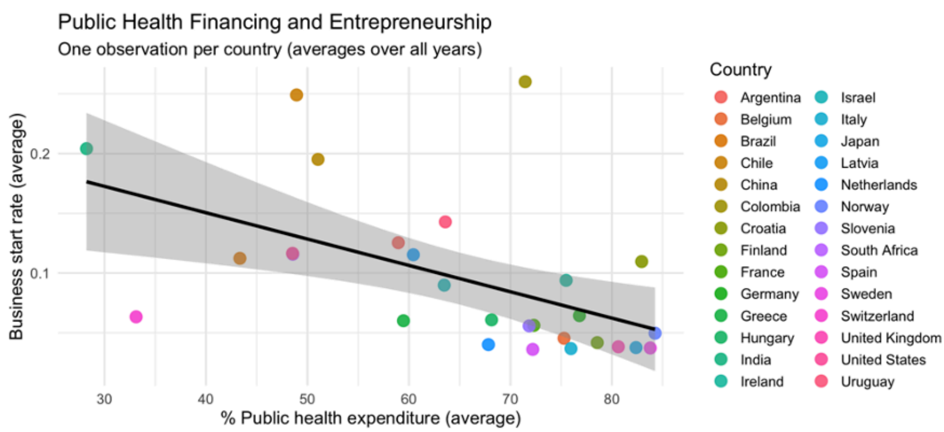
Appendix

Appendix A: Public Health Financing Across Countries



Description: *Average public share of health expenditure, 2001-2021 for the twenty-eight-country sample.*

Appendix B: Public Health Financing vs. Entrepreneurship (Raw Correlation)



Description: *Country-level averages showing the unconditional negative correlation.*

Appendix C: Summary Statistics

Descriptive Statistics

Individual-level sample, countries with ≥ 15 years of data

Variable	Mean	SD	Median	25th pct.	75th pct.	N
Entrepreneurship	0.08	0.27	0.00	0.00	0.00	2,031,636
% Public	67.67	14.36	72.10	59.96	77.82	2,041,885
Age	33.59	15.31	33.00	21.00	45.00	2,017,647
Log GDP per capita[1]	10.09	0.80	10.22	9.53	10.67	2,041,885
Population (millions)	115.97	279.27	46.57	11.05	62.28	2,041,885

[1] GDP per capita is reported in natural logs.

Description: *Descriptive statistics for the twenty-eight-country sample (2,041,885 observations).*

Appendix D: Regression Results

Effect of Public Health Expenditure on Probability of Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship ~ % Public + Controls (Clustered SEs by Country)

	Full Sample	Lowest Income	Middle Income	Upper Income	Male	Female
% Public	0.262*	0.281+	0.251*	0.237*	0.289*	0.232*
	(0.117)	(0.146)	(0.120)	(0.110)	(0.127)	(0.108)
Age	-0.001***	-0.001***	-0.001***	-0.001***	-0.002***	-0.001***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Log GDP per capita	0.094+	0.079	0.115*	0.076	0.101+	0.084
	(0.054)	(0.057)	(0.049)	(0.063)	(0.058)	(0.051)
Population (in millions)	-0.000*	-0.001***	-0.000*	-0.000	-0.001**	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Num.Obs.	1406875	474916	466370	465589	691355	715520
R2	0.078	0.070	0.077	0.085	0.079	0.074
R2 Adj.	0.078	0.069	0.077	0.085	0.079	0.074
FE: Country	X	X	X	X	X	X
FE: Year	X	X	X	X	X	X
FE: Education	X	X	X	X	X	X
FE: Income	X				X	X
FE: Gender	X	X	X	X		

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Description: *Individual-level regressions relating entrepreneurship to public health financing with fixed effects. Results are robust to logging the population variable, which yields the same sign, direction, and magnitude for the key coefficient, albeit with marginally weaker statistical significance; the overarching patterns and interpretation are unchanged.*

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Green Bills and Red Tape: An Advocacy Coalition Framework Analysis of the European Agricultural Industry's Perception of the EU Deforestation Regulation

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Abstract

The EU's Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) lies at the confluence of pressures facing the bloc: climate commitments, rising populism, a changing global trade order, and deregulation in the name of international competitiveness. I analyze the reaction to this regulation by a central stakeholder: agriculture. I ask: Did EU agricultural actors, particularly oilseed, cattle, and soy associations, form policy advocacy coalitions in response to EUDR? If so, how do beliefs about EUDR's goals and instruments differ across sectors and firm size? I find that European agriculture centered around a single common policy belief, which expressed support in principle, but opposed implementation.

I. Introduction

The European Union is the second-largest contributor to deforestation in the world, behind only China (World Resources Institute). The bloc fueled 10% of all forest degradation and destruction from 1990 to 2020 (WWF). The majority of their contribution stems not from deforestation at home, but 'imported deforestation.' As the EU attempts to lead the green transition and meet its decarbonization goals, addressing the continent's outsourced environmental destruction has become key in the European Green Deal.

To this end, the EU adopted the Regulation on Deforestation-free Products (EU Deforestation Regulation or EUDR) in May 2023. EUDR applies to cocoa, coffee, soy, oil palm, timber, rubber, and cattle. The regulation requires businesses placing any of the specified commodities and their derivatives on the EU market to prove that products do not originate from recently deforested land or have contributed to forest degradation since 2020.

EUDR replaces the EU Timber Regulation and the EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Action Plan (FLEGT). It pioneers a novel approach to deforestation given its high degree of unilateralism, choice of the value chain as the unit of intervention, demand-side orientation, and sector- rather than territorial-level focus (Noordwijk et. al. 4). Prior regulation was constrained to the timber sector and focused on the legality of logging, thus taking a more bounded approach that responded to the domestic legislation of exporter countries (Fisher et al. 2).

The regulation most acutely impacts the agricultural sector. Agriculture is responsible for 90% of deforestation internationally (FAO 2021). Indeed, the EU defines deforestation as the "conversion of forest to agricultural use, whether human-induced or not." (European Commission). This makes EUDR particularly politically salient in the EU, where farmers are one of the most vocal lobbying groups. Despite only accounting for 4.2% of the Union's labor force and contributing 1.3% of the bloc's gross domestic product (GDP), over one-third of the EU's €2 trillion budget subsidizes agriculture (Eurostat, 2022; Eurostat, 2024; European Parliament). Recent years have seen mass unrest as the sector calls for lessened regulatory burdens on European farmers and increased protection from cheap imports.

Given the central importance of this interest group and their direct role in effectuating EUDR, analyzing their political reaction will yield insights into the actionable popularity of the regulation, with implications for its longevity and potential backlash. As the farming and rural constituencies shift rightward, their perceptions of EUDR and ability to form distinctive coalitions have implications for growing populism and Euroskepticism (Mamonova and Franquesa 705). Moreover, a more nuanced understanding of the coalitional dynamics of EUDR will aid the study of the bargaining and compromises involved in the EU's crafting of environmental regulation. Lastly, and most broadly, given the EU's unique political system as a supranational body, this analysis will further contribute to an understanding of the Union's coalition-building and decision-making processes.

Despite this importance, the domestic European agricultural industry's perception of EUDR is not obvious. There is a range of theoretical incentives for the industry to support and oppose the regulation, which I outline under 'Background.' This ambiguity in their position motivates my research question:

> *Did EU agricultural actors, particularly oilseed, cattle, and soy associations, form policy advocacy coalitions in response to EUDR? If so, how do beliefs about EUDR's goals and instruments differ across sectors and firm size?*

My investigation of this question will proceed as follows. First, I will outline the competing theoretical incentives for the European agricultural industry to either support or oppose EUDR (Background). A literature review will follow. I will then define "policy advocacy coalitions" and the central theoretical framework underpinning my analysis. This informs the typology I construct to categorize actors' positions towards EUDR. This framing will end with my four hypotheses and their justifications (Theoretical Framework). I outline my coding schema and sources in "Methodology" and present my findings in "Results." I then analyse their implications for each of my hypotheses, before concluding with a discussion of the broader implications for understanding the agricultural lobby in the EU and the coalitional politics of the Union's decision-making (Discussion and Conclusion).

II. Background

II.I Positive Incentive: Protection

The European agricultural industry, particularly cattle and oilseed farmers, has long held grievances against free trade (Guinea and Capuzzi). The revival of negotiations for the EU-Mercosur trade deal played a key role in inciting the 2024 Farmers' Protests. Central was the perceived asymmetry in product treatment between domestic and imported goods, since the latter face lower production costs in the absence of stringent environmental and phytosanitary regulations (Harrison and Paulini 724).

The European Commission has framed EUDR as an element in its larger effort to level the playing field between European producers and cheap foreign exporters (European Commission). This implies support for EUDR by the agricultural industry. They may view it as a fulfillment of the "mirror clauses" demand that the sector lobbied for during the EU-Mercosur negotiations, which would have applied the EU's conservation regulations on the Latin American bloc.

Secondly, EUDR was quickly decried as disguised "green protectionism" by the EU's trading partners. Indonesia and Malaysia point to the exclusion of rapeseed and sunflower oil, which directly compete with palm oil and are produced predominantly in the EU, from the listed commodities (WTO). Brazil highlights the last-minute addition of cattle to the regulation, which was central to the Mercosur grievances (O'Donoghue). Others have emphasized the exclusion of peatland degradation, which constitutes the majority of the habitat destruction on EU soil, from the regulation's definition of deforestation (Wetlands International; WTO).

Thirdly, EUDR's detailed supply-chain-tracing requirements necessitate extensive bureaucratic capacities, which some less developed countries may lack, thus shutting them out of the EU's market (Capuzzi 5). Since European farmers and the countries they reside in have more administrative capacity to meet EUDR's processing requirements, they have been accused of having a protective bureaucratic advantage. These accusations imply structural benefits for European farmers and thus incentives for their support of EUDR.

II.II Positive Incentive: Administrative Economies of Scale

EUDR's due diligence requirements create steep costs for farmers, requiring geolocation, product separation, and comprehensive supply-chain tracing. This process relies heavily on technology, particularly satellite monitoring, and requires an extensive administrative bureaucracy to ensure compliance. High investment costs are associated with each of these requirements. This implies economies of scale, benefiting larger firms. This suggests a competitive opportunity for firms more equipped to meet EUDR's requirements and positive incentives for larger firms to support EUDR.

II.III Negative Incentive: Administrative Burden

While the relative gains discussed above may exist, either vis-à-vis other countries or other domestic firms, EUDR ultimately steeply increases costs and paperwork for operators selling in the EU market. The European Commission's impact assessment estimated that the compliance costs would amount to between €150 million and €2.2 billion annually (EUR-Lex 2). However, those costs are expected to fall disproportionately on smaller farmers (Zhunusova 1). This suggests opposition from the agricultural sector.

II.IV Negative Incentive: Euroskepticism

Outside of the specifics for EUDR, the regulation comes at a time of increasing frustration with the European Green Deal and the EU at large. Within the same timeframe that EUDR was introduced, the EU adopted the controversial Nature Restoration Law and modified the Common Agricultural Program's subsidies to include more climate conditionality, also under the European Green Deal. If viewed in the context of the Green Deal as a whole, farmers may oppose EUDR as part of their opposition to other elements of the deal.

II.V Other Incentives

Beyond simple support or opposition for EUDR, the regulation has faced several political changes. The European Parliament postponed its implementation for a year, with varying private sector responses, some applauding the additional time to prepare and others critiquing the uncertainty for hampering the investment environment. Additional contestation has surrounded the regulation's risk benchmarking system, which sorts origin countries from high to low risk, and is charged with violating the EU's Most Favored Nation obligations under the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Capuzzi 7). Political contestation further increases uncertainty for businesses with associated costs.

III. Literature Review

The majority of literature on EUDR focuses on its distributive impacts. Several authors establish how uneven administrative capacities across states in the agricultural supply chain will influence their adaptation to regulate. Van Noordwijk et al. focus on the regulation's "collateral damage," arguing that smallholder producers in the Global South will be shut out of the EU's markets due to their inability to meet reporting burdens and EUDR's limited operationalization of its "forest" definition, regardless of their product's contribution to deforestation (1).

The literature on international distributive effects is complemented by work predicting the regulation's effectiveness. Tankam and Lescuyer construct a criterion to anticipate supply chain adaptation and resilience to EUDR, focusing on Cameroon and disaggregating their results by sector. Cesar de Oliveria et al. develop a Compliance Likelihood Index to predict compliance readiness in EUDR. They find that the cattle sector will face the steepest compliance barriers, with implications for the European beef industry's competitive advantages under EUDR (1).

This literature aids in understanding the sectoral and firm-sized variation in compliance burden on the international level. However, little research has evaluated these dynamics on the domestic level. Moreover, few studies have analyzed perceptions of EUDR, leaving a gap in the literature in understanding the initial narrative framing that influenced lobbying and coalition-building by the domestic agriculture industry surrounding EUDR.

Berning and Sotirov contribute to filling this gap. They integrate member state governments, European environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and EU certification firms into their model of coalition formation. Their work finds some evidence of a weak domestic agricultural support for EUDR to pursue "business-oriented pro-regulatory interests." However, their model also analyzes the influence of non-EU businesses, importing EU firms, and export-reliant non-EU governments. Moreover, they categorize agricultural firms as one actor and take a broad approach to coding according to a pro/con binary. Accordingly, research is still needed to separate and nuance the agriculture industry's perception of EUDR, given their centrality as a stakeholder.

Additionally, Berning and Sotirov apply their model to both policy documents and position statements, thus analyzing both the agricultural industry's perceptions of and influence on EUDR. This paper's sole focus on position formation allows for more independent analysis of the conceptualization of EUDR by the agricultural industry, as an ideological prior that drives the policy interactions discussed by Berning and Sotirov.

My research's focus on farming builds upon previous literature on the agricultural industry's influence on EU politics and decision-making. Nedergaard also applies the Advocacy Coalition Framework on the EU agricultural industry to analyze the 2003 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform. Jonsson focuses on collective action dynamics within the farming interest group and highlights the major paths of policy influence pursued by the agricultural lobby.

Finally, my research contributes to previous literature on business-oriented support for governmental regulation. Alger's research on large shipping corporations' support of more stringent standards highlights the economies of scale and monopolistic opportunities of increased regulatory burdens, informing my analysis.

IV. Theoretical Framework

IV.I The EU's Unique Political Structure

As a unique supranational structure with an extensive bureaucratic apparatus, the EU's legislative decision-making process and politics are shaped by an interplay between nonstate, state, and sub-state actors (Marks et. al. 372).

Coalition-building thus has to account for a range of international, national, and local-level interests and contexts.

IV.II Advocacy Coalition Framework

I situate my analysis within the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). This framework explains regulatory change and stability as the result of policy advocacy coalitions coordinating around commonly held beliefs. It holds an ontological commitment to individual actorness, but predominantly leverages the coalition as the primary unit of policy influence. Considering both levels of action enables analysis of both intra- and inter-coalition dynamics. Moreover, the framework's nuanced approach to the individual complements the framework's assumption of belief-bounded rationality, which is sensitive to both ideological and rational influences in an actor's decision-making (Jenkins-Smith et al.).

ACF assumes a three-tiered system of beliefs for the individual: (1) deep core beliefs, including normative values; (2) policy core beliefs, which dictate how an individual or coalition views the causes, severity, and preferred solutions of issues; and (3) secondary belief about the specific instrumental means of achieving the outcomes outlined in policy core beliefs. This allows the framework to recognize the institutionalized, long-term influences in coalition formation and orientation towards certain issues, while maintaining a commitment to agency and responsiveness to new issues.

In my analysis, this enables an appreciation for the context in which the farming industry interacts with EUDR, particularly given the power of major farming unions, the build-up of trade- and environment-related anti-regulatory grievances, and the legacy of previous stances towards the European Green Deal.

I define a policy coalition as an unofficial group that shares distinct core policy beliefs, which form the basis of its coordinated joint action to influence policy. For my purposes, policy coalitions are primarily constituted of individual farms, agricultural cooperatives, farmers' unions, agricultural chambers, and business associations. However, they can also include state actors and NGOs, united by a distinct shared policy belief.

There are two elements to my conception of a coalition: belief and action. My research question centers around the first element by attempting to identify where these shared core policies and secondary beliefs lie within the agricultural sector. This is clearly closely related to action, as policy beliefs are inherently action-oriented.

However, my research focuses on rhetorical analysis to understand the agriculture industry's (potentially varying) framing of EUDRs and its insufficiencies, impacts, and strengths, rather than on their attempts to mobilize on that framing. This primes future analysis of coalitional action, which is premised on these initial uniting beliefs.

IV.III Typology

Leveraging this framework, I employ the two-by-two typology in Table 1. This typology codes for two different levels of support for EUDR. "Support/concern for the goal of EUDR" codes the actor's core policy belief (with some additional implications for their normative/deep core beliefs) about whether deforestation should be a focus for EU legislation. "Support for EUDR's approach" codes the actor's secondary belief about the instrument used by the EU to address deforestation.

Actors in the "full support" (FS) category demonstrate both ideological, belief-based support for EUDR and rational support for its mechanism. Actors in the "instrumental support" (IS) category may critique the EU for its implementation of EUDR, emphasize the burdens that the legislation places on them, or call for the regulation's reform rather than repeal. "Competitive potential" (CP) refers to actors who see EUDR as a competitive opportunity, including because of economies of scale or trade protection. They may not have any ideological commitment to the regulation, but will support it for their individual/rational benefit. Finally, "full opposition" (FO) includes actors who both oppose the EU's choice to legislate on deforestation/environmental issues/supply chains and the instrument, citing general concerns of increased red tape.

Table 1: Typology

		Support/concern for the goal of EUDR	
		+	–
Support for EUDR's approach	+	Full support	Competitive potential
	–	Instrumental support	Full opposition

IV.IV Hypotheses

iv.iv.i. Hypothesis 1 (H1): Agricultural actors will form multiple policy coalitions.

As discussed, the EU agricultural industry has a history of lobbying and protest, particularly in response to environmental and phytosanitary regulations. These reactions have been tied to deeply held identity-based and ideological beliefs, implying that they are indicative of longer-term trends in political engagement by the industry (Shortall and Marangudakis 311). Given the size and proximity of EUDR's impact on the sector, I thus predict belief-based advocacy, forming ACF policy coalitions, by agricultural actors. I predict that multiple of these coalitions will emerge due to differing salience of incentives, discussed in H2 and H3.

iv.iv.ii Hypothesis 2 (H2): The "competitive potential" category will predominantly consist of large and import-competing firms.

Economies of scale accrue based on firm size, thus implying that larger firms can leverage their relative ease of regulatory compliance as a competitive advantage to push smaller firms out of the market. Accordingly, I predict that they are more likely to view EUDR as a competitive opportunity and demonstrate particular support for its administrative-burdensome mechanism. However, I do not predict that they will as ardently support EUDR's goal due to these actors' larger stance on EU environmental regulation.

Similarly, protection is more valued by import-competing firms. Accordingly, if EUDR is considered to afford protection to European farmers, the farmers more directly challenged by imports will likely support its structural impact on supply chains.

The three sub-sectors selected in my research question were chosen partly based on their competition with imports. Firstly, cattle was the industry most vocal about the threat faced to their competitiveness if the EU opened its market to Mercosur. The industry frequently impresses its need for protection from imports from Latin America and the United States.

Secondly, the EU's soy industry also raised import competition concerns from Mercosur following the negotiation of the Free Trade Agreement, as Brazil and Argentina are the world's first and third largest soybean producers, respectively (USDA). Although this industry is less entrenched than the beef industry, the European Commission views it as necessary to develop for the EU's "protein-sovereignty' (European Parliament). Accordingly, it has been the site of a past protectionist action with arguments framing it as an infant industry in need of protection.

Thirdly, oilseeds, specifically rapeseed and sunflower seeds, are the only subsectors in my research question not directly implicated by EUDR. However, they directly compete with imports of palm oil, which is restricted by the regulation. I thus predict that each of these three subsectors will align more closely with the "competition potential" coalition than the baseline sector.

iv.iv.iii Hypothesis 3 (H3): The "instrumental support" category will predominantly consist of smallholder farms.

Smaller farmers are less likely to have the administrative resources or funds necessary to meet EUDR's due diligence requirements. However, their consumer base is more likely to care about environmental issues, thus increasing the costs of perceived anti-environmentalism (Herrera 21). As such, I predict that their critiques will be aimed at EUDR's mechanism rather than its goal.

iv.iv.iv Hypothesis 4 (H4): Organic and other socially-focused farms will predominantly lie in the "full support" category.

These farms are more likely to have a consumer base willing to pay higher costs for environmentally-friendly goods, which is accordingly less likely to react to the cost increase associated with EUDR's regulatory burden (Herrera 21). This predicts their support, or at least ambivalence, towards EUDR's mechanism. Moreover, their prior willingness to prioritize environmental values, often at a cost, as the European organic market has experienced a series of recent price shocks, implies support of EUDR's environmental goals.

V. Methodology

I employed a mixed methods approach in my analysis. Quantitatively, I conducted a content analysis of public statements from the industry on EUDR. This included quotes to media sources, comments during the public consultation process, open letters to the European Parliament or Commission, and actors' websites and social media presences. Documents were identified using the keywords "deforestation," "EUDR," "mirror clauses," and "supply chain regulation." They were included in my database if they specifically discussed EUDR and were released in the period from 2022—2025.

Upon locating 528 relevant statements, I coded them according to the schema in Table 2. Narrowing down statements to the most pertinent to my question yielded the 110 statements core to my analysis. My schema establishes several central "claims" grouped by their corresponding typologies. By coding according to the claim, I take a more nuanced approach than a frequency-based test analysis, by focusing on the position taken towards EUDR, expressed either explicitly or implicitly, rather than keyword prevalence. In addition to coding statements by claims, I coded a dummy variable about whether EUDR's objective or instrument was supported (1), opposed (0), or addressed neutrally (0.5). Some statements established an actor's position towards multiple claims, resulting in them being coded multiple times. This ultimately yielded 163 coding entries. These entries corresponded to 54 individual actors.

Table 2: Claim coding schema

	Full support	Competitive potential	Instrumental support	Full opposition
Supply chain	Concerns about imported deforestation.	Increase regulation on imports to level playing field. (mirror clauses)	Need to prepare supply chains for potential shock.	Concerns about EU "food sovereignty."
Regulatory burdens	Effective/ambitious level of detail.	Competitive opportunity to lead industry in compliance.	Impossible administrative burden.	Tied to concerns about the "punitive ecology."
Farmer impact	Farmers' vulnerability to climate change & biodiversity loss	Rewarding compliant farmers.	The reality of farming was misunderstood by bill.	Farmers are demonized and misunderstood by Brussels.
Delays	Concerns about implications for deforestation.	Concerns about uncertainty, particularly related to compliance investment.	Support for additional time to adapt.	Support for the delays, with a desire for further repeal.
Implications for the EU	Emphasis on meeting EU's climate goals.	Emphasis on EU leadership in the green economy.	Concerns about harming EU's competitiveness.	Existential for European economy.

VI. Results

The raw results of my coding are displayed in Table 3. A cursory look highlights that the vast majority of statements fell under the "instrumental support" type. In terms of the type of claim, the majority addressed EUDR's regulatory burden (fifty out of 163), followed by EUDR's implications for agricultural supply chains (forty-two) and the delays in EUDR's application (forty-one). EUDR's implications for the wider EU were the least discussed, with only thirteen statements.

Table 3: Raw frequency of claims.

	Full support	Competitive potential	Instrumental support	Full opposition
Supply chain	4	8	27	3
Regulatory burdens	2	4	35	9
Farmer impact	2	4	7	4
Delays	2	4	31	4
Implications for the EU	0	0	10	3

Directly comparing the frequency of each position in Figure 1 highlights the dominance of IS claims. Figure 2 breaks down this analysis by statement type. IS statements constitute the majority of all statement types. Claims about the impact of EUDR on farmers were the notable outlier, as the only topic in which IS claims constituted less than 50% of positions. Excluding this outlier, IS statements comprised an average of 71.5% of claims-by-type, with an average variance of 5.025%. Including the outlier, the IS position represented an average of 65.2% of claims, with an average variance of 14.8%.

IS claims most strongly dominate statements about EUDR's implications for the EU. However, the topic's small sample size may have influenced this result. IS claims show the second-highest level of prevalence in discussions about potentially delaying EUDR's implementation, which had the largest sample size.

After IS claims, the concentration of positions follows the same order of frequency highlighted in Figure 1. The only variation is in the discussion about supply chains, in which the CP position is the second most prevalent, followed by FS, breaking from the trend of FO statements following IS statements.

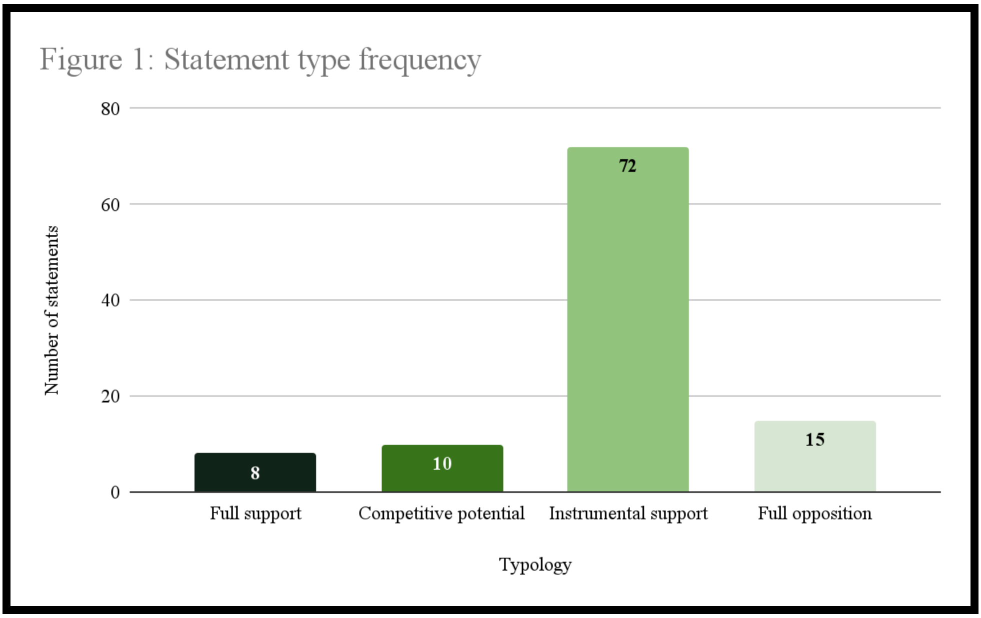

Figure 1: Statement Type Frequency

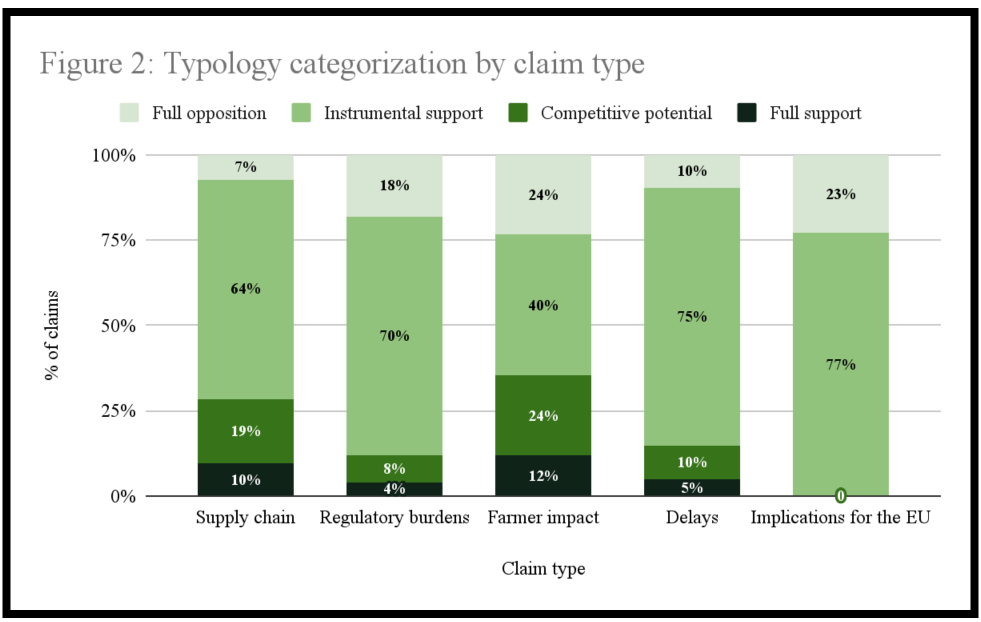

Figure 2: Typology Categorization by Claim Type

Given ACF's focus on individual actors as units of analysis, I also visualized positions by firm, as seen in Figure 3. I determined a firm's position based on which claim it expressed most frequently. The IS position dominated again. However, FS firms were the second most frequent, rather than FO claims, such as in Figure 1.

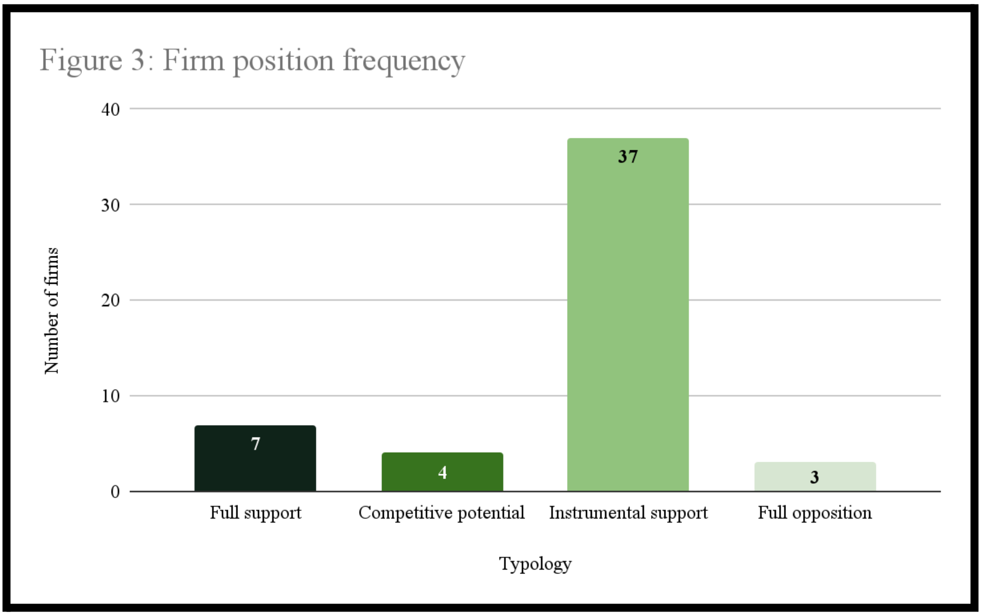

Figure 3: Firm Position Frequency

To investigate H2 and H3, I disaggregated the firm's preferences by sub-sector in Figure 4. Likely due to the salience of large collective agriculture unions in the EU, actors expressed most of their preferences through general "agriculture" unions, such as Copa-Cogeca or national Chambers of Agriculture. Accordingly, this analysis was limited to twenty-three specialized firms. In this sub-sector analysis, positions are more varied by firm than in the IS-dominated sector-wide visualization. Furthermore, FS positions are more frequent.

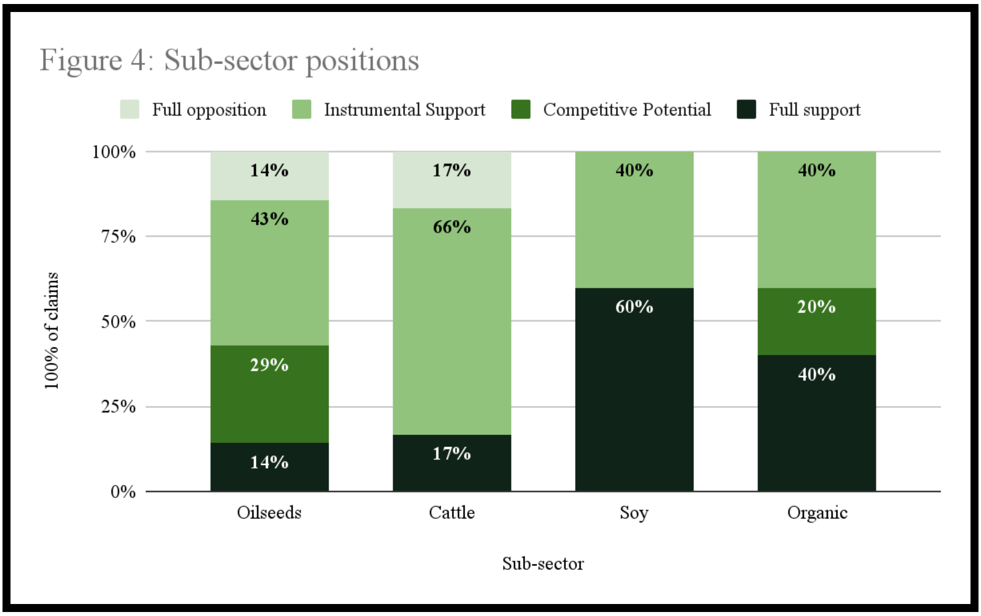

Figure 4: Sub-sector Positions

VII. Discussion

To make sense of these results, I will go hypothesis-by-hypothesis to see how they map onto my theoretical framework.

VII.I Hypotheses

vii.i.i Hypothesis 1

My results suggest support for the first half of H1, that the agricultural industry formed a policy coalition in reaction to EUDR. The prevalence of the IS position indicates the dominance of a narrative framing of EUDR as a worthy cause, poorly executed. The position corresponded with frequent narratives of rushed implementation, unclear communication, and unrealistic, repetitive administration requirements. Communications often shared the exact phrases "practical challenges," "implementation concerns," and "uncertain paths to compliance" in common.

This position does not pit European farmers and Brussels regulators at fundamental odds with one another, nor does it portray the EUDR as a hopeless cause. However, it highlighted the need for sensitivity to European farmers' realities, a longer timeline, and increased communication and support. In the words of a representative from Copa-Cogeca, the largest agriculture association in the EU:

> "The focus must [be on] addressing the practical challenges associated with the EUDR's implementation to prevent uncertainties and avoid supply chain disruptions." Copa-Cogeca (1)

This narrative framing clearly delineates the scope and severity of the policy issue and range of possible responses, thus fitting the ACF definition of a core policy belief. This, in turn, establishes the grounds for the formation of advocacy policy coalitions.

However, my results do not support the latter half of H1, that the industry will form multiple coalitions. There was some sub-sector level variation, as Figure 2 depicts and further discussed below when I address H2 and H3. However, the fact that many smaller firms or more specialized associations signed onto statements by larger aggregates, particularly Copa-Cogeca, left a smaller sample size of sub-sector level actors to frame their alternative position. This smaller sample size thus casts a level of doubt on any associated conclusions.

Moreover, it points to the larger incongruity with my initial hypothesis, as the relative dearth of sub-sector information indicates that primary interaction with EUDR and framing of positions relative to it were channeled through the singular sector-wide coalition. Furthermore, the wider diversity of views within the sub-sector analysis in Figure 4 highlights that this group is not centered on a distinct alternative core policy belief, and thus did not form a separate coalition.

A possible explanation for this divergent result is the role of large institutionalized farmers' associations in the agriculture industry's political engagement. My initial hypothesis may have underestimated the force of central agricultural lobbying groups, such as Copa-Cogeca, which has been active in the EU agriculture lobby since the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1958 (Shortall and Marangudakis, 311). Indeed, Candel (2021) and Gueguen (2021) describe Copa-Cogeca's long-held and widely recognized privileged access to the EU's Directorate General for Agriculture (DG AGRI). They further demonstrate that this tight relationship with DG AGRI and historic role in the EU agricultural lobby has granted Copa-Cogeca a unique level of legitimacy among European Farmers and agricultural cooperatives.

Accordingly, while there may be varied theoretical factors pushing different profiles of agricultural actors to different views of EUDR, the institutionalized influence of Copa-Cogeca as the conduit through which the agricultural industry makes itself heard may have played a larger role, drawing actors into a single policy coalition.

Indeed, this is supported by my results. Copa-Cogeca takes the IS position, as do the vast majority of other farms and cooperatives. The letter to the European Commission about EUDR that was most discussed by the media sources I coded was Copa-Cogeca's calling for a delay in the regulation's implementation date.

vii.i.ii Hypothesis 2

My results do not imply support for the first part of my hypothesis about economies of scale. Firstly, one of the four CP firms was a small Venetian farming association, with fourteen affiliated smallholder farms. In their statement, they do not commit any time to judge EUDR's aim and frame the regulation as ending "supply chain abuses" by ensuring that farmers exporting to the EU follow the same environmental and phytosanitary regulations as EU farmers (Associazione Veneta Produttori Biologici e Biodinamici, 1). This is a clear narrative about relative competitiveness, yet not stemming from economies of scale, as is evident from Aveprobi's limited size and reach. Secondly, the majority of large firms and associations took positions in the IS category.

These results clearly conflict with H2, which states that economies of scale will motivate larger companies to invest. A potential explanation for this arises from farms' statements about delaying EUDR. As the EU considers and then acts upon proposals to move the start date or change the country benchmarking system, uncertainty for businesses increases. Farmers discuss concerns about whether EUDR will ultimately be implemented and whether it will apply to European producers. This thus generates uncertainty about whether increased investments in administrative capacity will pay off in the future. This, in turn, decreases the attractiveness of this investment for the future and perceptions of EUDR as a potential competitive opportunity.

To address the second half of H2 regarding import-competing firms, I turn to Figure 4, which has mixed implications. For oilseeds, the CS position (29% of oilseed farms) is far more prevalent than in the agricultural industry as a whole (7.5% of farms). This supports the latter half of H2.

For cattle, the complete lack of any farms holding the CS contrasts with my expectations. Indeed, the cattle sub-sector notably has the highest percentage of firms that fully oppose EUDR of the analyzed sub-sectors. Statements from the cattle industry uniquely highlight fears of supply chain disruptions. Many cattle farms rely on soy-based feed, another product covered by EUDR, thus placing them further along the value chain. These concerns likely outweighed any perceived benefits.

Thirdly, my results show a lack of the CS position in the soy sub-sector, but a large (60%) proportion of farms express full support for EUDR. This may speak to the ease of supplementing support for the mechanism of EUDR with more normative statements in support of the goals of fighting deforestation, which is generally popular among the European population. The comparative popularity of EUDR in the soy sub-sector relative to oilseeds may be tied to the soy production's relative novelty in the European market and perceptions that protecting it while it develops is more effective than protecting the mature oilseeds market. Furthermore, the fact that soy is directly listed under EUDR rather than indirectly impacted like oilseeds may have increased awareness of the regulation in the sub-sector.

vii.i.iii Hypothesis 3

The dominance of the IS position by all firm types frustrates efforts to evaluate H3 by hindering efforts to isolate smaller farms and associations from the dynamics influencing the agricultural industry as a whole to concentrate as a single coalition. However, the results support the logic forwarded under H3 that firms strike a balance between opposing a regulation and not taking an unfavorable anti-environmental stance. They may just broaden its applicability to a range of firm sizes.

vii.i.iv Hypothesis 4

The results in Figure 4 clearly support H4. Organic farms exhibit significantly higher FS positions (40% of firms) compared to the baseline sector (13%).

VII.II Further Discussion

Looking at the results broadly, the prominence of the IS category speaks to the emphasis European farmers place on maintaining a pro-environment (or at least not anti-environment) rhetoric while critiquing environmental regulation. This finds resonance with the complaints of farmers throughout the 2024 protests, who frequently objected to perceived narratives that characterized them as polluters or cruel to animals (Douwe van der Ploeg, 602).

The prominence of the IS category also highlights excessive government red tape and confusing bureaucracy as the fundamental grievance driving opposition to the EUDR. This places the EUDR opposition into the larger movement currently underway in the EU to simplify regulations (European Commission).

VII.III Potential Limitations

Firstly, as highlighted in my discussion of H1, the sample size for the sub-sector was unfortunately small, given the wide deference to sector-wide organizations. This substantially limits the generalizability of any results.

Secondly, the CP group may have been inherently difficult to track, particularly compared to the IS group. A key element of competitive advantage and the capture of the relative gains associated with it comes from moving before or to the exclusion of a competitor. Accordingly, farms and cooperatives with CP positions toward EUDR may not have vocalized them, coloring my sources.

Thirdly, the latter limitation points to a larger issue about the potential for performative environmentalism. I contend that even the performance of caring about green issues is telling. However, I attempted to supplement explicit media statements with less audience-focused statements, such as meeting minutes and EU consultation responses. These sources generally followed similar trends to the more outwardly-focused media quotes and press releases.

In future research, a less image-conscious perspective on EUDR could be achieved through the employment of a survey of European farmers. While this would be fruitful, I maintain that the way cooperatives and companies portray themselves to external audiences and, in doing so, shape framing narratives around policy issues, is a crucial factor in understanding the advocacy policy coalition formation, as such coalitions inherently have an external angle due to their policy goals.

VIII. Conclusion

I conclude by returning to my research question. Firstly, yes, the agricultural industry did form a political advocacy coalition in response to EUDR. Secondly, the beliefs about EUDR's aims and mechanisms varied surprisingly little across firm size and sub-sector.

My findings have several implications. Firstly, policies attempting to find support from the European farming industry will have the most success when aligned with the core farming unions and agricultural associations. Secondly, firms are less likely to perceive the competitive advantages of certain environmental regulations in the face of uncertainty or excessive bureaucracy. Thirdly, the mechanism through which a policy is enacted is often its most important element.

Future research into understanding the European agricultural industry's response to elements of the European Green Deal should first look into how these shared core policy beliefs translate into action and pressure. Additionally, further research could investigate further the impact that value-chain location has on the support of supply chain regulation. More research should also investigate how agricultural actors link various policy elements of the European Green Deal to one another and to domestic environmental regulation.

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