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Editorial Note

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This issue of *Politikon: The IAPSS Journal of Political Science* brings together a diverse collection of articles examining critical questions in contemporary political science, with particular focus on international law, human rights, democratic participation, and gender politics across different regional contexts.

Critical Intersections

The issue opens with Lala Jafarova's analysis of the challenges and opportunities in global health cooperation. Drawing on policy analysis and theoretical frameworks from both political science and bioethics, Jafarova demonstrates how the proposed pandemic treaty navigates competing demands of national sovereignty and global public health. As the world continues to process lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, Jafarova's work reminds us about the complex challenges of building effective global governance. Her article highlights that the pandemic exposed critical gaps in international cooperation while also creating opportunities for reimagining global cooperation.

Judy El Baba's article offers historical analysis of Lebanon's sectarian politics, tracing how the French Mandate's colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary governance structures and political representation. Through examination of religious biases in colonial administration and the 1943 National Pact, El Baba shows how institutionalized sectarianism impacts modern Lebanese politics through religious quotas, patronage networks, and fragmented national identity.

Catalina Catana and Simen Ekeberg's timely article analyzes the tensions between national sovereignty and universal human rights through the lens of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Their decolonial critique of international law reveals how the nation-state system and human rights framework remain embedded in colonial power structures, limiting their effectiveness in protecting vulnerable populations. The authors make a compelling case for reimagining these institutions beyond their colonial origins.

Sung Jun Han's research note contributes to debates about identity and democracy. Han argues that merely making identities more flexible is insufficient for addressing contemporary challenges to democratic practice. Instead, Han proposes that fostering multiple, distinct social identities that can coexist and interact within individuals and communities may better serve democratic ends.

Stephanie Mae Pedron's essay advocates for expanding voting rights to non-citizens in the United States. Drawing on historical analysis of immigrant suffrage and contemporary democratic theory, Pedron challenges us to rethink traditional connections between citizenship and political participation. She argues that extending voting rights, particularly at the local level, would enhance democratic representation while facilitating immigrant integration into American society.

The issue also includes two thoughtful book reviews examining feminist movements and gender politics. Maria Tarasenko's review of Leta Hong Fincher's *Betraying Big Brother* (2018) analyzes feminist activism and state repressions in China, while Georgy Slavin-Rudakov's review of Julie Cassiday's *Russian Style* (2023) explores the performance of gender and power under Vladimir Putin's regime. Both reviews highlight the complex intersections of gender, politics, and authoritarian control.

Collectively, these articles, while diverse in their geographical focus and methodological approaches, converge around the key questions about how political systems respond to demands for inclusion and representation. Jafarova, Catana and Ekeberg, and El Baba each reveal how sovereignty claims—whether in global health governance, international law, or national politics—shape the distribution of rights, responsibilities, and political power. At the same time, historical structures and colonial arrangements continue to influence institutions, from Lebanon's confessional system to the limitations of international legal regimes. Finally, identity—whether understood as sectarian affiliation, gendered performance, or multiple overlapping identities—emerges as both a constraint and a resource for democratic governance. Their intersecting analyses show how historical structures—state sovereignty claims, colonial legacies, sectarian institutions, international and citizenship laws—shape current political possibilities while also suggesting pathways for contestation and transformation.

Academic Publishing and Global Knowledge Production

In our *Conversations* section, Abel Polese—the author of a brilliant career guide for PhD students and emerging scholars *The SCOPUS Diaries and the (il)logics of Academic Survival*

(2019)—offers a pragmatic examination of inequalities in academic publishing while challenging oversimplified narratives about discrimination. He dissects the multiple factors that influence manuscript acceptance and provides practical, experience-based advice for students and early career scholars from the Global South. This contribution is particularly valuable for its emphasis on agency and professional development. While acknowledging structural barriers, Polese argues that scholars can take specific steps to enhance their work's chances of publication. This contribution continues the dialogue initiated in our previous volume by Velomahanina Razakamaharavo (2023) on the challenges and opportunities for scholars from the Global South in academic publishing.

These discussions resonate strongly with the broader literature on global academic inequalities. A recent study on Global South scholars publishing in Global North journals, for example, documents the practical, academic, and epistemic tensions faced by scholars who must adapt ("shapeshift") to Northern norms while remaining grounded in their local contexts (Naidu et al 2024). The participants of this study describe moments where their work is dismissed as irrelevant, where rejections are opaque or difficult to interpret, and where success requires balancing local institutional pressures with the demands of an international publishing ecosystem dominated by Global North epistemology. These tensions are further illuminated by Klaus Beiter's argument (2023) that global copyright regimes—deeply shaped by commercial publishers and Global North policy priorities—restrict access to scholarly knowledge and undermine the "right to science," especially in the Global South. Beiter shows how high subscription fees, restrictive licensing practices, and technological protection measures impede both research and teaching, creating structural disadvantages that cannot be overcome merely through individual effort. Similarly, Tibelius Amutuhaire's critique (2022) of the "publish or perish" paradigm underscores how Western institutional expectations, when transplanted to the universities of the Global South, reproduce academic inequalities rather than alleviate them. He calls for contextually grounded models of knowledge production that recognize diverse forms of academic labor, including teaching, community engagement, and applied research.

These findings complicate overly optimistic narratives about meritocracy: even when scholars follow all the advice offered by mentors or editorial guidelines, they still confront systemic asymmetries in recognition, legitimacy, and visibility. For emerging scholars, practical strategies outlined by Polese, including co-authoring with international colleagues, seeking robust methodological training, and engaging with global debates may open

important opportunities. Yet these efforts must occur alongside collective projects to transform the structural conditions that shape global knowledge production.

Against this background, our journal strives to be not merely a venue for publication but a forum for ongoing dialogue about academic knowledge production, and we invite readers to consider and respond to several key questions that emerge from Polese's and Razakamaharavo's contributions. How does linguistic diversity enhance or complicate scholarly exchange? What role can mentorship and cross-regional collaboration play in democratizing academic publishing? How can journals, publishers, and universities reform their practices to create more equitable pathways for emerging scholars? And how might shifts in copyright policy, publication incentives, and editorial norms contribute to a more inclusive global knowledge ecosystem?

Our goal is to foster constructive dialogue between established and emerging scholars while building networks of support that reflect the diversity of global academia. *Politikon* occupies a distinct and necessary niche by providing a scholarly platform dedicated to early-career voices, offering high editorial standards alongside structured support such as free copy-editing and developmental feedback, and actively promoting contributions from underrepresented groups, diverse backgrounds, and scholars from the Global South. By offering a venue for innovative, interdisciplinary, and critical perspectives, we expand the boundaries of political science and help emerging researchers enter global debates on more equitable terms.

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The WHO Pandemic Treaty: Ethical Imperatives and Political Realities in Global Health Governance

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Abstract

This paper examines the political and ethical implications of the proposed pandemic treaty within the context of global health governance (GHG). Analyzing the treaty's development, we found that the explicit political content has been moderated from the initial draft of the document to its latest version. The treaty's ethical considerations rooted in global bioethics, however, remain central. Bearing this finding in mind, we explore the treaty's navigation of global health imperatives and national sovereignty. More so, we highlight the treaty's potential to reshape international health relations through scientific cooperation and knowledge sharing, and we consider the document's adaptability to emerging technologies in healthcare, such as AI. Despite implementation challenges of the treaty, we conclude that this document represents a significant step toward formalizing the interconnection between global health and politics, underscoring the enduring relevance of ethical approaches in international health governance and diplomacy.

Keywords: Global Health Governance; Pandemic Treaty; Bioethics; Science Diplomacy; International Relations; COVID-19 Pandemic

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed critical gaps in global health cooperation, demonstrating the urgent need for a coordinated international response to worldwide health threats. This realization prompted an international debate around the so-called "pandemic treaty." The proposed treaty aims to create a robust framework for international collaboration and preparedness to address future health crises more effectively. However, the scope and nature of such a cooperation inevitably intersects with complex political considerations as nations must balance global health imperatives with their own sovereignty and interests.

The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, first proposed a pandemic treaty at the Paris Peace Forum in late 2020. This idea quickly gained traction, receiving support from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the leaders of twenty-three countries (Euractiv.com 2021; NEWS WIRES 2021). In response, the 2021 Special Session

of the World Health Assembly (WHASS) saw member states unanimously agree to establish the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB). Operating under WHO's constitution, the INB was tasked with drafting a convention, agreement, or other international instrument for pandemic preparedness and response (PAHO 2018). While the first draft presented by the INB in October 2021 was focused on public health, its implications extended far beyond. Its scope encompasses not only health considerations but also political and ethical dimensions that affect all nations globally.

In May 2023, the WHO Director-General announced the "end to COVID-19 as a public health emergency" (WHO 2023c). However, this declaration did not imply the elimination of the global threat. Although the pandemic's acute phase has concluded, the virus continues to circulate and mutate. Furthermore, the potential emergence of new pathogens remains a constant concern. Recognizing this ongoing risk, WHO has designated the concept of "Disease X" to represent the threat of an unknown pathogen that could cause a future pandemic (Wilson 2024). These ongoing threats inspire continued discussions and the development of a treaty that would bring forward a framework for international preparedness and response to potential health crises—a framework that would acknowledge the persistent need for global coordination.

The proposal of a pandemic treaty is politically significant as it aims to be legally binding. Its adoption could revolutionize global cooperation and governance in pandemic response, addressing not only the health concerns themselves but also their political and ethical aspects. It may even mark a pivotal moment, institutionalizing the connection between politics and health at an international level.

Currently, governance in this area is "fragmented" (Heidingsfelder and Beckmann 2019; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Westerwinter 2021), consisting mainly of recommendatory documents. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw WHO-level decisions implemented nationally, but without having formal legal mechanisms in place to assess nations' compliance with these recommendations. The proposed treaty could become a primary tool for global health governance and significantly influence how nations implement both domestic and foreign policies related to pandemic response. Moreover, some experts view this pandemic treaty as a foundation for global solidarity, encompassing extraterritorial obligations in healthcare-related human rights (Yamin, Grogan and Villarreal 2021; Petrie-Flom Center Staff et al. 2021).

In analyzing existing drafts of the pandemic treaty, it is crucial to consider their scientific and ethical components. The modern world requires integrating scientific

approaches into the global health governance. The application of new technologies in healthcare also involves ethical considerations that must be addressed. These scientific and ethical aspects are not merely abstract concepts but have real-world implications for how the treaty might be implemented, how it could shape international cooperation in pandemic response (Yamin, Grogan and Villarreal 2021), and how it could create new opportunities for humanitarian diplomacy (Ratajczak and Broś 2023).

The challenges faced during COVID-19 vaccine distribution and subsequent debates over intellectual property rights (Editorials NATURE 2020; Runde, Savoy, and Staguhn 2021; Cozzi and Galli 2022) highlighted the complexities of maintaining ethical standards in global health crises. By establishing new ethical foundations for international cooperation, particularly in health-related matters, the treaty addresses some of the shortcomings observed during the COVID-19 response. However, it also raises significant concerns about national sovereignty and the delicate balance between global health imperatives and individual state rights.

Overall, while most current works focus on health/medical, legal, and related ethical aspects, there is a notable lack of analysis regarding the treaty's implications for global governance and international cooperation in the realm of science and technology development, particularly from a bioethical perspective. This paper aims to fill this gap by examining the intersection of political considerations, especially around state sovereignty, with ethical aspects within the treaty framework. Despite the typical dominance of national interests in realpolitik (Britannica 2024), this work investigates how ethical considerations might serve as policy tools, particularly in humanitarian and scientific diplomacy. By providing an analysis of the treaty's capacity to shape both international relations and public health policy, we aim to bridge politics, bioethics, and global health governance.

Our analysis is based on diverse secondary sources, including reports of governmental agencies and international organizations, policy papers, and academic literature. For the review of academic literature, we focused on studies published in English between 2005 and 2024 that examine the politicization of global health issues, focus on the balancing of global health governance and national sovereignty, and address (bio)ethical issues related to the proposed pandemic treaty. We searched the key databases by using the following set of keywords: *Global Health Politics* OR *Governance*, *Coronavirus* AND *Politics*, *Pandemic Treaty*, *Science* OR *Humanitarian Diplomacy*, *Ethical Issues in Global Health* AND *Politics* OR *Governance*, *Politics* AND *Global Bioethics*, *Politics* AND *Science* OR *AI*, *Politics* AND *Global*

health AND *Ethics* OR *Ethical Principles*. We employed a thematic analysis approach to analyze all retrieved literature.

In this paper, we first provide an overview of the concept of global health governance (GHG) and its evolution, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. We then examine the proposed pandemic treaty, analyzing its potential to reshape international health relations through scientific cooperation and knowledge sharing. Furthermore, we aim to explore the treaty's abilities in successfully navigating global health imperatives and national sovereignty concerns, and we discuss its challenges in balancing these competing interests.

We discuss the ethical dimensions of the treaty, rooted in principles of global bioethics, and their implications for political decision-making in health issues. In this paper, we also consider the treaty's adaptability to emerging technologies in healthcare and governance, such as AI. Finally, we assess the potential impact of the treaty, including its promises and challenges on international relations and global health diplomacy. Throughout, we emphasize the enduring relevance of ethical approaches in international health governance and diplomacy.

The Concept of Global Health Governance

Resolving issues encompassing global health requires collective engagement from the international community, inevitably involving complex political dynamics. The study of health issues' significance in global politics is associated with the process of globalization, which has given rise to a new field of study: global health governance (GHG). The GHG concept emerged from the interdisciplinary analysis of globalization-induced processes. Globalization has fostered such a close connection between individual countries and even continents—a connection that has become especially prevalent in the context of global health threats. Meaning, localizing the spread of viruses and other infectious diseases has become nearly impossible.

The connection, highlighted by the GHG framework, underscores the necessity for robust health governance systems that can respond to crises swiftly and effectively. The COVID-19 pandemic, as a case in point, has not only confirmed the challenges posed by global health threats but also emphasized the critical role governance must play in coordinating international efforts and policy implementation to mitigate such threats. Moreover, Tiwari and colleagues (2022, 249) believe that COVID-19 has "strengthened the role of governance in health" and, "as a political determinant of health," governance plays a significant role in the effective implementation of policy (Tiwari et al. 2022, 255).

There are many definitions of GHG. A fundamental reference point for defining governance in the context of global health issues is WHO, the preeminent international organization in this field (WHO 2013). Various countries participate in GHG by coordinating efforts to mitigate factors that adversely affect health and by allocating resources. This collaborative approach encompasses the development of policies that are accepted by the international community through platforms such as WHO. Key examples of such policies include the adoption of regulations and standards for water quality, the establishment of air quality standards, and the implementation of tobacco control measures. These global health governance initiatives demonstrate how international cooperation can lead to the creation and implementation of standards that have far-reaching impacts on the public health across nations.

Within WHO, countries also can exchange information on disease outbreaks. The International Health Regulations, adopted in 2005, established rules for preventing, controlling, and responding to the international spread of diseases (WHO 2005). This regulatory structure is complemented by funding and through accountability mechanisms. For instance, in 2022, the World Bank, with technical guidance from WHO (2022), created the fund for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, exemplifying this aspect of governance.

A practical application of governance through the unification of standards in global health is the "health in all policies" approach. This concept, which can be traced back to 1978, serves as "a mechanism to promote action on the social determinants of health" (Baum et al. 2014; Ståhl 2018). This approach illustrates how GHG can influence policymaking across various sectors, and it recognizes that health outcomes are affected by decisions made in multiple domains beyond just healthcare.

Overall, the GHG does not have a rigid institutional structure but rather represents a dynamic field that can incorporate new players. Kelley (2011) further suggests that GHG includes a "complex web of UN agencies, public/private partnerships, donor and recipient governments, foundations, corporations, and civil society organizations." This diversity of participants introduces a level of complexity in regulating and coordinating global health efforts. Meaning, if each entity pursues their own interests, then the GHG may adopt a somewhat chaotic structure. Therefore, diplomacy forms an integral part of this system. Analyzing global politics, Kickbusch and Liu (2022, 2160) conclude that in today's interdependent world, most of the initiatives are not limited to "purely humanitarian goals."

This implies that even ostensibly humanitarian efforts in health can reflect broader geopolitical objectives.

The pandemic treaty proposed by WHO emerges as a significant development within this complex landscape of GHG. It represents an attempt to formalize and strengthen the existing structures of global health cooperation, addressing the gaps and inefficiencies revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The treaty aims to create a more cohesive framework for international response to health crises, potentially streamlining the "complex web" of actors described by Kelley (2011). However, as with other aspects of GHG, the treaty must navigate the delicate balance between collective action and national interests, thereby embodying the tension between humanitarian goals and geopolitical ones. As such, the pandemic treaty can be seen as both a product of an evolving GHG and a potential catalyst for further developing a cohesive GHG in the future.

Balancing Global Health Governance and National Sovereignty

The politicization of global health topics, a trend that emerged over two decades ago (McInnes, Lee, and Youde 2019), has significantly accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic (Papamichail 2021). This intensification has transformed health issues into a political factor in world politics. Sturm and colleagues (2021) draw on Michel Foucault's notion of "politics of health" (Foucault 2014) to analyze the geopolitical aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic. They propose the notion of "critical health geopolitics," with an emphasis on the importance of geopolitical foundations in health, and they argue that within the "new form of politics," as outlined by Foucault, medical agents function as political subjects. However, they also identify a need to conceptualize, theorize, and scale health geopolitics "from the global to the local" level.

From this point of view, the proposed pandemic treaty could serve as a primary instrument in enabling the politicization of global health issues. The political significance of this document is underscored by the characterization of the "zero draft" (WHO 2023a) as a "political declaration" at the UN General Assembly High-level Meeting on Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response (UN 2023). By framing this text, which fundamentally regulates public health, in political terms within WHO discussions, the drafters have made the link between global health concerns and political governance more explicit. Similarly, media framed the document as "the UN political declaration on pandemic" (for example, Cullinan 2023). As the final version of the document has not yet been adopted, and as the number of countries that will join and ratify this draft remains uncertain, it is

premature to fully assess its impact. Nevertheless, from the perspective of sovereignty, the document holds significant interest in the context of global politics.

Since the presentation of the initial draft of the treaty (WHO 2023b), the text has undergone modifications, with some reduction in its political aspects. In comparison to previous versions, the word "political" appears only once (Article 16 (a)) in the March 2024 draft (WHO 2024a). While a detailed comparison is beyond the scope of this analysis, even a cursory review of the text reveals a decrease in its explicit political content, specifically in the context of "promotion of global, regional and national" commitments.

Moreover, the developers of the document also slightly altered its initially proposed legal status. The current name does not contain the word "treaty," but instead mentions "convention, agreement or other international instrument." From a legal standpoint, while these concepts are semantically connected and often used interchangeably, they can differ in nature. A "treaty" is defined as "an international agreement concluded between States in written form and governed by international law, whether embodied in a single instrument or in two or more related instruments and whatever its particular designation" (UNTC 2024). Consequently, treaties are typically more formal, legally binding, and detailed instruments used for significant matters between nations (Cremona 2019). They adhere to international law principles and often require ratification by a country's legislative body.

Agreements, in contrast, cover a broader range of situations and can exist in both international and domestic contexts. They offer greater flexibility in terms of formality and legal weight, and may not always carry the same binding force as treaties (UN Dag Hammarskjöld Library 2024). The selection of "agreement" over "treaty" may have implications for the document's legal status, the process of its adoption, and the obligations it imposes on participating states. Based on the current version of the document, states appear to prefer the term "agreement."

Regardless of its formal designation, the proposed pandemic treaty is intended to have legal force from the perspective of international law. As a legal instrument, its adoption and implementation will inherently involve political and ethical components. The European Council emphasizes that such an instrument would "ensure higher, sustained and long-term political engagement at the level of world leaders of states or governments" (Council of the EU and the European Council 2023). This explicit acknowledgment of the political component highlights new dimensions of this document.

The potential legal force of the agreement raises significant questions about sovereignty in national decision-making processes. It represents a delicate balance between

the need for coordinated global action on health issues and the preservation of individual nations' autonomy in shaping their domestic health policies. This tension is at the heart of many international agreements but takes on particular significance in the context of global health governance. The draft treaty acknowledges the concept of sovereignty (Philpott 2011), affirming that states retain the sovereign right "to adopt, legislate and implement legislation, within their jurisdiction" and reaffirming the principle of sovereignty in "addressing public health matters." Simultaneously, the draft assigns a "central role for WHO" in research and development issues (article 9). This juxtaposition highlights the balance the treaty attempts to strike between respecting national sovereignty and establishing a coordinated global response to health crises.

An analysis of the current version of the document suggests that political considerations have significantly influenced its content, potentially overshadowing some of the initially conceived health objectives. While the document remains subject to further additions and amendments, the very existence of this treaty creates a novel legal mechanism that could potentially impact the internal politics of countries through the lens of addressing global health problems and threats. To have legal mechanisms in place is particularly relevant in the context of global health issues. Indeed, the potential for an epidemic to escalate into a pandemic underscores the need for such a global framework, especially then when there are no effective treatments readily available to navigate the threat.

However, given the existing political conflicts and ongoing wars between countries, the potential powers of the WHO under the proposed treaty remain a subject of speculation. The adoption of this document has the potential to impart a more pronounced political role to the organization, potentially creating a new stage in the development of global politics where health issues are formally recognized as political ones. At the same time, while the draft calls for increased equality, cooperation, and solidarity, it is unlikely to radically transform international relations.

Nevertheless, the ethical factors embedded in the treaty cannot be dismissed. The treaty discussions uncover many ethical questions, particularly regarding the sharing of knowledge and technology. On one hand, the proposed sharing of knowledge could potentially increase access to technologies for low-income countries, addressing longstanding inequities in global health. On the other hand, implementing such provisions would require a significant restructuring of the entire system of economic relations in health and the development of new rules for global economic interactions during pandemics. The ineffectiveness of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights

(TRIPS agreement) in waiving intellectual property rights during the COVID-19 pandemic (Thambisetty et al. 2022) underscores the challenges in balancing intellectual property protections with global public health needs.

In this context, complex ethical considerations extend beyond mere altruism. They touch on fundamental issues of global justice, economic rights, and the responsibilities of wealthier nations towards less resourced ones in times of global crises. The treaty thus has the potential to not only reshape global health governance but also to influence broader patterns of international cooperation and resource allocation. These political and ethical considerations extend beyond general principles to specific areas of scientific cooperation and ethics.

Science Diplomacy and Research Sharing

From the perspective of scientific cooperation in the realm of health, the proposed treaty has the potential to become a key instrument as it dedicates a section to research and development, which includes the sharing of scientific achievements and their results. This aspect of the treaty is particularly interesting from a political standpoint in the context of science diplomacy.

As the importance of science and technology grows, so does their politicization, correlating with their elevated status as a "geopolitical determinant" (EEAS 2022). This phenomenon underscores the increasing influence of scientific and technological access in shaping global political dynamics. In this context, science diplomacy can be utilized to achieve national interests, suggesting that seemingly altruistic cooperation in this area may serve pragmatic purposes. It can function as a form of soft power and be employed at various levels of governance on a supranational scale (Nye 2005, Legrand and Stone 2018, S4D4C 2019). Accordingly, advancements in health sciences can serve as a conduit for both scientific and humanitarian diplomacy, as this domain intersects ethical and political aspects, defining their pragmatic application. These intersections highlight how health-related scientific progress can foster diplomatic relations, being universally relevant and ethically charged, necessitating collaboration across diverse geopolitical landscapes.

Recognizing this political dynamic, the draft treaty focuses on "data science capacities" and promotes scientific collaborations (WHO 2024b). Yet, the WHO Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing System (PABS system) proposed in the draft has sparked political and ethical discussions. Some authors argue that this "mechanism has long proven incapable of delivering equitable outcomes under international law" (for example, Hampton, et al.

2023). PABS establishes legal requirements for users of biological materials to participate in benefit-sharing mechanisms. However, sharing biological materials, given scientific developments and genetic engineering possibilities, becomes a national security concern. Some authors (Cropper 2020; Drexel and Withers 2024) underscore the critical need for stringent biosecurity measures to mitigate the risks posed by the sharing and manipulation of biological materials, including the potential for deliberate attacks and creating bioweapons using engineered pathogens. The 2001 anthrax attacks, which occurred shortly after 9/11, were the most severe biological attacks in US history, killing five Americans and sickening seventeen others (Hughes and Gerberding 2002). This demonstrates that while naturally occurring biological threats are dangerous, modified pathogens could pose even greater risks.

The treaty's approach to scientific cooperation, particularly through the proposed PABS system, further highlights the complex interplay between sovereignty and global governance. As we look towards the potential implementation of the treaty, several challenges and considerations such as political-ethical compliance come to light. In a broad sense, politics and everything it includes creates a basis for intersecting cause-and-effect relationships that can either facilitate or hinder scientific cooperation.

Sovereignty and global governance issues become closely intertwined in the treaty's practical implementation, potentially opening a new stage in world politics development. As the treaty's scope is broad, implementing its provisions will inevitably involve political-ethical aspects. Thus, its developers pay attention to humanitarian issues, emphasizing the commitment to "respect the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence of recognized humanitarian organizations for the provision of humanitarian assistance" (WHO 2024b).

The document's concept of "regional economic integration organization" is politically significant, too. It is described as an organization of sovereign states that have transferred competence over certain matters, including binding decision-making authority (WHO 2024b). This provision requires detailed consideration regarding sovereignty, as transferring state competence implies political aspects that may manifest during implementation.

Finally, the initial draft (June 2023) included a section on creating a compliance committee, potentially interpreted as a supranational mechanism with political influence intersecting with sovereignty matters. However, this section was removed in the March 2024 version (Cullinan 2024), indicating political influence on the document's development and the primacy of sovereignty issues in modern politics, even when it concerns global health.

The extension of negotiations for another year to "resolve critical issues" further confirms the ongoing politicization (Morich and Greenup 2024).

Despite the treaty's political aspect, its ethical dimension is also significant and may become the dominant factor favoring its future adoption. Ultimately, most humanitarian and social issues of international importance involve solving ethical problems like ensuring equality, solidarity, and justice. Therefore, the ethical approach remains central to political negotiations in this context.

The Pandemic Treaty in the Era of Global Bioethics and AI

The importance of ethics in science, particularly in health, is growing. The rapid development of COVID-19 vaccines, described as an "unprecedented triumph of science," highlights this importance. While protecting public health is the responsibility of sovereign governments, global crises require a "global coordinated response" (Ghebreyesus 2024) ensured by effective global governance. The draft pandemic treaty emphasizes scientific cooperation, including in digital health. However, from a global governance perspective, cooperation between states is primarily based on mutual political interests. This context reveals a convergence of political goals, ethical approaches, and global governance as an implementation tool.

An analysis of the draft treaty shows its significance from political and global governance perspectives. However, the implementation of ethical aspects, while mentioned, raises concerns. The text directly mentions ethics only once, in the context of promoting international recruitment principles and fairness. Nevertheless, it contains many provisions of a (bio)ethical nature, such as equity and solidarity. From the perspective of UNESCO's bioethical principles, the text includes important provisions on genetic data use, raising questions about ethical research and its application. The presence of ethical principles in this essentially political-legal document demonstrates their continued relevance and importance in modern politics.

In the era of rapid technological advancement, it is crucial to intensify our focus on ethical considerations. This diligence is essential in the formulation of policy documents, ensuring that ethical imperatives are not sidelined but integrated as a foundational element. While ethics encompass a broad philosophical discourse, this paper narrows its focus to global bioethics. Despite its etymological connection to ethics, bioethics has evolved into an independent field of study, examined through the lens of global processes. Without delving

too much into the history and concept of bioethics, we aim to provide a brief definition of the term and explore its contemporary significance.

V.R. Potter, a key figure in developing this concept, described bioethics as a "science of survival" and a "bridge to the future" that has expanded to a global level (Mammadov and Jafarova 2022). In his exploration of bioethics, Potter introduces the term "global bioethics" to move beyond ethical deliberation and to establish collaborative methods for resolving worldwide issues. Notably, Potter asserts that health is "an admirable basis for a global bioethic" (Potter 1992, 73).

Globalization impacts all spheres of life, including politics, health, and science. As a scientific field, global bioethics initially focused on issues related to "health, healthcare, health science and research, and health technologies and policies, and the activities, practices and policies to influence and resolve these global problems" (ten Have 2022, 42). However, Willem ten Have (2022) suggests distinguishing global bioethics from traditional bioethics because "as a response to a specific kind of problem it has a different moral orientation." He notes that global bioethics should not be limited to its initial understanding as a purely health-related topic. The scope and meaning of global bioethics now encompass broader ethical values, such as the unity of humanity, solidarity, and equality. These values serve to find common ground between people as citizens of individual countries and as citizens of the world. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ruth Macklin (2021) examines a "new definition" of bioethics. The author proposes that its main issue is the consideration of the relationship between self-interested behavior of nation-states and the requirements of global cooperation. Macklin (2021, 10) concludes that bioethics on a global scale investigates "ethical aspects of relations between and among nations or regions of the world."

Recent research underscores the urgent need to recalibrate international politics, policies, and legal frameworks in the health sector to align with the rapidly evolving landscape of artificial intelligence (AI) and other advanced technologies (Schwalbe and Wahl 2020, Murphy et al. 2021, Arsenault and Kreps 2022, Shaw et al. 2024). In the sensitive field of health, policy decisions must carefully consider the implications of these emerging technologies.

In this context, the field of bioethics plays a crucial role. Over a decade ago, the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (hereafter referred to as the UNESCO Declaration) established fundamental principles for the international collaboration on global health matters (ten Have and Jean 2009). These principles serve as a cornerstone for ethical standards in medical practices and health research. Despite its

somewhat overshadowed status due to its declarative nature, the UNESCO Declaration fosters a unified approach to health-related challenges across nations and should be considered in the development of the pandemic treaty.

As AI and other rapidly developing technologies permeate almost all spheres of life, regulatory frameworks are evolving to address their impact. The European Union, for instance, has developed the Artificial Intelligence Act (AIA). This act adds to the substantial body of technology regulations, such as the Digital Services and Digital Markets Acts (Afina and Buchser 2023). The AIA fulfills a political commitment made by President von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, for the 2019-2024 term (European Commission 2021) and notably identifies health as one of its "high-impact sectors."

The integration of AI into governance and politics raises important bioethical considerations. Erman and Furendal (2022) argue that "political legitimacy" is a crucial property of good AI governance, cautioning that transferring certain forms of decision-making to AI systems could negatively impact this legitimacy. In response to such concerns, the EU adopted the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which protects health-related data, including genetic and biometric information, as well as political data (articles 9, 13-15).

However, the ethical challenges of data protection during global crises remain significant (Christofidou et al. 2021, Tacconelli et al. 2022). As AI becomes increasingly integrated into various aspects of society, including health and governance, the role of bioethics in guiding its development and implementation becomes paramount. This intersection of technology, ethics, and policy underscores the need for ongoing dialogue and adaptive regulatory frameworks to address the evolving landscape of global health and AI governance.

Advancements in scientific knowledge have the potential to revolutionize global governance, transforming how international affairs are managed and conducted. This shift could fundamentally alter the dynamics of global leadership and policy-making. In today's world, high technologies are no longer a luxury but a necessity, especially in healthcare. Ensuring equality now begins with providing access to these technologies. States or societies that lack access to these technologies are not competitive and tend to struggle to ensure their population's health—a primary task of both domestic and foreign policy.

While advanced technologies offer many benefits, they also introduce new risks. Guidelines on "AI ethics" are being developed, but they are often violated or lack comprehensive provisions for using such technologies (Hagendorff 2020, 114). In

healthcare, we refer to those scientific technologies that promote well-being and enhance quality of life. Scientists are already implementing AI to accelerate the discovery of new drugs and vaccines (for example, Kaushik and Raj 2020, Sharma et al. 2022).

The proposed pandemic treaty represents a pivotal moment in global health governance, highlighting the complex interplay between political realities, ethical imperatives, and technological advancements. As the world grapples with the challenges posed by global health crises, the treaty serves as a potential framework for international cooperation, grounded in the principles of global bioethics. However, the rapid evolution of technologies such as AI introduces new dimensions to this discourse, necessitating adaptive and ethically-informed governance structures. The integration of AI in healthcare and governance underscores the need for robust regulatory frameworks that can balance innovation with ethical considerations, particularly in data protection and decision-making processes. As we move forward, the success of global health initiatives will increasingly depend on our ability to harmonize political interests with ethical standards, while leveraging technological advancements responsibly. The pandemic treaty, viewed through the lens of global bioethics and emerging technologies, offers a unique opportunity to redefine international cooperation in health. It challenges us to create governance models that are not only effective in a crisis response but are also ethical, equitable, and adaptable to the rapidly changing landscape of global health and technology.

Conclusion

The emergence of the pandemic treaty proposal in response to the COVID-19 crisis represents a potential paradigm shift in GHG and international relations. This proposed instrument aims to establish a framework for coordinated global action in the face of future pandemics, while navigating the complex interplay between public health imperatives and national sovereignty.

Comparing versions of the treaty presented in 2023 and in 2024 reveals a noticeable reduction in both political assertions and comprehensive scope. This evolution underscores the delicate balance required in crafting international regulations that can garner widespread support while still maintaining its effectiveness. The shift from using the term "treaty" to "agreement" further illustrates the nuanced legal and political considerations involved in this process.

Significantly, the proposed agreement exemplifies a contemporary convergence of global health governance, diplomacy, and global bioethics. A key strength of the proposed

treaty lies in its emphasis on scientific cooperation and knowledge sharing. By elevating global health issues to a new level of political significance, the treaty has the potential to enhance global preparedness and response capabilities, while also serving as a platform for science diplomacy in health-related matters. This development forms a legal basis for utilizing health issues as instruments of global politics and diplomacy, potentially reshaping international relations in the health sector.

However, the treaty's implementation faces several challenges. The concept of sovereignty remains a key consideration, as the agreement aims to balance global health imperatives with nations' rights to develop their own public health policies. This tension between global governance and national autonomy is particularly acute in the context of infectious disease control, where a country's internal affairs can have international ramifications.

The ethical dimensions of the treaty, while not always explicit, are woven throughout its framework. These ethical considerations, rooted in principles of global bioethics, can serve as a foundation for political decision-making in health issues. Even when implemented in pursuit of national interests, the treaty's provisions for humanitarian and scientific diplomacy can facilitate assistance to populations in other countries, thereby serving ethical objectives. Moreover, since modern development of science is governed by various laws and ethical principles, the bioethical ones adopted by acclamation can serve "as a vehicle for political decision-making" (Gluchman 2015), specifically in health issues.

As emerging technologies like AI increasingly intersect with health and governance, the treaty's ability to adapt to these developments will be critical. The ethical implications of AI in healthcare and governance underscore the need for flexible yet robust regulatory frameworks that can keep pace with rapid technological advancements. It is important to note that the mere existence of such an agreement does not guarantee its execution or universal adoption. Some countries may choose not to sign or ratify the treaty. Nevertheless, the ethical component of the document remains relevant from a diplomatic perspective, potentially influencing international relations even in the absence of universal ratification.

While it is premature to fully assess the treaty's significance for international relations without an approved text, its potential adoption could contribute to increased cooperation between countries in the health field, elevating the relevance of WHO in matters of global governance. However, the modern world's political contradictions and competing national/geopolitical interests may complicate the treaty's implementation. Ultimately, its success will depend on the ability of the key stakeholders to strike a balance between global

coordination and national interests, between scientific progress and ethical considerations, and between immediate responses and long-term preparedness.

In conclusion, as we navigate the complex landscape of global health governance in the 21st century, it is crucial to recognize the ethical aspects of health politics and adhere to universal bioethical principles. These principles can serve as a guiding framework for ensuring the sustainable development of humanity. The proposed pandemic treaty, despite its challenges and limitations, represents a step towards formalizing the critical intersection of global health, politics, and ethics. As such, it affirms that an ethical approach still matters significantly in the realm of international health governance and diplomacy.

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Roots of Lebanon's Sectarian Politics: Colonial Legacies of the French Mandate

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Abstract

This paper contends that the French Mandate significantly contributed to the institutionalisation of sectarianism in post-colonial Lebanese politics, and it investigates the Mandate's enduring impacts on confessional governance. Building on existing research on the legacies of the Mandate and the development of sectarianism in Lebanon, the paper explores the Mandate's roots of Lebanon's sectarian politics. The analysis examines religious biases by the colonial administration and the National Pact of 1943. By doing so, this paper argues that the political representation in Lebanon can be traced back to sectarian connotations through religious quotas in the parliamentary system, patronage networks, and the fragmentation of Lebanese identity. This phenomenon is known as sectarianisation—a term that is used when political representatives exploit sectarian grudges within the population to acquire power. While other factors play a role in the development of sectarianisation, this paper argues that the French Mandate functions as the primary catalyst in the institutionalisation of sectarianism in Lebanon. Consequently, the central research question this paper seeks to answer is: What are the legacies of the French Mandate on the sectarianisation of post-colonial Lebanese politics?

Keywords: Confessionalism; French Mandate; Post-colonial Politics; Sectarianism; Colonialism; Lebanon

Introduction

"Well, that occupation is something! They left us schools, dispatches, institutions, organisations, languages!" says Joanna, the Catholic character praising the French colonial administration in Lebanon in George Khabbaz's play *Ella Eza* (2018). "Yes, but they also fostered religious bias," replies Omar, a Sunni Muslim whose response is met by Nicola, a Roman Orthodox: "You're right. And they gave the presidency to the Maronites."

This excerpt from Khabbaz's play illustrates the complicated legacy of the French Mandate on the sociopolitical landscape of Lebanon. The former "Switzerland of the East" is plagued by economic crises, political instability, foreign interference, and social divisions, which have persisted since the 20th century. With a failing government and a polarised nation, both the public and the private sectors in Lebanon are unstable due to the inability to counter corruption, poverty, and unemployment rates (Abouzeid 2021). As this paper will

explore, the structure of the Lebanese government is heavily influenced by the legacies of the French Mandate.

Furthermore, Lebanon has a rich history of cultural diversity, ranging from the early civilisations of Phoenicia and Babylon, the empires of Rome and Greece, to the colonial rule of the Ottoman Empire and the French before its independence in 1943 (Barnette et al. 2023). Consequently, Lebanon is the most religiously diverse country in the Middle East (Thames 2023). While scholarly research suggests that religious diversity often contributes to social progress (Davie 2022), the Lebanese confessional system is crippled and overwhelmed with inefficiency in fulfilling the needs of the people. This confessional system is a form of governance which designates governmental and decision-making positions based on religious affiliation, which ensures the alleged representation of the officially recognised sects in Lebanon.

This system enables Lebanon's political leaders to alienate different sects from each one another by utilising sectarian grudges that date back to the Ottoman Empire. More so, this system allows these political leaders to remain in power as long as they represent their followers' religious identities. This practice is best described as sectarianisation (Hashemi and Postel 2017). Sectarianism and sectarianisation, though closely related, differ in their point of reference. Sectarianism refers to the deep-rooted religious animosity between individuals or groups who belong to different sects, a sentiment that persists among the Lebanese population. In contrast, this paper focuses on sectarianisation, which refers to the actions of political leaders who represent these sects. Sectarianisation involves political leaders' exploitation of sectarian grudges to acquire and maintain power (Hashemi and Postel 2017; Wiesner 2020), thereby perpetuating the fragmentation of society.

Indeed, sectarian divisions extend here beyond the simple dichotomy between Muslim and Christian. Internal factions within Muslim sects, external ones with the Druze community, and opposing stances of being pro-Arab or pro-Western all contribute to the fragmentation of the Lebanese society (Fayad 2020). The Lebanese people harbour resentment accumulating over generations—a resentment that may also stem from the lack of accountability in ending the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). Because of these developments, the Lebanese depend on their sectarian representatives to voice their grievances in parliament. This dynamic perpetuates the power of political leaders and allows their descendants to succeed them in office.

It is important to note that while the French Mandate played a pivotal role, there is a complex interplay of factors to fuel political sectarianism. Its roots stem from the pre-

Islamic Mount Lebanon. More specifically, it exists since the sectarian tensions between the Maronites and the Orthodox Christians, and after the Maronites originally escaped Syria and sought refuge there in the 10th century (Our Lady of Lebanon, 2013). Then came the rise of the Umayyad Empire and the consequent Islamic Caliphates ending with the Ottoman Empire, which, depending on the political context, decreed sectarian policies and intensified the sectarian grievances (Traboulsi 2007, 16). These developments further extended the tensions between Chrisitian-Druze and Christian-Muslim animosities. However, the French Mandate remains the focal point of this paper due to the institutionalisation of generations-old sectarianism that occurred during that era, making it the colonial catalyst for sectarian governance.

What are the legacies of the French Mandate on the sectarianisation of post-colonial Lebanese politics? The paper argues that the French colonial administration promoted a sectarian political framework which devised the modern confessional system of Lebanon. In the long term, the promotion of such a sectarian political framework induced the sectarianisation of post-colonial politics via the political representatives of major sects. The analysis of this paper encompasses the religious biases that developed during colonial rule and the National Pact of 1943 to demonstrate their enduring influence on the political representation in Lebanon today. Political representation is then analysed through three main aspects of post-colonial politics: religious quotas in the parliamentary system, patronage networks for state welfare, and the fragmentation of Lebanese identity. Building on these historical roots established during the Mandate, the investigation shows how the confessional structure evolved, thereby perpetuating sectarian dynamics in modern governance.

Pretexts in Existing Literature

The development of sectarianism in Lebanon has been a dominant topic of research regarding Lebanese politics, particularly due to sectarianism being the stimulus behind the political dynamics and events in the country since the foundation of the Lebanese state. Previous scholars demonstrate the influence of this sectarianism on many levels of analysis, including sectarianism's projection on the social identity of Lebanese citizens (Fayad 2020; Mallo 2019) and its participation in the Lebanese political system (Cammett 2011; Gardiner 2015; Salame 1986). Target analyses often revolve around identity (Fayad 2020), clientelism (Gardiner 2015), the nature of the Lebanese confessional system (Calfat 2018; Salloukh 2024), consequences on economic progress (Ghoble 2018), etc. While it is undoubtedly valuable to consider these concepts when analysing the development of sectarianism in

Lebanon, they do not provide a comprehensive understanding of how this sectarianism was initially institutionalised in Lebanon's governmental structure—a political system that primarily resulted from the French Mandate. Consequently, the goal of this paper is to build on the existing body of work to develop a theory of how French colonialism directed the overarching sectarianism of Lebanon's confessional political system.

Confessionalism is a form of consociational power sharing, meaning that governmental structure is arranged according to religious/ethnic lines and based on deep-rooted social divisions (Salloukh 2024). Davie (2022) argues that religious diversity can contribute widely to social progress. However, according to established scholarship, multi-sectarian Lebanese confessionalism has resulted in fragile and unstable state institutions, which challenge the state welfare and fail to attend to the needs of the non-elite (Calfat 2018; Salloukh 2024). The consequences of this apparatus have been studied, as priorly mentioned, especially its result in the Lebanese Civil War shortly after gaining independence in 1943 (Salame 1986). Yet, what induced the institutionalisation of sectarianism is often overlooked. The paper argues that the roots of Lebanon's sectarian politics lie in the colonial legacies of the French Mandate. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse how the Mandate cooperated with the Lebanese elite, and, by doing so, coordinated this mode of governance.

Scholars have extensively documented various aspects of the French Mandate in Lebanon. For example, Abi-Rached and Diwan (2022) and Santer (2019) analysed the economic legacies of the French Mandate in Lebanon. Geukjian (2023) explored the historical and political ties between the French and the Lebanese since the 19th century. Ishani (2012) examined women's political struggle in the French Mandates.

However, all these valuable investigations still fall short on the crucial reverberation of the French colonial institution: the assembly of an independent, confessional Lebanese government as the impetus for sectarianised post-colonial politics. The closest to an analysis regarding the legacies of the French Mandate on Lebanese governance can be found in Adel's research from 2022. This study discusses the violent political consequences of colonial rule. Yet, its focus remains too broad to evaluate the colonial roots behind sectarian politics and the post-colonial dynamics between the Lebanese citizens and their politicians in detail. Hence, previous literature regarding the French Mandate fails to adequately address its legacies on post-colonial politics as a pivotal area of analysis.

While existing literature predominantly focuses on socioeconomic outcomes, this paper adds a unique dimension by examining the influence of the French Mandate specifically on sectarian dynamics in post-colonial Lebanese politics. In contrast to the

studies that have failed to discuss how colonial authority can shape modern governance and that have failed to link the current status quo of the country to colonised Lebanon, this paper seeks to demonstrate how the Mandate has set in motion the sectarianisation of the political framework by modern Lebanese politicians.

Preliminary Context

Understanding the origins of the French Mandate is important for the interpretation of the modern political framework of Lebanon. After World War I, the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) allocated former Ottoman regions in the Levant between British and French colonies, with France gaining control over Mount Lebanon, a Maronite-dense territory. This development strengthened the ties between the pro-French Maronite Church and the French administration (Adel 2022, 8).

Yet, the historical ties between the French and the Maronites predate the Mandate. In 1249, King Louis IX of France vowed to protect Maronites through a letter addressed to Maronite patriarchs and bishops, particularly in light of the crusades (Gül 2015, 9). In 1649, the king of France appealed to that in his own letter to the Maronite Patriarch, ordering French ambassadors to assist them under the Ottoman Empire (Beggiani 2003, 36). In short, France was a main supporter for Maronites during Ottoman times.

After the Empire's dissolution, the Ottoman-drawn borders of Greater Syria were dismantled. With the deconstruction, Lebanon's borders were officially expanded in 1920 when French General Henri Gouraud, the first High Commissioner of the Levant (1919–1922), announced the creation of Greater Lebanon. Opposition, particularly from the new concentration of the Muslim population upon the new expansion, demanded a unification with Syria under the basis of pro-Arabism (Fayad 2020, 39–41). This demand for unification fostered social tension among the Muslim and Christian populations. However, the French administration and Elias Peter Hoayek, the 72nd Maronite Patriarch of Antioch, dismissed this opposition. Moreover, Maronites were no longer the religious majority, as demographic shifts continued to occur throughout the mandate.

These demographic shifts are majorly attributed to the migration of Lebanese Christians into the Lebanese diaspora and the migration of Palestinians to Lebanon (Traboulsi 2007, 114). Nevertheless, in 1926, a constitution was drafted for the future Lebanese state. Still followed through to this day, the amended constitution granted Maronites the claim of state leadership in the name of their numerosity and their embrace of Francophonia (Fayad 2020, 40; Mallo 2019). The Lebanese Republic became a semi-

autonomous state under French supervision in 1926 as a Levant Mandate and adapted a confessional structure of government based on religious distribution. This power-sharing arrangement aimed to maintain a delicate balance among the various religious communities in Lebanon. However, this confessional system would later become a source of political instability and sectarian tensions in the country.

Out of all confessional states, Lebanon is a particularly intriguing case with 18 officially recognized sects among a population of approximately 5 million people (Central Intelligence Agency 2023). Although the exact numbers are unknown and disputed, demographic shifts indicate that Muslims constitute the majority, followed by Christians and the Druze. It is worth noting that while the Druze are often considered part of the Islamic religions, some sources regard them as a separate religious group (Minorities at Risk Project 2005; Das et al. 2016).

Not only is the parliamentary distribution in accordance with religious boundaries, but state positions in the executive and legislative branches are held by leaders who belong to the respective sect in charge of the position. This has made the state sensitive to demographic changes, foreign interventions, and military imbalances (Calfat 2018).

Table 1 illustrates the geographical concentrations and parliamentary seats allocated to various Lebanese sects (Collelo 1987[1]; Fayad 2022; Khalife 2015). The confessional system in Lebanon distributes power among the major religious groups, where they all share specific numbers of seats in parliament. The current ratio of Muslims (Sunni and Shiite) to Christians (Maronites as a majority) regarding parliamentary seats is 1:1, with the Druze being considered amongst the Muslim population.

[1] While Collelo (1987) is admittedly dated, more recent scholarly works and demographic studies suggest that the overall patterns of geographical distribution among Lebanese sects have remained relatively stable since the late 1980s, as with Minorities at Risk Project (2003), Minorities at Risk Project (2005), and Minority Rights Group International (2008). Finding more current, comprehensive data on the geographical distribution of sects has proven challenging, as most recent sources focus on electoral statistics by district rather than providing a detailed breakdown by sect. Including updated information would likely require citing a separate source for each of the 16 officially recognized sects in Lebanon, significantly increasing the number of references needed to address this topic.

Table 1. Geographical Concentrations and Parliamentary Seats of Lebanese Sects

Religion	Sects (Khalife 2015)	Geographical Concentration (Collelo 1987)	Parliamentary Seats (Total: 128) (Fayad 2022)
Islam	Sunni Muslims	Sidon, Tripoli, Akkar, West Beirut	27
	Shiite Muslims	Southern Lebanon, Western and Northern Bekaa, Southern Suburbs of Beirut	27
	Alawites	Jabal Mohsen, Tripoli, Akkar	2
	Ismailis	Minority	-
Christianity	Maronites	North Beirut, North of Mount Lebanon, South of North, Governorate Southern Part of South Governorate	34
	Greek Orthodox	Ashrafieh (Beirut), Douma (Batroun), Dhour El Choueir and Mansourieh (Matn) Anfeh, Koura	14
	Greek Catholics	Beirut, Zahle, Suburbs of Sidon	8
	Armenian Orthodox	Bourj Hammoud (Beirut), Al-Matn District, Zalka (Beirut)	5
	Armenian Catholics	Bourj Hammoud (Beirut), Al-Matn District, Zalka (Beirut)	1
	Evangelicals	Beirut	1
	Syriac Orthodox	-	1 (Christian Minorities)
	Syriac Catholic	-	
	Nestorian Assyrians	Achrafieh (Beirut), Jdeideh (Matn), Zahle	
	Roman Catholics	-	
	Copts	-	
	Chaldeans	-	
Druze	Often considered an Islamic sect by itself and often a standalone.	Mountains of East and South Beirut, villages such as Falougha, Beit Mery, and Brummana	8
Judaism	-	Wadi Abu Jamil (Beirut)	-

Source: Compiled by Author

Institutionalisation of Sectarianism during the French Mandate

Religious Biases by the Colonial Administration

French colonisers strategically allied with specific religious groups, predominantly the Maronite Church. This strategy not only heightened sectarian tensions amongst the population but also perpetuated an unequal distribution of resources and representation within religious groups. The legitimacy acquired for the basis of colonial rule was the formation of a representative state of the "national people" who resonated with Francophonic culture. Thus, it was Arab Christians who were held in high esteem by the French administration, branding them as more "civilised" (Provence 2021, 116). Correspondingly, Lebanese Christians were in favour of British and French colonial rule as they were withheld in high status positions, prevailing over the remainder of the population (Fayad 2020, 39–41). While Arab Christians called for pro-Western relations, the Muslim population continuously advocated for a unification with Syria and the creation of a strong Arab nation. The divergence between national causes nurtured sectarian tensions, seen through the restrained Arab revolt by the French when the formation of Greater Lebanon was announced in 1920. This formation intercepted a legitimate backbone to oppose the French Mandate and deployed a situation to be exploited by the French. Hence, identity bias by the colonial administration fostered the existence of opposing religious factions, which will later outline Lebanon's governance structures.

The borders of Greater Lebanon were not directly constructed upon declaring its formation; it was likewise a question under the subject of the creation of a Christian state under French protection, an ideology evolving as "Lebanonism" or "Christian Protectionism" (Traboulsi 2007, 85–87). To control the rebellious Sunni population, General Gouraud's administration kept them outside major cities to hinder the spread of pan-Arabist ideology. In 1921, French Prime Minister Aristide Briand suggested separating Tripoli, which had, and still has, a significant Muslim population, from Lebanon and integrating it into Syria. This proposal aimed to maintain the security and Christian character of the newly established Lebanese state (Traboulsi 2007, 86).

The segregation of Muslims from executive positions in favour of Maronite elites fuelled religious resentment in the region. The declaration of the State of Greater Lebanon in 1920 was accompanied by the establishment of the Administrative Council (later known as the Representative Council) with two-thirds of Christian partakers. This disproportionate representation of Christians in the council led to the Muslim boycott, which compelled the

French administration to expand the council from fifteen to seventeen members to dilute the Christian presence by including more Muslim representatives (Traboulsi 2007, 88). Despite this concession, the Maronite Church and Patriarch Hoayek continued to exert significant influence over administrative affairs. The office period of High Commissioner Maurice Sarrail (1924-1926) saw efforts of reconciliation with the Muslim population, but these attempts were largely unsuccessful. Sarrail aimed to reduce inequalities in taxation between the residents of the annexed territories and Mount Lebanon, and he also opened administrative posts to Muslims and proposed a secular and public education system. However, most of Sarrail's reforms were dismissed by the French Foreign Ministry under pressure from the Maronite Church (Traboulsi 2007, 89). The Maronite Church's ability to influence French policy decisions during this period demonstrates the extent to which the French Mandate relied on Maronite support and how this alliance contributed to the marginalisation of other religious groups, particularly Muslims. The occupancy of Maronites on top of the social hierarchy during the French Mandate exacerbated adversarial relations between religious factions. As a consequence of these developments, the Muslim population felt increasingly disenfranchised and resentful of the preferential treatment given to Maronites.

Christians used their numerical majority as a justification for their claim to political domination. Alongside the French colonial agenda, they ignored demographic shifts in territory. The census of 1932 confirms a slight majority, with Maronites constituting 28% of Lebanon's population (Mallo 2019). The overall ratio of Christians to Muslims was 402.000 Christians to 383.000 Muslims. However, this demographic distribution would change significantly in later years. Despite the tenuous nature of their numerical advantage, Maronites claimed the presidency with the drafted constitution of 1926—the constitution that would later serve as the foundation for the Lebanese Republic. Lebanon's independence in 1943 was thus achieved with the officialism of the *fait accompli*, established during the French Mandate period. More so, it included the Maronite presidency and the confessional distribution of political power.

The National Pact of 1943

The strict dichotomy between the political interests of Christians and Muslims decreased as the Mandate years passed by. Particularly as of 1936, the association of Christians with Lebanonism and Muslims with unionism was no longer accurate. The controversial actions of the French administration, such as the suspension of the constitution in 1932 and the French monopoly on the national economy, swayed the pro-French attitude

of the Maronite Church (el-Khazen 1991). Anthony II Peter Arida, the 73rd Maronite Patriarch of Antioch (1932-1955), began to forge closer ties with Syrian leaders, a move that was criticised by some Sunni unionists. Bechara al-Khoury, a prominent political figure who would later serve as the first president of the Lebanese Republic, was one of many Christian politicians advocating for an independent Lebanon, built in collaboration with the Muslims of the population (Traboulsi 2007, 95). Although Muslims took longer to dissolve their aspirations for Syrian unification, the continued negotiations between Lebanese representatives and French administrators aided the convergence of the present political agendas. Riad al-Solh, a Sunni patron and politician, who preferred to be separate from Muslim unionists, endorsed inter-sectarian alliances with Christians against the French Mandate (Traboulsi 2007, 99).

After these developments, the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance between France and Lebanon, signed during the year 1936, recognised Lebanon as an independent state. Yet, this independence was not ratified by the French government (Khadduri 1944, 603). Instead, it was the National Pact of 1943 that was the guarantee of Lebanon's independence, constructed as the only formula to ease sectarian tensions within the population and as a promise of self-determination.

The developing relational dynamics were formally adopted in the early 1940s, with the condition of a total consensus on recognising the Lebanese Republic as an Arab state and the conversion of Christians' pro-West attitude into Arab nationalism. The acceptance of these conditions for independence by both parties is credited to external influences from Syria, where meetings were held to support Maronite candidate Bechara al-Khoury as president and his acquaintance Riad al-Solh as Sunni prime minister in 1942 (el-Khazen 1991). Although the National Pact is an unwritten agreement and a strategic arrangement between Lebanese elites, the constitution states that there is no legitimacy for any authorities to contradict the "pact of communal existence" (US Department of State Office of International Religious Freedom 2019, 6). The National Pact establishes the following (el-Khazen 1991):

- Maronites must cease seeking Western interventions and accept Lebanon's Arab identity.
- Muslims must abandon the goal of unification with Syria.

The National Pact also stipulates that key positions in the Lebanese government and military must be allocated to specific religious communities:

- The President of the Republic must always be a Maronite Catholic.

- The Prime Minister must always be a Sunni Muslim.
- The Speaker of Parliament must always be a Shia Muslim.
- The Deputy Speaker of Parliament and the Deputy Prime Minister must always be Greek Orthodox Christians.
- The Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces must always be a Maronite Catholic.
- The Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces must always be a Druze.
- There should always be a ratio of 6:5 of Christians to Muslims (including Druze) in the Lebanese Parliament.

With the National Pact, Greater Lebanon gained independence in 1943 and became known as the Republic of Lebanon. The pact laid the foundations for a confessional political system, which was based on the assumption that it was the only means to achieve social harmony in a country with diverse religious communities. However, this arrangement was built on two critical assumptions that would prove to be problematic in the long run. First, the National Pact assumed that the region's demography would remain constant over the years, with Christians maintaining a slight majority. Second, the National Pact was presented as reflecting the standpoint of the entire nation, despite being an informal agreement negotiated by a small group of elite politicians.

Utilising Sectarian Grudges for Power Acquisition in Post-Colonial Lebanon

Religious Quotas in the Parliamentary System

The constitution and the components of the National Pact, which were established upon Lebanon's independence, did not permanently satisfy the Lebanese population. The Palestinian-Israeli war, which sparked up in the late 1940s, led to an increase in the Lebanese Muslim population due to the influx of Palestinian refugees (Perera 2021). The majority of these refugees were Sunni Muslims, which upset the delicate confessional balance that underpinned the Lebanese political system and led to attempts at demographic manipulation. For example, in the 1950s, Maronite President Camille Chamoun permitted Palestinian Christians to apply for Lebanese citizenship to boost the concentration of Lebanese Christians in the state (Ghandour 2017, 66). This move was seen as an attempt to maintain Christian political dominance in the face of changing demographics.

Moreover, the divergent political aspirations of Muslims and Christians in post-independence Lebanon further exacerbated sectarian tensions (Perera 2021). On one hand, many Muslims, particularly those who were sympathetic to pan-Arabism, desired to join the United Arab Republic (1958-1961). Led mainly by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, the UAR was a short-lived political union between Syria and Egypt. On the other hand, many Christians sought to maintain close ties with Western allies. Their interests manifested through President Chamoun, whose pro-Western policies amidst rising Arab nationalism triggered the 1958 crisis in Lebanon (Sorby 2000, 87). Violent protests erupted in Muslim cities, such as Tyre, voicing support for the UAR against Chamoun (Sorby 2000, 91). Fearing the fall of Lebanon into pan-Arabist hands, Chamoun seized on the Eisenhower Doctrine (Sorby 2000, 89), a U.S. foreign policy that enabled Middle Eastern states to request economic or military U.S. assistance amidst the threats of the Cold War. The crisis exemplified conflicting visions for Lebanon's political and cultural orientation. Coupled with the growing demographic imbalance and the perceived inequities of the confessional system, it serves as an illustration of how sectarian tensions escalated between Christian and Muslim communities. The failure to address these underlying grievances and to adapt the political system to changing realities would ultimately lead to the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990).

The confessional distribution of parliamentary seats based on religious affiliation has led to the sectarianisation of postcolonial Lebanese politics, with major political parties being arranged according to their respective sects. The Taif Agreement in 1990, which marked the end of the Lebanese Civil War, amended the National Pact. The treaty decreased the representation of Christians in the parliament from a 6:5 ratio to a 1:1 (Perera 2021). Furthermore, it stipulated that citizens who do not list their religious affiliations on their national registration cannot hold a seat in parliament, a measure designed to maintain equal representation of sects in the legislature (US Department of State Office of International Religious Freedom 2019, 7). This strict adherence to religious quotas has hindered the emergence of strong political representatives capable of transcending sectarian boundaries. The focus on identity-based politics has often overshadowed substantive policy debates and made it challenging to build consensus on critical issues. A recent example is the 2023 conflict over the switch to daylight saving time, which created a sectarian dilemma between Muslims and Christians (Homsi 2023). Muslims, who fast during the holy month of Ramadan, preferred to keep standard time to shorten the fasting period, while Christians favoured the switch to daylight saving time. As a result of this sectarian political environment, political

leaders often exploit sectarian grudges as representatives of their respective Lebanese sects, and major political parties are known for the sects they represent.

The way the four major sects are represented within the major political parties provides an illustrative example of how religious identity has become a core component of political representation in Lebanon:

- **Amal Movement and Hezbollah:** These two parties are the main Shiite parties in Lebanon. Beyond their political agenda, their supporters rely on these parties for representing Shiite ideology in parliament. Hezbollah's long-term maytyred leader, Secretary-General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, has attracted supporters not only through militant rhetoric but also through his Islamist message (Blanford 2022).
- **Progressive Socialist Party:** Although officially secular, this party mainly consists of Druze members and serves as the major representative of the Druze sect in Lebanese politics. It is led by the Druze Jumblatt family, which was a politically-dominant feudal family in Mount Lebanon in the nineteenth century (Francis and Perry 2017).
- **Lebanese Forces and Free Patriotic Movement:** These Christian-based parties have the largest shares in parliament. Consisting of mainly Maronites, they are representatives of Christian ideologies, such as Lebanese nationalism and Christian democracy.
- **Future Movement and Islamic Group:** As Sunni-based parties, they act as the representatives of Sunni Muslims in Lebanon's confessional politics (Abdel 2008).

In sum, the confessional framework for Lebanese politics was fabricated as a condition of independence during the French Mandate, allegedly to ensure the segregation of sectarian resentment from political reform. However, this system has paradoxically hindered the separation of religious identity from politics, and it has empowered political leaders to act as representatives of their respective religious communities. By doing so, this system perpetuates sectarian divisions and undermines the development of a more inclusive and national political debate.

Patronage Networks for State Welfare

The institutionalisation of sectarianism into the governmental system of Lebanon crippled the state's ability to provide for its citizens (Gardiner 2015, 2). The Lebanese

population hence resorts to patron-client relationships with political leaders to ensure the deliverance of their basic needs. Unlike common clientelist systems, which tend to keep government agencies outside their apparatus, patronage networks in Lebanon do not exist outside the sectarian governmental structure of the state (Gardiner 2015, 12–14).

During the French Mandate, clientelism was the primary source of political power (Gardiner 2015, 13). The feudal families became integrated into the system as politicians, while maintaining client-patron relationships with members of their respective sects (Gardiner 2015, 13). For instance, Sunni elites, who dominated the trade in coastal areas, arose from prominent merchant families. To participate in the political system, these elites became patrons to their local populations while delivering a pan-Arabist agenda in coastal conferences, which were held to push for a unification with Syria (Traboulsi 2007, 81).

As Lebanon gained independence, these existing patron families assimilated into the parliament and ministries, further entrenching the sectarian nature of the political system. In this context, the role of the client became crucial: to vote for and endorse their patron's agenda. This client-patron relationship, based on sectarian loyalty and the provision of services and benefits, became a fundamental feature of Lebanese politics, especially with the economic crackdown of the state. The inability to access basic services has forced the Lebanese communities to resort to patron-set charities and institutions. For instance, Najib Mikati's Azm'e Saade Foundation in Tripoli rivals state services by providing welfare for families in need (Knudsen 2020, 212). It fortifies the support of the impoverished Sunni families for Mikati, a Sunni politician who has served as the prime minister of Lebanon. Hence, with the state's incapacity to respond to citizen needs, patronage networks replaced state welfare and became private sponsors for the needs of clients with similar religious affiliations. The provision of healthcare and social services is the case in point. About 17% of medical centres and dispensaries are run by Christian charities and 11% by Muslim charities (Cammett 2011, 5). Sunni and Shia parties account for about 7% and 8% of all basic health care institutions, respectively (Cammett 2011, 5).

Hezbollah, though a militant group, exercises a substantial amount of soft power. According to Simon Haddad's (2013) research, 88% of respondents confirmed that they have received certain types of aid from the Shiite political party. The testimony of a hospital worker at Ragheb Harb Hospital in the predominantly Shia city of Nabatieh highlights the role of sectarian political parties in providing social services to their constituents:

> Ninety percent of the patients who go to the Hezbollah Ragheb Harb Hospital in Nabatieh are in the party. If you don't have papers from Hezbollah or connections to it, then you

> don't get help from Hezbollah and you go to the Nejdeh hospital instead. (as cited in Cammett 2011, 15)

The findings from the 2008 national survey in Lebanon further reinforce the significant role that sectarian political parties play in providing social services to their constituents. According to the survey, 63% of respondents who benefited from food and cash handouts reported that they received these benefits from a political organisation (Cammett 2011, 8).

This form of patronage is another indirect legacy of the French Mandate. As the French colonial administration relied on cooperation with sectarian elites, such practices continued after independence. This historical continuity reveals a pattern where contemporary political parties continue to build and sustain sectarian-based patronage networks, effectively leveraging religious identities for the sake of gaining political power. They lead to passing the control of political parties down to family members to ensure that patron-client relationships remain stable, such as the Jumblatt Druze family, which chairs the Progressive Socialist Party in Lebanon (Francis and Perry 2017).

The Fragmentation of Lebanese Identity

Various forms of nationalism emerged during the French Mandate. Whether Lebanese nationalism or pan-Arabism, nationalist ideology was distributed along sectarian lines (Salame 1986). The French Mandate's emphasis on sectarian identity promoted a fragmented sense of Lebanese nationality, where loyalty to religious affiliations often took precedence over allegiance to the nation. Moreover, the French identity would become interlinked with the Lebanese mainly in Christian communities (Fayad 2020, 40). These inclinations led to a distorted, disunited Lebanese identity.

Many people in today's Lebanon have gone through an identity crisis. Some Lebanese have sought to distance themselves from the Arab identity by emphasising their connection to the ancient Phoenician civilization (Tutkal 2022). This identification with a pre-Islamic, Mediterranean heritage has been used to assert a distinct Lebanese identity, separate from the broader Arab world.

Furthermore, major political parties have aligned themselves with specific religious communities to secure political power. As a result, politicians prioritise the interests of their respective sects over national consensus, which strains the possibility of constructive political reform. These endeavours are a major contributor to the existence of sectarian-based patronage networks, as well (Traboulsi 2007, viii). Sectarian political groups often exploit historical narratives, where each group presents itself as a defender of historical legacies, garnering support and trust from their respective communities.

Table 2 compares two major Lebanese political parties, Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces. They correspond to different religious affiliations and diametrically opposed ideologies.

Table 2. A Comparative Analysis of Two Adversarial Lebanese Parties

Party	Religious Affiliation	Ideology
Hezbollah	Shiite Islam	Anti-Western imperialism. Pro-Syrian. Main historical narrative: its successful fight against Israel (1980s, 2000, 2006, 2024) and the protection against imperialism (for example, the fight against US-backed Syrian extremist groups in Lebanon like Jabhat al-Nsura in 2017) (Nerguizian 2018).
Lebanese Forces (LF)	Christianity	Lebanese nationalism. Pro-Western. Main historical narrative: protection of Christians in Lebanon (for example, with the fight against Palestinian Muslims in the Lebanese Civil War) (Nerguizian 2018).

Source: Compiled by Author

However, it is important to note the following: while these parties contribute to the confessional system that fosters sectarianism, the legitimacy of their interests depends on the context of the situation at hand. For example, one might argue that Hezbollah threatens the sovereignty of the Lebanese state every time it engages in military warfare against Israel. This challenge can be seen with Hezbollah's armed intervention in the Palestinian-Israeli war following the events of October 7, 2023, when the Palestinian Resistance group Hamas launched an attack against Israeli residencies. Hezbollah's military presence could be viewed as a strategic necessity to deter Israeli military incursions during and after the Lebanese Civil War. This illustrates how the legitimacy of Lebanese political parties and their actions is often shaped by historical context and circumstantial needs.

The polarisation of Lebanese identities has grown so far as to introduce a fairly recent ideology into the current political setting: Lebanese federalism. The seemingly growing divide has led to the advocacy of a federal Lebanese state. This federal segregation would be based on religious sects, in which Shia Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Christians, and the official sects in general each receive a specifically designated area of land under federal law (Rabil 2023). To have such ideology in post-colonial times is a manifestation of the Mandate's legacies. The aftermath of institutional bias by the colonial state has made the century-old debate over Lebanese borders resurface. As Lebanese identities continue to diverge, questions about Greater Lebanon's borders and unity remain central to contemporary political discourse.

Although the confessional system implemented in Lebanon was to enable the peaceful coexistence of Lebanese sects, the fragmentation of Lebanese identity was an ultimate legacy of colonialism, which was projected onto a political dimension, harbouring sectarian tensions amongst the nation.

Alternative Perspectives: Regional and Geopolitical Factors

Some analysts argue that foreign influence for geopolitical purposes is the main reason for fuelled sectarian tensions between the Lebanese people (Center for Preventive Action 2024; Ghoble 2018; Noe 2021). They point to examples such as the Palestinian presence in Lebanon, the Syrian endeavours prior to the Syrian conflict, and/or regional Iranian hegemony.

For instance, the Syrian presence in Lebanon, which was most prominent in the 1970s till 2005, is often regarded as a significant contributor to the sectarianisation of Lebanese politics. After the Lebanese Civil War, the Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination formalised cooperation between the two countries, enabling Syria's influence on Lebanon's foreign policy and security fields. According to Bassel F. Salloukh (2005), the treaty legitimised Syrian overlordship in Lebanon, where Syrian intelligence officers influenced Lebanese institutions, appointments, and electoral outcomes, suppressing opposition and controlling elections.

Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, who had been in conflict with the Syrian regime, planned to challenge Syria's influence through the 2005 parliamentary elections. However, before these elections could take place, Hariri was assassinated in February 2005. His death, combined with mounting international pressure, ultimately forced Syria to withdraw its forces from Lebanon. It divided Lebanese political parties into two main factions: the March 8 Alliance (which consisted of pro-Syrian parties such as Hezbollah, the Amal Movement, and the Marada Movement) against the March 14 alliance (which consisted of anti-Syrian parties, such as the Democratic Left, Future Movement, the Lebanese Forces, and the Progressive Socialist Party). The Free Patriotic Movement was a part of the March 8 Alliance, yet their strategic relationship concluded in 2013 (Ajami 2019; Global Security 2021; Sensenig-Dabbous 2009).

These alliances are an important factor for the demonstration of the sectarianisation of Lebanese politics. The parties are not at all distributed based on Christian-Muslim sectarian connotations. While major Christian parties allied with the Sunni Future Movement, Shiite-Sunni sectarian tensions increased (Ajami 2019). Parties within these

alliances often portray themselves as defenders of their sect's interests, reinforcing the perception that political representation was, and still is, intrinsically tied to sectarian affiliation. More so, these parties seek to secure their constituencies' loyalty through confessional identity, which reinforces the idea that political power is determined by religious affiliation, contributing to the sectarianisation of Lebanon's electoral landscape. However, as the French Mandate institutionalised divisions on a governmental dimension, tensions would manifest on an institutional level, as electoral campaigns and the selection of a Lebanese president often revolved around sectarian interests.

The analysis of geopolitical influence in the Middle Eastern region is valuable for understanding how sectarianism continues to be a prominent aspect of Lebanese society post-colonialism. However, it is important to recognize that the institutionalisation of sectarian conflict in Lebanon can be largely attributed to the legacies of the French Mandate. The confessional power-sharing arrangements put in place during the Mandate period have had a profound impact on Lebanese governance, shaping the development of sectarian political parties and the distribution of power along religious lines. While regional powers have certainly exploited Lebanon's sectarian divisions for their own interests, the underlying cause of these divisions can be traced back to the colonial legacy. The French Mandate's emphasis on confessional identity and the codification of religious representation in the political system laid the groundwork for the sectarianisation of Lebanese politics. Had the interests of the Lebanese population not been so closely intertwined with religious representation, it is possible that the threat of foreign influence could have been overcome through a united national identity. However, the mandate's institutionalisation of sectarian divisions in the governmental structure of Lebanon has made it difficult for such a unified identity to emerge.

The legacy of the French Mandate can be seen in the continued prevalence of religious representation in parliament, the existence of religious-based patronage networks, and the fragmented nature of Lebanese identity. These factors have all contributed to the perpetuation of sectarian conflict and have made it difficult for Lebanon to develop a strong, cohesive national identity. While other factors, such as regional geopolitical tensions and internal power struggles, have certainly played a role in the sectarianisation of Lebanese politics, the French Mandate emerges as a central catalyst for this process. The colonial legacy of confessional power-sharing and the institutionalisation of sectarian divisions have had a profound and lasting impact on Lebanese society and politics.

Conclusion

The legacies of the French Mandate on the sectarianisation of post-colonial Lebanese politics remains a multi-faceted intricate issue. While acknowledging other contributing factors, the French Mandate emerges as a central catalyst that set in motion the institutionalisation of sectarianism in the modern confessional structure of Lebanon.

However, it is crucial to recognise that while the French colonial administration played a pivotal role, it is not the sole determinant of the discussed outcome. Sectarian roots of the Ottoman era, external influences, and internal power struggles have also shaped Lebanon's political landscape. The sectarian dynamics of Lebanese politics are flexible and ever-changing, as seen with the development of the March alliances. What seems to persist is the relationship between the Lebanese citizens and the politicians who represent them. In this context, the French Mandate serves as a primary but not as an exclusive cause of the sectarianisation of Lebanese politics. With that said, understanding the legacies of French colonialism on Lebanese sectarianism can help shed light on the extraneity of the subject, in turn deflecting the sectarian conflict from its internal aspects to promote national unity in the country. When a polarised nation continues to be destabilised amidst sectarian propaganda, it is crucial to acknowledge the roots of the issue at hand as it can foster solidarity between the Lebanese, who have been wavering pointed fingers toward each other.

Additionally, future research that addresses different post-colonial societies and the complex socio-economic state of their respective regions could use comparative methods to examine the roots of sectarian conflict and promote civil unity. For example, such research could focus on the Balkan society to better understand its development post the Ottoman era. Indeed, the post-colonial Balkan populations comprise a diverse plethora of religious groups, each being favoured by a certain colonial power. The Ottoman's policies pushed for Islamic conversion, a strategy that was successful in both Albania and Bosnia. Russia and Austria, however, favoured Serbia and Croatia respectively in terms of Christian bias. These prejudices gave rise to sectarianism and nation-states based on, for the most part, ethno-religious identities, and it polarised the region. The similarity of this case with that of Lebanon becomes especially prevalent when looking at the influence colonial powers have in shaping sectarian dynamics—powers that significantly impact the course of political dialogue and order.

This paper examined the institutionalisation of sectarianism during the French Mandate through religious biases by the colonial administration and the National Pact of 1943. Such affairs were then linked to post-colonial Lebanese politics through the analysis

of religious quotas in the parliamentary system, patronage networks for state welfare, and the fragmentation of Lebanese identity. In essence, the French mandate has a far-reaching legacy in moulding the past, present, and the future of the Lebanese political scene. Essentially, the Mandate shaped the Lebanese political landscape, and it played a pivotal role in the founding of systemic sectarianism, inner sectarian conflicts, and the intricate confessional framework that still persists in Lebanon today.

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Nation-States and International Law: Israel's War on Gaza and the Illusion of Universal Human Rights

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Abstract

This article explores the frictions between national sovereignty and the universalization of human rights, highlighting the deep colonial roots and persistent coloniality within the nation-state system and international law. It critiques the liberal framework of nation-states that marginalize "non-nationals" while also perpetuating colonial relations and racial hierarchies through unequal integration into the nation-state system. The ongoing assault on Gaza starkly illustrates the violence inherent within the nation-state and points to the limitations of the current human rights framework. Advocating for a decolonial approach, the article argues that the violence in Palestine underscores the need to rethink and debate international law and human rights, expanding on decolonial scholarship to liberate these frameworks from their colonial, modern, and capitalist contexts.

Keywords: Palestinian Liberation; Israel; Gaza; Nationalism; International Law; Human Rights; Decolonization; Nation-states Regime; Postcolonial Cosmopolitanism

Introduction

The pronouncement by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on January 27, 2024, mandating Israel to halt all genocidal actions brings both hope for universal justice[1] but also bitterness that the reality endured by Palestinians trapped in Gaza—subjected to continuous military assault and starvation—remains unchanged (Akram and Quigley 2024). While the ICJ lacks enforcement authority, the pressing question looms: Will the international community honor the ICJ's ruling and take measures such as sanctions or boycotts against Israel, thereby bolstering the credibility and efficacy of international law?

[1] The ICJ did not uphold South Africa's claim of definitional genocide but instead emphasized humanitarian aid, refraining from ordering an immediate ceasefire.

In the face of overwhelming proof submitted by South Africa, along with consistent warnings from NGOs and international organizations such as Doctors without Borders, Human Rights Watch, the United Nations itself, the response from the US, the UK, Germany, Canada, and France, has been disappointingly passive. Concurrently, the US and Germany persist in providing military support to Israel and disseminating unverified claims without scrutiny. The US has maintained a hostile stance towards international judicial bodies, evident in its disdain for the International Criminal Court (ICC)[2] since the George W. Bush administration. Israel's response to the ICJ ruling is perhaps the most brazen and explicit undermining of international law. Israeli Defense Minister, Yoav Gallant, dismissed the decision with a snub phrase "Hague Schmague," while Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly rejected the legitimacy of the ICJ's ongoing hearing.

This case, however, stands most starkly when compared to the Western[3] countries' reaction to Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In October 2022, the president of the EU Commission rightfully decried the actions of the Russian military as war crimes, while the Joe Biden administration has ordered the US to share evidence of Russian war crimes to the ICC. By comparison, in the initial stages of Israel's offensive in Gaza, the Israeli defense minister imposed a comprehensive siege, depriving the population of essential resources such as electricity, water, food, and fuel, under the pretext of combating "human animals" (International Court of Justice 2023). Despite these severe conditions and explicit endorsement of war crimes, Western leaders exhibited a striking lack of concern for Palestinian civilians. Their unequivocal support for Israel's "right to self-defense,"[4] without acknowledgment of the Palestinian plight for securing their right to self-determination as an occupied indigenous people under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (UN General Assembly 2007), reflects a hypocrisy in the application of international law and makes a mockery of the concept itself. Despite a persistent focus on Israel's right to self-defense in Western media, the attack on southern

[2] The US and Israel are not signatories to the Rome Statute, which established the ICC, and therefore do not recognize its authority. Nevertheless, both Republican and Democratic administrations have backed the court in certain instances. The Biden administration in particular has acknowledged the court's crucial role in addressing offenses in Ukraine and Sudan (Human Rights Watch 2024).

[3]We acknowledge the imprecision of terms like "the West" and "Western" but use them for analytical clarity. By "Western" attributes, we refer not to specific territorial sovereignties but to "the zone of being" (Fanon 2004) or the colonial powers that have historically established racial hierarchies and continue to exert dominance through neocolonial dependencies (Achiume 2019).

[4] Antony Anghie (2005) argues that the language and legalization of "self-defense" is in fact a new instrument of imperialism. It is "the most problematic and delicate doctrine of international law, the one doctrine that is inherently connected with unilateral action. It is precisely through the doctrine of self-defense that the entire structure of the 'civilizing mission' is being recreated" (302).

Israel on October 7, 2023, resulting in civilian casualties, is not an isolated event but a result of 75 years of Israeli occupation and settler colonialism.

The Western media's portrayal of the indiscriminate bombings in Gaza as justifiable actions reflects a deliberate myopia rooted in structural racism, which undervalues Palestinian lives compared to Israeli ones. Furthermore, the frequent portrayal of the Israeli-Palestinian "conflict" as a religious struggle, pitting Judaism against Islam, or as a confrontation between European-looking, democratic Israel and Islamic fundamentalism, reflects a narrative deeply rooted in Orientalist and colonialist perspectives. As Judith Butler (2016) writes, conflict often divides people into those whose lives are deemed "grievable" and those who are not. Such dehumanization becomes a justification for armed conflict, as those with different values or traditions are rendered less-than-human, making their lives expendable.

Contrary to this prevailing narrative, we assert that the so-called "conflict" is a national liberation movement confronting a settler-colonial regime which can be regarded as a continuation of anti-colonial struggles and decolonial worldmaking rooted in principles of non-domination (Getachew 2019). This perspective challenges the overly simplistic and/or religious interpretation and instead delves into the complex dynamics involving nationalism, colonial history, and the ramifications of the global system of nation-states. Consequently, the article prompts a rigorous analysis of the existing world order, emphasizing that the ongoing friction between the nation-state framework and universal human rights, as seen in the Palestinian struggle, stems from a limited liberal perspective on decolonization. This perspective confines decolonization to a mere transition from empire to nation-state, aligning with European standards and perpetuating unequal integration. We argue from a decolonial perspective that the violence in Palestine underscores the need to rethink and debate international law and human rights, expanding on decolonial scholarship to liberate these frameworks from their colonial, modern, and capitalist contexts.

The Nation-state and Challenges for Stateless Peoples and Unrecognized Nations

The Rise of Nationalism and the Development of Nation-states

Benedict Anderson (2016, 7) suggests that the focal point of modern nation-states is the creation of a shared cultural identity, whereas nationalism is used as a tool to bring people together as an "imagined community" united by common beliefs, values, and traditions. Ernest Gellner (2006, 35) further argues that nationalism is rooted in the belief that the nation and the state should be interconnected, suggesting that nationalism is "the organization of

human groups into large, centrally educated, culturally homogeneous units." In other words, the unit, which is the nation-state, shall have a common culture, language, and history. To create the perception of the nation-state as timeless and essentialist, nationalists often engage in the selective appropriation of historical events to cultivate the idea that individuals of a specific group, faith, or ideology inherently belong to that nation-state (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991). Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (2014) recognized the nation-state as a social construct intricately linked to the global capitalist system, hinging upon "a universal interdependence of nations." Similarly, Anderson (2016) writes that capitalism and the nation-state developed simultaneously. Print capitalism made it possible for people to think of themselves in profoundly new ways and produced new ideas of simultaneity.

The genesis of modern nation-states, as we perceive them today, can be traced back to the French Revolution and the subsequent decline of Western empires. Hannah Arendt (2017) observed a paradox inherent in the French Revolution: the emancipated peasant classes aimed to overthrow the feudal system and fought for equal social and economic rights, but it was the capitalist middle class and bourgeoisie that ultimately shaped the course of the Revolution. The bourgeoisie envisioned the nation as a tool to consolidate political power and create a stable environment for economic capitalist expansion.

As we will argue later in this article, the nation-state did not emerge as a challenging social structure to empire, nor was it a political formation born out of proletariat struggles against capitalist exploitation. Politically, the nation-state was an extension of the previous imperial structures and logic, as well as a stable, cohesive economic structure facilitating the circulation and expansion of capital. The nation, or *la République*, according to the French had a moral responsibility to "spread the benefits of the French civilization," and its colonies were "providers of possessions for the sake of the nation" and a "*force noire*" protecting the inhabitants of France (Arendt 2017, 167).

The newly formed European nation-states subsequently expanded their long-reaching arms into the rest of the world. They pillaged and dominated so-called "empty lands" and their "backward" inhabitants and used the plundered wealth to build strong states with powerful bureaucracies and democratic politics in Europe. The Berlin Conference of 1884-85 is a notorious example of pillaging under the guise of international law and a "civilizing mission," where England, France, and Germany reconciled their European tensions by dividing the Congo Basin and making territorial claims in Africa (Anghie 2005).

It is in the context of 18th- and 19th-century European developments of constructing homogeneous national identities without clear sovereign limits (Arendt 2017;

Anderson 2016) that Zionism emerged as a political doctrine aiming to secularize Judaism and transform it from a religious into a national identity (Erakat 2019). This movement coincided with the development of Palestinian national sentiments under the influence of a changing Ottoman Empire. In the 19th century, the surge of nationalist ideas reached the Southern Levant and the land of Palestine. For over four centuries, Palestine was part of the vast Ottoman Empire and was characterized by a predominantly rural landscape with not only a thriving agricultural industry but also vibrant urban centers, encompassing Jews, Christians, and Muslims (Pappe 2017; Khalidi 2020). Initially, Palestinians exhibited loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, valuing it as the protector of significant religious sites and regional heritage. However, with the dissipation of secular and liberal Western Enlightenment ideas, particularly the ideology of nationalism, the Ottoman Empire's seeming cosmopolitanism was challenged, exposing and exacerbating existing religious inequalities and transforming them into national conflicts[5] (Levene 1998).

European nation-states, built on racial hierarchies and colonial exploitation, perceived spreading the nation-state model globally as a moral duty. However, this system was not a new approach to creating egalitarian societies but rather an extension of the imperial system, using bureaucratic means to further imperial ambitions. The perpetuation of European exceptionalism, as Rashid Khalidi (2020) argues, led to the belief that Middle Eastern[6] societies lagged Western countries as they could not match the European ideal of the nation-state, a continued colonial and oriental form of thinking. Western powers and Zionists portrayed the region as lacking a common national identity, dismissing it as merely religious groups which became even more evident under the British Mandate established in the Southern Levant in 1922. In the context of Palestine, the rise of nationalist ideologies and Enlightenment-era racialized ideas, particularly Zionism, led to significant shifts in identity and the development of new nationalist lexicons (Shohat 2017). Khalidi (2020) argues that Palestinian national identity has evolved through regional and global changes and,

[5] The Ottoman Empire managed multiethnicity by favoring Muslims, while Christians and Jews were tolerated and guaranteed protection through the *millet* system and the imposition of the *jizya* tax. The 1869 Nationality Law, rather than ensuring equality, exposed and exacerbated inequalities between the *umma* (Muslim community) and the *millets* (other religious communities). Toward the end of the Ottoman period, and continuing into the era of its successor state, Turkey, many demographic reforms aimed at Turkification, particularly in Anatolia, led to displacement, deportations, and massacres amounting to genocide. For more on Ottoman management of ethnic and linguistic diversity, see Benjamin Braude (2014). For more on the impacts of Ottoman policies of demographic transformation, see Taner Akçam (2012) and Mark Levene (1998).

[6] Following Juan M. Liotta and Amadeo Szpiga (2022, 164), we point out that the "Middle East" is an Anglo-centric term referring to the westernmost region of Asia, including the peoples of the Maghreb, Bilad al-Sham, and Mashriq.

while influenced by Zionism, cannot be reduced to simply its opposition. Instead, it represents a distinct and complex response to broader historical forces.

Stateless people and the creation of "the other"

Sivamohan Valluvan (2019, 35) notes that "the identification of significant others is necessary for a nation to meaningfully acquire a sense of selfhood." Arendt (2017), drawing from her experience as a stateless Jewish person, emphasized that national emancipation often entails the continuous identification and exclusion of "the other"[7]—a process she personally experienced when she was stripped of her German citizenship in Nazi-controlled Germany. Her reflections on the nation and national destiny, influenced by her historical context and the need to address rampant European anti-Semitism, highlight how the Nazi regime justified the exclusion of "undesirable" groups under the guise of national destiny and security (Arendt 2017, 351). European states similarly used the pretext of "national security" to collaborate with the Gestapo against Jews, Romani people, Slavs, and refugees from Russia, Armenia, Hungary, Germany, and Spain, thereby perpetuating a narrative of exclusion (Arendt 1994; 2017).

The Soviet regime initially viewed the national question as crucial for achieving internationalism and global communism (Brubaker 1996; Bonnell 1996; Plokhy 2017). However, under Joseph Stalin, the Soviet Union perpetuated the anti-Semitic legacy of the Russian Empire, with Stalin arguing that Ashkenazi Jews did not qualify as a "nationality" due to their lack of a distinct land and language[8]. The early Zionists took Stalin's position seriously when developing their vision for the Jewish nation-state and aimed to create "an ancient collective imagery" that would forge new immigrants into one unified people (Sand

[7]Arendt's deliberations on nationalism and the inherent violence of the nation-state are deeply influenced by her experience as a European Jew who was othered and stripped of her European citizenship. Her writings, however, did not extend to the Palestinian context, which she treated as an exceptional case. Despite her criticisms of the concept of a "Jewish state", Arendt advocated for a Jewish homeland in Palestine to assert Jewish agency, identity, and political consciousness, as reflected in her *Jewish Writings* (Arendt 2009). While her work offers valuable insights into the nation-state's paradoxes, it also reveals limitations and inherent contradictions, particularly her Eurocentric and myopic perspective on Palestine. See Raz-Krakotzkin (2011), Jacobson (2013), and Robaszkiewicz and Weinman (2023) for more critical analyses of Arendt's work.

[8] Stalin expanded the USSR into a federation of "ethnicities", each with assigned territories based on the perceived maturity of their national consciousness. Jewish people, like elsewhere in Europe, found themselves a minority tied by religion and cultural customs, but with no territory that could fulfill the criteria of a homeland. The Soviet regime sought to resolve the issue of a Jewish Socialist Republic by establishing the Jewish Autonomous Region of Birobidzhan, near the Russia-China border, with Yiddish as its primary language. However, this initiative failed to attract significant Jewish settlement (Pinkus 1988). Notably, before the First World War, the Bundist movement also aimed to combat European hostility towards Jews. Unlike Zionists, Bundists advocated for socialism, believed Jews could be non-religious, and sought cultural autonomy within other states. After the Second World War, the movement was suppressed, with many members imprisoned or killed (Pappe 2017). Returning Jews faced discrimination, as they found their homes and jobs occupied by hostile inhabitants and were denied access to higher education, making them second-class citizens once again (Gitelman 2012).

2020). To achieve this, secular Ashkenazi Jews in Europe leveraged Judaism in creating a Jewish *national* identity interlinked with the state of Israel. As Zvi Gitelman (2012) claims, Zionists promoted the idea that Jewish people, like other nations, should have a state of their own, ideally in the biblical land of Palestine. David Ben Gurion utilized the Bible "as the proof of its claim to the land of Israel" (Sand 2020, 109), which ultimately strengthened the narrative of Jewish isolationism in European society. To further legitimize the imagined national identity of Israeli people and the use of the Old Testament as a secular national text, the Jewish bourgeois leadership revived the Hebrew language, a language that had not been spoken on a daily basis for centuries and urged Israelis to adopt ancient biblical Hebrew names (Sand 2020).

To conclude, this section has detailed how the contemporary nation-state system, originally rooted in European colonial ambitions and Enlightenment ideas, has transformed into an instrument of nationalization, structured around division, categorization, and territorial boundaries. Its inherent violence is bound to produce new marginalized groups such as minorities, refugees, migrants, and stateless, who live in constant precarity. Through their very movement across imaginary borders, they enter the frame of lawlessness as strangers or aliens, "non-nationals" subjected to state violence through assimilation, eradication of difference and distinct identities, segregation through exile, or even physical elimination (Bauman 1995). The institution of apartheid is the starkest measure of differentiating between "nationals" and "others" (Pappe 2017), categorizing identities through legal means and determining their access to political rights, employment and even one's right to live.

The current situation in Gaza, driven by the rhetoric of the far-right Netanyahu government, highlights the contradictions in Israel's founding myth as a "people without a land" building a democracy, juxtaposed with the realities of settler colonialism and the Nakba. This dynamic suggests that Israel's inherent structure as a settler state, and ethno-national narrative that its survival depends on the expulsion or annihilation of Palestinians, will perpetuate brutal containment and violence following what Patrick Wolfe (2006) referred to as "the logic of the elimination of the native." This narrative, often overlooked if not tacitly supported by many Western governments, exposes the inherent violence at the core of nation-state formation. It also highlights the inadequacy of the international law system in protecting vulnerable populations and holding aggressors accountable. International law has been co-opted as a tool by global superpowers to serve their interests, applied selectively to condemn certain actions, such as Russia's war crimes in Ukraine, while conveniently

disregarding others, like Israel's actions in Gaza. This leaves Palestinians in a precarious position, underscoring the need to examine the historical roots of international law within the context of the nation-state system and its Eurocentric foundations.

The Global System of Nation-states: Colonial Legacies and the International Legal System

International law, though not entirely absent before the World Wars, was a concept confined by the sovereignty principle[9] and primarily applicable to interactions among European superpowers. At its core, international law bears the indelible marks of colonial thinking and Eurocentrism, as it was conceived and wielded by colonial powers to regulate trade, secure property rights of European colonizers, dispossess and maintain dominion over indigenous peoples, territories, and resources. Even after the collapse of the last empires and the emergence of new nation-states, international law continues to govern a world order premised on neocolonial imperialism, even if formal imperialism has been outlawed. It continues to advantage the economic and political interests of the Global North, dispossess and exploit people in the Global South, regulate refugee flows, and de-regulate capital flows. In other words, the political organization of the world might have changed, but the logic of exploitation hasn't. Thus, even after political decolonization, international law operates within a geopolitical order of capitalist, racist, and patriarchal power relations that consolidate European coloniality (Liotta and Szpiga 2022).

The international legal system and its colonial legacies

International law is part of the complex of the dominant bourgeois ideology of European "modernity" (Mayblin and Turner 2021), interdependent to slavery and colonialism which allowed European empires to concentrate wealth and through that, fund the Industrial Revolution and global trade expansion (Rodney 2018). Tendayi Achiume (2019) writes that European colonizers employed ambiguous conceptualizations of property and sovereignty to consolidate their rule, dispossess native peoples, and justify their civilizing missions overseas. Since the colonized peoples lacked (or were denied) both, they were

[9] Anghie (2005) explains that the sovereignty doctrine emerged out of the colonial encounter to create a legal system that would account for the relations between European and non-European worlds in the colonial confrontation. The sovereignty doctrine is understood as "the complex of rules deciding what entities are sovereign, and the powers and limits of sovereignty"(Anghie 2005, 16) It confines international law by establishing which entities are recognized as sovereign and delineating the scope and limitations of their sovereignty.

discarded as uncivilized and unfit to be part of and shape the international legal framework. As Edward Said (2003, 36) put it:

> There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated, which means having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2015) refers to these colonial origins of international law as characterized by an abyssal line that divides Europeanness and the respect for the rule of law from the colonial territories characterized by lawlessness and violence. Immanuel Kant's thinking is reflected in this dichotomy and has been crucial to the very foundations of international law (Anghie 2005). Kant posited that the ownership of property and possessions signified progress in societal development. He perceived objects labeled as "unowned" as a tumultuous "state of nature" and a threat to the establishment of stable states. Thus, the process of stabilizing property laws and cultivating a framework of "domestic civilization" became an essential precursor to the formulation of civil laws (Gani 2017). This domestic transformation, premised on the universality of private and public law principles and the belief that property appropriation equated progress, ultimately paved the way for the creation of international laws governing relations between states.

The work of decolonial, critical scholars such as Aníbal Quijano and Michael Ennis (2000), Walter D. Mignolo (2017), and Walter Rodney (2022) has been essential in exposing the historical context within which international law was formulated to justify colonial rule and legitimize European property rights in the colonies. Mignolo (2017), for instance, has distinguished between "colonization" as a historical series of events and "coloniality" which has to do with epistemologies, ways of thinking, and a formal system of political domination. Coloniality, he asserts produced colonialism. And thus, the abolition of colonialism did not abolish coloniality, which continues to govern the relationship between states and international law to this day. From a decolonial Marxist perspective, colonialism and imperialism are derivatives of dominant capitalist class interests. According to Rodney (2022), these "economic command centers" are exploiting the Global South to accumulate wealth while establishing international institutions and treaties that would maintain the status quo through political domination.

The perpetuation of coloniality within international law and the establishment of a human rights regime is most vivid in the political reorganization of the world after the First World War, a topic which we turn to next.

From minority rights to human rights

With the collapse of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, the victors of the First World War established the League of Nations to maintain global peace and cooperation. Importantly, it established the principle of self-determination concerning the states that emerged in the Middle East and Eastern and Central Europe, and its appendix, the Minorities Treaties, aimed to protect the vast populations that found themselves as minorities in the newly established states.

Many scholars (for example, Erakat 2019, Moses, Duranti, and Burke 2020, Pappe 2017) have pointed out that the League of Nations never intended to establish a new world order where all the newly formed states were equals alongside the descendants of former great empires but rather saw them as autonomous territories that had to be administered and controlled by the "great nations" to mimic the experience of European nation-states. The Mandate system, for instance, established by the British and French, had the task of ensuring that the Western model of law and social organization was followed in the new territories. It did so through the identification of a hierarchy of Mandate classes—A, B, and C—to evaluate the proximity of each society to the European social, economic, and political ideals that would then be shepherded through "administrative advice and assistance... until such time as they are able to stand alone and join the international system" (Erakat 2019, 35). In essence, the League of Nations and its Mandate system aimed to continue colonial penetration and control. As such, Lord Balfour, when responding to Japanese proposals for a racial equality clause at the 1919 Versailles Conference, stated that it was "true that all men of a particular nation are created equal, but not that a man in Central Africa was created equal to a European" (Ibhawoh 2020, 45).

From the beginning, the British Mandate saw Palestine as an exception due to its significance to the three monotheistic religions, but most importantly because of the Zionist imperative of establishing a Jewish homeland. The settler colonial project of Israel is thus interlinked with the historical context of the inter-war years and of the establishment of the state system guided by the League of Nations, which saw homogenous nation-states as prerequisites for global peace and according to which Jewish people were a "problem" in all European states.

In theory, international law and the Minority Treaties should have served as safeguards to address this inherent flaw within the state system. As a first international mechanism recognizing minorities and their vulnerabilities, these treaties were imposed on the newly formed nation-states in Eastern Europe and the Middle East as two major empires,

the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman, collapsed. The victors of the First World War did not ratify the Minority Treaties themselves. Interestingly, the Minorities Treaties' most significant impact was to institutionalize and consolidate what had been practiced and implied within the nation-state system: it recognized that minorities not only exist within nation-states but that also they need an additional body, outside of the nation-state to guarantee their rights and protection (Arendt 2017).

Dirk A. Moses, Marco Duranti, and Roland Burke (2020) argue that in the inter-war period, there was no contradiction between human rights and the expulsion of minorities because rights were guaranteed by states and only as a last resort by organizations like the United Nations:

> The first priority was to establish the modern, democratic, and homogeneous nation-state dedicated to human rights. The expelled minorities' temporary suffering was for the greater good and, besides, they were collectively guilty in this case. (Moses, Duranti and Burke 2020, 167)

Furthermore, homogeneity of populations was seen as a prerequisite for "development" and "reform", and thus the resettlement of minorities was a necessary and acceptable price to pay to achieve long-term stability and ensure that new settlers would contribute to maintaining the bourgeois system of production. The most notorious example of the time was the population exchange between Greeks and Turks, with over a million Greek Orthodox driven out of Western Turkey and around 350,000 Muslims forced to leave Greece for Turkey (Mazower 1997). What is essential in these events, argue Moses, Duranti, and Burke (2020), is the discourse accompanying them, namely that these transfers were packaged in a narrative about human rights, modernity, and the role of settler projects in development. The Greek refugees brought to Macedonia, for instance, were believed to have increased the productivity of the land, and due to the homogeneity achieved through transfers, there was less conflict. Contrary to modern perceptions, human rights language at the time justified practices like population transfers and partition and regarded them as "humane" solutions as opposed to nationality conflicts (Halper 2021). If people would move to their respective homogenous groups, there would be no more warfare and conflict (Moses, Duranti, and Burke 2020). Such discourses, which marked the transition from minority rights to human rights, served as inspiration and justification for violence in the postwar world. Population transfers thus became humanitarian ideals and solutions as opposed to genocide.

This logic was used extensively to justify the movement of Palestinians and the institution of Israel. René Cassin, the French lawyer instrumental in the formulation of the

UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), has also led the French Alliance *Israélite Universelle* campaign for the UN's partition of Palestine in 1947 and argued for the case of the Jewish settlers:

> 'The democratic hope in the Near East can only progress under the influence of the Jewish ambition in Palestine,' he wrote. The establishment of Israel, Cassin was suggesting, would at once alleviate the Jewish refugee crisis in Europe and inaugurate a human rights order in a part of the world run by what he called the 'thieving and bloody indigenous masters' of Jewish minorities in the Middle East, namely the Arabs whom he saw as oppressors of Jewish minorities in North Africa. (Moses, Duranti, and Burke 2020, 169)

The genesis of the UN itself traces back to the aftermath of the Second World War, emerging as a response to the League of Nations' inadequacies in preserving global peace. Further, the UDHR, adopted in 1948, under the auspices of the newly formed UN, was created as a direct response to the "barbarous acts" that had "outraged the conscience of mankind" during the tumultuous Second World War (D'Souza 2018). The colonized populations viewed the adoption of the UDHR with skepticism and suspicion, perceiving it as a response to white suffering during the Second World War while colonial atrocities continued to be disregarded.

It is particularly the deeply rooted colonial logic and instruments at the core of the human rights system and international law that have eroded trust in international supranational regulating bodies and solidified the belief that only national self-determination can solve the issues of oppression, inequality, statelessness, and injustice. This brings us to our next argument: in our current world order, shaped by the events of the past century, nation-states have emerged as institutions that perpetuate global inequalities and "postcolonial racisms" (Sharma 2022) under the guise of guaranteeing human rights. Moreover, human rights are still advocated from a liberal perspective, confined within the frameworks of state and self-governance, making them realizable only as the rights of citizens.

Revisiting human rights: Decolonial perspectives on sovereignty and justice

The concept of human rights is fraught with ambiguity, as it is deeply intertwined with the political structures of nation-states. While theoretically universal, human rights are applied and enforced in ways heavily influenced by the coloniality of power, where the oppressive structures of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy continue to draw the color line (De Genova 2017) and maintain the "colonial matrix of power" (Mignolo 2017). Citizenship, whether seen as a nation-state institution organizing disparities in wealth and power or as a means of making political claims, normalizes what Nandita Sharma (2022) calls

"postcolonial racisms". By grouping people under citizenship, it brings them under the control of nation-states, creating a form of global apartheid where powerful entities like the US can act with impunity while stateless and occupied peoples lack access to justice. Considering the ongoing genocide of Palestinians and the apparent incapability of international law and human rights discourses to transcend the coloniality of power, we argue for revisiting decolonial accounts of self-determination and human rights to emancipate them from their colonial, modern, and capitalist contexts.

Moses, Duranti, and Burke (2020) contend that national sovereignty poses a significant obstacle to the universalization of human rights, particularly evident in the insistence on non-interference in domestic affairs, which states frequently employ to shield themselves from international scrutiny and intervention. Bonny Ibhawoh (2020) points out that in the instance of Tunisia's independence proposed by Arab and Asian states based on the principle of self-determination, the UN rejected it as an interference in France's affairs. Similarly, it was through the defense of sovereignty, that South Africa could maintain its apartheid regime and resist external pressure for so long. Ibhawoh (2020) writes:

> The South African statesman Jan Smuts, who introduced the concept of 'human rights' into the UN Charter, remained a firm believer in white supremacy and could not countenance extending the human rights principles he so vigorously championed at the UN to the nonwhite populations of his own country. Delegates of the white minority South African government at the UN strongly opposed discussions about racial discrimination in their country, seeing it an undue interference in their internal affairs and a violation of sovereignty. (Ibhawoh 2020, 44)

The idea of national sovereignty remains a powerful rationale for contemporary warfare, perpetuating the marginalization and even annihilation of those labeled as "the other," including refugees or migrants, and contributing to ongoing human rights violations (for example, Bauman 1995; De Genova 2017; Sharma 2022). As Arendt (2017) argued, political sovereignty is most absolute in dealing with emigration, naturalization, expulsion, and nationality. Human rights thus need to be understood in their historical context and their transformation throughout different historical events. From the French Revolution's Declaration of the Rights of Man, human rights have been formulated ambiguously as they speak of the rights of "man" and of the rights of the "citizen." In the former context, they imply a certain universality and belongingness based on one's humanity. The second meaning, on the other hand, is much more restrictive, limiting rights to people belonging to a state. As Arendt (2017) writes, human rights in theory concern an "abstract" human being existing nowhere, whilst in practice one's birth, identity, and existence in a specific social

order is paramount in determining how and when these rights are applied and who is the authority enforcing them. These tensions have marked the ambiguity and confusion of human rights ever since, particularly given the absence of any global entity that could govern these rights on a supranational level (Santos 2015, Erakat 2019). The issue of human rights became tightly linked with statehood, as demonstrated during the Holocaust when the Nazi regime revoked the legal status and rights of Jewish people, stripping them of citizenship before challenging their right to live. As Arendt (2017, 387) noted, "a condition of complete rightlessness was created before the right to live was challenged."

In addressing the tragic events of the Second World War, dominant political narratives have neglected the decolonial viewpoint which uncovers the deep-rooted violence embedded in nation-states and highlights the striking similarities to the colonial atrocities inflicted upon colonized peoples throughout history. Instead, the neo-imperial global order perpetuates colonial relations and racial hierarchies through unequal integration into the nation-state system (Getachew 2019). With the creation and support of Israel, European powers could absolve themselves of guilt for the Second World War (Pappe 2017), while simultaneously consolidating a neocolonial world order where the West shapes other cultures and regions but remains untouched by them (El-Tayeb 2011). The recognition of "the Jewish state" from the Mandate period extended European imperial domination and continued the "civilizing mission" in the region, with the Zionist project initially serving Britain's foreign objectives (Pappe 2017, Halper 2021) and later advancing US geopolitical interests, as Israel evolved into a "subimperial power deploying anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism to bolster both national and geopolitical agendas" (Kumar 2022, 27). Ihab Shalbak (2023, 498) further argues that Israel presented itself as the restorer of human rights "through the establishment of national rights" for Jewish people. This narrative justified settlers' role in "civilizing" the Holy Land, bringing law and order to the region, while Palestinians through their very existence embodied a violation of the law and a transgression on settler sovereignty. In this context, any anticolonial struggle by the Palestinians is delegitimized as an act of "terrorism" (Anghie 2005).

The establishment of Israel as a Jewish state did not resolve the issue of minorities or statelessness either. Instead, it gave rise to a new category of refugees and stateless individuals—the Palestinians. This reality is poignantly illustrated in Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*, where three Palestinian men, deemed stateless and stripped of basic human rights, seek a better life in Kuwait. Forced to hide in a water tank of a smuggler's truck at border posts, their journey ends in tragedy when they suffocate in the tank due to a delay at the

Kuwaiti border. Upon discovering their lifeless bodies, the smuggler discards them in a nearby garbage dump after stripping the men of their valuables. The story ends with the haunting question: "Why didn't you bang the sides of the tank?" (Kanafani 1998, 74). Bashir Abu-Manneh (2016) writes that this tragic ending captures the plight of Palestinians, left without any hope of returning to their homes as they are pushed out of the liberal nation-state system. As Michael Ignatieff (2011, 15) emphasizes, "nationalism solves the human rights problems of the victorious national groups while producing new victim groups, whose human rights situation is made worse".

Lynn Hunt (2007) argues that it took two devastating World Wars to shatter the notion that nation-states alone would be able to safeguard the rights of their national people. However, recent examples show ongoing exclusionary practices that limit the scope of rights to those recognized as citizens: the far-right Israeli government has proposed stripping Israeli citizenship from those "supporting terrorism," defined as showing solidarity with the Palestinian cause (The Times of Israel 2023). Similarly, the German government has debated whether German citizenship should be contingent upon recognizing the state of Israel (Thurau 2023). These positions shed light on the settler colonial context where Israel is a member of the international community that can bear and enforce law, while Palestinians are disqualified from claiming these rights. As Shalbak (2023) stresses, despite Palestinians' efforts to appeal to the discourse and framework of human rights and international law to resist settler colonial violence, they face a geopolitical reality that either excludes them from the international community or includes them only as objects of governance.

We argue that this ongoing friction between the nation-state framework and the principle of universal human rights, evident in the ongoing genocide of Palestinians, stems from a liberal account of decolonization that limits it to a political transition from empire to nation-state. This perspective frames the global order's expansion around nation-states, extending from the European core to former colonies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. As a result, political decolonization is viewed merely as an extension of European standards of international law and political organization. Post-colonial nation-states, shaped and constructed through international orders and treaties, experience unequal integration in the international system (Getachew 2019).

In contrast, thinkers like Frantz Fanon (2004) argue that the antidote to colonialism lies in developing national consciousness and sovereignty. Fanon (2004, 199) posits that:

> National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension... It is at the heart of national consciousness that international

> consciousness lives and grows. And this two-fold emerging is ultimately the source of all culture.

He views the nation not as oppressive or nationalist but as a space for class struggle that promotes secular democratic values, ensuring equal rights for all based on their humanity.

Similarly, decolonial thinkers, such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Kwame Nkrumah sought to reinvent self-determination beyond its association with the nation-state, advocating for juridical, political, and economic institutions that ensure non-domination. They argued that true decolonization necessitates not only autonomy from alien rule but also a restructuring of international law, economic relations, and political inequities to secure conditions of non-domination (Getachew 2019; Prashad 2016). Writing from a decolonial Marxist perspective, Rodney (2022) highlights that political decolonization has not significantly altered the material and cultural conditions of life, nor the social and political structures sustaining global capitalism. In the case of Palestine, Rodney's (2022) concept of "economic command centers" is particularly evident in the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA), where Palestinian sovereignty was compromised to align with the prevailing system of production. The PA's authority was limited by conditions imposed by Israel and its allies, restricting its jurisdiction over the Occupied West Bank and Gaza (Pace and Sen, 2019), thus creating a condition of perpetual dependence and interference from neo-colonial structures. Liotta and Szpiga (2022) further argue that while human rights, as discourse and institutional networks, are useful in resisting various forms of violence, they cannot dismantle the oppressive structures of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. The inclusion and integration of historically marginalized groups into the framework of law and rights, while necessary, does not end structural oppression.

We thus argue from a decolonial position that, as the violence in Palestine shows, international law and rights framework need to be (re)examined and debated to include and expand on decolonial scholarship and emancipate human rights from their colonial, modern, and capitalist contexts. The Palestinian pursuit of self-determination responds to their political and juridical erasure since the British Mandate (Shalbak 2023; Erakat 2019). For Palestinians, self-determination is essential in overcoming their status as humanitarian subjects under international law and affirming their existence as a historical and political entity. Edward Said articulated this anticolonial pursuit of self-determination, stating "we [Palestinians] are in a unique position of being a people whose enemies say that we don't exist. So for us the concept of 'rights' means the right to exist as a people, as a collective

whole body, rather than as a collection of refugees, stateless people, citizens of other countries" (Said 1993, as cited in Shalbak 2023, 508).

Conclusion

Throughout this article, we have argued that there is a complex and often contradictory interplay between national sovereignty and the universalization of human rights. We have exposed the deep colonial roots of the nation-state system and the persistent coloniality that governs international law and the human rights regime. The nation-state, we conclude, is a paradoxical construction that, on the one hand, tends to marginalize and even annihilate "non-nationals," while, on the other hand, it has become the hegemonic vehicle for securing the rights of minorities through their pursuit of self-determination.

As the Israeli violence against Palestinians consistently unfolds within a condition of domination that perpetuates neocolonial imperialism, there seems to be an irreconcilable space between Israeli settler sovereignty and Palestinian popular sovereignty and aspirations for self-determination. If the former is recognized and protected by the international community as a bearer and enforcer of law, Palestinians are acknowledged within international law only as humanitarian subjects or refugees (Shalbak 2023). When Palestinians resist their oppression and challenge the settler colonial arrangement, they are labeled as "terrorists," disruptors of the international order (Roy 2007).

This inequity, we argue, is due to the incomplete process of decolonization advanced by anticolonial nationalists in the last century that sought not only to ensure their right to self-determination and emancipation from alien rule, but also "worldmaking" with the principle of non-domination at its core. The current world order organized as nation-states continues to operate within the logics of colonialism and imperialism, placing the institutions and discourse of human rights within these structures of hierarchical power and thus rendering them incapable of addressing structural oppressions. Thus, achieving statehood does not ensure liberation, but rather creates new forms of domination that can deny citizens their political and economic rights (Farsakh 2021).

As Pappe (2017, 138) asserts, "peace is not a matter of demographic change, nor a redrawing of maps: it is the elimination of the racist ideologies and apartheid policies." It is precisely from this perspective that we are tempted to question the viability of a two-state solution as the only possibility to stop the cycle of violence in Palestine. A two-state solution is intrinsic to imperial strategies of dividing and conquering. It only solidifies the belief that Palestinians and Jews cannot live side by side, that Muslims and Christians cannot find

common ground, and that these two peoples pertain to different civilizations that demand their own territories and states to feel safe and enjoy political rights. Leila Farsakh's (2021) edited volume brings together Palestinian scholars who envision Palestinian liberation beyond the territorial confines of sovereignty. These decolonial perspectives include viewing the state as a social relation of power within a global capitalist reality, thus rethinking the state to be accountable to the individual and collective rights of both Jews and Palestinians. Other scholars (for example, Ilan Pappe, Yousef Munayyer) emphasize that Palestinian liberation is intertwined with other global intersectional struggles for justice and freedom, including indigenous movements in the Americas and Australia, refugee struggles against European border regimes, and the "Arab Spring" uprisings against oppressive Arab regimes.

Rodney's (2022) assertion that all ideologies in a class society are class ideologies aligns with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine's (PFLP) perspective, as articulated in their *Strategy for the Liberation of Palestine*. The PFLP (2017, 85) emphasizes that national liberation movements exist in a context of class struggle and react to the material conditions and neo-colonial structures of domination:

> The Palestine and Arab liberation movement does not move in a vacuum. It lives and fights in the midst of specific world circumstances that affect and react with it, and all this will determine our fate. The international ground on which national liberation movements move has always been, and will remain, a basic factor in determining peoples' destinies.

Although further research is needed to identify the concrete legal and political actions required to create a decolonial entity, every scenario must begin with dismantling settler colonialism and Zionist imperialism, revoking colonial privileges, addressing historical injustices, and fostering reconciliation. As Pappe (2017, 141) has pointed out already a few years back:

> The exceptionalism enjoyed by Israel, and before that by the Zionist movement, makes a mockery of any Western critique of human rights abuses in the Arab world. Any discussion of the abuse of the Palestinians' human rights needs to include an understanding of the inevitable outcome of settler colonial projects such as Zionism. The Jewish settlers are now an organic and integral part of the land. They cannot, and will not, be removed. They should be part of the future, but not on the basis of the constant oppression and dispossession of the local Palestinians.

Since October 7, 2023, Palestinians in both Gaza and the Occupied West Bank have been "banging on the walls of the tank" without any immediate action from the international community. Their cry for help should resonate as our collective cry, highlighting the brutal reality of an imperialist system that deems certain lives expendable. We must continuously

return to, revise, and build on ideas of decolonial and internationalist thinkers to imagine a different organization of the world; one that manages to reconcile with and overcome the sins of European colonialism, capitalist imperialism, and militant nationalism. Franz Fanon put it brilliantly:

> Let us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions and societies which draw their inspiration from her. Humanity is waiting for something other from us than such an imitation, which would be almost an obscene caricature. If we want to turn Africa into a new Europe, and America into a new Europe, then let us leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted among us. But if we want humanity to advance a step farther, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries. If we wish to live up to our peoples' expectations, we must seek the response elsewhere than in Europe. (As cited in Erakat 2019, 21-22).

The case of Palestine starkly illustrates the paradox of the human rights regime, leaving us at a critical juncture: to continue to undermine international law or to envision and work towards a world where all humans are afforded rights by virtue of their humanity. Adom Getachew (2019) proposes that postcolonial cosmopolitanism, centered on the principles of non-domination and the equal moral worth of all individuals rather than nation-states governed by international law, could be more effective in restraining state power. This decolonial vision can start with an immediate and fundamental reform of the international legal and rights system: the active and equitable involvement of formerly colonized nations to ensure that international law is no longer merely an extension of colonial powers but is reshaped collectively by all global stakeholders. In other words, the international legal system needs to do what it claims to be doing.

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Beyond Flexibility: The Case for Identity Plurality in Democratic Politics

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Abstract

While Derrick Darby and Eduardo Martinez's "Making Identities Safe for Democracy" proposes flexible identities as a solution to reconciling social identity with democratic politics, this paper argues that flexibility alone is insufficient to address contemporary challenges to democracy. Through a critical examination of their work, I identify two significant limitations in their argument. First, their primary example of veteran status as a flexible identity is problematic, as empirical evidence shows it remains significantly aligned with Republican partisan identity and may be grounded in potentially restrictive forms of national identity. Second, their framework fails to adequately address how identity flexibility can counter the phenomenon of partisan sorting, where partisanship has evolved into a mega-identity that increasingly structures both political and social life. In response to these limitations, I argue that emphasizing the plurality of social identities, rather than merely their flexibility, offers a more effective approach to treating—rather than just preventing—the challenges that identity poses to democratic practice. While flexibility remains important, cultivating multiple, distinct social identities that coexist and interact within individuals and communities may better dilute the dominance of partisan mega-identities and foster more inclusive democratic engagement.

Keywords: Democracy; Identity Politics; Partisanship; Partisanship; Plurality; Social Identity

Introduction

In modern democracies, it is common for individuals to regard themselves as members of various social identity groups. These can range from declarations of political membership—for example, liberal or conservative—and geographical location—for example, West Coast, Southerner, or Texan—to familiar ethnic, religious, and class-based ascriptions. Yet, social identity can pose a problem for democratic politics. Democratic citizens ought to exercise their share of political power in ways that advance the common good. However, social identity can get in the way of this democratic duty of citizens. In seeing ourselves as members of an identity group, we can lose sight of the common good, opting instead to advance the good of our own group. Thus, here is a puzzle: seeing oneself

as situated within an identity group seems socially necessary, but it poses a threat to democratic politics.

In *Making Identities Safe for Democracy* (2022) Derrick Darby and Eduardo Martinez seek to dissolve this puzzle. They argue that when social identities are made suitably flexible, they are compatible with sound democratic practice. In this way, they diagnose the puzzle as emerging from the rigidity of social identities rather than from identities as such. Their view thus amounts to a "qualified optimism" about the role of identity in democratic politics (Darby and Martinez 2022, 277). Their paper makes an important contribution to democratic theory because it provides an account of how identities can promote democratic accountability while avoiding some of the politically troubling aspects of identities.

However, I argue here that their account does not succeed. Specifically, I argue, first, that flexibility does not answer the problem of ingroup and outgroup conflicts. Then I argue that flexible identities like veteran status cannot make partisanship flexible. Taken together, these objections suggest that to make identity safe for democracy, identities must be not only flexible but also plural.

Are All Identities Dangerous to Democracy?

To begin, I will sketch Darby and Martinez's core argument. They start by acknowledging the tension between social identity and the responsibilities of democratic citizenship. Specifically, they regard social identity as a necessary aspect of the authenticity of individual lives. Social identity supplies an individual with the background of values, commitments, and priorities necessary to navigate life. Religious identity provides a clear example. When one identifies as a Christian, for instance, one adopts various values, priorities, and commitments that not only situate one within a faith community but also orient one's life toward certain goals and projects. In this approach, identities are an essential component of a person's life project.

Darby and Martinez's account of the importance of social identity brings the puzzle into sharp relief. Our social identities can pull us towards political ideals and projects that serve the interests of our own group. On standard conceptions of democracy, however, citizenship involves the duty to seek the common good, rather than simply the good of some subset of the whole. This means that citizens have the responsibility to base their political advocacy on considerations that can speak to the priorities, interests, and concerns of their

fellow citizens as such.[1] Social identities, then, are in tension with the demands of proper democratic citizenship.

Darby and Martinez's solution to this tension is straightforward: Claiming that the problem owes to the rigidity of identities rather than identities as such, they argue that we must loosen our identities and make them more flexible (Darby and Martinez 2022, 292). Drawing on Kwame Anthony Appiah's account of identity, Darby and Martinez note that flexible identities can still support an adequate conception of self-authorship in a democratic society. Flexible identities are those whose boundaries are not exclusive of other identities. These identities do not rigidly bind individuals to specific group boundaries by which in-groups and out-groups are not only distinguished but separated.

Flexible identities can situate us socially and ground our life projects, while also allowing for healthy ingroup-outgroup relations. For instance, the distinction between the represented and the representatives can enhance the internal coordination of the former with which they are empowered to hold the latter accountable to them (Darby and Martinez 2022, 280).[2] In this way, social identities strengthen political participation and democratic accountability. Flexible identities are thus consistent with the collective self-authorship of an identity group but do not challenge the responsibilities of democratic citizenship.

Thus, Darby and Martinez's account of flexible social identity allows them to describe their view as a "qualified optimism" about the role of identity in democracy. Against the identity optimist, they can hold that social identities can, indeed, pose a threat to democracy. Against the identity skeptic, they can resist the call to seek to eliminate social identities altogether (Darby and Martinez 2022, 275-277).

Is Flexible Identity Safe for Democracy?

Darby and Martinez's account occasions two criticisms. Together, these cast doubt on whether identities can be made safe for democracy. First, there is reason to doubt that their principal example of a flexible identity—veteran status—can resolve the tension between social identity and democratic citizenship. Second, there is the problem that even

[1] The Rawlsian duty of civility is an example. However, my view is not committed to a particular conception of it because what I want to preserve is the idea that there is a sense of obligation for citizens to at least try to base their political advocacy on reasons accessible to their fellow citizens. See Rawls 2005.

[2] Such a positive implication of partisanship has been supported in other materials as well. Intensified partisanship increases democratic participation because one's partisan identity provides a motivational reason for participation. See Huddy and Nadia 2007; Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2002.

when social identities are flexible, they might yet be captured by partisan mega-identities. I will explain these in turn.

The Flexibility of Veteran Status

Darby and Martinez use veteran status as their prime example of a suitably flexible social identity. On their account, veteran status serves as a ground for an individual's social situatedness but seemingly does not invoke a rigid ingroup and outgroup distinction. However, two critical points emerge. First, even if Darby and Martinez are correct about the flexible nature of veteran identity, it might be that this identity is unique. For example, its flexibility may be due to the overriding acknowledgment of mutually shared trauma on behalf of a common experience in serving one's country. In other words, veteran status might be special. In any case, prevalent social identities that are already codified in US politics present little opportunity for flexibility. In the reality of political conflicts associated with social identities, Darby and Martinez need to show that *existing* identities can be made flexible rather than simply pointing out some examples of flexible identities.

Second, even if we suppose that veteran status does succeed as a model of democracy-safe social identity, and even if we suppose that currently rigid identities could be made to be more like veteran identity, there remains the concern that any social identity, flexible or restricted, will nevertheless posit a boundary between insiders and outsiders. To start, we should accept that flexible identities, like other identities, have a group boundary. Though Darby and Martinez proceed as if flexibility helps overcome conflicts at the boundary, the best that flexibility does to the boundary is to soften, not eliminate it.[3] To see the problem more clearly, consider veteran status. They argue that it is a safe kind of identity for democracy due to its flexible border—it is not aligned with ideologies and, naturally, free from partisanship. On one side, it seems flexible about various identities because almost any citizen can join the army regardless of their background. It may be possible to resolve partisan tensions by strengthening collaboration amongst persons from various political backgrounds when there is an inclusive boundary between ingroups.

However, there are two problems with understanding veteran status as a flexible identity. First, veterans tend to be more Republican than Democrat, and thus emphasizing veteran status as an answer to partisan conflicts could bring in favorable results for

[3] The boundary's relative openness to a new ingroup is another benefit of flexibility. For instance, the collective identity of the working class or workers can be flexible because it is compatible with many other non-economic identities. When people who identify as workers encounter a new identity, such as being transgender, they can do so very readily into their overall identity. It is unlikely that flexible identity can demonstrate such openness to an established outgroup, though.

Republicans. Darby and Martinez could be right that veterans are inclusive of various identities. However, this does not rule out partisan inclination within veteran groups. For example, during the presidential election campaign of 2020, 52% of veterans supported Trump while Biden supporters remained 42%. Though the number of Trump supporters among veterans decreased by 8% compared to the previous election, it shows that the partisan inclination of the veteran group still exists (Shane 2020). Note that this is not limited to the 2020 election. A Gallup survey in 2009 shows that veterans are less Democrat and more Republican in their partisan orientation. The partisan gap—the percentage of Democrats minus the percentage of Republicans—was a minus 1

3% in the age between 18 to 24 and remained in the range of negative number throughout most age ranges except for 50 to 59 and 80 to 99. Veterans of most ages are, therefore, more likely to lean Republican than Democrat (Newport 2009). Moreover, veterans tend to be more Republican than Democrat compared to non-veterans of the same age. In the same Gallup survey, the partisan gap between veterans and non-veterans ranges from 31 points to a low of 10 points. For example, while non-veterans of the age group of 18 to 24 are much more Democrat than Republican (18% more Democrats), veterans of the same age group are strongly Republican (13% more Republican) (Newport 2009). Lastly, veterans tend to be supportive of civilians' gun-carrying rights compared to non-veterans, though their responses vary in degrees when it is to individual policies (Ellison, Kelley, Leal, and Gonzalez 2022). This implies that veteran status has partisan inclination because there is a stark partisan divide over gun policies.

Darby and Martinez offer veteran status as their principal example of a flexible identity, but the empirics tell a different story. Veteran social identity skews significantly conservative and veterans tend to vote Republican. Were veteran status indeed as flexible as Darby and Martinez suggest, partisan profiles among veterans should roughly match those of the larger electorate, but they do not. This suggests that veteran status is less flexible and more restrictive.

This gives rise to a second critical point. Perhaps, the flexibility of veteran status, such as it is, owes to the more restrictive background identity of being an *American*, or an *American who served the country* in a special way. A nation is a pre-political community wherein its membership is determined by various standards such as ethnicity, culture, language, and civic values (Habermas 1989; Miller 2013). Thus, national identity can be defined as a social identity with a sense of belonging to the nation (Huddy, Leonie and Khatib, Nadia. 2007, 65). Surely, not all national identities are restrictive. Because of the country's greater breadth

than either the Democrat or Republican parties, attachment to the nation is not usually correlated with ideological affiliation. Additionally, a liberal interpretation of national identity can assist various ethnic groups in identifying themselves with the nation rather than their ethnicity, providing a secure foundation for social cohesion and collaboration (Citrin, Wong, and Duff 2001). For example, different ethnic groups endorse a national identity that places racial equality and freedom among its top priorities for what it means to be a "true American" (Citrin, Reingold, and Gree 1990). In this regard, there might be a space for flexibility in the national identity and, consequently, the veteran identity.

However, despite this optimism, other than a liberal national identity comes with moderate to excessive restrictiveness. For example, while ethnic minorities tend to conceive of them in dual terms of their ethnicity and being American, whites are inclined to see themselves as "just Americans" restricting the membership in the national identity to a particular ethnic group (Citrin, Wong, and Duff 2001). Veterans are not an exception, since they view military policies like increased military budget and involvement in overseas conflicts more favorably than other identities (Endicott 2002). This suggests that the veteran identity is still tied to a national identity, whose fundamental commitment may include defending the country's security using military force.[4] Presenting veteran status as a flexible identity only moves the issue from the domestic to the international level at the expense of a potentially more severe issue, given that international conflicts typically take a more violent shape. Thus, even veteran status, which is the main example of the paper, does not eliminate but only temporarily displaces the problem.

Partisanship as a Mega-identity

Perhaps Darby and Martinez can reformulate their conception of the flexibility of social identities in a way that addresses the foregoing concerns. Nonetheless, a second challenge looms. It is not enough for Darby and Martinez to provide examples of social identities that are flexible enough to be safe for democracy. They must also provide a reason to think that the restrictive social identities that prevail in the US can be made to be more flexible. Here, the worry is that many of our social identities have been captured by partisan mega-identities that are defined by opposition to the outgroup, and thus do not allow for flexibility. As Lilliana Mason has argued, in the United States, partisan allegiance has coalesced into a mega-identity with which various social identities are aligned (Mason 2018).

[4] Due to the possibility of multiple nations existing within a state, national conflicts are not exclusively confined to foreign relations. For instance, Quebecois believe that they belong to a distinct nation from other Canadian provinces. Consequently, national conflict threats might manifest on both a global and a local level. See Meadwell 1993.

Partisanship is not merely a political but a social identity, sorting people of various social lives by the partisan line. Thus, it became almost like a second-order identity that overlaps other identities as such. However, partisan sorting poses a threat to collective rule among political equals because partisan citizens would view other partisans as an objects to be defeated for justice rather than equal participants of democratic collective rule (Talisse 2021).

Surely, Darby and Martinez's view might be right that flexible identities weaken the restrictiveness of partisanship by imbuing flexibility into it (Darby and Martinez 2022, 293-294; 297). As party members identify their partisanship more in line with flexible identities, partisanship itself can become flexible accordingly. Nevertheless, we should consider the opposite scenario wherein the restrictiveness of partisanship makes a flexible identity more restrictive. This scenario might involve political sorting that is more identity-based and less issue-based because political issues have more breadth than identity groups. For instance, Black Americans' political identity during the civil rights debate in the 1960s was pliable because their party identification was mostly based on policy choices. They supported the Democratic party because it promoted ethnically inclusive policies. However, more modern Black Americans put their party preferences less on the policies and more on their racial identity (Mangum 2013).

As partisanship became the dominant social and political identity, it is not limited to one's policy preferences but means who one is. Though some partisan conflicts are genuine conflicts of ideologies, many of them are collisions of psychological attitudes based on the friend and enemy relation (Mason 2018). Certainly, people with flexible identities may be relatively open to other identities. When they enter the arena of partisan struggle, however, they may have to view the other as an enemy. This is not because their identities are insufficiently flexible. It is because the political situation brings animosity between them. Because one might even willingly sort their identities along party lines to prevail against other partisans, no single flexible identity can survive against partisan sorting in this environment. Thus, flexibility seems hardly to be an answer for mitigating partisan sorting of social identities.

Plurality, not Flexibility

One might ask where we should go with identities in democracy. To answer, we should consider two approaches to solving a problem—preventing and fixing it. Preventive methods should be taken to eliminate the conditions for the problem before it is prevalent. When it already prevails, however, fixing it by reversing its effects should be the appropriate cure (Talisse 2019). Then, the question should be: Are we tasked with preventing an identity

from becoming a mega-identity or treating an existing mega-identity not to be a threat to democracy? Unfortunately, partisanship has already become a mega-identity, and the problem with identities in democracy is not a matter of prevention but treatment.

The most worrisome aspect of partisanship is that it saturates non-political identities with politics (Mason 2018). Even if we accept the positive effect of flexible identity for diminishing the restrictiveness, they are easily calcified into elements of restrictive partisan identities at least under existing conditions of democracy. For that reason, flexible identities may be, at best, preventive methods, not a cure.

Then, what can be the answer for treating the rise of mega-identity and its threats to democracy? One possible answer is found in James Madison's answer to diversification. To prevent the appearance of a dominant faction, James Madison suggested two solutions: Removing the cause and controlling the effects of it. Since the former option is not viable as factions are rooted in human psychology, he argued for controlling the negative effects of factions by diversifying sects (Hamilton, Madison, and Jay 2008). Likewise, I suggest pursuing plurality in addition to the flexibility of identities as a treatment of partisanship.

The plurality of identities refer to the idea that individuals possess multiple and distinct social identities that coexist and interact with each other. For example, a person might simultaneously identify as a parent, a professional, a member of a particular religious group, a citizen of a nation, and so forth. Each of these identities plays a role in shaping that person's values, perspectives, and behaviors.

In a democratic society, the plurality of identities is essential because it can dilute the dominance of any single identity, reducing the risk of rigid ingroup-outgroup dynamics that threaten democratic practices. When people recognize and engage with the multiple facets of their identities, they are less likely to adopt extreme or exclusionary positions based on a single identity. This diversity within individuals can foster more inclusive and deliberative democratic practices, as it encourages citizens to consider a broader range of perspectives and interests.

Surely, despite plurality, each of plural identities might become restrictive and thereby worsen the problem of identities in democracy. This still calls for the emphasis of flexibility as a means to mitigate the restrictiveness of a single identity and, for that reason, flexibility is still important for plurality. In other words, each of the plural identities still needs to be flexible. Yet, unless we were in a situation where partisanship is not a mega-identity and had a chance to make it flexible, the task of making partisan identities flexible seems to be a toll order. Therefore, the foremost task for those who want to save identities for democracy

should be to ensure that non-partisan identities are sufficiently present within individuals and in society. Surely, some non-partisan identities are restrictive and, consequently, pose identity conflicts. As more non-partisan restrictive identities are made flexible by non-partisan flexible identities, however, we will have a greater pool of non-partisan flexible identities with which the calcification effect of partisanship can be less effective. Thus, Darby and Martinez have offered a good recipe for preventing social identity from posing a threat to democracy, but in so doing they have not provided a remedy for the threat identities currently pose.

Conclusion

Darby and Martinez's attempt to make identities safe for democracy poses a lens through which we can think positively about identities in democracy. Yet, flexibility alone cannot be a reliable answer to the problem of democracy, namely that flexible identity can be rooted in a restrictive identity and it seems not robust enough to reduce the dominating influence of partisan mega-identities. Accordingly, the tension between social identity and democratic citizenship stands.

When partisan identities dominate non-political identities and, for that reason, their threats are not a matter of the future but the present, we should emphasize how to treat them rather than prevent them. Emphasizing plurality over flexibility means encouraging our society to be a place where individuals embrace and engage with the full spectrum of their identities, not limited to political ones, in their daily lives. This can help mitigate the dangers posed by rigid social identities, particularly in environments where partisanship has become a mega-identity that overshadows other forms of social belonging. By fostering a plurality of identities, democracy can better safeguard against the divisive effects of identity politics.

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Reimagining Democracy: Expanding US Voting Rights beyond Citizenship

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Abstract

In this brief Conversations essay, I trace how immigrant suffrage in the United States deteriorated in the 19th century and argue that the US should move toward creating a pathway for noncitizen voting for two reasons—a more representative democracy and for a smoother assimilation process into American culture. Noncitizens contribute economically and socially to their communities, and they often have the same investment in their community's welfare as citizens. Expanding voting rights to noncitizens, even if only at the local-level, would give them a voice in decisions that affect their everyday lives.

Keywords: American Politics; Citizenship; Democracy; Immigration; US Elections; Voting Rights

Introduction

How did voting rights in the United States come to be associated with citizenship? In this brief Conversations essay, I trace how immigrant suffrage deteriorated in the 19th century and argue that the US should move toward creating a pathway for noncitizen voting for two reasons—a more representative democracy and a smoother assimilation process into American culture.

I focus specifically on the US because of its unique history of expanding voting rights to different groups and its evolving definition of who constitutes a citizen. The US emphasis on federalism and state-level control over voting laws also creates opportunities for experimenting with noncitizen voting in local elections. Some cities, such as San Francisco, allow noncitizens to vote in certain local elections, which shows that this is not unprecedented within the US context. With voting being tied to citizenship status, the right to vote is often seen as a symbol of full membership in US society. But this view can be limiting when considering the millions of noncitizens who contribute economically, culturally, and socially to their communities.

Naturalization alone also does not ensure complete assimilation into society. Views of what a desirable immigrant should look like have changed over the years in line with federal immigration policy, to the extent that, even if an immigrant were to be naturalized, that would not necessarily mean that they would be fully integrated into American society. A crucial gap exists between being legal and being socially legitimate. The ability to vote is a critical marker of social legitimacy. Voting is not just about selecting leaders; it is about being recognized as a member of the political community. The act of voting is a form of empowerment—it allows people to have a say in decisions that affect their lives, reinforcing the democratic process by more amply reflecting the will of the people.

For many racial and gender minorities, voting was the first step toward political equality, as well as a significant part of the integration process in U.S. society. Granting minority groups the right to vote gave them enough political power for their unique concerns to be heard, which ultimately impacted everything from state health and safety ordinances to personal perspectives on equality and race. For noncitizen residents who currently have no means of defending their interests in the political sphere, issues will only continue to be sidelined. This is especially significant in today's globalized world. The number of noncitizens in the U.S. only continues to grow (Frey 2020). Adjusting procedures of inclusion to the rapidly changing demography is necessary as the world becomes more interconnected.

An Overview of Noncitizen Suffrage

Contrary to popular belief, voting rights in the US have not always been associated with citizenship. In line with this, democratic participation in the US has been both an expansive and restrictive process. Looking at the history of immigrant voting rights offers a more nuanced view of suffrage and restrictions on political participation. Immigrant voting—specifically for white, male aliens—in the late 1700s was not controversial, rather it was a prominent part of America's nation-building process (Kogan 2013; Raskin 1993). During a time when states were regarded as sovereign political entities, certain noncitizens were freely allowed to participate in elections in recognition of their presence within the state. Rather than citizenship, voting rights were instead tied to gender, race, and wealth (property ownership). Ohio's 1802 Constitution provides a classic example by extending the right to vote to "white male persons, above the age of twenty-one years, who are compelled to labor on the roads of their respective townships or counties, and who have resided one year in the state, from having the right of an elector" (Ohio Constitutional Convention of 1802 2004). Congress also promoted noncitizen voting rights through the enactment of the

Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which granted noncitizens who met certain residency requirements the right to vote in local elections or serve in state legislatures.

The War of 1812, however, sparked anti-immigrant sentiment and eventually instigated the reversal of immigrant suffrage. Some states that had initially allowed noncitizens to vote "revoked the practice [by] changing the [state] constitutional definition of voters from *inhabitants* to *citizens*" (Raskin 1993). Shortly after the War of 1812, support for immigrant voting rights further decreased when the movement to abolish property requirements gained prominence. States that granted property-owning noncitizens the right to vote would suddenly be faced with a large immigrant electorate made up of those who had initially been deemed undeserving of the ballot. At the same time, increased immigration from Western Europe caused a shift in the demographics of the US and may have spurred feelings of racial or economic threat from the dominant group. Growing concerns about the assimilability of newly arrived Irish and German immigrants alarmed citizens (Hayduk 2006), which contributed to the increased salience of immigrant suffrage.

In an effort to maintain some semblance of control over the larger electorate, states began to add other qualifications to vote—including citizenship (Hayduk 2006). Meanwhile, nativist sentiment against the waves of incoming immigrants continued to grow across the country. In the 1850s, the Know-Nothing Party blatantly denounced foreigners and immigrant suffrage. The party called for extreme changes to naturalization laws that would prevent immigrants from naturalizing until after twenty-one years of residence (Hewitt 1935). Granting certain immigrants voting rights was no longer viewed as a basic tenet of democratic government. Instead, the political participation of noncitizens even in local elections became a contentious issue that would go on to play a significant role during the Civil War. Northern states believed in expanding the political clout of immigrants, while Southern states believed in restricting it due to the general hostility of incoming immigrants to slavery (Murdock 1980). When the Civil War began, the Union drafted noncitizens into the army on the basis that they had expressed their intent to naturalize because they had voted in a prior election (Hayduk 2006; Raskin 1993).

Rapid industrialization coupled with massive influxes of immigrants in the years following the Civil War generated heated debates about the impact of immigrants on all aspects of social and civic life (Parker 2015). Anti-immigration sentiment grew in tandem with notions of eugenics and moral superiority (Ngai 2004). Nativists disseminated false stereotypes of immigrants that endure to this day, such as their inability to fully integrate into American society, their affinity for committing criminal acts, and the economic threat they

pose to American blue-collar workers in the labor market. The numerous political and cultural conflicts in which immigrants became entangled as a result of dramatic demographic changes eventually led to the enactment of exclusionary immigration laws that limited their entrance into the country, their civic participation through methods like literacy requirements, and even their ability to naturalize.

Immigrant suffrage was completely eradicated in 1926. Exclusionary immigration policies, however, have continued to evolve throughout the years, affecting trajectories of racial formation by consistently reshaping the concept of illegality and redefining public perceptions of who an immigrant ought to be or look like (Parker 2015; Pedron, 2021). Today, noncitizens can only vote in select municipalities. But this important link between citizenship and voting also eventually resulted in voter ID laws diffusing across the country with little controversy or partisan divide (Ramirez and Peterson 2020), despite these laws potentially being antidemocratic since they are more likely to disenfranchise voters than prevent illegal voting (Ansolabehere and Persily 2008; Kogan 2013; Overton 2017; Stewart III, Ansolabehere, and Persily 2016).

Separate Voting from Citizenship

Illegality is a fluid concept that evolves in line with public opinion and federal and state immigration policy (Pedron 2021). There is a stark contrast between the prevailing narrative that the US is a champion of democratic principles and the harsh reality of its historical treatment of immigrants. Through federal law, the US emphasized the importance of race in matters related to citizenship up until the early 1950s. This ultimately played a hand in shaping the social identities of many Americans today. Furthermore, the limited categories of noncitizens that were granted voting rights in select states were slowly stripped of them following changes in property-owning requirements.

Decades of false political rhetoric suggests that immigrants all come from a far-away place (Parker 2015). But generations of immigrants are born and raised in the US, and by equating being a property-owning, white male with citizenship and suffrage, the US ostracized even people within its borders. Since the US was founded, citizens have excluded different groups of people from civic participation based on the color of their skin, their gender, and even their political leanings. But the relationship between voting rights and race, gender, or citizenship is not intrinsic. Codified political biases from the past continue to affect the electoral system to this day, disenfranchising noncitizen residents from broader society and undermining their right to have a say in who represents them. Recent research

has also shown that if citizens perceive racial minorities and immigrants as typical perpetrators of casting illegal ballots, they are more likely to believe in voter fraud and its prevalence (Udani, Manion, and Kimball 2024). This highlights the deep relationship between citizenship, voting rights, and social legitimacy—with certain groups being viewed as more or less worthy of civic participation. When misperceptions about certain groups of noncitizens voting illegally reshape public opinion, it could potentially affect the experiences of minority groups who share the same physical characteristics as those disfavored noncitizens (Pedron 2026).

Owing to the political exclusion of noncitizens, the current electorate is demographically skewed. Immigrants shape the local communities in which they reside and play an increasingly important role in the types of policies enacted by states. Their lack of political power, therefore, exacerbates inequality at all levels because, without the power to vote, the interests and concerns of noncitizens are often neglected by policymakers. Voting is not merely an outcome of successful integration into society, but a means of engaging with the government and community. It is a form of empowerment and a crucial factor in assimilation and community membership (Harper-Ho 2000). While naturalization has long been considered the formal pathway to civic participation, it is a time-consuming and costly process that often takes years, sometimes decades, for immigrants to achieve. By the time they become citizens, most immigrants have spent a large portion of their lives in the country, contributing economically and socially, yet have no political voice in their communities—and become conditioned to not having one. Expanding voting rights to noncitizens, even if only at the local level, could help with this lag in political integration so that noncitizens might have a say in important decisions that affect their everyday lives, such as school board elections or public safety and housing regulations.

The acquisition of voting rights has been a pivotal moment for every minority group in the US because it is a key step to achieving social and political equality. Demographic changes in the electorate can have immense implications in terms of election outcomes because of how they fundamentally alter electoral cleavages over time (Gethin, Martinez-Toledano, and Piketty 2022). Immigrants are here to stay, and projections by the US Census Bureau (2024) show that their numbers will only continue to grow in the coming years. The question at this stage is not whether the majority of noncitizens will become a part of the US electorate, but rather when and how they will be. Legal immigrants who come to the US with the intent to naturalize occupy a liminal space, where they must grapple with being a noncitizen and having no influence over the representatives of the state in which they reside.

Granting local voting rights to legal immigrants could facilitate their assimilation into US society and encourage the future political participation of succeeding generations. Additionally, it could improve the voter participation rates of naturalized citizens, as well as improve multicultural communication among the diverse groups residing in the US today.

The upcoming 2024 US presidential election presents an important backdrop for my argument in favor of expanding voting rights to noncitizens. Immigration is an intensely polarizing issue, and the exclusion of millions of noncitizens, who contribute economically and socially to their communities, from participating in elections exposes a glaring gap in democratic representation. The stakes are particularly high given ongoing controversies around voter suppression, election fraud (at all levels of government), and restrictive immigration reforms. For a concrete example of these ongoing controversies, former US President Donald Trump has stated that millions of immigrants illegally voted in the 2016 and 2020 elections, which resulted in him losing the election or, in the 2016 case, losing the popular vote (Bernard 2024; Seelye 2017). This kind of discourse further marginalizes noncitizens, increases public distrust in both noncitizens and the electoral process, and cements the idea that citizenship is the only legitimate basis for political participation.

As the US defined and redefined what it meant to be an American, it also clarified what it meant to be an outsider. Given the heated arguments that constantly surround topics related to US immigration, "citizen" was and continues to be a powerful word. It invokes a sense of identity and highlights certain civic responsibilities and privileges. Similarly, the word noncitizen is powerful in a different way. It denotes foreignness and a stark *lack* of political rights that can disenfranchise immigrants from broader society. But noncitizens often have the same investment in their community's welfare as citizens (Harper-Ho 2000), and like other members of the community, they are more likely to become active political participants when given the opportunity to participate directly in common social and political activities. This overt connection to public life could be game-changing for immigrants uncertain about their future place in American society.

As a nation built by immigrants, the US should create a pathway for voting for the millions of noncitizens residing within the country today to have a say in how they are governed—even if only at the local level given how immigrants contribute to their local communities (including, paying taxes). Doing so would not only bolster democratic life and boost prospects of progressive legislation, but also send a striking message of inclusion to other nation-states (Abrahamian 2021). Expanding suffrage to noncitizens will not fully resolve deeper systemic issues related to representation or the distribution of political power,

but the current alternative of waiting for drawn-out naturalization processes before extending the right to vote offers little to no progress toward a more inclusive democracy. By incorporating these newcomers into the democratic process, we can make government more representative and accountable.

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Will my Paper be Rejected More Easily, or Even Automatically, if I am from the Global South?

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Abstract

There exist concerns about potential bias against Global South scholars in academic publishing. While discrimination exists, in academia as in life, I suggest this statement is an oversimplification. It is obviously worth acting if we witness clear signs of discrimination, but no work is immune from errors and an accepted paper might still offer room for improvement. Accordingly, rejection is a chance to revisit your work critically and improve it. In the piece, I offer an overview of the most common reasons for paper rejections, including unclear structure, weak methodology, language barriers, and insufficient engagement with global debates and practical advice for improving your manuscript (and possibly acceptance rate). They can range from co-authoring with international colleagues, to seeking feedback at conferences, reviewing for target journals, and pay special attention to methodological approaches.

Keywords: Academic Publishing; Global South Scholars; Peer Review Process; Academic Writing; International Collaboration; Publication Strategy

I get this question a lot, and my feeling is that there are both some victimization and truth in it. When framed this way, it irritates me—as any statement offering an oversimplification of a complex situation, we are academics after all. But adding a twist of reflection and variety, it is a good exercise to explore some obscure practices that permeate academia.

Let us start with a critical reflection: can we answer this question for all existing journals (29,165 in Scopus the last time I checked) and editors? Can we claim that all editors have prejudices against those with surnames from Asia or Africa? Or that submit from a non-Western university?

No, we cannot. That said, I cannot guarantee the opposite either, that everyone will be accommodating or that there are no prejudices. At any rate, some journals focus on the Global South, and I even know editors willing to go the extra mile to help young authors if their paper is not up to the standard of the journal.

So, my first answer would be no. There is no automatic death sentence for your article based merely on your name or affiliation. Besides, academic hierarchy and prestige also depends on your career stage. If you are an early career from a prestigious university, you might be as helpless as a scholar from the Global South against arbitrary or shallow decisions. The situation changes, however, if you are recommended to the journal by your famous supervisor or if you co-author with them.

I am also confident that an editor would avoid brutally rejecting a paper, even a weak one, from a superstar from their discipline or, as I suggested in my *Scopus Diaries* (Polese 2018), they might want to sugar the pill and at least write a personal letter explaining the reasons for the rejection.

So, why my paper was rejected?

Beyond discriminatory factors, several structural and methodological attentions can increase the likelihood of manuscript rejection in the peer review process. As discussed in my previous piece on desk rejection factors (Polese 2021), and extending that discussion to the peer review process, papers often receive negative reviews when their structure makes them hard to follow, their methods are not solid, or they have not engaged with broader academic debates.

Clear Structure

Reviewers are not paid and often have limited time, therefore they will try to minimize the time they spend reviewing your article. If they do not grasp the meaning of your article at the first reading, chances are that their evaluation will tend to the negative side. I always advise to start from a clear structure: introduction, literature review, empirics, and conclusion. While this structure is not a condition *sine qua non*, it helps both reviewers and future readers navigating the article.

The same structure can also serve as a checklist. You can always use a different one but keep in mind that those four elements should always be present in an academic article and you should be able to move from one to the other: the literature briefly mentioned in the introduction can be expanded in the literature review, the argument you make in the introduction can be backed up by evidence in the empirical section.

Methodological Rigor

Weak or inconsistent methodology is a major problem for scholars who have undergone little or marginal methodological training. A flawed methodology compromises basically everything, from data collection to interpretation to the capacity to engage with the arguments.

Language and Communication

One thing is to write with some mistakes, and another is to write something that the reader cannot even understand. You might be requested to send the article for proofreading if accepted but there is no need to do so if your English, although non-native, is clear. As a starting point, I usually suggest using the simplest ever sentences: if you write each sentence short, using a subject, a verb and a complement, even if the sentence is not clear, it is still understandable.

Global Engagement

Your articles should engage with global debates. There is no problem in sending an article about any country to any journals, but if you are submitting an article about Bhutan to, say, the *Journal of Global Politics*, you should explain why your case is important and why readers will learn more about global politics (not only Bhutan politics) from your article.

Some Advice

Having outlined the common pitfalls that lead to desk rejection, there are a few tricks enhancing your chances of publication success. The following recommendations draw from my experience as both an editor and author, providing practical strategies that have somehow helped me. While not exhaustive, these suggestions can represent a starting point to improve the quality of your submission.

Collaborative Writing and Co-Authorship

Co-authoring (Polese 2019) can add a lot about your publication in terms of input and experience but also visibility and citation, consider and try to engage with other authors, especially from other countries/universities. This is especially advantageous when you manage to get one co-author that is a native English speaker. They might work a bit less on the content, but they will be the crucial ones helping with proofreading.

Embracing New Tools

AI is not something we can overlook. I enjoy the writing process, and I think there are still some risks, but it can be useful at least to get an overview of debates and to correct your English, some colleagues who are English native speakers, for instance, use it to identify typos and awkward expressions.

Building Professional Relationships

If there is a chance to meet the editor or some members of the board, for instance to have a chat at the conference, you might better understand how to tailor your article for the journal or even manage to discuss your submission informally.

Seeking Feedback and Improvement

Get as much feedback as possible on your paper before submitting, send it to colleagues and present it at conferences, as others will often spot issues you might miss. If someone at a conference is interested in your presentation, take the opportunity to ask them to review your draft and provide comments.

Developing Through Peer Review

Review for journals, especially for the ones you plan to submit to. This will help you understanding what their modus operandi is but also will develop your critical skills. In the end, identifying inconsistencies in other people's work might also help you noticing your own mistakes in your papers.

Continuous Learning

Never stop learning and studying. New methodologies continually emerge, and maintaining an elastic mind is key to quality writing.

Lessons learned?

Engaging with a new task, in this case prepare and submit a manuscript, often involves failing a few times before getting things right. Reasons for rejection can certainly be external (for example, someone dislike your style, the focus of your work, or other aspects), but rejection also offers a chance for critical reflection on what you are doing. We can victimise ourselves ("my work is great, the world does not understand it") or think "if this happened, what were my own mistakes"? You do not have to conclude that you made it all

wrong. Perhaps you made just a few minor mistakes, but these were enough to tip the scale toward rejection. You might want to take care of them when preparing the next text.

It is not always easy to critically look at your own work. It is painful to think (or even realise, months later) that your approach was flawed, especially after investing so much effort. However, in my experience, this self-reflective attitude pays off better in the long term.

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Book Review: "Russian Style: Performing Gender, Power, and Putinism" by Julie A. Cassiday

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Russian Style: Performing Gender, Power, and Putinism

By JULIE A. CASSIDAY

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Keywords: Russian Politics; Gender and Sexuality; Heteronormativity; Queer Theory; Drag; Putinism

Julie A. Cassiday's *Russian Style: Performing Gender, Power and Putinism* is a deep analysis of how the state in Russia, under Vladimir Putin's leadership, has manipulated gender and sexuality in building up notions of citizenship and power. Focusing on performances of gender and sexuality within the frame of Russia's popular culture between 2000 and 2020, Cassiday looks at how such performances-from state-sponsored hypermasculine imagery to memes, drag performances, and viral videos-have served as both tools of political control and articulations of resistance. Building on queer theory, cultural studies, and political science, she has provided an interdisciplinarity of inquiry into the ways that Putin's regime uses traditional gender and sexual norms in framing a specific vision of Russian identity while repressing dissent. Cassiday also reveals that specific cultural performances, such as those connected to drag shows and parodies, have contested and undermined state-imposed norms and opened a space for resistance in the context of repression.

The central argument of *Russian Style* is that gender and sexuality in Putin's Russia are more than personal or social issues; they are deeply related to political power. Cassiday indicates that Putin's regime has made many exaggerated and hypergendered performances of masculinity and femininity to construct an ideal form of Russian citizenship. This idea is entrenched in heteronormativity and a very polarized version of gender roles, wherein

masculinity is tied to strength, nationalism, and authority, and femininity is tied to fertility, loyalty, and submission.

But perhaps the more striking claim of the book is that the "ideal citizen" in Putin's Russia is not the hypermasculine male figure but a young heterosexual woman who gets sexualized as available, willing to mold her body and desires to the state's imperatives for reproduction and culture. By analyzing the vast array of media, from television and film to memes, drag performances, and music videos, Cassiday, through her work, builds a picture of a society where gender and sexuality are irresistibly performative, with those performances continuously policed by both the state and the media.

One of the book's most significant contributions is its focus on the body as a political and cultural performance site. Cassiday argues that in Putin's Russia, citizenship is not only about legal status or participation in the political process but also about conforming to state-sanctioned ideals of gender and sexuality. To this end, the body of the Russian President himself becomes the book's case study. Putin promoted a carefully contrived public image of himself, with the state media consistently portraying his hypermasculine body: the bare-chested hunter, fisherman, or judo practitioner. Cassiday carefully deconstructs these images to show how they serve both as an act of personal power and as a reinforcement of state authority. She argues that Putin's machismo is a model for Russian men, who are expected to emulate his strength and authority. In contrast, Russian women are expected to support these ideals by playing submissive reproductive roles.

One of the strengths of *Russian Style* is Cassiday's interdisciplinary approach, which integrates insights from queer theory, cultural studies, and political science to analyze popular culture. Drawing on these diverse fields, she demonstrates how gendered performances in Russia have become political acts, consciously or not. For instance, the book opens with a case study of a viral 2018 video showing Ulianovsk cadets performing a parody of Benny Benassi's *Satisfaction*. The cadets, engaging in overtly sexualized gestures, unintentionally sparked a public debate over "gay propaganda" laws, which strictly regulate expressions of homosexuality. Cassiday uses this example to explore broader cultural tensions in Russia, where such performances—though not explicitly homosexual—challenged state-imposed norms on sexual propriety. The irony of this situation lies in the fact that the cadets, representatives of state institutions, unknowingly undermined the very conservative values they were expected to uphold by parodying a Western video, ultimately making a parody of the Russian state itself.

Cassiday's analysis of Russia's popular culture, especially in Eurovision, drag performances, and viral memes, is another fascinating layer of her argument. Examining how Russian drag performers like Verka Serduchka (though Ukrainian, she is very popular in Russia) and Zaza Napoli mobilize humor, irony, and camp, Cassiday demonstrates that popular culture in Russia offers room for the possible subversion of gender norms, even in those moments when they are being reinforced. For example, she shows how the figure of the "drag queen" becomes a site of queer performativity where classic gender norms are exaggerated and, at the same time, spoiled. She points out that artists such as Vladislav Mamyshev-Monro undermine the hyper-masculine view of Putinism with their campy, outrageously exaggerated performances. With this, Cassiday proceeds to show that even while the state may look to fasten specific, strict gender roles onto citizens, few resistance areas exist to such norms. Not less engaging is her chapter dedicated to Russia's participation in the Eurovision Song Contest. According to Cassiday, Russia's Eurovision entries often present a struggle among the competing notions of national identity, gender, and sexuality. The performers representing Russia in this contest (Dima Bilan, Little Big) must balance between modern cosmopolitan images with adherence to the state-promoted "traditional values," thereby turning Eurovision into a stage where Russia's complex relationship with gender, sexuality, and the West is openly displayed to the international community. Taken together, these examples help broaden the reader's understanding of how culture operates both as a tool of state control and as a space for resistance.

Cassiday weaves together insights from political theory, cultural studies, and gender theory into a complex tapestry that decenters our notions of how gender and power intersect in Putin's Russia. She also anatomizes these issues through popular culture, which effectively allows her to grapple with an extensive array of cultural texts with which academic and general readers alike feel keenly connected.

However, the dense theoretical frameworks that undergird Cassiday's arguments may be hostile to readers unfamiliar with either cultural theory or Russian studies. This is partly due to the book's heavy reliance on North American cultural studies approaches that theorize around issues of performativity and queerness. While such perspectives are portentous, they sometimes obscure deeper sociological and historical contexts specific to Russia. For example, Cassiday's emphasis on gender as performance overshadows, at times, a more irritatingly local context of male/female understandings that have developed through Russia's peculiar political, cultural, and historical processes. While the analysis is good in its comprehensiveness, stylistically, more explicitly, Russian sociological or historical

perspectives would further flesh out the reader's understanding of how such gender/sex identities have taken hold under Putin's regime in relation to Russian history.

This would root the North American theoretical lens in local realities and produce a richer, more context-sensitive critique. Finally, in several parts of the book, language or explanations should be more accessible to readers who are not specialists in some fields. Also, while the book is filled with numerous examples from Russian popular culture, at some points, the details overwhelmed a reader who wanted to see the general argument being pursued.

Further development might be due to Cassiday's discussion of resistance with respect to Russian society. While she points to the moments of subversion and dissidence, especially in the drag performances, memes gone viral, and internet culture, too often the analysis stops short of addressing the greater socio-political effects of these acts. While Cassiday points out these resistive moments, such as using humor, camp, and irony in performances, there is more that the book might have done to consider how these acts challenge the deeper structures of state control over gender and sexuality.

The somewhat more important question, less discussed, would be how effectual such acts of resistance have been. While performance can create ephemeral subversions, cultural resistance may only fleetingly subvert state narratives, and Cassiday does little to explore whether such moments are actually capable of enacting social or political change.

In Putin's Russia, with the overarching state control of the media and public life, whether such subversive acts make their way into the mainstream in ways that can considerably challenge that state's authority, or whether they mostly stay confined to those niche cultural spheres which cannot disrupt the broader political order. More importantly, while Cassiday focuses on the symbolic resistance ingrained in popular culture, the book might probe further into the limitations of these performances as less-than-widely impactful political and social performances. Do these acts actions those that are rebellious for the moment themselves little more than safety valves through which frustrations may be well expressed, continued, and even compounded, all to keep dissent contained and the extant system well in place within the paradigm of entertainment and subcultural sprees? It might further critique popular culture's role in authoritarian contexts, either by reviving notions of meaningful challenges to state power or simply by providing controlled means of resistance to manage discontent.

Cassiday might also research how the state responds or co-opts these acts of resistance. Another trait common to most authoritarian states is the attempt to suppress

cultural subversion and/or soak up dissidence into the state's own propaganda machinery in a move to nullify its subversive potential. What needs to be added here, one may have welcomed in this book, is an understanding of how the Russian state, which anyway is quick with its media regulation and control over culture, reacts to those moments of subversion-censorship, propaganda, or more subtle forms of control.

Cassiday deconstructs the convoluted relationship between gender, sexuality, and the political ground of contemporary Russia. Using an interdisciplinary approach-quite importantly, queer theory, political science, and cultural studies-and focusing on popular culture, she highlights the mechanisms involved in state-controlled betterment and governance over gender and sexuality. The tools include state-imposed narratives of hyper-masculinity, laws inhibiting the representation of LGBTQ+ persons, among them the notorious 2013 "gay propaganda" law, and the fostering of "traditional values" that would reduce femininity to reproductive and subordinate roles.

Cassiday points out how the state uses media and cultural platforms to spread these ideals, which reinforces a heteronormative and patriarchal version of Russian identity. Popular culture, from state-sponsored television to viral memes on the internet, becomes a battleground where these gender norms are both enforced and, with greater frequency perhaps, subverted.

Although Cassiday does note moments of ironic resistances-such as drag performances and parodies like the 2018 viral cadet video-what is missing in her analysis is a sense of how those acts would create meaningful opposition to the state's control; often, they are more releases of frustration than meaningful forms of resistance that threaten the system. It is worth reading for those interested in how state mechanisms control gender in Russia and the limits of cultural subversion; the in-depth analysis and historical context will provide a better understanding of the issue of the junction of gender, power, and popular culture.

Russian Style is an essential read for scholars in political science, gender studies, and Russian studies. It provides a vital resource for understanding the complex dynamics of power, gender, and identity in contemporary Russia.

Book Review: "Betraying Big Brother: The Feminist Awakening in China" by Leta Hong Fincher

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"Let's break free from our heavy shackles and reclaim our power as women!"–sang Wei Tingting, one of the Feminist Five, while in detention after the derailed campaign against sexual harassment in 2015. After her release, she created an online account called "Prison Notes," where she posted about the "joy in betraying Big Brother." This metaphor became the inspiration for the title of Leta Hong Fincher's book Betraying Big Brother: The Feminist Awakening in China.

Betraying Big Brother is written as a gesture of feminist protest and resistance against China's authoritarian state. Published in 2018, this book by journalist and scholar Leta Hong Fincher explores the plight of women in China. It is her second book, following Leftover Women, which discusses gender inequality in the country, especially the parameters set by patriarchal norms on what an urban woman can be and do. Betraying Big Brother further reveals the conflict between China's patriarchal government and feminist activists who challenge widespread sexism. Fincher shares the stories of the Feminist Five activists, enabling readers to trace the events of their arrest and subsequent release. The author also draws on interviews with other activists and human rights lawyers, as well as their works, to illustrate the scale and consequences of state policies aimed at making women a tool to achieve China's developmental goals.

At the heart of the book is a set of stories about five women who rebelled against the Chinese Communist Party's sexual harassment and misogyny. The interviews with the

Feminist Five activists allowed Fincher to recount the events of the day of their arrest on March 8, 2015, conveying the emotions and feelings of each detainee. She delves into the personal stories of these five women and traces their paths from becoming involved in activism to their release and eventual flight from the country. At the same time, the Feminist Five's detention is only one aspect of the fight against misogyny and patriarchy in China. Fincher claims that feminist issues have penetrated almost all resistance activities in China, including labor rights with activists demanding gender equality and fair treatment. Family life is another aspect in which women must defend themselves and fight for their rights. For example, Fincher says that if a woman decides to report domestic violence, she could face retaliation involving even more violence, as perpetrators are rarely held accountable. In addition, the author provides UN data on men and violence in China, showing that half of men have used sexual violence against their partners (there are no governmental statistics on domestic violence). This shocking statistic reveals that women's bodies have become a battleground, and even in family life, not all women feel safe. Consequently, it has become crucial for activists to pressure the government to provide adequate support for survivors and ensure effective law enforcement. However, Fincher concludes that it will not be possible if the topics of sexual harassment and sexual violence remain politically sensitive.

A significant part of the book is devoted to the history and events of the May 4th Movement in 1919 and the Mao Era of 1949 to 1976. These events influenced the emergence of "new women," who were urban, educated, and eager for change. For example, after 1919, feminist activists organized secret meetings and published journals advocating for equal rights for men and women in society and fairer sharing of family responsibilities. The Mao Era was controversial in terms of women's rights. On the one hand, gender equality was officially enshrined in the Constitution (1954), and women were granted new freedoms, such as the right to divorce and remarry. Moreover, women became a normal part of the social economy and were no longer required to seek permission from fathers and husbands, which was a clear signal of women's emancipation. On the other hand, as Fincher points out, this liberation was largely symbolic, and many women's voices remained marginalized by the Party. These historical events laid the groundwork for today's women who are not afraid to rebel, employing methods of protest that fall outside of the traditional paradigm of the All-China Women's Federation (a party-led organization). These methods include online campaigns, provocative demonstrations, and the feminist movement outside China—a so-called "new front," free from state intervention and led by activists who have fled the country. Inside today's China, educated and urban women are the driving force in the

feminist movement, initiating the *#MeToo* Movement in China, which has led to accusations of sexual harassment against over 30 high-profile Chinese men. By comparing past and present, the book aims to draw parallels between political events in different historical periods of women's activism. It demonstrates that the current conflict between the authoritarian Chinese state and the new generation of feminist activists compels women to find new ways to oppose patriarchy and fight for their rights, much as they did a century ago.

The book analyzes the ambiguity of the state's position on domestic violence and sexual harassment by examining the law against domestic violence enacted in 2016. Fincher claims that the law itself is deficient because it does not consider marital rape a crime. Moreover, poor implementation of the law prevents women from obtaining restraining orders or accessing help in domestic violence shelters. The biggest contradiction is that, while the state is willing to pass legislation on domestic violence and sexual harassment, it still suppresses feminist activism and excludes activists from participating in the legislative process. As a result, even with the law in force, the problems of domestic violence and sexual harassment remain acute, and it is no surprise that activists continue to struggle for more effective laws. From Fincher's viewpoint, this situation persists because the state "views patriarchal authoritarianism as critical for the survival of the Communist Party." Feminist activism, in turn, is considered a threat to China's regime.

The book's laudable activist orientation could have been further sharpened if the author had engaged more deeply with the arguments of establishment feminism in China. The book would benefit from including the perspectives of government officials and representatives of the All-China Women's Federation. Such insights could shed additional light on the arrests and law enforcement processes, as well as provide a contrasting viewpoint to the author's stance that feminist activists pose a threat to China's political regime.

Betraying Big Brother not only offers an insider perspective from the author, who has lived in China, but also makes a substantial contribution to the understanding of feminism in China, its development, and its two sides: state feminism, represented by the ACWF, and activist resistance. A comparative analysis of China's past and present provides readers with an opportunity to grasp the uniqueness of China's paths. Readers are able to answer why, despite the years of promoting gender equality and government's claims of taking gender discrimination seriously, issues such as "leftover women," a lack of gender-specific laws, and poor implementation of existing laws persist. This account of the rise of the feminist movement in China allows readers to hear the voices of feminist activists on all these issues unfolding in the shadow of Big Brother.