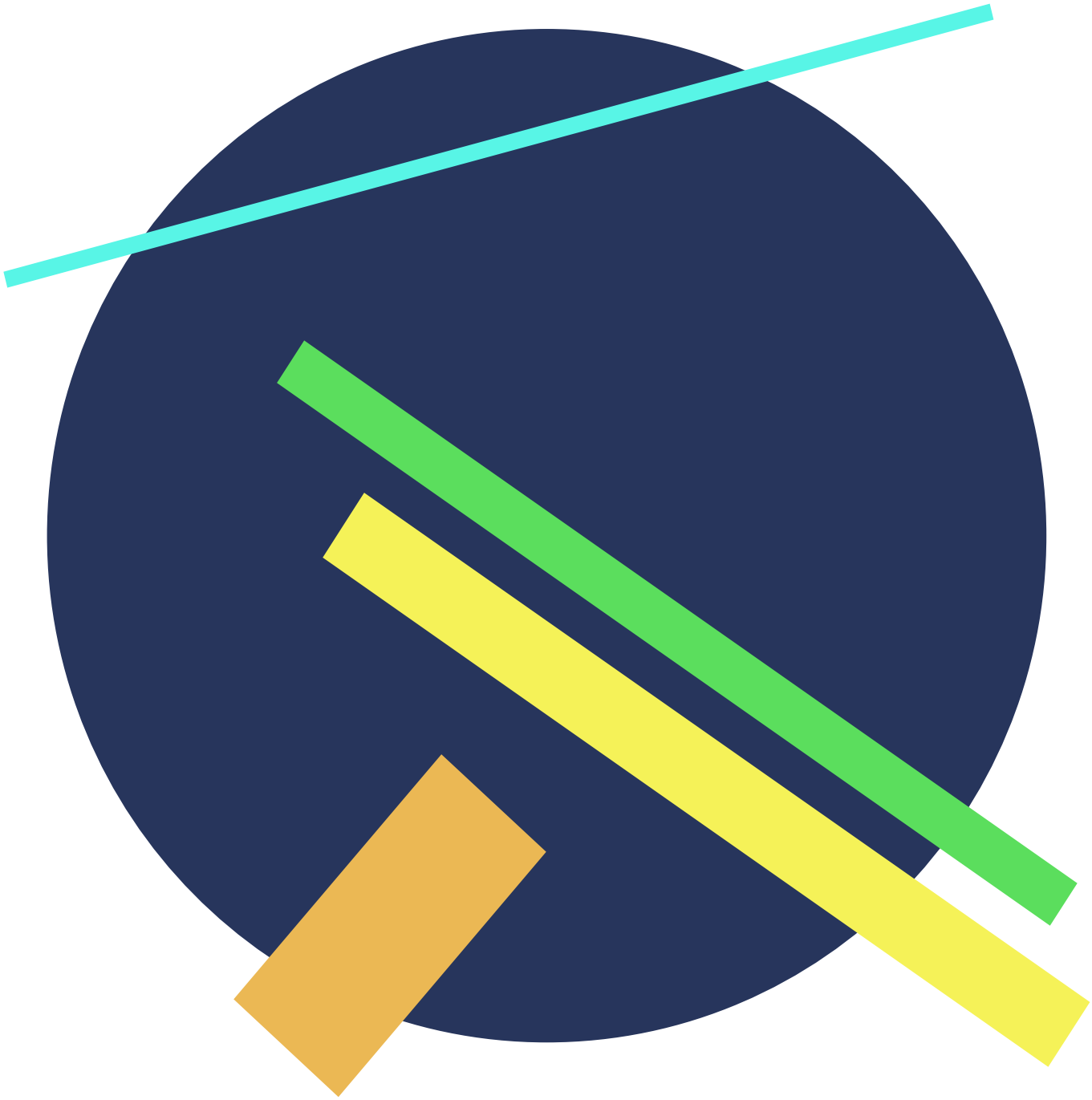
Politikon:

the IAPSS Journal of Political Science



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Editorial Note

https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.56.0

Anya Kuteleva, *Editor-in-Chief*
University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom

Welcome to the latest issue of Politikon: The IAPSS Journal of Political Science. This compelling array of interdisciplinary articles offers unique perspectives on complex issues in international finance, criminal governance, social mobilization, electoral phenomena, and energy transitions.

Minglou Li explores the internationalization of China's renminbi (RMB) and its potential to transform the global monetary system. Employing a mixed theoretical approach, Li analyzes China's growing monetary influence through the lens of power transition theory and neofunctionalism. This multifaceted analysis evaluates the RMB's evolving role at both the global and regional levels.

Jean Vilbert unravels the paradoxical links between crime governance and social mobilization in Brazilian favelas. Going beyond conventional explanations, Vilbert utilizes tools from contentious politics and qualitative meta-analysis to reveal the nuanced interactions between organized criminal groups, the state, and favela residents. The findings highlight the complicated motivations shaping residents' responses, explaining why some accept criminal rule while mobilizing against state interventions.

Mohammad Amaan Siddiqui challenges prevailing narratives surrounding Donald Trump's 2016 electoral victory. Rejecting simplistic "whitelash" explanations, Siddiqui offers a more detailed analysis grounded in right-wing populism. By examining diverse factors, from campaign strategies to critiques of democracy, he provides a comprehensive framework that transcends the limitations of the "whitelash" concept.

Our new Conversations section features Serena Saligari's exploration of energy transitions in an informal settlement in Kenya. Through vivid ethnographic study, Saligari complicates conventional perspectives, emphasizing context-specific, culturally sensitive approaches to clean energy policymaking. Her work spotlights the social dimensions of energy access, pushing beyond technological shifts to address local communities' diverse concerns. Saligari's groundbreaking visual poster enriches her essay, offering an accessible snapshot of the complex dynamics surrounding sociotechnical change.

This innovative scholarship signals Politikon's commitment to amplifying diverse, inclusive academic voices. As we embrace new genres and perspectives, we look forward to pushing boundaries and fostering interdisciplinary insights into pressing global challenges. In an increasingly complex world, it is vital that Political Science remains creative, adaptive, and connected to real-world contexts. Static, siloed approaches cannot adequately grasp the multidimensional issues societies face today—from climate instability to global health crises, migration flows to authoritarian resurgence. By opening our pages to interdisciplinary work, we want to support innovative theoretical frameworks, methodological tools, and analytical approaches that keep pace with our rapidly changing planet. Politikon seeks to spur positive change in Political Science—one that bridges divides, synthesizes knowledge across diverse fields, and engages substantively with the concerns of marginalized communities. Only then can our understanding of vexing phenomena move beyond surface explanations to reveal underlying drivers, interdependencies, and human impacts. This spirit of creative engagement, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and contextual sensitivity will shape the journal's aspirations in future editions in 2024. We invite bold, boundary-pushing submissions from scholars worldwide seeking to advance political science's frontiers and societal relevance.

RMB Internationalization: A Fragile Impetus in the Global Monetary Order and the Dilemma of Regional Leadership

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Abstract

The internationalization of the renminbi (RMB) is viewed by some experts as a potential challenge to the US dollar's (USD) hegemonic status in the current global monetary system. This study employs a mixed theoretical framework to delve into the prospective evolution of China's monetary influence. By applying the power transition theory to analyze the global monetary power structure, this study evaluates China's dissatisfaction as a potential challenger against the dominance of the USD and examines the power parity between China and the United States. On a regional scale, the analysis focuses on possible Asian monetary integration of the RMB-domination by adopting the neofunctionalist paradigm derived from the European experience and juxtaposing this process with European monetary integration. The analysis shows that China has not been able to directly challenge the dominance of the USD, nor has it effectively spearheaded the agenda for regional monetary integration. More specifically, China's export-oriented growth model has hindered the emergence of the RMB as a substantial competition to the USD within East and South Asia.

Keywords

Monetary Power; Hegemony; Integration; China; US Dollar; Renminbi; Internationalization of the Renminbi

Introduction

Since 2009, China has made impressive strides in the renminbi (RMB) internationalization agenda. For example, one of China's most significant achievements has been the RMB's admission to the special drawing rights (SDR) currency basket of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Being added to the SDR currency basket has come with valuable advantages, such as international recognition of China's expanded exporting capacity and a wider usability of the RMB (IMF 2023a). The progress in the RMB internationalization is further reflected by approximately 30 bilateral currency swap deals as well as an increase in both the number of states that hold the RMB as a part of their foreign exchange reserves and its proportion in global foreign exchange transactions. Compared to the USD, however, the RMB internationalization level is still relatively low.

On one side, some scholars find that the gap between the USD and the RMB is gradually reducing. For example, Wang and Wang (2022) note that the RMB is approaching

the leading position of IMS and will soon be able to shape global currency market development in a similar way to the USD. Cheung (2021) even outlines a clear path, including some policy recommendations for China, such as liberalizing its financial markets and loosening control of capital flow, to further advance its progress in internationalizing the RMB. More so, he confidently asserts that the increasingly internationalizing RMB will unavoidably intensify monetary power competition between the US and China.

However, other researchers argue that China's potential to hold a key currency status similar to the US is unlikely, given China's export-oriented growth model and the government's tight control of the national financial market. For example, Adam Przeworski (1991) points out that an authoritarian regime, such as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), relies on significant economic prosperity to legitimize its rules. Meaning, the domestic governance legitimacy of the CCP significantly underpins the accruement of internal wealth. Additionally, China's export-oriented growth model continues to bring domestic economic development (Hamilton-Hart 2014). Indeed, since China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, its current account has consistently demonstrated a surplus, primarily attributed to its extensive export endeavors that target consumption-driven markets. With large capital inflows, China continues to maintain strict capital controls, and as a result, currently holds the largest foreign exchange reserves in the world.

More so, China's export-oriented growth model stimulates household savings that serve as a financial buffer, mitigating life uncertainties and unavoidable expenses. Such a private financial shield is particularly significant in China's society where welfare provisions are limited. These reserves also offer a symbolic advantage, helping the CCP to maintain an illusion of economic openness—a trend that began in 1978. With the implementation of a set of economic policies, known as the "Reform and Opening-up" policies, China's economic rise kickstarted and legitimized the CCP's development strategies for the past four decades.

While these policies ensure trade surplus, encourage domestic savings, and stimulate domestic development, they also limit China's ability to bear the costs of the key currency status. For instance, issuing extra currency to increase convertibility and foreign states' reserves would lead to currency devaluation, reducing the value of private savings. Similarly, opening the domestic market to foreign exporters and abandoning controls over cross-border movement of capital would result in capital outflow. In sum, the costs associated with acquiring the key currency status would destabilize the export-oriented economic model,

resulting in a crisis of government legitimacy. Such a trade-off is unacceptable for the CCP, which prioritizes social and political stability.

Furthermore, state interventions are necessary to maintain China's growth model (Katada 2017). To encourage the development of manufacturing industries, the state provides subsidies and low-interest loans to domestic enterprises. The state also maintains low costs of labor and turns a blind eye to unethical industrial practices. As a result, China remains "the world's factory," producing almost all imaginable goods at low cost and with high efficiency for export to global markets (Ravenhill 2020). At the same time, the state restricts domestic capital outflow through the Regulation of the Chinese Foreign Exchange Administration (State Council of the PRC 2008). Thus, the wealth earned from exports largely remains within China's borders, which limits the availability and convertibility of the RMB in the global market. Indeed, the state's restriction on capital outflow also restricts international actors from accessing sufficient amounts of RMB. Simply put, the state does not want to jeopardize its current economic growth model in favor of obtaining the status of key currency for the RMB.

Overall, state control over the national economy and regime legitimacy are interconnected. Policies that promote exports and diminish capital outflow stimulate domestic savings that citizens rely upon to absorb risks from impaired social welfare. Thus, citizens passively support the CCP's development strategy, which, in turn, encourages the CCP to adhere to earnings-oriented policies rather than invest in the internationalization of the RMB. When seeing the key currency as a public good that incurs costs for the entity that offers it, assuming the role of a provider of a public good disrupts the existing state of affairs in which the CCP's pursuit of regime stability aligns with residents' aspirations for wealth accumulation.

The existing literature tacitly presumes that China's policy goal (or at least one of its goals) for the RMB internationalization is to challenge the US hegemony. However, the analysis above shows that RMB is unlikely to obtain key currency status because China cannot afford the costs associated with it. If the goal of internationalization is to replace the US hegemony, then China should suspend or thoroughly re-design its strategy. Yet, Chinese foreign direct investments and financial aids to developing states through the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (2021, 12) have been consistently increasing in recent decades, which indicates that China aims to internationalize RMB.

To address this apparent contradiction, I posit that the existing literature oversimplifies China's rising monetary power by framing it as a zero-sum game—a power

shift challenging the US monetary hegemony. As previously mentioned, scholars such as Wang and Wang (2022) and Cheung (2021) propose that rising China has the potential to successfully challenge the dominance of the USD. In contrast, following the logics of scholars like Przeworski (1991) and Hamilton-Hart (2014), China is anticipated to face challenges in competing with the US because of inherent domestic structural barriers. This dichotomous narrative, however, falls short of capturing the intricate motivations underlying RMB internationalization. To fill the gap, this article centers on the following interconnected research questions: Why does China continue to pursue the RMB internationalization without a clear ambition to challenge the hegemonic status of the USD? What are the implications that this internationalization has on the current US-led international monetary order?

In this article, I will critically rethink the nature of the monetary power conflict between the US and China, as this will allow me to explain what the RMB internationalization means to the existing IMS. To do so, I will use the power transition theory that defines satisfaction and power parity as two factors causing conflict. My goal is to explain China's motivations for promoting the RMB internationalization, as well as the country's policy ambitions, by examining the degree of the potential challenger's dissatisfaction. I argue that the US policies and economic sanctions on China that aim at promoting further liberalization of China's national financial market are the sources of China's dissatisfaction with the current unipolar international monetary power structure. I will conduct a comparative analysis of the USD and other regional key currencies (the euro and the yen) to estimate the potential of the RMB to become a key currency, as well as its relative competitive advantage in the existing IMS. I will then focus on the progress of the RMB internationalization on the regional level in East and South Asia. Here, I will examine China's potential for regional monetary integration and draw parallels to the neofunctionalist framework derived from European monetary integration by focusing on loyalty and spillover as well as their underlying motivations.

Rethinking the US-China Monetary Power Transition

In the framework of the power transition theory, conflicts can only arise when the challenger's willingness to challenge the status quo and power capacity—that is the capacity to achieve parity relative to the hegemon—are attained simultaneously (Russett and Star 1992). Organski (1958) suggests that satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the current hegemon—in this case, the hegemony of the US within the existing IMS—determine state

interactions. While satisfaction with the current hegemon leads to cooperation and peace, dissatisfaction results in competition and conflict. Although general satisfaction in the global power hierarchy does not guarantee a stable hegemony, the potential challenger's dissatisfaction often leads to different levels of power competition.

Similarly, Moul (2003) bases his analysis on empirical evidence from the past 200 years. He contends that power parity between opposing sides is very likely to incite conflict based on an analysis of empirical evidence from the past 200 years. Upon attaining a state of approximate power parity, the aspiring challenger may find a greater incentive to prioritize the potential benefits over the associated costs in the deliberation of whether to initiate conflicts aimed at contesting the prevailing hegemony of the dominant entity.

Taking the power transition theory as a starting point, my analysis will present a more in-depth investigation of the two conditions. In other words, my examination hopes to determine the likelihood of a conflict by going beyond discussing the two dichotomies that the power transition theory outlines (e.g., satisfaction/dissatisfaction and power parity/imbalance). In this sense, the power transition theory only provides a basic conceptual framework. A more nuanced analysis of each condition is necessary to go beyond simply reiterating the already established logic between the two conditions.

Hegemonic Stability Theory: Reviewing the Theoretical Base for the Current Unipolar IMS

Kindleberger's *The World in Depression 1929-1939* presents the famous hegemonic stability theory, arguing that a unipolar international system offers greater stability than either bipolar or multipolar systems (Kindleberger 1973). According to Kindleberger, the hegemon acts as a public goods provider, proposing and implementing solutions for global problems. Such solutions may include offering discount facilities, making counter-cyclical lending available, encouraging markets during periods of economic stagnation, as well as promoting international cooperation through the IMF, World Bank, trade agreements, and other institutions. Above all, such solutions are said to stabilize and maintain a liberal monetary order. However, providing such public goods comes with significant costs. Hence, the provision of public goods is contingent upon a hegemon that is willing to and simultaneously has sufficient capacity to bear costs associated with leadership (Gavris 2021).

Kindleberger dismisses the notion of a conceivable bilateral co-leadership, suggesting that such an arrangement could potentially disrupt the provision of public goods. The underlying logic in this context is that such a leadership arrangement is perpetually caught in

a cycle of being relinquished by one party and subsequently assumed by another. As one participant gradually weakens, the other progressively diminishes its inclination towards the dominant role, ultimately culminating in an inherently unstable IMS. Consequently, Kindleberger's theory unveils a causal connection between the existence of a unipolar leader within the power hierarchy and the stability of a liberal IMS. This stability is achieved through the identification of the incurred costs associated with assuming such a hegemonic position and its sustainability.

Kindleberger (1973) acknowledges the significance of small and middle powers within a unipolar framework. Small and middle powers, devoid of the direct capability to exert influence on global dynamics, tend to adopt an advisory role, primarily focused on persuading the hegemons. Without having to assume additional international responsibilities, these states tend to prioritize their individual national interests. However, on some occasions, they may extend foreign aid, a gesture stemming from rational deliberation or, at times, prompted by ethical considerations. The convergence of their respective positions and operational inclinations implies that the preferences of small and middle powers are guided by national self-interests when responding to the choices of the leaders. Consequently, these advisors are inclined to achieve swift economic progress, particularly when their exclusive focus on national interests is not subject to censure, and major powers are enticed to provide public goods.

In this article, however, I argue that Kindleberger's analysis of the international hierarchy is largely static and overlooks the potential for small and middle powers to develop over time. For example, a pivotal question that remains unanswered in his framework pertains to the resolution of conflicts arising from emerging challengers represented by small and middle powers within the unipolar structure, while concurrently upholding the integrity of this structure.

China's Dissatisfaction with the USD Hegemony

Through its participation in the US-led liberal international economic framework, China has undergone rapid economic growth, attributable to its export-driven growth paradigm. This dynamic has facilitated the augmentation of China's economic influence on a broader scale. However, China has also consistently conveyed discontentment with the unipolar IMS dominated by the US. For instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (PRC) released a report titled *US Hegemony and its Perils*, which explicitly articulates China's concerns: According to the report, "China opposes all forms of

hegemonism" (2023, 1). Diverse "hegemonic practices" bring "grave harm" (2023, 5) and, as a case in point, "the hegemony of USD is the main source of instability and uncertainty in the world economy" (2023, 3). China attributes the financial challenges faced by other nations, especially emerging economies, to the dominance of the USD within the IMS. This prevailing structure allows the US to leverage its global primacy, often to the detriment of the interests of other states. The report criticizes the manipulative exercise of authority aimed at evading the burdens of adaptation, stating that:

> The US abused its global financial hegemony and injected trillions of dollars into the global market. […] In 2022, the [Federal Reserve] ended its ultra-easy monetary policy and turned to aggressive interest rate hikes, causing turmoil in the international financial market. […] As a result, a large number of developing countries were challenged by high inflation, currency depreciation, and capital outflows. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC 2023, 5)

Furthermore, this report levels allegations against the US for wielding its hegemonic authority as a means to advance its domestic interests by enacting regulations that favor its own agenda under the guise of safeguarding a "rules-based international order" (2023, 2). Additionally, the report asserts that the practice of "long-arm jurisdiction" (2023, 4) is harnessed as a tool to stifle economic rivals and intrude upon routine international commercial activities.

Ultimately, the report concludes that the US employs economic coercion to quell adversaries to further its own strategic economic objectives. It enumerates a range of economic sanctions and highlights the utilization of international financial institutions to manipulate the monetary sovereignty of other nations, among other tactics. The report posits that these actions are designed to compel other states to embrace financial liberalization and facilitate the opening of their financial markets, thereby aligning their economic policies with the strategic ambitions of the United States. The logic that guides China's criticism differs from the logic that underpins Kindleberger's analysis, which mainly focuses on the costs of providing public goods endured by the hegemon. China, on the contrary, directs attention to the privileges that the hegemonic power exploits for its own self-interested objectives.

The key argument of the report allies with studies that attribute the global economic instability to the US exploitation of its hegemonic power to support its self-interests (e.g., Helleiner 1994; Webb 1995; Vermeiren 2010). However, the report fails to account for the expenses borne by the US in its efforts to establish the USD as the KC. Additionally, the vague nature of the critiques regarding hegemonic privilege undermines the overall persuasiveness of the report's assertions.

The idea of "hegemonic harm" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC 2023, 1) proposed in the report implies that the additional burdens assumed by developing economies during times of crisis are linked to the contention that the United States is clandestinely advancing its self-interest within the unipolar IMS. This perspective relies on an oversimplified speculation, resembling an ideological manifesto. It is important to note that US economic sanctions are not universally applied but rather tailored to target China and some of its allies, a strategy that aims at navigating their controlled domestic markets within the framework of a liberal economic order. For example, the US imposed sanctions on China in 2019, accusing it of currency manipulations. This action was taken in response to China's alleged undervaluation of its currency, which the US viewed as a means of gaining unfair competitive advantages through protectionist interventions in the foreign exchange market. The primary objective of these sanctions, as stated by the US Department of the Treasury (2019), was to press China to increase the transparency of its exchange rate and reserve management operations, and to minimize government intervention in the foreign exchange market. Yet, in these regards, the report sidesteps the connection between China's reluctance to progress with financial liberalization and the customized sanctions on China by the US.

Another example is the punitive tariff barriers imposed by the US pose a significant threat to China's future export surplus and foreign exchange inflows (Vermeiren 2013). During the trade war initiated by Donald Trump's administration in 2018, Chinese companies experienced higher costs to access their major export markets. Most recently, Joe Biden's administration strongly condemned China's policies in Xinjiang and urged multinational corporations to reduce imports of agricultural and manufacturing products from Xinjiang to punish China for human rights violations (Layne 2020). In 2022, the US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen introduced the so-called "friend-shoring" as part of a supply chain reform. This policy compels China to demonstrate allegiance and endorsement of the principles of US liberalism to uphold its exports to the US. Indeed, this strategy inadvertently diminishes the earnings derived from China's export sector, and consequently might lead to the escalation of nationalist sentiments within China and the exacerbation of scepticism towards US supremacy within the global economic framework. This sentiment is further underscored by the case of "monetary sanctions" on Russia that include the freezing of its national reserves and the assets of affluent individuals associated with the state by the US and its European allies following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The Policy Goal of Internationalizing RMB

To counteract US monetary hegemony and limit the ability of the US to sanction China, the state has two potential choices. First, to challenge the status of the USD as the KC. However, as the paper previously argued, China is unable to endure the costs of making the RMB a new KC. Influenced by Chinese Marxism, the willingness to pursue the status of a key currency is incongruent with the development strategy pursued by the CCP (Eichengreen and Lombardi 2017). This stems from Chinese Marxist economics, which perceives the reserve currency as an emblem of international monetary hegemony forged through imperialistic and expansionist forces, a notion that contradicts Marxist principles (Desai 2020). Consequently, assuming the role of a key currency provider is deemed unfavorable.

Secondly, the alternative approach involves striking a balance in the asymmetry of the US and a comprehensive reconfiguration of the existing unipolar IMS. This transformative endeavor would facilitate the emergence of a multipolar IMS, rendering a global key currency unnecessary and promoting the establishment of several regional key currency providers. Such a recalibration of influence spheres would create an avenue for China to augment its monetary prowess and acquire additional autonomy in monetary policy, while concurrently embracing controlled additional international responsibilities. This strategic realignment could effectively curtail the magnitude of external sanctions within acceptable thresholds. The internationalization of the RMB seems to present a more attractive avenue for undermining the foundations of the unipolar IMS.

The RMB internationalization projects are designed to expand China's sphere of influence and develop an RMB-dominated network. Indirect initiatives in the internationalization of the RMB serve a dual purpose by enlarging China's sphere of influence and intensifying the economic interdependence of smaller nations upon it. China's deployment of substantial investments and low-interest development loans for infrastructural undertakings in developing countries casts China in the role of a responsible stakeholder, committed to fostering "common development." A case in point is the AIIB, which strives to advance "prosperity and economic development for Asia," offering diverse financial services, including loans, guarantees, and equity investments, to alleviate financial strains and economic contractions in developing economies (AIIB 2023). In this manner, China assumes the role of a lender of last resort for nations grappling with deficits in foreign capital or significant obligations to Western financial institutions, potentially establishing a refined system for global crisis management akin to the post-World War II US approach

(Horn et al. 2023). This strategic move fosters closer integration into a China-led economic framework, potentially rendering these nations more susceptible to the ramifications of Chinese economic policies.

Conversely, direct initiatives aimed at RMB internationalization contribute to enhancing the RMB's utility as a medium of exchange within the global marketplace and enable the accumulation of RMB reserves abroad. As highlighted by the European Central Bank (2022), RMB currency swap agreements effectively manage potential short-term market disruptions and mitigate abrupt liquidity shortages encountered by foreign banks. This dynamic implies an increased demand for RMB in contexts marked by extensive trade and investment activities. Such arrangements facilitate heightened accessibility to RMB as a viable inclusion in the foreign exchange reserves maintained by states. The implementation of foreign exchange reserve arrangements further augments international acknowledgement of the RMB's role as a reliable store of value. A discernible outcome is the potential proliferation of an outward flow effect, where nations holding significant RMB foreign exchange reserves manifest a preference for conducting trade transactions with third parties using the RMB, thus culminating in the establishment of an RMB-dominated clearing network (Ikenberry 2005).

Assessing China's Current Monetary Power

Assessing the extent of China's monetary power thus far is crucial in gauging its potential to achieve its objectives of counteracting US hegemonic monetary power. A comparative analysis of the cumulative monetary power of the RMB against the USD and other KCs, such as the euro (EUR) and the yen (JPY), serves as a valuable metric. A prevalent approach to evaluating states' monetary power, particularly concerning the identification of a KC, involves appraising currencies based on their performance across three pivotal roles: medium of exchange, unit of account, and store of value (Cohen 2013). However, considering that China's aspirations do not revolve around inducing a power shift within the prevailing hierarchical structure of the IMS, Cohen's three functions of key currency no longer offer an apt framework for quantifying the precise monetary power sought by China. For instance, the anchor role acting as a currency numeraire provides negligible symbolic gains—international prestige—in the face of its cost. Its pegging function impairs the issuer's ability to resort to exchange-rate shifts as part of the adjustment process, thereby compromising the power to delay or deflect (Cohen 2013). This subsequently impairs China's autonomy to control the currency and financial markets, outcomes incongruent with China's strategic objectives.

To augment its monetary sway relative to the US and curtail the US capability to enforce sanctions, China intervenes in its floating exchange rate system to pursue at least two intertwined goals: the preservation of monetary policy autonomy and the expansion of RMB reserves overseas, despite some associated costs including curtailed capital movement and RMB depreciation. These pursuits collectively contribute to bolstering overseas monetary influence, aligned with the broader objective of potentially supplanting the USD as the predominant medium of exchange in international transactions.

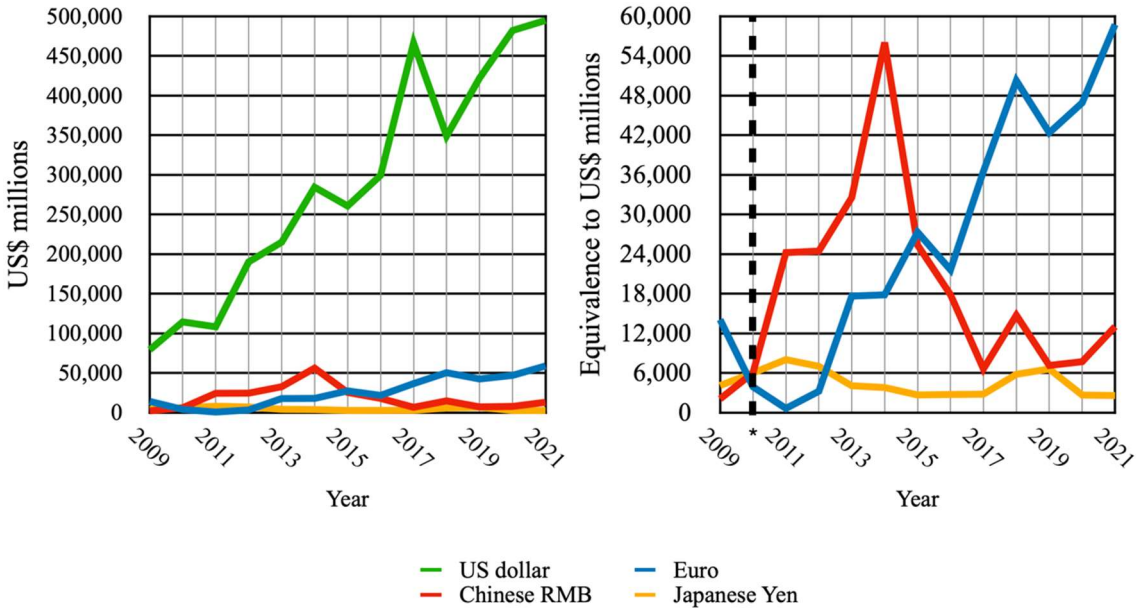
The autonomy of monetary policy is contingent upon the extent of monetary sovereignty vested in the central government. In this context, monetary sovereignty is defined as the capacity of a state to issue sovereign debt. Accordingly, assuming debt obligations denominated in a foreign currency is regarded as an abdication of sovereignty in the domains of monetary and financial affairs. Such a practice curtails the state's capacity to exercise diverse facets of monetary sovereignty, including the regulation of money supply, interest rates, and the exchange rate system (Patrício Ferreira Lima 2022, 423). This unconventional definition facilitates a quantitative evaluation of the extent to which states are predisposed to acknowledge and manifest their willingness to be influenced by Chinese monetary policy through the possession of liabilities denominated in the RMB. A greater magnitude of RMB-denominated debt held abroad signifies heightened confidence and trust exhibited by those governments in the resilience of the Chinese economy and its fiscal regulations. For China, the imperative lies in cultivating alliances and expanding its sphere of influence within the global hierarchy of monetary power.

Figure 1 illustrates that USD-denominated bonds significantly dominated the Asian market from 2009 to 2021, constituting approximately 89% of the total issued bonds. This observation underscores the considerable credibility of the US government across numerous Asian economies, rendering them receptive to the influence of Federal Reserve Bank policies. Notably, RMB-denominated bonds exhibit the most pronounced compound annual growth rate (19.45%) among the four currencies analyzed. This suggests a rapid expansion in RMB-based bond issuances, surpassing those denominated in Yen by 2010, albeit still representing a modest proportion of the broader Asian bond market.

While bonds denominated in EUR display consistent growth, RMB bonds overtook the EUR's second position in the aftermath of the European debt crisis, maintaining this position until 2015 (as depicted in Figure 1 without USD). The ascent of RMB bonds to a prominent position represents a notable challenge to the established standing of the euro. Although RMB cannot presently contend with the pervasive dominance of the USD within

the Asian bond market, its trajectory could potentially contribute to cultivating a more diversified regional landscape within the bond market in the foreseeable future.

Figure 1. International bond issuance in Asia by currency with and without USD



* = Europeam debt crisis outbreak in 2010.

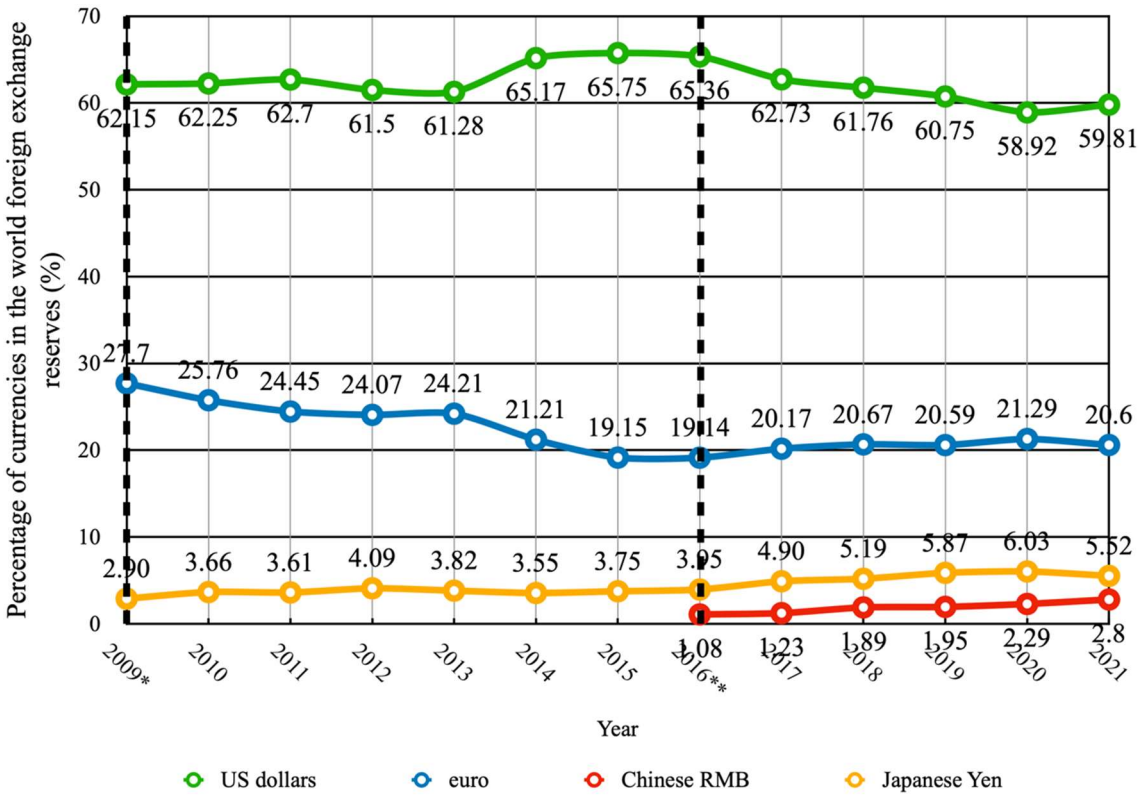
Source: International Capital Market Association (ICMA), January 2022.

Moreover, the accumulation of renminbi (RMB) reserves by foreign governments contributes to the process of de-dollarization among nations holding substantial RMB reserves. The presence of RMB reserves establishes a foundation that prompts holding states to engage in a trade with China, thereby facilitating an augmented outflow of RMB to these nations. This phenomenon results from the heightened accessibility of and growing demand for RMB in bilateral trading endeavors. As the proportion of RMB in the foreign exchange reserves of these nations increases, there emerges an incentive for them to prioritize the utilization of RMB over the USD in their mutual trade transactions, even in the absence of direct Chinese involvement. Subsequently, an ecosystem for RMB clearing is cultivated within these nations.

While some critics argue that this pathway might be deemed impractical due to the continued reliance of these nations on sophisticated technologies, knowledge-intensive professional services, and other products from Western markets that predominantly mandate transactions in USD (as I will discuss in the next section), it is noteworthy that this scenario does not produce adverse repercussions when foreign exchange reserves serve as a metric.

Figure 2 illustrates the sustained dominance of the USD in global foreign exchange reserves, consistently retaining a majority share of approximately 60%. However, an enduring downward trajectory in the USD's share has been evident since 2016, coinciding with China's inclusion in the special drawing rights basket following a seven-year initiation of the RMB internationalization. Notably, the USD's share dipped below the 60% threshold in 2020. The average growth rate for the USD between 2009 and 2016 recorded a value of 0.4585. Subsequently, a noticeable downturn to -1.11 was observed from 2016 to 2021, aligning with RMB's incorporation into the special drawing rights basket. Conversely, the average growth rate for RMB during the same interval stood at 0.34, indicating a potential adverse correlation between the USD and RMB over the preceding six years. This correlation may suggest a subtle yet progressive realignment in monetary power dynamics. Notably, the yen also exhibited growth during this period. However, its average growth rate (0.21) remains lower than that of the RMB, signifying a more robust growth trajectory for the latter.

Figure 2. World official foreign exchange reserves by country



*= China began RMB internationalization programs in 20019.

**= RMB joined SDR basket at IMF in 2016.

Source: IMF (2023b)

Remarkably, among the top four reserve currencies, RMB's share of global official foreign exchange reserves has displayed the most formidable growth pattern. Although the substantial disparity in absolute share between the US and China suggests that immediate power parity is improbable, the divergent trends observed in recent years warrant attentive consideration.

As previously mentioned, the US monetary sanctions that hindered Russia's access to its USD-denominated foreign exchange reserves after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 have prompted President Putin to acknowledge the imperative of alternatives to the USD in trade transactions (Simes 2020). Simultaneously, Chinese leaders view these sanctions as an opening to challenge USD supremacy (Alwago 2022). In addition to increased RMB reserves held by the Russian Central Bank, RMB bilateral swap agreements can facilitate Russia's circumvention of these sanctions (Siddiqui 2021).

Indeed, the pursuit of the so-called "de-dollarization" has persistently constituted a shared aspiration for both China and Russia. This commitment was underscored by their early currency swap agreement in 2014, amounting to 150 billion RMB (equivalent to 24.5 billion USD). Consequently, the employment of USD in bilateral trade between Russia and China has noticeably waned over recent years. In 2015, nearly 90% of bilateral transactions were conducted in USD, a figure that receded to 51% by 2019 (Simes 2020). Given the relatively stable foundation of mutual political trust between Russia and China and the increasingly deteriorating US-Russian relationship, coupled with China's rising significance as a foreign trade partner, it is reasonable to anticipate a continued increase in the proportion of RMB in Russia's foreign exchange reserves, at least in the near term.

China's palpable discontent with the prevailing global hegemony of the USD is conspicuous. Yet, despite this discontent, the prospect of imminent power parity remains remote, making it inadequate to anticipate an immediate power transition. However, China does exhibit remarkable potential and benefits from favorable external conditions—including Russia's support—that could increase of its monetary power. One avenue for exploring this latent "potential" is to scrutinize the extent to which RMB internationalization initiatives can amplify China's monetary power over an extended temporal horizon, with a narrowed emphasis on a specific region. In the subsequent section, I will evaluate the plausible future trajectory of East and South Asian monetary integration and the role that RMB internationalization may assume within this context through the lens of neofunctionalism.

Prospects for RMB-led Regional Monetary Integration in East and South Asia

Since 2000, the euro has swiftly ascended to secure the second position among global reserve currencies (as illustrated in Figure 2), maintaining a stable share ranging from 19.14% to 27%. This places it behind only the USD and significantly ahead of the yen. The period from 2017 to 2021 has seen a modest recovery and stability for the EUR, indicating its notable resilience to debt crises. While it is widely acknowledged by analysts that the euro is unlikely to surpass the USD as the primary global currency in the foreseeable future (Cohen 2009; Germain and Schwartz 2014; Polivach 2020), the EUR serves as an intriguing model for monetary integration beyond the context of USD unipolarity. It offers a ray of hope for China to potentially achieve a comparable integration, contributing to the establishment of a multipolar global monetary order alongside other regional key currencies (KCs) (Tammen et al. 2017).

As a result, economists have applied a range of optimal currency area criteria to the East and South Asian context and juxtaposed its performance with that of the Eurozone to evaluate the feasibility of an RMB-led regional common currency area. Scholars contend that this region is approaching a state of readiness for integration (as discussed in Grauwe 2012; Watanabe and Ogura 2010; Quah 2012; Lee and Koh 2012, among others). This assertion is supported by the diminishing impact of nation-specific factors within the region and the burgeoning growth of financial and trade integration, closely mirroring the developmental trajectory of the Eurozone (Lee and Azali 2012). This evidence suggests an increasing capacity within the region to embark on the path of forming a monetary union. Ahn et al. (2006) argue that East Asia has already fulfilled the macroeconomic prerequisites for an optimal currency area, and they call upon China's strategic acumen to play a pivotal role in solidifying a regional monetary union.

While the existing literature recognizes the relevance of political factors in the context of monetary integration, it tends to downplay the influence of politics. Notably, this stance contradicts Mundell's (1961) proposition, which posits skepticism about the efficacy of flexible exchange rates for economic stabilization based on an unsuccessful Canadian experiment. Intriguingly, even after six decades, countries like the United States, Canada, and other American nations have yet to actualize a fixed exchange rate system as initially postulated by Mundell. As such, Chey (2009) draws attention to the fact that regional political conditions could potentially impede the establishment of a monetary union, providing a pertinent counterpoint to prevailing assumptions.

Applying a Neofunctionalist Framework

Neofunctionalism, a theoretical framework rooted in coherent political propositions concerning regional monetary integration, has been particularly applied to the European context (as discussed in Rosamond 2000, 51-52). Central to neofunctionalism are two key concepts—loyalty and spillover—which provide essential political criteria for evaluating the potential for a common currency area in East and South Asia.

In terms of loyalty, the establishment of the European Monetary Union (EMU) in 1999 stands as compelling empirical support for Haas's (1958) proposition that the transfer of loyalty to a new regional center while retaining pre-existing national (or local) identities is attainable. This transfer of loyalty relies on the presence of a widely trusted regional monetary framework with clear leadership, wherein smaller states entrust the integration process to offer more systematic and efficient solutions to their economic interests compared to their national authorities. On the other hand, Haas (1968) originally defined spillover as the phenomenon wherein the initiation and deepening of integration within a given economic sector led to further integration within and beyond that sector, necessitating augmented authoritative capabilities at the regional level. Furthermore, Haas (1961) suggests that economic sectors involving "low politics"—those directly impacting daily life—tend to foster integrative tendencies more effectively than sectors dealing with macro-level and grandiose issues, such as defense and diplomacy.

Then returning to the PTT, an examination of the RMB's regional sphere of influence within the global context reveals significant progress in mitigating China's reliance on the USD through efforts towards internationalization in Asia. This progress is exemplified by the establishment of a loosely structured bilateral RMB clearing network, with China serving as the central axis. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the entrenched affiliations and vested interests of the US and its regional allies impose substantial constraints on the wider proliferation of the RMB, rendering it susceptible to potential US interventions.

Loyalty: A look into competing leaderships and the choices small powers make

The pursuit of key currency status within a confined regional context operates on principles akin to those governing global key currency status. This implies that similar challenges arise, including potential trade deficits stemming from domestic market openness, the tension between domestic inflation control and the need for currency stability as a store of value, and the obligation to serve as an anchor in an intraregional fixed exchange rate system, among other factors. While the burdens faced by regional key currency providers

may be relatively lighter than those of their global counterparts, they are nonetheless inherent.

However, recent developments underscore the CCP's heightened vigilance in safeguarding monetary and financial autonomy. The Central Committee of the CCP has initiated a new phase by elevating financial power to a higher political standing within the party-state structure, as evidenced by the 2023 Program for Party and State Institutional Reform. This reform introduces the State Administration for Financial Supervision, transferring the daily oversight responsibility of financial matters from the central bank to the State Council. Additionally, it establishes a Central Financial Commission, relocating the Financial Stability and Development Commission – formerly accountable to the State Council – to CCP headquarters. This reflects that CCP has been even further centralizing and reserving its monetary and financial autonomy. Implicit in these changes is the indication that the CCP is unlikely to anchor a currency or accept a fixed exchange rate, relinquishing the critical autonomy to adjust the floating exchange rate for advancing monetary integration.

Moreover, the opportunity cost of not providing a regional key currency (or merely anchoring a potential Asian exchange rate mechanism) should not involve accepting a foreign currency to assume this role. Such an arrangement potentially deepens the regional monetary hegemony of the USD. Japan, a prominent Asian economy capable of maintaining key currency status similar to that of the USD, faces constraints posed by China. The Chiang Mai Initiative[1], co-proposed by China, provides an alternative framework to the Japan-proposed Asian Monetary Fund, which downgrades Japan's leading role to a cooperative role in the region (Rapkin 2001). Consequently, China and its potential Asian allies, such as Russia and ASEAN members, can diminish the US sphere of influence in shaping East and South Asian monetary integration by marginalizing Japan as the US agency.

However, at the behest of the US, Japan will collaborate to counteract any actions that might downgrade the USD's status to a "negotiated" currency in the region (Katada 2008). Given the considerable reliance from export-oriented Asian economies (including China itself) on Japan's extensive consumption markets and advanced production resources, even a slight appreciation of the USD or the yen can notably bolster the US and Japanese

[11] The Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI) originated as a series of bilateral swap arrangements, evolving into a consolidated multilateral agreement via the CMI process in 2009. This transformation culminated in the establishment of a regional reserve pool, valued at USD120 billion, consolidated under a singular contract. This pool was significantly backed by contributions from the 'plus three' states and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states. Subsequently, in 2011, the ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO) was instituted as the regional surveillance agency for the CMI (De Grauwe and Zhang, 2012).

capital influence in the region, thereby rendering de-dollarization less likely. This competitive landscape underscores that China and Japan both resist initiatives that bolster the other's position in leading monetary integration, potentially leading to a contentious struggle for dominance. Considering the prevailing circumstances, it becomes apparent that neither China nor Japan is presently positioned to assume key currency status, casting a shadow over the prospects for the emergence of a preeminent supranational monetary institution.

The absence of clear leadership and consensus among major global powers presents a significant impediment to smaller states in their consideration of realigning allegiance towards external entities such as the under-institutionalized Chiang Mai Initiative. For peripheral states, the calculus involves weighing anticipated benefits from integration against potential hazards tied to potential encroachments on their national governments' spheres of competence (Lindberg 1966). In comparison to committing to a binding regional framework devoid of a clearly defined dominant power, these states prioritize the preservation of their national policy-making autonomy. This preference is guided by a belief that such autonomy serves their economic and political interests more effectively (Solís and Wilson 2017). Another concern is that the commitment to a binding reginal framework without a clearly defined dominant power could introduce unwelcome uncertainties into domestic political arrangements due to the resultant diminution of domestic autonomies.

The Asian Development Bank underscores that the credibility of the Chinese central bank still stands on par with central banks in any other emerging markets (Aizenman et al. 2011, 26), thereby raising questions about the capacity for it to serve as a dominant regional monetary authority. Reflecting on the Annual Dinner of the Economics Society of Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong emphasized Singapore's imperative for adaptive flexibility and consistent economic reform (Bank for International Settlements 2003). He expressed support for "broad leadership groups" as opposed to centralized agencies for international governance. This viewpoint is substantiated by the external context characterized by the competition between great powers, notably the Sino-Japan rivalry for monetary leadership in this case. Leaders of small states (such as Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand), therefore, find themselves necessitating substantial independent autonomy to enact frequent domestic economic reforms in response to the volatile global economic landscape marked by shifting hegemonic dynamics.

However, this emphasis on preserving domestic policy autonomy engenders strategic divergence among small states. The resultant policy landscape is illustrated by the delicate solidarity within ASEAN member states, wherein some members lean towards forging closer

ties with the US, while others gravitate towards China (Graham 2013). This underscores the reality that small states make disparate choices in navigating the competition for economic interdependence between competing major powers, further attenuating the prospects for regional integration.

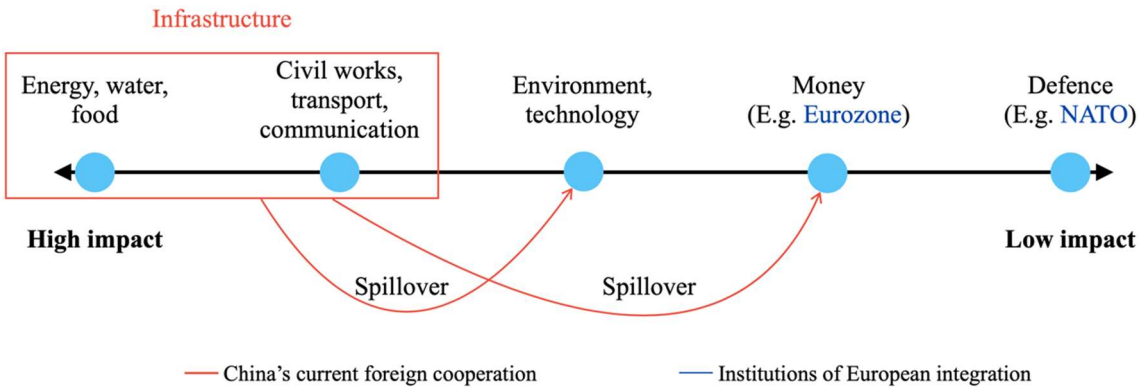
Spillover: An impaired effect with political pressure as its driver

Analogous to the role of coal and steel in igniting the process of European integration, cooperation in infrastructure development stands as the foundational cornerstone of China-led integration. Both realms hold pivotal significance in the everyday lives of individuals, although the latter encompasses a considerably broader spectrum of indispensable sectors (refer to Figure 3). The 2021 Annual Report of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) highlights that over the period spanning 2016 to 2021, a total of 70 approved projects were dedicated to essential sectors, encompassing domains such as energy, transportation, water resources, and agriculture (AIIB 2021). This subset represented a substantial 44% of all projects that received approval.

In a responsive maneuver to the exigencies arising from the COVID-19 crisis, the AIIB also sanctioned the approval of 45 projects under the pandemic recovery facility in the years 2020 and 2021 (AIIB 2021, 12). Remarkably, this cluster accounted for more than 28% of all approved projects during that timeframe. Thus, a noteworthy 72% of the cumulative projects, equivalent to an estimated value of 23 billion USD, were strategically channeled towards directly buttressing the quality of everyday life for targeted populations in specific locales. This pronounced emphasis on addressing the immediate needs and welfare of the populace underscores the centrality of infrastructure development as a pivotal conduit for realizing China-led integration objectives.

The spillover has manifested most notably in the realm of environmental cooperation (Figure 3). Both international and local non-governmental organizations have raised concerns regarding the lack of transparency pertaining to resource utilization and the limited strides taken towards safeguarding animal and environmental interests within projects funded by Chinese investments (Siripurapu and Berman 2022). A technical examination conducted by Sattar et al. (2022) has empirically validated that China's overseas investments exert a substantial influence on environmental degradation, with energy expansion being identified as a dominant contributor to carbon emissions within the host regions of such investments. These adverse environmental repercussions not only imperil China's own commitments within the framework of the Paris Agreement but also cast a shadow on the commitments of its partner nations.

Figure 3. Different economic sectors' impact on people's everyday lives



Note: Economic sectors are measured in a form of ordinal data in which categories possess an inherent order up daily impact on the public during non-war period but with distances between them that are not uniform.

Source: Author.

In response to mounting environmental concerns and pressure to align with global climate objectives, China has embarked on an augmented trajectory of cooperation with its investment destinations, specifically focusing on climate-related issues. A tangible reflection of this evolution is discernible in the recalibrated corporate vision of the AIIB in 2021. This re-envisioned paradigm underscores the pursuit of a prosperous Asia that hinges upon sustainable economic development and heightened regional collaboration. Concomitantly, it conveys the collaborative intent to channel increased investments towards sustainable infrastructure, thereby unlocking fresh reservoirs of capital, novel technologies, and innovative mechanisms aimed at addressing the specter of climate change across the Asian domain (AIIB 2021, 9). The 2021 AIIB Annual Report (AIIB 2021) delineates that a substantial 92 projects are earmarked as "green infrastructure" constituting the highest proportion (80%) among all areas prioritized by the AIIB for financial assistance. In contrast to the explicitly articulated intent to collaborate on climate-centric matters, the dynamics of monetary collaboration undergo a subtler influence through spillover effects.

As China's international trade and investment activities continue to expand, a growing number of foreign states find their financial systems becoming increasingly reliant on RMB liquidity. This trend is exemplified by the approximately 20 Asian states, including advanced economies like Singapore, Japan, and South Korea, which have entered into currency swap agreements with China (for a comprehensive list, refer to Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2020). David Mutimer (1989) introduces an additional prerequisite for achieving higher levels of regional integration, emphasizing the necessity for potential member states

to establish a more profound degree of multilateral interdependence before experiencing spillover. In its pursuit of heightened regional integration, China has positioned itself as an exclusive partner for Asian countries seeking to overcome mutual distrust and integrate into the global economic chain. This strategic approach aims to grant China substantial latitude and external advantages within these regional partnerships.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that such a bilateral cooperation often culminates in partnerships cantered exclusively around China, with limited relevance to interactions among states interconnected through bilateral currency swap arrangements. Consequently, while bilateral cooperation may encompass a myriad of economic sectors within specific geographical domains, it frequently falls short of elevating these two-way partnerships to the level of a multilateral network or a comprehensive integration process. Notably, the renewal of bilateral currency swap arrangements with China frequently transpires without substantial alterations to the pre-existing conditions, as observed in the cases of Singapore, Japan, Thailand, and others. A discernible trend in the number of agreements and their authorized values has consistently emerged over the observed period (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2020), suggesting sustained stability in the swap values encompassed within each agreement.

Drawing parallels from the historical progression from the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) to the European Monetary Union (EMU) as an empirical model of functional spillover (Rosamond 2000), it becomes apparent that the ECSC was fundamentally rooted in genuine multilateral cooperation before evolving into the more advanced EMU stage. In contrast, existing bilateral cooperation often fails to encapsulate the overarching desire of the signatory parties to achieve comprehensive integration. Empirical analysis by Mohammed Ahmed (2019) suggests that the principal incentive driving the signing of swap agreements lies in the substantial symbiotic benefits accrued to both recipient and provider countries, rather than in actively contributing to collective endeavors aimed at advancing the region's shared interests.

It is imperative to underscore that bilateral cooperation oriented towards self-interest and immediate gains yields limited progress in the establishment of a supranational high authority that necessitates member states relinquishing a degree of autonomy. An analogous phenomenon from the European experience, termed "spill-around and retrenchment" (Schmitter 1971), emerges wherein cooperation expands across different sectors while maintaining the existing level of cooperative engagement within each sector. In this context, while relevant states may elevate the extent of collaboration contingent upon their

assessment of its impact on national interests, the creation of comprehensive regional institutions remains an elusive strategy.

This intricate interplay between bilateral cooperation and multilateral integration is evidenced in the case of RMB liquidity and currency swap agreements. The substantial volume of swap lines, peaking at 347.2 billion RMB (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2020), has not significantly altered the overall trade settlement dynamics of partner countries, which predominantly continue to be denominated in USD (Hao, Han, and Li 2022). This underscores the inherent limitations of bilateral cooperation in driving substantive shifts in the broader economic landscape, with much of the trade dynamics remaining anchored to established patterns.

In summary, while the expansion of RMB liquidity and bilateral cooperation holds the potential to catalyze regional integration, the prevailing pattern of exclusive bilateral partnerships centered around China and driven by self-interest poses challenges to the establishment of a comprehensive multilateral framework. The dynamics between self-interest and shared regional objectives underscore the need for a more nuanced and encompassing approach to achieving lasting regional integration.

A fundamental disparity in the underlying dynamics of the spillover is apparent when comparing the process of East and South Asian integration with that of the Eurozone. In case of the Eurozone, the EMU's establishment served to notably reduce transaction costs within the well-established European single market. This integration was underpinned by the need for coordinated transportation policies among member states to facilitate the efficient movement of essential commodities such as coal and steel. The resultant spillover effect primarily aimed at enhancing economic gains for the participating nations, fostering a cohesive economic landscape. Conversely, when the spillover is driven by political considerations, its durability becomes more susceptible to fragility. An illustrative example is the spillover stemming from AIIB's new corporate vision, which accentuates environmental concerns. In this context, the spillover is not market-driven but instead is a result of political pressures arising from China's commitment to the Paris Agreement and its endeavor to evade Western critique. The spillover effect might be less stable because the CCP can arbitrarily withdraw climate treaties without direct economic cost. Overall, political "obligations" of this nature tend to exhibit a heightened fragility to develop and sustain such spillover in comparison to the enduring influence of economic interdependence. Such different nature of the driver of the spillover gives China an ambiguous future.

Regional Sphere of Influence under the Global Hegemony's Interference

PTT posits the concept of hierarchical structure in global and regional power dynamics and describes the interactions between great powers at these levels. Regional powers are typically unable to effectively engage with global power structures, while global powers can influence regional outcomes (Lemke 1996, 2002). In East and South Asia, where strong ties and interests with the US and EU are prevalent, there is heightened interference from these global powers. This consequently limits China's ability to exert influence within the region. The *2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* accentuates the escalating challenges emanating from China, serving as the principal catalyst for the intensified focus of the United States and its allies (White House 2022). The 2022 strategic blueprint pledges to bolster the US economic leadership in Asia, outlining a competitive strategy against China. Although the UK and the EU have established a certain level of financial cooperation with China, such as currency swap agreements, they publicly endorse the US strategy and are relatively conservative and falter in these collaborative actions.

Despite China's considerable accumulation of monetary power through its active engagement in Asian infrastructure development, its global influence remains constrained. This is primarily attributed to the persistent reliance of developing states on the enduring hegemony of the United States in knowledge-intensive industries and its robust domestic consumption market, which continue to prevail despite the ongoing transformation of the region. The focus of South-South cooperation predominantly centers on primary and secondary industries that cater to essential human needs, including agriculture, manufacturing, and transportation. However, these collaborations do not encompass the production processes associated with products and services demanding high levels of knowledge-intensive expertise from tertiary and quaternary industries.

As a result, Asian states continue to heavily rely on Western consumer markets for the export of their basic goods, while simultaneously importing advanced technology products and professional services to augment their production capabilities and broader societal developments. This entrenched dependence underscores the necessity for these Asian countries to sustain trade relations with Western markets, thereby reinforcing the indispensability of the US-led IMS. Consequently, the pursuit of closer monetary integration under the leadership of China may not be perceived as a credible or prudent strategy to effectively meet their trade requirements, particularly for non-communist states like Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. In these cases, the United States wields substantial power and

influence over their decision-making processes and developmental trajectories, making the prospect of a China-led monetary integration less viable (Niemann and Ioannou 2015).

Conclusion

This article offers a twofold contribution. First, it supports the prevailing consensus that China is unlikely to pose a challenge to the hegemony of the USD on the global stage because of structural barriers on the domestic level that render the key status unattainable for RMB.

In this article, I used the power transition theory framework to provide valuable insights into the current state of relations between the US and China in the context of monetary power. By doing so, I was able to highlight that despite China's dissatisfaction with the prevailing dominance of the US, a substantial power disparity continues to exist between the two nations. A monetary power shift between the US and China is improbable, as noted by Tammen (2017). Following this logic, I argued that China seeks to promote RMB internationalization without an ambition to replace USD as the key currency. China has long criticized the US for exploiting its hegemonic monetary status to impose sanctions to promote the liberalization of China's national financial market. To mitigate the impact of US sanctions, the establishment of a monetary network cantered around the RMB within China's economic sphere of influence could potentially serve as a countermeasure against the prevailing US power asymmetry. This network has the potential to escalate costs for the US as it endeavors to advance its strategic objectives by imposing sanctions. Indirect RMB internationalization programs expand China's sphere of influence by increasing the economic dependence of small and middle powers in China to build a new monetary alliance. Direct initiatives aimed at the internationalization of the RMB contribute to enhancing its role as a viable medium of exchange in the global market and facilitate the accumulation of RMB reserves abroad. Nonetheless, empirical evidence indicates that these efforts have not yet posed a substantial threat to the prevailing hegemony of the USD.

At the regional level, this study delved into the potential for China to establish monetary supremacy within the confines of East and South Asia. The creation of a unified currency framework for the region could strategically serve China in countering the US's ability to wield sanctions. However, the comprehensive analysis of factors such as loyalty and spillover revealed that China's reluctance to offer a global key currency extends to the regional sphere. Furthermore, the foregone benefits of not providing a regional key currency do not include permitting others to assume that role. The competitive dynamic between

China and Japan obstructs both nations from assuming the role of a key currency provider, thereby inhibiting the emergence of a supranational monetary institution. As a result, neither major powers nor smaller states can shift their economic dependence to a regional entity due to the lack of consensus on leadership and a dependable regional authority. Concerning the spillover, it is evident that this phenomenon promotes collaborative efforts between China and the region across various economic sectors. However, there is no substantiated indication that spillover, arising from bilateral collaborations, significantly impacts the depth of integration among the participating partners. Meanwhile, the USD dominates this region, and China has yet to demonstrate the capability to serve as a viable alternative in terms of both its driving force and competencies.

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Criminal Governance and Social Mobilization in Brazilian Favelas: A Qualitative Meta-Analysis

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Abstract

This article examines the dynamics of crime governance and social mobilization in Brazil's impoverished communities to answer why residents of favelas mobilize against state interventions while seemingly accepting the rule of organized criminal groups (OCGs). Previous studies have primarily explored the materialistic hypothesis or the role of coercion and fear in shaping community behavior. This article employs the tools provided by the literature on contentious politics and a qualitative meta-analysis to systematically assess the varied ways in which OCGs interact with the state and favela residents, mapping the heterogeneous effects produced as a result. The findings suggest that in favelas where criminal organizations are perceived as benign, residents may rely on them to fulfill basic needs, while the state is seen as an outsider that brings disruption of routines and violence. In favelas where criminal organizations are malign, there are few incentives for change as the outcomes of challenging OCGs are uncertain.

Keywords

Criminal Governance; Organized Criminal Groups; Social Mobilization; Qualitative Meta-Analysis; Routines; Grievances

Introduction

Since the 1980s, organized criminal groups (OCGs) have dominated many poor communities in Brazil's largest cities—Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Fortaleza, Salvador, and Brasilia (Arias 2014). Using enough firepower to confront the state, drug dealers impose their informal institutions (Dana 2016), setting these impoverished areas, known as favelas[1], apart from the rest of the city and regulating almost every aspect of their residents' daily lives (Arias 2006). Reports indicate that organized crime in Rio de Janeiro controls almost one-fourth of

[1] More recently, the term "favela" has been substituted with "community," as the former sometimes carries a negative connotation. Despite the good intention, the contraposition of terms may highlight the difference between the city and the so-called favelas, the peripherical communities (Birman 2008). In this article, I employ the term "favela" to account for its traditional use and communal identity, using the term "slum" as a synonym only to avoid excessive repetition.

the city's population (Sistema de Assentamentos de Baixa Renda 2021; Leitão and Lannoy 2020).

Successive state and federal administrations have tried to counter the problem via confrontation, leading to dismal results: the number of deaths related to police interventions in the country went from an already high 2,212 deaths in 2013 to 6,416 deaths in 2020, making Brazilian police one of the most lethal in the world (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2021, 62). Police killings frequently spark street protests in the victimized communities, sometimes escalating into blockages of roads near the favelas. Officials most times try to disqualify these demonstrations as orchestrated by OCGs to discredit the police (Pandolfi and Grynszpan 2005, 135). Corroborating this latter statement, a widespread opinion in the country is that favela dwellers complain only about state violence, never against gang violence: "Nobody protests against drug dealers" (Trigo 2020). Along these lines, a question of heated popular debate but still underexplored in the literature is why favela dwellers protest against police intervention rather than against OCGs. Why do not residents use formal and informal channels to oppose crime organizations and help the state to assert its monopoly of political authority?

Common knowledge suggests two answers: (1) residents are coerced to accept the criminal rule, living under fear (Zaluar 2002; Silva 2004; 2010), or (2) they condone the illegal order and benefit from criminal governance (see Souza 2005; Leite 2008). Regarding the *fear hypothesis*, there are many reports on how criminals terrorize vulnerable communities (G1 2017), subjugating dwellers to harsh quasi-laws, curfews (Narrete 1999), expulsion from the community, and even executions (Maia and Muniz 2015). Also, residents may fear that the state will be inefficient in fighting against drug dealers, which would allow criminals to remain in place and then seek revenge (Custodio 2013). Concerning the *materialistic hypothesis*, as Sakamoto (2022) notes, many in Brazil seem to believe the solution to urban violence is "to drop a bomb on crime-controlled communities." Following this logic, slum dwellers are all part of a big criminal organization or, at least, would-be criminals (Guimarães 1981).

I do not reject the demobilizing role fear can play (see Young 2019) or the existence of cases in which members of poor communities, for multiple reasons that will be addressed ahead, develop a symbiotic coexistence with OCGs (see Leite 2008; Fernandes 2019). However, assuming fear as the prevalent explanatory variable for crime governance oversimplifies a complex dynamic and undermines agency, failing to account for instances

in which communities spontaneously oppose police intervention (Gouveia 2017).[2] Likewise, conjecturing that entire communities ally with drug dealers for material gains may be tantamount to adopting a stereotype that describes poor populations living in gang-dominated areas as criminals by equivalence (Zaluar 1994; 1985)[3].

More recent scholarship has called attention to the varied ways crime organizations compete or collaborate with the state and interact with populations in Brazil's impoverished communities, producing heterogeneous effects (Barnes 2017). OCGs that are tyrannical, violent, or predatory spark grievances that may lead to certain degrees of popular resistance. On the other hand, where criminal organizations are benign toward the population, criminals can gain community acceptance (Magaloni et al. 2020). Despite this proposition may seem to corroborate the *materialistic hypothesis*, it is a more nuanced approach that goes beyond depicting the relationship between criminals and communities as a *quid pro quo* bargain of material benefits to yield popular support. The outcomes from the interaction between actors arise from a complex net of social trust, identity, frames, and repertoires of action.

Therefore, recent studies (e.g., Magaloni et al. 2020; Arias 2006; 2014; Alves 2011; Arias and Rodrigues 2006; Barnes 2017) have provided important insights into the understanding of criminal governance and the behavior of affected populations. Still, social science research has mostly overlooked the social mobilization dimension of the phenomenon. The notable exceptions are Holston's study (2008) which addresses the dynamics between OCGs, states, and democracy and Arias' study (2019) which tackles the strategies employed by civic groups to control violence by police and criminal groups. The present article contributes to this literature by focusing on contention politics towards governance—both civil and criminal.

The benefit of using the extensive knowledge produced by the specialized literature is to add new layers to the study of the relations between vulnerable communities, the state, and crime organizations. Whereas Magaloni et al. (2020) indicate that benevolent OCGs in Brazilian favelas can win hearts and minds, the underlying social mechanism that leads the population to undertake informal norms and reject state intervention is still not clear. The

[2] Gonçalves (2013) argues that, in contrast to common misconceptions, residents of favelas are far from being passive victims. They actively engage in the process of shaping and reshaping their urban landscape, demonstrating legal knowledge and capacity for political mobilization.

[3] It should be noted that there are significant differences across favelas and OCGs. Some OCGs are known for their more paternalistic and communalistic views, while others lean towards authoritarianism and even have close ties with the police. As a result, the reality in one favela in Rio de Janeiro may not be directly comparable to another favela in the same city, let alone with a favela in other cities like Guarulhos, Belo Horizonte, or Salvador—each with its own unique context (see Feltrán 2018). This article aims to focus on common reasons behind the rule of OCGs and the progression of social mobilization against the state in Brazilian favelas, while still acknowledging that there are key differences between various OCGs and communities.

substantive and formal tools that the social mobilization groundwork provides are remarkably apposite in this scenario when the goal is to understand the political action that takes place outside the conventional political arena (McAdam et al. 2001, 11).

In addition to building on the theoretical framework, this article employs a qualitative meta-analysis to collect empirical evidence from materials that addressed the topic of criminal governance and violence in Brazilian favelas, systematically mapping the studies that used interviews as a source of evidence and qualitative methodology to inform the analysis. Based on these elements, I argue that in Brazilian favelas where criminal organizations are benign, populations resort to them to fulfill basic needs (e.g., public safety, dispute resolution, cable television, Internet, transport, water, electricity, gas, food, and medications). This situation does not only create dependence but shapes frames and identity status under which the state (and its police) becomes the outsider, playing the role of the agent that brings disorder and violence to the community. Parallelly, where criminal organizations are malign, there are few incentives for changes in the *status quo*, given the uncertainty of payoffs: not only the chances of successful takeover against crime organizations are trifling, but the outcomes are also uncertain—the community will still be underserved and vulnerable to be subjugated by another criminal faction.

To substantiate the argument, the remainder of this article is organized into three main sections. The second section develops on why and how contentious politics guides the construction of the analysis, elaborating on the concepts of grievances, routines, frames, and counter-frames. The third section employs a qualitative meta-analysis to assess how favela dwellers perceive their identity, their relationship with the police and criminals, the needs of their communities, and how these elements interact organically. The fourth section discusses the consequences extracted from the empirical data and theoretical framework, summarizes the findings, and outline their policy implication.

The Politics of Contention

The objective of this article is to understand patterns of contention politics in Brazilian favelas, given the current conjuncture of criminal governance, articulating the analysis through the lenses of the social mobilization theoretical framework. Given this intention, a preliminary question is whether it makes sense to do so. Contention politics finds its classical conceptualization as episodic, public, and collective action that includes the government as a claimant, object of claims, or party to the claim (McAdam et al. 2001, 5). In the case of communities under OCGs' rule, mobilization includes the State as either

"mediator, target, or claimant." (McAdam et al. 2001, 5). Local, state, and federal governments are not only deeply interested in popular claims involving criminal organizations but sometimes targets, when the population demands a solution for the war between factions or for the police violence that ensues—not to mention that states are claimants themselves, via police incursions to crackdown on gang activities.

Moreover, although crime organizations in Brazil do not seek to "topple the government and seize formal power" (Lessing 2015, 1488), they have developed complementary and competitive relationships with the state, sometimes gathering expressive political authority (Barnes 2017). States set the boundaries of contentious politics (Beissinger 1998), still, as Tilly and Tarrow (2015) demonstrate, states have mostly disregarded the impact of non-state armed groups on shaping political contention in the areas they control. Therefore, either because criminal groups present themselves as proto-states within the communities they dominate or because governments are embedded in the problem, the dynamics of contention between OCGs, states, and communities can be analyzed as a social mobilization problem.

The importance of this conceptual choice is that it clears access to a series of well-developed categories, such as grievances, identity, frames, routines, and repertoires of contention. In the following subsections, this article uses these categories to explore in depth the underlying mechanism that explains how criminal governance becomes engrained in favelas in Brazil. By doing so, the article also uncovers why the dwellers of vulnerable communities not only do not mobilize against OCGs but fiercely resist state intervention.

Grievances and Routines: Order and Disorder

Between the 1940s and 1950s, facing the underprovision of all sorts of public goods and the absence of coordinated structures to establish even the most basic collective services (e.g., protection, dispute resolution, water, electricity), favela communities in Brazil started to devise their authoritative bodies with proto-governance roles. Because these bodies lacked enforcement power, other forms of authority developed in parallel, including independent vigilant groups aimed at enforcing local norms and adjusting social behavior (Wolff 2015). When OCGs took over the communities in the following decades, criminals assumed these functions, becoming providers of public goods (Arias 2006).[4]

[4] Misse (2003) argues that criminal groups were more paternalistic in the 1980s and 1990s. However, as the main leaders of these OCGs were either killed or incarcerated, younger leaders took over, and their criminal actions became notably more violent and disruptive. Concurrently, the provision of social services or public goods by these groups appears to have decreased. The qualitative evidence I have collected at least partially contests this perspective.

This could be a temporary conjuncture, once from the 1990s on, the governments in Brazil and other Latin American countries have tried to expand social welfare programs. However, the poorest social groups are not the main beneficiaries of these policies (Holland 2018)—the social safety net in Latin America historically supports people above rather than below the level of income risk (Haggard and Kaufman 2020). Moreover, state capacity is a critical problem across the continent (Luna and Soifer 2017), casting doubts on the state's ability to deliver its promises. Thus, a crucial point is that dwellers of favelas in Brazil do not *take advantage* of informal structures that deliver public goods in the absence of the state; instead, the population of underserved communities *depends* on parallel welfare networks for their subsistence (Lessing 2008; Mota et al. 2008), to access services that are available to populations living in other neighborhoods.

Taking the popular source of criticism in Brazil—that favela communities mobilize only against the police, not against criminals—the intricate dynamic between the state, OCGs, and underserved communities should help explain why slum dwellers may offer resistance against state intervention. As anticipated in the introduction, the literature on social mobilization provides categories that shed new light on the phenomenon. Among them, *grievances* and *routines* show that sporadic police incursions disrupt and endanger the continuity of subsistence services the community counts on to meet basic needs. As Simmons (2014, 515) observes, "threats to subsistence resources are a particularly powerful locus for collective action as they activate a combination of materially and ideationally driven concerns […] perceived not only as material threats, but also as threats to community."

To be clear, this does not mean that communities protest against police intervention due to rational calculations, that is, risk assessment of losing subsistence services. The very disturbance of subsistence routines is enough to engender spontaneous backlash. Bourdieu's (1990; 1996) description of *habitus* is applicable here: socially developed schemas that tend to be reproduced without questioning and regardless of conscious awareness. Habitus (or routines[5]) guide people's perception of the world as well as their actions in the world (Bourdieu 1998). More than a matter of semiotics, routines produce representations that allow people to attribute meaning to their daily experiences (Woodward 2000, 17-18). Exogenous forces that threaten the disruption of routines will often sound counterintuitive and meet fierce opposition, sometimes leading to collective action.

[5] Despite the subtle differences between routines, *habitus*, and quotidian, I am using the concepts to design those taken-for-granted attitudes of everyday life. For this purpose, they are similar enough.

The prospects of contention are especially high when the existence of a community's subsistence routines is jeopardized via intrusion of privacy, safety, or control (Snow et al. 1998). Actions of the state in Brazilian favelas often fulfill all the requirements to pose a threat to the survival of its dwellers, either indirectly (by interrupting routines of subsistence) or directly (via extrajudicial killings). Under the argument that it is not safe for conventional police officers to patrol "areas of risk," the Brazilian state retreated from many communities, allowing OCGs to develop their structures mostly unchecked (Miranda and Muniz 2018). In the last few years, militarized police incursions have become the main mechanism of intervention in gang-controlled territories in Brazil (Hirata et al. 2021). During well-publicized large-scale operations, police employ war-like strategies to occupy favelas, besieging the community, screening residents in the streets, and invasively searching people's houses for drugs and weapons. To outsiders, police incursions may be deemed as necessary to restore public order, yet those living in the affected communities often experience these incursions as disruptions to public services, violations of their rights, including freedom of movement and the sanctity of their homes, and even the potential for loss of life (Alves 2011).

According to the Brazilian Public Security Forum (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2021, 62), the police kill on average 18 people every day in Brazil.[6] Hirata et al. (2021) mapped police interventions in Rio de Janeiro favelas and found a significant convergence between the number of deaths and wounds in shootings during periods of a high incidence of police operations and the number of shootings with the presence of police. According to Brazilian laws, police officers are allowed to use lethal force only to confront an imminent threat[7], yet that might not always be the case. An investigation of police killings in Rio de Janeiro by *The New York Times* found that "officers routinely gun down people without restraint" (Andreoni et al. 2020). Multiple victims were shot in the back and/or three or more times. Half of the killings were carried out by officers already charged with murder (Andreoni et al. 2020).

In these circumstances, it is unsurprising that police interventions are not always met with flowers in favelas' streets. Beyond the analysis of formal lawfulness, the dichotomy "good guys and bad guys" is convoluted, as police forces often bring disorder and even death

[6] Specialized literature considers excessively high any ratio of police killing to the number of homicides above 10% (Cano and Fragoso 1999, 208). Brazil's average is 12.3% (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2021) — police killings as a proportion of the total number of intentional deaths.

[7] Article 25 of the Penal Code of Brazil stipulates that "acts in self-defence who, using moderately the necessary means, repulses an unfair aggression, present or imminent, to his/her own or somebody else's rights."

to the communities, not liberation. Magaloni et al. (2020) predict that state crackdown against criminal regimes that offer an extensive network of public services to poor populations tends to backfire, as communities see the police as oppressors and criminals as benevolent. This happens not only due to material aspects: the concepts of grievance and routines put state forces as outsiders. In the eyes of vulnerable populations, the legitimate use of violence is not always in the hands of the state. Translating this line of thought into a hypothesis to be tested in the empirical section:

> *H1. OCGs are more integrated into the favelas' than the police, causing police interventions to disrupt dwellers' routines and produce grievances.*

Frames: Defining Who is Who

Grievances and routines are not the only categories that may explain why favela dwellers mobilize against police intervention instead of assisting the state to restore its monopoly of political power. Grievances and routines interact with other categories, such as frames, to produce collective action (Verta et al. 2009, 887). Frames are "interpretive schemata" that "enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large" (Polletta 1998, 139; see also Snow and Benford 1992; Snow et al. 1986). In other words, frames construct meanings (or images), mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas with powerful impacts in the real world (Benford and Snow 2000).

Demonstrating the influential role of frames in the realm of crime policy in Brazil, a prevailing belief holds that "a good criminal is a dead criminal." This belief, captured in a popular saying, was even adopted as a populist jingle by former President Jair Bolsonaro in 2022 (Brasil 2022). Similarly, between 2018 and 2019, Rio de Janeiro's Governor Wilson Witzel implemented what he described as a "shoot-to-kill policing policy," which included the deployment of snipers in helicopters to strategic locations, including favelas (Kaiser 2019). As the number of police-involved killings increased, Witzel justified these actions by framing them as a necessary response to "confront terrorists" (Child 2019). While this may be an extreme case, it is essential to recognize that even in situations where such a policy is not explicitly articulated, the overarching frame of "society versus criminals" or, in some cases, "terrorists", encourages law enforcement officers to adopt a more aggressive and self-righteous approach when dealing with favelas. This framing contributes to what has been described as a "logic of urban confrontation, built on a 'metaphor of warfare'" (Machado 2017).

The structure of frames can be disaggregated into its parts: identity, injustice, and agency (Gamson 1992; 1995), which facilitates its understanding in-depth. The *identity* component refers to the feeling of belonging and "depends on factors such as particular events, compelling public narratives, prevailing discursive frames [themselves], and so on" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 20). Put differently, the ways of doing things can shape how individuals are perceived by a community (Shesterinina 2021, 143) and who is in or out of a certain group, eventually shaping collective identities and defining who are the outsiders (Meyer 2004, 137).

Being aware of the challenges in outlining a satisfactory concept of identity, either instrumental or non-instrumental (Brubaker and Cooper 2000), I conceptualize collective identity as how groups are seen (via cognitive models, rules, purposes, and relational comparisons with other social categories) and make meaning of themselves (within-group content) (Abdelal et al. 2006). The underlying assumption is that social ties create a sense of common purpose (McClendon 2014, 281), allowing groups to affirm and defend themselves collectively, but it also creates potential for other groups to challenge their claims or target them as a collectivity. (Kellner 2001; Gripsrud 2002). All these elements seem to be present in the case of favela dwellers, either to shape a common identity or to become a source of antagonism.

Leite (2008; 2012) maintains that in Brazil the idea of "favela" encompasses the notions of unity and marginalization. In the latter aspect, favelas are, in Wacquant's (2001) words, a "stigmatized territory." They are conceived as territories plagued by poverty and branded by criminality, disorder, and violence, whereas favela dwellers are seen as "dangerous classes." The socio-spatial segregation between the so-called "asphalt"[8] and the favela produces separation and concentration of social groups, isolation (localization), inequality of access (in various meanings of the expression), and—most prominently—internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Marinho and Schor 2009, 80). This segregation results in "human antagonists rather than impersonal forces like hunger or poverty, against which collective action must be mobilized" (Polletta 1998, 139).

As for the *injustice* component, it denotes that a situation is unfair and that it is political rather than simply personal (Klandermans 1988, 179). Individuals may be moved emotionally by an act or context that violates conceptions of morality and those emotions can explain social mobilization (Simmons 2014, 521). Jasper (1997, 106) calls it a moral shock: a piece of

[8] Favela dwellers call "asphalt" the rest of city, those parts that are not poor and underserved communities.

information—for instance, a case of police killings—that raises such a "sense of outrage" that makes individuals embrace political action.

Sometimes, political action takes more subtle forms than protests. It can take the form of "adversarial framing" (Gamson 1995) or "counterframing" (Benford 1987). Aware of the real-world effects of frames, social groups and movements have engaged in processes of refuting the frames built by outsiders, constructing their images of "good" and "bad", attributing blame, and targeting antagonists. This may lead favelas dwellers to point out the state as a propitiator of violence in the slums, given its historical omission, at the same time that the presence of the police propitiates violence as well (Pandolfi and Grynszpan 2005, 134). In terms of hypothesis:

> *H2. Popular perception of police intervention is negative in favelas, which diminishes the support for state action.*

Finally, the *agency* component of frames conveys "a sense of collective efficacy, a belief that the situation is not immutable and that 'we' can change it" (Polletta 1998, 139). Can favela dwellers change their condition? Silva (2004; 2010) considers that slum dwellers face a dual form of domination: they are marginalized in the prevailing social order, confined to the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy, and they are subjected to the coercive sociability enforced by criminals. Accordingly, it seems almost unimaginable that social mobilization against OCGs could flourish in an environment of duress, in which criminals impose their laws with arbitrary violence. However, there are well-documented cases of social mobilization under extreme repression. For example, Pfaff and Yang (2001) describe how groups used commemorative dates to protest in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and China in 1989. The Arab Spring has been extensively studied in the literature (e.g., Eltantawy and Wiest 2011; Hoffman and Jamal 2014), with examples of groups mobilizing from scratch amidst repressions, as exemplified by Pearlman's (2021) of protests in Syria. These protests have involved a diverse array of strategies, ranging from discreet collective action in China (Fu 2017) to online opposition in Saudi Arabia, despite the risk of imprisonment (Pan and Siegel 2020).

Hence, slum dwellers could mobilize against OCGs, but do they have an insensitive to do so? According to Opp and Gern (1993), social mobilization makes sense when the benefits of participating in the movement are higher than the costs, that is when the prospects of meaningful changes overcome the risks of repression and its severity. I assume

that historically neglectful states have very little credibility when it comes to offering benefits to underserved communities. The hypothesis is:

> *H3. Favela dwellers see the costs of mobilization against OCGs as higher than the benefits they could achieve by reestablishing the state's authority.*

Nobody can better than the dwellers themselves elaborate on this point. The next section of this work brings data amassed from multiple sources, via meta-analysis, translating into research the voices and thoughts of those living in favelas.

Empirical Test: Qualitative Meta-Analysis

In this section, I test empirically the predictions about how grievances, routines, and frames determine patterns of social mobilization in Brazilian favelas. To do so, I employ qualitative meta-analysis (QMA) to analyze a segment of the literature produced in the Portuguese language that studies life in underserved communities in Brazil and addresses directly or indirectly criminal governance in these spaces.

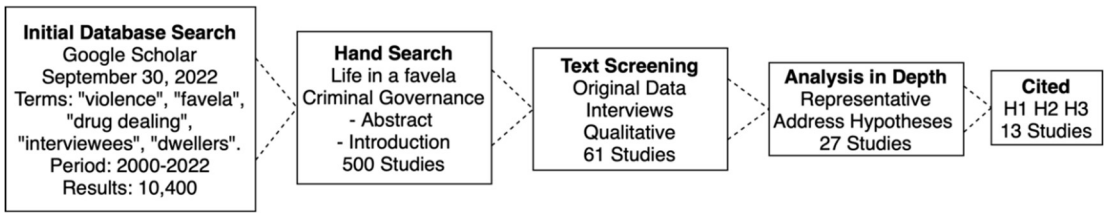
Qualitative meta-analysis is an instrument for research on social science that has been underexplored (Paterson et al. 2001), considering its multiple potential applications. As a research instrument, it delivers a "rigorous secondary qualitative analysis of primary qualitative findings" (Timulak 2009). The method allows researchers to synthesize previous research by drawing on the richness of their material, exploring different works, and even different study designs in an aggregated work (Newig and Fritsch 2009)—as a secondary analysis of case-based research, QMA focuses on primary sources collected in previous works, instead of their findings themselves, increasing sample sizes and explanatory power, enabling a wider generalization. Also, given that QMA follows a systematic procedure to select the data, it reduces the risks of selection bias relative to literature reviews.

Here, this type of design is particularly useful. Single cases studying favelas are insightful but usually rely on the idiosyncrasies of each community (e.g., location, size, and type of criminal governance) or the role of the interviewees (e.g., current, or former gang member, resident, or community representative) to conclude. The product of aggregated data, if carefully examined, can deliver a comprehensive picture from the perspective of those living within different underserved communities in different periods. Such a study design indeed loses direct observation (Fu and Simons 2021), but it gains the ability to collect elements that account for variations in time and space, thus increasing the generalizability of

the analysis (Newig and Fritsch 2009). Moreover, a thorough treatment of the collected data with "ethnographic sensibility" (Simmons and Smith 2021) should take advantage of the heterogeneity in the data while enhancing external validity.

I conducted the search on September 30, 2022, on the Google Scholar database, limiting the period of interest from 2000 to 2022. I used the terms "violence," "favela," "drug dealing," "interviewees," and "dwellers" in combination.[9] The Google Scholar search returned about 10,400 results. I reduced the universe of interest to 500 results by applying a stopping rule: after 100 consecutive articles that lacked substantive relevance for the topic under scrutiny, I interrupted the analysis. This first manual screening evaluated the title, abstract, and, when needed, introduction. In a second screening, besides the substantive aspect, articles were selected based on their use of interviews to collect qualitative data. Excluding duplicates (3) and broken links (13), 61 materials that dealt directly or indirectly with the topic under investigation were selected. As additional exclusion criteria, materials without original data (40), purely quantitative, and monographs and dissertations (260) were excluded. In the case of edited volumes, I treated book chapters as independent studies. The final sample comprises 27 published materials that were read in-depth, from which 13 brought relevant data that is now cited along with the results.[10] Figure 1 presents a graphical description of the process of selection and Table 1 in the Appendix lists the cited works.

Figure 1. Studies' selection strategy



Subsistence Routines and Disruptive Policing

The first striking element the data suggests is the existence of strong grievances towards the state, due to a perceived historical negligence of the community, and a positive

[9] For the search in the Portuguese language I use the following terms: "*violência*," "*favela*," "*tráfico de drogas*," "*entrevistados*," and "*moradores*." I did not use the term "criminal governance" (*governança criminal*) because it is not a term of common use in Brazil. I use instead the term "violence," which in combination with the other terms was enough to filter down the universe of results.

[10] In a quantitative meta-analysis, where each observation can significantly alter the results, employing multiple coders to select and evaluate the articles is crucial. However, this requirement is less stringent for a qualitative meta-analysis. Therefore, in this study, I took on the role of a single coder.

view of criminal governance. In the words of an interviewee, "the Command[11] has social action in the community, while the state worries more about those neighborhoods in the South Zone, or Tijuca, where there are those middle-class people" (Pandolfi and Grynszpan 2005, 138). Another interviewee is emphatic: "There is no such a thing as police action. Who solves the problems is the Command" (Pandolfi and Grynszpan 2005, 141). These descriptions match with the view the drug dealers have of themselves: "One has to accept. Who makes the community safe? The Command does it! Why is there no robbery in the community? Because the Command bumps off any burglar. Good for who? Good for the residents" (Informer 29; Zilli 2015).[12] Despite many dwellers avoided to praise drug dealers, the cognition that the Command rules the community, provides services, and solves problems is prevalent and a lesson that must be quickly learned by new residents:

> When I moved in here, I learned about this guy who rules the community. My sons were having issues with some boys bullying them after school. I talked to this guy, who to me is a 'good person,' explained what was going on and it was done! We've never had problems again. (Interviewee 124, 30 years old in Souza et al. 2016, 59)

The body of interviews makes a clear case: OCGs get the job done. However, given their lack of formal legitimacy, the effectiveness of criminal networks depends on their ability to deliver timely and satisfactory outcomes: "I always say that we have two Courts of Justice: the lawful one and the unlawful one. The unlawful works much faster. In the blink of an eye, it's done, no problem! Because their [OCGs] intention is to have no problem in the favela!" (Pandolfi and Grynszpan 2005, 141). Apart from various sociological factors, the constant demand for achieving desired outcomes typically leads criminal networks to exhibit a high degree of violence. This consistent exposure to such violent methods, in turn, molds what Silva (2004) describes as "violent sociability," which is the process of desensitizing individuals to brutality against fellow human beings and normalizing such behavior. Inez (43 years old) illustrates how these structures and theoretical concepts operate on the ground:

> The second time they broke into my house… they destroyed everything and wrote on the floor that I was going to die. They really wanted to scare me! What solved this? A bunch of guys we know from another community. They settled the issue with those who broke into my house… It wasn't something that get somebody killed but it did cause some broken limbs. (Silva 2013, 11)

[11] "Command" is the term used by gang members and slum residents to refer to the criminal group that exercises control over the community.
[12] In all citations, I am using the original coding, where existing, including fictitious names.

A chorus of dwellers reiterate the same idea: the problems of the favela are solved *within* the favela. And the police are not part of their world—only if as an intruder. Favelas are indeed spaces strongly filled with signals that delineate a zone of influence, define loyalty, and imply allegiance and submission to the internal order (Gomes 2002, 64). In some communities, calling the police is a big mistake, one that might not be without consequences, as it directly challenges the authority of the Command. Yet, there is a practical and spontaneous aspect of the issue as well, based on grievances:

> I don't like the police… I prefer to have a drug dealer by my side rather than a police officer, with those big guns. The police are racist, they already harassed my brother in front of our house because he is Black. This is absurd [talking with tears in her eyes]. (A 23-year-old woman in Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández 2013, 112-3)

This is not an isolated voice. In the last decades, underserved communities in Brazil have organized protests, marches, and other campaigns against discrimination and police brutality. In 1993, a forty-kilometer march along a highway from downtown to Vigário Geral, a favela in Rio de Janeiro where twenty-one dwellers were killed by the police, attracted broad media coverage and public attention to the massacre (Arias 2019). This type of episode of contention and tactical repertoire "create solidarity, oppositional consciousness, and collective identity among participants, while also defining the relationship and boundaries between collective actors and their opponents" (Taylor et al. 2009, 868).

In this context, the police, as an institution, takes on an almost depersonalized role and is viewed as an adversary: "The police will invade your house and will beat you… They don't see that we live here because we can't afford to buy a house. We have nowhere else to go. We *work* to survive" (L., 23 years old in Paula and Pimenta 2007, 61).

L.'s account is one among many that stress the "worker condition." As Conceição (2015, 210) points out, when favela residents assert the phrase "I am a worker" in their interactions with the police, it conveys more than a mere denial of being a criminal. In alignment with Conceição's perspective, Zaluar (2000, 145) argues that identifying as part of the working class reflects a belief in the moral superiority of hard work over pursuing easy gains through criminal activities. It emphasizes values associated with family and ethics. Furthermore, this identification directly challenges the *materialistic hypothesis* that favela residents endorse criminal behavior. Although they may share the same living environment, there is still a clear distinction drawn between those who break the law and those who are diligent workers. This testimony illustrates this point:

> They accuse us of protecting criminals, of being favorable to drug trafficking, of conniving with this parallel power. If you take the population here, 98 percent, 99 percent of the

> community are *workers*, people who get home very late after work, who leave before dawn to work. So, why do they treat people here like that? Why does the state see us this way? It is a way to exclude us. A way to deny our rights. You are excluded. Excluded economically, excluded from politics, excluded socially, from your rights. (Pandolfi and Grynszpan 2005, 136)

The intriguing fact is that dwellers simultaneously reject both OCGs and the police. While this topic will be further explored in the upcoming subsection, it is worth noting that the sentiment among many favela residents can be summarized quite succinctly: the misconduct of criminals does not automatically equate to a positive view of the police. At least drug dealers are always in the community: they are part of the favela, and they are there in tough times. The same cannot be said about the state, as the police are often seen as the ones who *create* the tough times when they appear: "Police take away our peace of mind, I'm not against police action, but let it be an intelligent thing, they can't come shooting everywhere." (Geraldo, 42 years old in Sonoda 2012, 8). This is quite a common opinion, shared by many interviewees. "The worst thing that can happen is when we have [police] operations, you know? … The people, dwellers, workers end up dying" (a 17-year-old woman in Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández 2013, 75). The presence of police means that the routines are disrupted, and violence is unleashed: "Every time the police come here, classes are suspended, businesses close... It directly interferes with our lives… Police coming to the community is a harbinger of violence" (Marcos, 45 years old in Sonoda 2012, 9).

These factors provide substantial support for hypothesis H1: despite drug dealers not being celebrated by the majority of residents, OCGs tend to have a greater degree of integration within the favelas compared to the police. The police, often accused of truculent behavior, including allegations of racism, make their interventions disruptive to the daily routines of residents while also generating enduring grievances.

Portraited Images

Favelas evoke a wide range of emotions, from deep passion to strong disparagement. A poignant example is provided by a 12-year-old boy who shares his heartfelt aspirations: "My dream is to get my mom out of here, because when there is a shooting, the criminals shoot by the side of my room… I've never liked to live here." (Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández 2013, 69). The strong sense of community within favelas can sometimes lead the elderly to momentarily forget about the frequent shootings, as illustrated by Silvio, a 75-year-old resident: "I like here. I cannot afford another place and if I have to pick a favela, I prefer here" (Polivach a and Santo 2012, 185). A 24-year-old woman is even more passionate: "I love my favela. I am proud of living here" (Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández 2013, 80).

From an external perspective, the view might not be as positive: "There is a frontier: on one side, the *favelados* [favela dwellers], hated, despised... On the other side, the rich, white… Their dream is to get rid of us. I grew up with this threat lingering in our mind 'one day this will have an end', 'one day you will have to go'!" (Margarida in Brum 2009, 4). Margarida's account seems appears to align with Wacquant's (2001) concept of "stigmatized territory." Favelas, like other spatial structures that either reflect or run parallel to economic, political, and social systems (Gomes 2002; Marinho and Schor 2009), are considered "entrenched facts of social life that have their autonomous (or at least relatively autonomous) logics and that determine or at least tightly constrain social action" (Swell 2001, 54).

of favelas are renowned for enabling their inhabitants, including those involved in criminal activities, to adeptly navigate their narrow pathways, while outsiders, including the police, often face considerable difficulties in moving around (Conceição 2015). The proximity of houses in favelas, often constructed closely together, and in some cases even on top of one another, may foster a profound sense of shared identity and community. However, the consequences of residing within a favela extend well beyond its physical boundaries, both in reality and perception. Being identified as a "favelado"2 or resident of a favela when outside these neighborhoods is a challenging and complex experience: "You can wear nice clothes, but you look like a poor. It's in your face. You will get there [in a shopping center] and they won't let you in" (R., 27 years old in Paula and Pimenta 2007, 60-1). In a vivid illustration of Leite's (2008; 2012) concept of "dangerous classes", a 28-year-old man shares his experience: "It happens all the time. We are walking down the streets, and the person sees us and hold the purse, change their path, think we are going to mug them. That's horrible!" (Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández 2013, 90).

Valladares (2000; 2005) posits that favela residents, being impoverished, have struggled to shed the negative image that has long been imposed upon them, replete with stereotypes. This image has deeply influenced how the national elites perceive the poor, associating poverty with vagrancy, vice, filth, and idleness. In the words of a 24-year-old man: "Once, I was looking for a job and the woman asked, 'Where do you live?' I answer 'Vigario Geral.' She said I couldn't work there because people from Vigario were 'too angry'… The woman did not give me the job because I lived in the favela" (Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández 2013, 91).

In response to the described state of affairs, three non-exhaustive reactions can be expected. Firstly, grievances are likely to run deep, as demonstrated in the previous subsection. Secondly, favela residents may adopt the strategic use of identity, including

concealing their identity (for an extreme example, see Einwohner 2006). Lastly, slum residents may choose to confront the challenges by constructing counter-frames, precisely as anticipated by H2. The obvious targets are outsiders and, in particular the main instrument of state intervention in favelas, the police. Regretfully, José, a 42-year-old resident, expresses his lament that "there was a time when there existed a distinction between 'criminals' and 'police officers'" (Mota et al. 2008). He further explains his perspective:

> I cannot see a police officer as an authority, a representative of the law. Not here, within the favela… It got so absurd that on a bus, I was the only one to get patted down. So, my feeling toward the police is outrage. Not even citizens we are. We are favelados. That's what we are: fa-ve-la-dos." (Pandolfi and Grynszpan 2005, 135)

When it comes to the fundamental rationale for violence, or even the legitimization of violence within the favela master frame, both the police and criminals are perceived as equally violent, with no distinction. As explained by a 25-year-old woman: "Within the community we know who the villains are… Here we are subjected to the Command; in the asphalt, we are subjected to the police… So, to me, they are the same thing" (Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández 2013, 113). In a session involving a group of teenagers, Fernandes (2019, 232-3) posed a series of questions regarding the perceptions of police and criminals. When asked, "What do criminals do?" the response included activities such as trafficking drugs, committing murder, theft, assault, and engaging in various forms of humiliating acts. Subsequently, when asked, "What does a cop do?" the response indicated a perception of similarity with criminals: "Same thing! It's all shit, just the same!" (followed by laughter).

Nevertheless, while violence from OCGs and the police have similarities, the differences are striking. A 28-year-old man goes so far as to assert that the problem lies in "not the violence in the favela, but the police violence" (Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández 2013, 114). Fernandes (2019, 235), drawing insights from her fieldwork, notes that the presence of drug dealers does not interrupt the daily routines of the favela community, yet the dynamics change significantly when the police are present, evident in the behavior of the residents. Fernandes (2019, 235) further shares that the situation where a member of an OCG pointed a gun at her elicited no significant reaction from the 12-year-old teenager she interviewed. The teenager simply laughed it off, stating that "it's okay." appear to evoke minimal concern among favela dwellers, whereas the mere presence of the police induces a sense of unease and nervousness within the community.

The apparent double standard could be explained in two complementary ways. Firstly, police officers pose an immediate threat of harm, while drug dealers, often integrated

into the community (as suggested by H1), tend to be dangerous to residents only under well-established circumstances, becoming part of the routine. Secondly, the product of the counter-frames created within the community gives rise to a qualitative distinction between internal and external violence (as posited by H2). Internal violence happens within (informal) rules the community is aware of and can avoid. Exogenous (police) violence is sporadic, unpredictable, unruled, inevitable, and then unfair and unacceptable.

Frames are certainly not static, as Benford and Snow (2000, 614) elucidate. Framing is an active and dynamic process, which involves agency and contention. Interpretive frames not only differ but also challenge one another, evolving in response to changing circumstances and perspectives. On the other hand, priming ensures that previous experiences pre-sensitize people to activate a frame (Snow and Moss 2014, 1134)—favela dwellers will hardly trust the police due to past abuses. The key takeaway is that frames can change, but they are also sticky. This bolsters H2: the interaction between frames and counterframes makes state action in favelas, especially via police intervention, very unpopular.

Weighting Costs and Benefits

While substantial support has been found for H1, it is crucial to highlight the varied and complex impacts of criminal governance and state intervention, as outlined by Magaloni et al. (2020). The interviews confirm that diverse types of interactions between criminal actors and the population produce different outcomes. While in some communities criminals play the role of benevolent dictators, providing a generous range of public services, in other favelas they are seen as tyrants: "I cannot go to the dances anymore. Now there is a new faction there and they shave our heads if we show up over there. Can you imagine I going to work with a shaved head?!" (Rosa, 35 years old in Santos and Kerstenetzy 2007). Hence, the assessment of costs and benefits—whether it involves mobilization or acceptance of criminal governance—is contingent on the specific context. Nevertheless, certain elements are common across communities, such as the pervasive feeling of state abandonment and the relentless pursuit of a better life.

Once again challenging the *materialistic hypothesis*, the narratives of some favela residents reveal the immense struggle they face while trying to lead their lives in the midst of pervasive violence stemming from multiple sources. It becomes evident that not everyone can normalize violence and adapt their behavior and perceptions based on the available frames and counter-frames. Many individuals suffer adverse consequences, including physical and mental health issues. Laura, a 32-year-old resident, exemplifies this point: "I

developed panic disorder. If I hear any noise, I can't help thinking it's a shooting" (Santos and Kerstenetzy 2007). Laura's experience is not unique: cases of chronic stress – including phobic-anxiety syndromes such as post-traumatic stress disorder – triggered by violence, fear of violence, and pervasive feelings of insecurity are endemic in favelas (Souza 2008, 40).
The situation has evolved in such a way that favela residents have consistently shown support for the rise of "militias," which have gained prominence over the past two decades. Starting around 2006, several favelas have come under the control of groups of off-duty military police. These groups have ousted drug dealers from the areas and established their own presence, complete with offices and a mandatory fee (commonly called "contribution") that residents must pay to maintain what is described as "order" (Misse 2007, 154). Despite being in dire economic straits, most residents comply with paying the fee, as they perceive it as a marked improvement in their living conditions. In the words of one resident: "It's much better. We don't have that thing of being stopped by the drug dealer. We no longer have that. Drug trafficking was horrible. Not anymore. The militia has taken control, and now residents can live in peace" (E6 in Costa 2013, 243).

For many residents, militias are far from being a perfect solution, but they are perceived as the best available option. As one resident, Celma, expressed, "We would like the police to come here and implement an organized system in the community, arresting those who need to be arrested" (Conceição 2015, 212). Another resident, Zélia, added, "But since the government does not do its part... We cannot count on the government to provide order, you know? So, at least we live in a place that is not ruled by criminals [if the militias dominate]" (Conceição 2015, 213). Consequently, it is evident that grievances also exist against OCGs, and the state could potentially leverage these grievances to regain control with the cooperation of the residents. However, as emphasized by McAdam et al. (1996, 5), "people need to feel both aggrieved about some aspect of their lives and optimistic that, acting collectively, they can redress the problem."

The state's total lack of credibility is one of the greatest barriers to envisioning a pro-state social mobilization. Having gained insights into the vivid experiences of those living in favelas, it appears surreal to imagine that vulnerable populations would risk their lives mobilizing against OCGs for the sake of a negligent state that has consistently delivered nothing but violence. As one resident puts it, "Two and half million people without govern, do you understand? Without state. The state commits violence twice: first for its omission and then when it invades the community (E1 in Costa 2013, 248). Even in areas not (yet) entirely under the control of gangs, the sentiment prevails that "if there is a crime in the

community … we don't call the police because *they don't come anyway*, so we don't bother calling" (Interviewee 10, 35-year-old in Souza et al. 2016, 58).

It is no wonder that even in the rare cases when OCGs are targeted by social mobilization, the state does not escape criticism and scrutiny. Rocinha, a large Rio favela in Rio de Janeiro, provides an instructive example. In 2004, a significant number of individuals lost their lives in a conflict that erupted between rival gangs, and the subsequent police intervention further escalated the situation. A city-level NGO worked with local grassroots groups to organize a demonstration that featured a concert by a renowned protest singer from the 1980s, known for advocating democracy (Monken 2004; Arias 2017; 2019). Even though the act stung criminal factions, the organizers made it explicitly clear that they held the police "responsible for violence in the favela" as well (Arias 2017; 2019).

All around the world, people engage in social mobilization because they expect to make things better: they dare to have hope (Moss 2014). In Brazilian favelas, dwellers appear to lack reasons to believe that a shift away from OCGs or militias to the state would improve their living standards, ability to survive, or levels of victimization. Even if most residents do not benefit from criminal governance, it does not mean that it makes sense for them to bear the costs of social mobilization to help the state. As articulated by a resident:

> Some people, a minority, benefit [from criminal governance]. But the immense majority, if they had a magic wand that could, like that, without risk, put an end to all this [violence], they would do that. That's for sure… So, I mean, the immense majority is against this, but just doesn't see how to solve the situation. Why? What should one do? Denouncing? Sometimes the police themselves are involved. That's the reality. So, dwellers don't feel safe saying anything, you know? (Pandolfi and Grynszpan 2005, 136).

Therefore, even from a rational perspective of a collective action problem, it raises serious doubts whether favela residents would be in a better position by mobilizing against OCGs. The cost-benefit calculation tends to be negative unless the state completely changes its approach to underserved communities. In today's scenario, the risks of social action are excessively high and the payoffs for successful mobilization are uncertain or even weak. As anticipated under H3, favela dwellers believe (as they should) that the costs of mobilization against OCGs are higher than the benefits they would achieve by siding with the state.

Discussion and Conclusion

Heterogeneity across space and time is a remarkable feature of favelas in Brazil. Some favelas are large and under the control of criminal gangs, while others remain in contention,

with rival gang factions vying for dominance. Some are deemed "pacified" at certain times, while many undergo recurring periods of frequent police incursions and the ensuing confrontations. Despite these distinctions, favelas share several important commonalities: poverty, prejudice, drug dealing, and violence can be regarded as constants across these underserved communities. By gaining insights into the subjective viewpoints of residents from various favelas, this meta-analysis draws a comprehensive picture of what residents think regarding criminal governance and state intervention, which provides valuable insights into patterns of contention.

An explicit and underlying premise of this work is that the prevalent explanations for the persistence of criminal governance in favelas, such as fear or material gains, are inherently incomplete. The body of interviews did not identify *fear* as the primary explanatory variable for why OCGs find almost no popular opposition to their rule. Fear of repression is surely an important constraint for political dissent (Young 2019), but many other emotions (Pearlman 2013, 391-2), such as anger (Gould 2002), are also relevant to explain social mobilization (Goodwin et al 2004). In the same way, most dwellers expressed scant signs of affinity for criminal governance[13], and, and there is limited evidence to support the idea of *material gains* beyond what is an average community typically receives from the state – public goods that are offered in other neighborhoods in Brazil.

The central question that arises is this: if neither fear nor material gains offer a comprehensive explanation for how criminal governance becomes entrenched and why favela dwellers resist attempts of police takeover, what can rationalize the patterns of social mobilization within these communities, often directed against the state? My argument is that the interaction between grievances and frames, aligned with the state's historical action (or inaction) in favelas, shape the structure that drives social mobilization against the state and makes mobilization against OCGs meaningless, primarily due to its unpopularity, high costs, and meager potential rewards even in the unlikely event of success. Figure 2 summarizes this scheme and provides a graphical representation of the proposed theoretical model.

[13] One concern could be social desirability bias, leading the interviewees to express disagreement with unlawful activities. However, given that most interviews occurred within favelas, the opposite could also be true: dwellers may express support for the Command either under fear of repression or given a sense of communality.

Figure 2. Theoretical model for explaining social mobilization against the state and not against OCGs

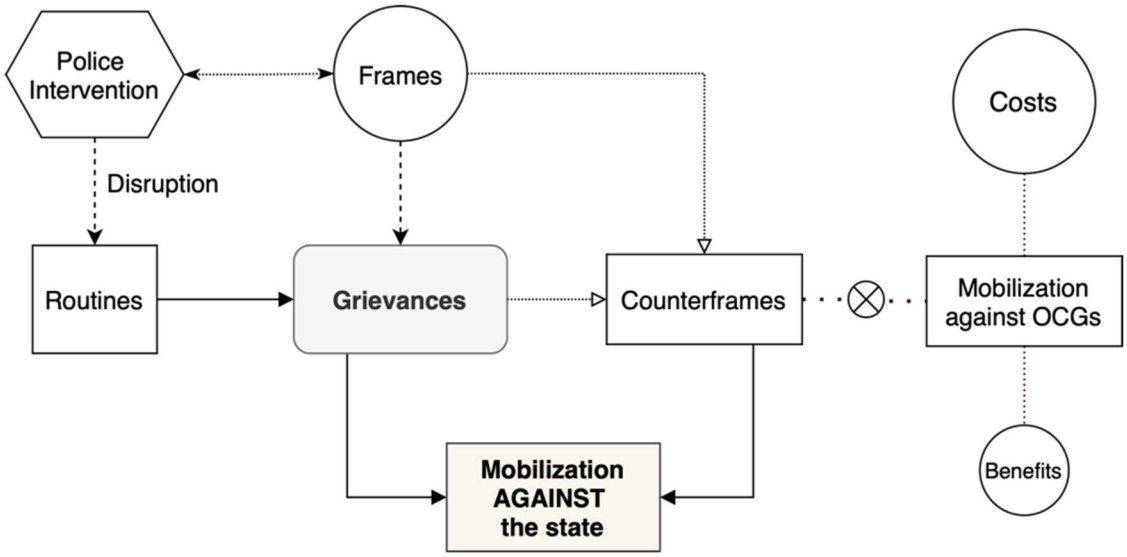


Figure 2 shows how police intervention disrupts established subsistence routines in favelas, resulting in grievances. These grievances are also fabricated by detrimental frames that portray favela dwellers as dangerous. Police intervention serves to reinforce these frames, while these frames, in turn, drive more aggressive police intervention, forming an autopoiesis or feedback mechanism. In response to this dire situation characterized by disruption leading to grievances and detrimental frames, favela residents develop counter-frames. Both grievances and counter-frames lead to social mobilization against the state. Counterframes also block mobilization against OCGs by producing double standards in the evaluation of violence—exogenous (police) violence is unacceptable, while internal violence is manageable. To add to this, the state's historical negligence in offering basic public goods to underserved communities makes the costs of social mobilization against OCGs much higher than the benefits that could be achieved if the bid was successful.

A number of important questions arise from the proposed theoretical model. First, what kind of subsistence routine is disrupted by police intervention? Scholars connected to legalist traditions reject assertions that drug dealing, despite being a criminal offense, represents a feature of favelas' spatial structure (see Campos 2005).[14] It is true that drug

[14] The legalist frame, which dichotomizes between the legal city and the unlawful city (Silva and Leite, 2007, 548), lacks the capacity to garner sufficient popular support in favelas. This is because the available counter-frames (depicting the police as racist, violent, and selective) resonate more strongly due to shared grievances. While there is no doubt that Organized Crime Groups (OCGs) create a legal problem, an exclusively legalist perspective primarily relies on repression and establishes rigid boundaries between the legal and illegal realms,

dealing in favelas became so normalized that it is easily represented in moments of leisure, while police intervention is depicted as a threat to the whole community (Fernandes 2019, 235). However, this phenomenon has gained visibility not only in favelas but also in various Brazilian cities, especially the metropolises, where economic and sociopolitical dynamics have been increasingly influenced by the presence and consumption of drugs. This is not, therefore, a "marginal" reality of an "exotic" space, but a relevant phenomenon that has shaped different sectors of the society as a whole (Souza 2000). Furthermore, as indicated by the interviewees, subsistence routines include schooling, legal businesses, transport, and many other public services that the community needs to provide itself in the absence of the state.

Contributing to the recrudescence of an already undesirable condition, claims of racism and prejudice have historically followed police action in favelas (French 2013; Håndlykken-Luz 2020). Since group identity is rooted in history (Dawson 2020), in-group policy demands (Enos et al. 2019) and the recognition and legitimatization (or lack thereof) of their actions depend on cultural elements (Swell 1999). The absence of cultural assimilation, for instance, may create space for intergroup hostility and violence (Kopstein and Wittenberg 2011). This is the environment in which frames and counter-frames blossom. As Polletta (1998, 139) remarks "frames combine a *diagnosis* of the social condition in need of remedy, a *prognosis* for how to do that, and a *rationale* for action."

In the case of violence in favelas, in addition to the role frames play, routines themselves are important in explaining why dwellers see internal and exogenous violence through different lenses. Internal violence (coming from other dwellers or criminal governance overall) is normally predictable, comprehensible, and falls within (informal) rules that permit dwellers to navigate and evade it. Without external violence, dwellers live their (hard) lives, doing their best to take care of their affairs and ensure their survival. However, exogenous (police) violence is sporadic, unpredictable, unruled, unavoidable, and perceived as unjust. It is not surprising that police incursions provoke disturbances, resistance, and frequently lead to mobilization. Simmons (2014, 520), discussing why some facts resonate more than others, suggests that "certain 'problems' may systematically conduce to the formation of an easily prioritized identity, and particular events that highlight, create, or

compelling the state to try to assert its monopoly of force through violence. This approach has proven unsuccessful in various parts of the world (Lessing 2017). In contrast, the standpoint of contentious politics acknowledges that the conflict is not solely about formal institutions (laws) but also about claims. This perspective introduces fresh explanatory variables and offers new possibilities for conditional solutions, irrespective of the legal status of the issue at hand.

expose those problems might favor identification with a category particularly conducive to participation in organized resistance."

As long as the state continues to neglect providing public goods to underserved communities, favelas have no reasons to mobilize against OCGs. Where OCGs are perceived as benign, dwellers resort to them to meet basic needs —from public safety and dispute resolution to access to essential services such as water, electricity, food, and medications. Where OCGs are considered malign, incentives for mobilization are not higher because of uncertain and weak payoffs. Moreover, police incursions will keep facing fierce resistance, as they disrupt the lives of those who are already dealing with significant hardship. Police confrontation in favelas means nothing more than death and destruction for the affected residents.

The implication of this article is that states can increase the likelihood of popular dissent against OCGs by changing the parameters of the calculation between costs of benefits of social mobilization. This could be achieved by providing more public services, socioeconomic opportunities, establishing sources of income, creating a welfare safety net, and adopting community-based policing in underserved communities. Such measures would make it more difficult for criminal governance to operate effectively. Conversely, persisting with the current approach is likely to continue producing grievances and counter-frames, making state intervention in favelas increasingly complex, while populations become dependent on the benevolence of criminals.

Certainly, this study has its limitations. It involves highly heterogeneous data collected from diverse communities subject to varying types of criminal governance and police violence. Beyond geographical diversity, the study also spans a broad time period, with qualitative data ranging from 2002 to 2017. These time windows encompass circumstances that may have had significant impacts, not always controlled for in the original methodologies. Nevertheless, these shortcomings do not diminish from the relevance of this study, particularly in terms of its theoretical and conceptual contributions. The heterogeneity across units and temporal variance can also be seen as a strength, uncovering the common explanatory factors that remain constant across space and time.

In terms of future research, there is still space to examine whether and how initiatives to reinsert the state in favelas, such as the Pacifying Police Units (*Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora*, abbreviated UPP) in Rio de Janeiro, reshape the interrelationships among communities,

OCGs, and the State.[15] Additionally, the role of media in constructing the perception of favela residents and the real-world impacts of this framing, particularly regarding the "workers" versus "criminals" dichotomy should be further investigated. Moreover, there is a need for deeper insights into the role of social identity, that is, how OCGs embed themselves within impoverished communities, often becoming integral to the favela's informal institutions. Unraveling these questions is key for shedding light on why residents may prefer one form of violence over another, and why violence perpetrated by the state is seen as oppressive and intolerable, while criminal groups manage to integrate into the daily life of favelas. This understanding is crucial for developing more effective policies and interventions in underserved communities.

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[15] While there's an extensive body of literature on the impact of UPPs on violence and drug trafficking, there has been surprisingly little focus on how the introduction of police into favelas has altered the dynamics of relationships among the community, criminals, and the state.

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Appendix

Table 1 Materials with cited interviews

Work	City	Favela	Time	N
Paula and Pimenta (2007)	Guarulhos	Pimentas Bananal Vila Galvão	2007	71
Mota et al. (2008)	Rio de Janeiro	Guaratiba	2008	*
Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández (2013)	Rio de Janeiro	Cantagalo Cidade de Deus Madureira Vigário Geral	2009-2011	204
Costa (2013)	Rio de Janeiro	Vidigal	2012	30
Santos and Kerstenetzy (2007)	Rio de Janeiro	Barbante	2007	50
Souza et al. (2016)	Viçosa	César Santana Ben José Cardoso Floresta	2014	125
Sonoda (2012)	Rio de Janeiro	Various[Ψ]	2007-2008	30
Brum (2009)	Rio de Janeiro	Cidade Alta	2008-2009	*
Silva (2013)	Londrina	Jardim Santa Rita	2011	57
Conceição (2015)	Rio de Janeiro	Cidade Alta	2012	5
Ferreira and Santo (2011)	Rio de Janeiro	Manguinhos	2008	26
Zilli (2015)	Belo Horizonte	Various[Ψ]	2010-2011	40
Pandolfi and Grynszpan (2005)	Rio de Janeiro	Formiga Maré Rocinha	2002	*

[Ψ] Sonoda (2012) collected data from 28 favelas in Rio de Janeiro (RJ). Ferreira and Santo (2011) worked in 16 favelas in Belo Horizonte (MG) and metropolitan region.
* Sample size was not reported in the original work.

Donald Trump's Appeal: Is "Whitelash" an Adequate Explanation?

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Abstract

Scholars have expounded in diverse ways the rise of former US president Donald Trump. One proposition has been that his appeal to white middle-class people was successful. This concept connects to whitelash—the idea that there was a backlash against political liberalism, inclusiveness, and progressive politics from white people. However, this article demonstrates that whitelash does not provide an adequate explanatory framework to understand Trump's electoral victory. Rather, whitelash is merely one phenomenon leveraged by appealing to voters' whiteness through what is more accurately identified as right-wing populism. Moreover, relying on the concept of whitelash to explain the rise of former US president Donald Trump tends to ignore other issues regarding American democracy and the presidential elections of 2016. These include Trump's upper hand in election strategies, the poor record of the Clinton family, voter turnout, and wider critiques of democracy itself. While there is some value in using the concepts of whitelash and whiteness to assess Trump's presidency, replacing whitelash with different interpretive approaches extends a more robust and broader understanding of Trump's electoral victory.

Keywords

Whitelash; Donald Trump; Populism; Hillary Clinton; Democracy; Political Correctness

Introduction

The election of Donald Trump in 2016 has been an interesting research subject. Scholars offered various explanations of why Trump, with his controversial character, won the elections with minimal political experience. The interests stem from his explicitly divisionary claims, and an overall demeanor that is atypical of Republicans' "business as usual" (Embrick et al. 2020, 220). Some researchers explain it as a working-class feat, while others call it a conservative awakening (Bhambra 2017). An emergent interpretation of Trump's victory associates his success with a backlash from aggrieved white people—a concept that is commonly known as whitelash (Kellner 2017; Embrick et al. 2020). While the term whitelash is decades old, its use has increased substantially in the aftermath of Trump's election (Hughey 2022). For example, Terry Smith's book *Whitelash: Unmasking White Grievance at the Ballot Box* shows the weight of this phenomenon. Admittedly, Hughey's (2022)

review of it highlights that Smith's understanding of whitelash is in conjunction with populism. Nevertheless, populist cases were only identified in the context of whiteness. Lippard et al. (2020) also argue that whitelash played a role in electing Trump and claim that whitelash is as old as non-discriminatory civil rights.

Indeed, whitelash is associated with whiteness, where being white motivates certain actions (Ahmed 2007). McDermott and Ferguson's (2022) article highlights that many key political events associated with domestic politics, such as Trump's elections and its subsequent actions, have made whiteness more visible. Some scholars argue that whites hold such beliefs to the extent that they feel like the "principal victims of discrimination," replacing blacks (Scott and Andersen 2020, 414). Bhambra's (2017) work associates Trump's electoral victory with middle-class white people.

These various scholarly discussions suggest that whiteness has been a common theme among scholars in trying to understand Trump's success in the 2016 elections. However, researchers seem to be less in agreement around white Trump voters' class positioning. Moreover, while there is substantial scope for examining Trump's policies holistically, including an international relations view, from a whiteness perspective, this paper addresses only its domestic elements related to the 2016 electoral victory.

Without doubt, whitelash tenets are observable in Trump's electoral victory. However, the concept itself does not satisfactorily explain the political phenomena of Trump's successful election. Methodologically, the conceptualization of whitelash represents a form of face-value reading that lacks appropriate construct and external validity, which results in limited usefulness beyond Trump's political context and produces highly limited inferences (Drost 2011). Indeed, there are many difficulties in extrapolating case studies to external validity (Lijphart 2014). However, replacing whitelash with different interpretive approaches extends a more robust and broader understanding of Trump's electoral victory and similar victories globally.

In this paper, I first explore whitelash as a concept and capture how recent literature describes it. Secondly, I argue that whitelash does not adequately explain Trump's rise to power. I suggest three main arguments to support my thesis. Firstly, whitelash is only one tool in a larger populist warehouse. Secondly, Hillary Clinton's campaign and credibility were weak, leaving people to perceive Trump as the stronger option. Finally, Trump's electoral victory and broader political dynamics cannot be adequately understood and explained without also looking at voter turnout and democracy itself.

Whitelash

Whitelash is essentially a backlash from white people against the politics and cultures established by the Democratic Party, or the political liberals (Kellner 2017; Embrick et al. 2020). Kellner (2017) defines whitelash as "a rebellion of angry white people who were totally alienated from the established political system" against a culture of "political correctness that criticizes racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of bias" (138). Kellner believed that these white Trump voters opposed inclusion and tolerance. His definition of whitelash connects this concept to wider perspectives around whiteness, and it leads to the question of what gives white people the right to oppose inclusion. Ahmed's (2007) interpretation of whiteness argues that it is not merely a rhetorical construction but an orientation that shapes subsequent rhetorical constructions, desires, and possibilities. Ahmed and many other "nonwhite" bodies' experiences in a "white world" find that racialized structures lead non-reflexive white people to treat others as guests whom they grant privileges as they deem fit (150). Thus, white orientations could explain whitelash.

However, such orientations do not necessarily come from facts. Indeed, the existence of racial divisions has been questioned entirely. Specifically, Trump's supporters were made to believe that the government's actions and people's support for inclusion and tolerance came at the expense of white people. The belief that whites are "losing out" because of supposed privileges that other social groups receive can be identified in Trump's speeches and public opinion polls done by research centers and media houses (Sengupta et al. 2018). Anti-immigration was a key issue weaponized by Trump to spread that narrative (Kellner 2017; Embrick et al. 2020). Economic scapegoating was part of Trump's electoral arsenal (Sengupta et al. 2018). Trump's voters believed that his policies would act against immigration to protect their jobs from immigrants (Sengupta et al. 2018). For the most part, these claims are pure hoaxes often utilized by right-leaning governments to secure votes from their support base (Blake and Adolino 2011).

Blake and Adolino (2011) rightly identified that "a tougher stand on immigration has tended to pay off" at the electoral booths (156). Pew Research Center's (2018) electorate demographics report for the 2016 elections shows that non-college graduates, regardless of their race, albeit more so if white, voted for Trump. An argument about immigrants stealing jobs sought to appeal to those people by accusing immigrants of working in low-skilled roles that the American white worker would have attained their livelihood from instead (Borjas 2016). Note that questions of feminism and masculinity are also important in assessing Trump's electoral victory. Data shows that men tended to vote for Trump while women

were more likely to vote for Clinton (Pew Research Center 2018). The role gender played in Trump's electoral success certainly requires a separate, more in-depth study. Nevertheless, the consideration of gender further shows the inadequacy of whitelash as a concept in explaining Trump's victory. The difference in race has been more apparent, as well (Pew Research Center 2018). Apart from gender, the overall effects of the campaign and presidency were that Trump made voters despise globalization, immigrants, people of color, and other elites.

Many commentators attributed Trump's election to the (white) working class. It was believed that they won against 'The Establishment'—the dominant social and political groups that allegedly suppressed them (Kellner 2017). However, Bhambra (2017) denounces that explanation. Bhambra posits that empirical analyses and proper class definitions categorize Trump's voters as middle-class. Overall, Bhambra extended two key conclusions. Firstly, Trump voters were generally richer than other Americans. Empirical data supports this claim. From 1967 to 2014, white households consistently maintained a near double per capita household income, compared to Hispanics and blacks (Pew Research Center 2016). Data from the Board of Governors of the US Federal Reserve System in 2022 shows that over 80% of national assets were held by white households, not radically different from previous years (USAFacts 2023). The second claim was that only one-third of Trump's voters came from lower economic classes (Bhambra 2017). However, mainstream discourse often attributes his victory to the working class (Bhambra 2017). A closer look at the data reveals mishandled statistics. While pro-Republican areas averaged low-income levels, the average Trump voter was richer than the average Clinton voter (Bump 2017). Ultimately, Bhambra (2017) posited that class analyses failed to acknowledge the interplay of race in modern politics, and, with Kellner (2017), rejected a significant working-class involvement in Trump's victory.

Populism

A deeper examination of the philosophical foundations of Kellner (2017) and Bhambra's (2017) discussions regarding whitelash provides the groundwork for understanding right-wing populism. In this context, right-wing populism is understood as an "ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups…and which argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people" (Mudde 2004, as cited in Urbinati 2019, 116). While Kellner introduces Nietzsche to his framework, Bhambra builds her philosophical foundation on the concept

of class. Moreso, it is important to note that she defines class rigidly. She also ignores Marxism.

I argue that Kellner's equation of Trump's followers to Nietzsche misunderstands Nietzsche's philosophy. It is not uncommon for Nietzsche's philosophy to be associated with fascism, Nazism, Zionism, and other supremacists. For example, most popularly, Nietzschean philosophy's anti-God beginnings and calls for an *Übermensch* are associated with "heroic realism"—Nazi-versions of Nietzschean philosophy that endorse a law-less, genocidal, and supremacist theory (The Wilson Quarterly 2008). However, such supremacist interpretations of Nietzsche constitute philosophical misappropriations (Golomb and Wistrich 2002). Kellner ascribes Christian religious awakening to Nietzsche. However, Nietzsche vehemently opposed religions such as Christianity and preferred the centrality of free will in discerning one's morality, while opposing racial supremacy (The Wilson Quarterly 2008). Ultimately, there is a different angle through which such philosophical discussions can be viewed in the context of Trump.

The facets of Trump's ascendency do not parallel the Nietzschean philosophy of becoming an *Übermensch*. Rather, they parallel misappropriations of data, information, and narratives to fool a following for votes, principally as Nazis misappropriated Nietzschean philosophy to justify their supremacy (The Wilson Quarterly 2008). Trump's scapegoating of immigrants and opposition to Mexicans, Muslims, and generalizations of the blacks are well known. Many studies investigating practices among Trump supporters find racial impacts of Trump's politics on them. Schrock et al. (2021) found that Trump's voters actively used racial and emotional communication during the 2016 elections. The US FactCheck.org (2015) declared that no other entity matched the number of falsehoods and denials to admit errors as Trump in 12 years of their work. Such fabrications of data and narratives were a core part of Trump's electoral strategy. Such strategies are common among populists (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012). Interpreting Trump's electoral victory as whitelash takes away from these broader conceptualizations and understandings of political phenomena.

The second philosophical consideration connects with how Bhambra (2017) conducts a class analysis. Bhambra (2017) has engaged deeply with claims that the working class elected Trump. While the findings that differentiate the role of different classes in electing Trump are empirically sound, the overall conclusion omits points more relevant to class analyses. There are little meaningful implications to draw from concluding that the middle class, instead of the working class, primarily elected Trump. Class analyses should pose specific and change-oriented inferences. In this context, class analyses of Trump's voter

base should include the feelings voters had against the Establishment, globalization, and the economic order at the time. Claiming that it was the middle class, not the working class, that elected Trump extends the implication that his voters should not have felt economically disadvantaged. This facet needs greater attention as scapegoating and misrepresenting information played a larger role than technical quirks about which class Trump's voters fall under.

It is also important to include a Marxist interpretation in class analysis. Marx's conceptualization of class consciousness expounds that people develop awareness against dominant ideologies in the context of their socioeconomic placement within the economic structure. In today's world, clear distinctions between middle class, working class, and bourgeois are difficult because of the increasing complexity of the economic and political system (McCreery 1964). These complexities make categorizing people by class brackets difficult under Marx's philosophy. Moreover, the philosophical implications of class consciousness are that if one believes they were economically marginalized, they act accordingly (Sengupta et al. 2018). Hence, paying too much attention to categorizing Trump's voters by income brackets is less helpful than investigating how these well-off voters were made to feel marginalized. This suggests that a more qualitative understanding of how perceptions of whiteness, wellbeing, privilege, and economic status affected voters is needed. Such an approach would extend our understanding of populism's functioning in the American context around class analyses better.

Theoretically, the ability of a politician to make themselves appear as a messiah to their voters who, despite not being marginalized, are made to feel that way, is a core tenet of populism (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012). Populist leaders present themselves as true representatives of the common public against establishments and create an othering (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012). By this definition, Trump is often classified as a populist (Zembylas 2019; Masaru 2021). If enough considerations have not already been viewed to support a populist understanding of Trump, other patterns can be identified, too. Mudde and Kaltwasser note that populists usually win two terms. When they fail, they deny election results and disrupt public order[1]. The January 6 Capitol Attack matches that argument. Many of Trump's other actions during his presidency are also populist tenets, such as hostility towards intelligence, ethics agencies, judiciary, law enforcement, and other institutional

[1] I have retained the definitions of "populism" that characterize its right-wing anti-democratic and often capitalist tendencies. The discussion around 'corrective' populism that is good for democracies is too nuanced and irrelevant to include in this paper. See Stavrakakis (2018) and Mansbridge and Macedo (2019) for more on corrective and left-wing populism.

players (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Despite these considerations and Kellner's labelling of Trump's movement as "populist," he did not place populism's explanatory power over whitelash (Kellner 2017, 143).

Reviewing other theories can provide more nuance toward understanding whitelash in the context of populism. Moreover, doing so ultimately highlights why populism is the better framework. Empirical studies extending these theories and works conducted in other regions would further expand our understanding of whitelash, whiteness, and populism in both Trump's electoral victory and the broader American context.

For example, Sengupta et al. (2018) explore the role of perceptions of deprivation through the Relative Deprivation Theory. They note that groups compare themselves with other groups and draw conclusions that enhance their wellbeing, regardless of the accuracy of these beliefs. To test this claim, they study whiteness in Australia and obtain affirmative results. In essence, the discussion around perceptions, inter-group comparisons, and wellbeing connect with the design of right-wing populism's success. The feeling of relative deprivation also explains the formerly discussed connection between whitelash and whiteness that whiteness can explain Trump supporters' so-called whitelash. However, given the lack of such research in the American context, an advancement on that front is needed for empirical confidence. This would provide data to test the strength of the underlying social theory connections with Trump's victory or discover if it was an exceptional event or one that was influenced by whiteness.

This discussion also reinforces the claim that populism is a better explanatory concept than whitelash. Whitelash can be understood as a phenomenon incited by appealing to voters' whiteness through populist rhetoric. McDermott and Ferguson (2022) outline how questions about the impact of "racialized rhetoric" on "the visibility of whiteness" are emerging across countries where anti-immigration and racist politics are taking hold (261). At the same time, the increasing visibility of whiteness does not instantly translate into whitelash. The aftermath of events like the January 2021 US Capitol attack and George Floyd's murder also create opportunities for more reflection and critical discussions. Further theoretically guided qualitative research should investigate what directions such discussions take. Specifically, McDermott and Ferguson ask whether awareness during such moments "translates to action that dismantles the power of whiteness" (268).

Populists also primarily weaponize social-group-based nationalism to win elections (Geary et al. 2020). Populist politics inherently divides society. A broader reason for placing populism in higher regard compared to whitelash is its broader applicability in understanding

similar domestic political climates across countries. Notable examples of right-wing populism polarizing society include Italy, Brazil, and France, among others (Russo 2021). The Indian Hindutva nationalist government rose to power similarly by weaponizing the Hindu religion against the corrupt establishment and non-Hindus (Plagemann and Destradi 2019). Populist tendencies globally share nationalism, homogeneity, othering, and impatience with deliberation, often championed by a single leader as common features that hurt democracies (Mansbdridge and Macedo 2019). Thus, the populist framework provides a strong understanding of Trump's strategy, supplanting a sole whitelash perspective.

Additionally, populism's manifestations during a presidency and not just in campaigning also need to be understood. Although nationalist fervor elects populists, populists' actions rather serve personal or niche interests than nationally beneficial ones. Indeed, in Trump's context, pursuits of self-interest can be identified instead of a mission that truly represented and prioritized whiteness. Howell and Moe (2020) describe Trump's management of political affairs at the White House as "the same way he ran his personal business" (87). Such actions are less democratic as Trump considered himself a boss, easily evicting individuals who disagreed with him. Running a government as a personal business also results in excessive focus on financial indicators, unprofessional communication, and personality-driven policy-ignorant leadership, all visible tenets in Trump's presidency. Even Thatcher's legacy was considered populist and nationalist, although her actions harmed the average person and aided capitalists by widening income inequalities (Fry 2008; Stepney 2014).

Blake and Adolino (2011) show that while the use of anti-immigrant rhetoric wins elections, it often does not reduce immigration, as voters do not and cannot track changes (since immigrants do not pose the threat they are accused of posing). Essentially, populist promises constitute marketing gimmicks rather than actual problem-solving—Trump's white nationalist appeal does not translate to the purported gains (Gruszczynski and Lawrence 2019; Kølvraa 2022). In research assessing Trump's actions during his presidency, his impact on socioeconomic indicators could also be studied as it was in Thatcher's case. Finally, there are predisposed factors that allow populism to succeed and other factors that contribute to electoral victories that must also be considered.

Other Factors Conducive to Trump's Electoral Victory

Populism tends to surface under certain conditions that make it easy for politicians to unite a group based on identity (Varshney 2021). Socioeconomic problems in America

since 2008 catalyzed Trump's ascendency (Sandel 2018). In addition to economic scapegoating, Trump reached out effectively to whites who felt disempowered (Sandel 2018). Contemporary findings also suggest that Trump's rhetoric highlights increasing white racial anxieties about a "nonwhite majority" dominating the demographic (Kelly 2020, 195). Essentially, Trump leveraged social conditions to make populism successful; it would be incorrect to claim that American democracy and society were perfect, and Trump single-handedly ruined it with his persuasive, entertaining, and racist politics (Hall et al. 2016). White anxieties persisting from colonial-era mindsets activated and cultivated those people's whiteness who were or grew skeptical of Obama (Patel 2017). Such skepticism and the conditions it created that led people to vote for someone who represented whiteness grew to the extent that Patel (2017) characterizes Obama's election as "the political rise of Donald Trump."

Such white anxieties have been understood in connection with settler colonialism, where settler colonialism is understood as a structure instead of a historic moment (Patel 2017). This view posits that occupation never finishes, and occupants continually suppress the non-dominant groups and structures. However, this view contradicts the definition of whitelash that claims it originates from those who were alienated from the system. How can a white settler colonial structure be in place simultaneous to white people being alienated? This view is not an either/or, as there has been progress in acknowledging race and working towards inclusivity, and whiteness has grown more complex than dichotomous understandings of colonizers versus the colonized (Ahmed 2007; McDermott and Ferguson 2022).

Election strategies also matter. While Trump's electoral strategy indeed leveraged whiteness to catalyze whitelash, part of his success is also because of the Democrats' failures where race is less directly relevant. Trump's campaign was objectively more nuanced, updated, and effective (Singh 2019). Compared to Clinton, Trump effectively united voters with emotional appeals, such as "Make America Great Again." Trump's campaigning also leveraged more personal and informal forms of communication, like rallies that developed better connections with him and potential voters than Clinton could (Feinberg et al. 2022). Clinton's campaigning strategy also fell short in strategically picking the right states and protecting herself from the barrage of accusations raised by the opposition (Kellner 2017). In essence, "democrats were out of touch with the major forms of communication and the electorate" (Kellner 2017, 139). Kellner also highlights other issues that damaged the credibility of the Democrats and Clinton as their leader. The critique against the Clintons has

been common since the 1990s following several controversies, hurting their credibility substantially (Patterson 2016). Even if the allegations were untrue, their existence discomforted voters. Moreover, Democrats' performance in previous years was poor. Sandel (2018) criticizes their technocratic liberalism. Akin (2018) finds that social media's aggression against right-wing users polarized society. Overall, the Democrats' relevance was declining just as their success in solving national issues (Bogaards 2017). This renders effective campaigning even more important.

The campaigning advantages have been the determining factor for the success of other populist governments worldwide where race was not a significant factor, as observed in India. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) politicians in India that formed the central government in 2014 and 2019 utilized channels of demographically sorted WhatsApp groups where BJP IT Cell campaigners maintained close relationships with group members (Nizaruddin 2021). These relationships enhanced trust and made it easy for campaigners to disseminate any kind of information, including lies, to prospective voters (Banaji 2018; Nizaruddin 2021). BJP's election campaign was also more technologically adept, utilizing social data on Facebook more efficiently than opposing parties (Singh 2019). The populist rhetoric of unity also allowed them to win an election by the technicality of having a greater vote share, while a larger proportion of the country's votes were scattered across other parties (Singh 2019). The observation of such patterns across different social contexts but similar dynamics in other states' domestic political climates reinforce the usefulness of the concept of populism or broader explanatory frameworks than whitelash.

Voter turnout also influenced the 2016 election. The 18 to 29 age group had the lowest voter turnout at 43.4%, with ages 30 to 44 at 56.9%, 45 to 59 at 66.2%, and 60+ at 71.4% (Macdonald 2020). People of color have an overall turnout of only 54%. Given that the youth and people of color overwhelmingly vote Democrat, this is an issue (Pew Research Center 2018). Finally, comparing the voter turnout between the 2012 and 2016 elections suggests that the working class played a greater role in Trump's election than Bhambra (2017) argues. Between 2012 and 2016, only the working class's voter turnout increased while all other brackets decreased (Morgan and Lee 2017). It is beyond the scope of this article to explore why different groups had different turnouts and what factors explain changes in the working class's voter turnout beyond Trump's calling. However, these are important questions relevant for further research investigating public political participation. Understanding such differences can also help campaigners strategize better.

Education and Issues Intrinsic to Liberal Democracies

What is next? Apart from the identified avenues for academic research, this topic has direct, important, and time-sensitive implications for politics and people. Research must not aim to reverse Trump's damages by retracing steps or idealizing a past image of American democracy but move in a different direction, such as questioning education as a solution and rethinking neoliberal democracy itself.

Educate the Masses?

Considering America's history and this resurgence of white nationalism, Kellner (2017) suggests education as a solution to curb the rise of what is essentially right-wing populism and white exclusionary nationalism. Interpretations of historic and national events also shape citizens' nationalisms differently. However, the aspect of knowledge of history is not applicable in Trump's context, i.e., the voters are not seeking a revival of decades-old, heightened levels of white supremacy, for two main reasons.

Firstly, a significant portion of Americans lack a solid grasp of their history. This undermines the feasibility of seeking to reinstate any perceived dominance when such aspirations are built upon a weak historical knowledge foundation. A YouGov survey investigating Americans' historical knowledge shows that most Americans have little to no knowledge about non-salient and older events (Sanders 2021). A survey of 41,000 Americans in all states by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation concludes that Americans' knowledge of national history was "abysmal" as only 27% of Americans aged below 45 had a "basic knowledge of American history" (Woods 2019).

Secondly, the weaponization of whitelash was not based on empirical evidence or history, rather, it was Trump's effective campaigning style that distorted facts and created false narratives, such as scapegoating immigrants and opposing political correctness (Sengupta et al. 2018). Overemphasizing whitelash as an explanatory concept has led to proposing unhelpful solutions. Discussing whitelash may prove helpful in understanding actions that altered institutions and led to 'nice racism' and 'color blindness' rhetoric during Trump's presidency (Lippard et al. 2020). Subsequently, understanding Trump's election from a critical perspective of political structures will provide better explanations and solutions.

Striving for More Systemic Changes

Bonilla-Silva (2018) rightly identifies that returning to "politics as usual" may be counterproductive as those systems had inherent features susceptible to fallouts and conducive to imbalanced power dynamics. Global right-wing populist trends, sparing not

even developed nations, raise important questions about why they came to be and what impact they will leave on the country's institutions, questions which the whitelash perspective significantly falls short of addressing (Scanni 2021). Thus, future trajectories must also account for such issues with democratic systems.

Liberal democracies are inherently imperfect for many reasons. The common public is not rational. Representative democracies work on the assumption that they are. However, the non-rationality of the common public makes democracies susceptible to populism (Finchelstein and Urbinati 2018). How can a country conventionally known for espousing liberal and democratic values defend itself against the fallouts seemingly created by the very systems it is often celebrated for? While some researchers find certain contexts that make states susceptible to these pitfalls, others consider the neoliberal structure entirely to be susceptible to the rise of anti-democratic politics (Ramos 2022). More radical perspectives find that liberal democracies and ethnic representation pave the way for identity politics, which takes away from anti-bourgeois politics and radical policy changes (Alcoff and Mohanty 2006).

Liberal democratic functioning also turns elections and the presidency into a vote-seeking competition where funds are wasted on what is essentially marketing. Such structures encourage vote-seeking behavior that compromises reason and problem-solving (Zohlnhofer 2009). In the American context, studies show more confident alarming results. Gilens and Page's (2014) study of factors influencing 1779 policy decisions in America found that economic elites and business-oriented interest groups significantly influence government policy decisions while average citizens and people-centric interest groups have negligible influence.

Finally, an increasing scholarly trend is emerging where liberal democracies often depict intrinsic contradictions within their values, produce income inequalities, and create civil discord (Wedekind 2020). These tenets propose that not only is it inadequate to attribute Trump's electoral victory to whitelash, but that a discussion of populism that does not probe its links to features of liberal democracy itself may be less helpful for academic and change-making pursuits. Further discussion is encouraged to investigate links between electoral rules, country-specific constitutional rules, and populist actions to better understand the connections between susceptibility to right-wing populism and democracy's intrinsic flaws. This will prove helpful in the context of America and beyond for political theorists and institutional design in strengthening democracy more meaningfully and sustainably.

Conclusion

Whitelash is only one strategy in Trump's toolkit. While it is valid, it lacks explanatory power in explaining Trump's ascendence and presidency, compared to other factors like voter turnout, election campaigning (marketing), failures of the opposition candidate, and issues intrinsic to liberal democracies. Overall, right-wing populist theory better explains Trump's electoral victory than whitelash does. However, deeper investigations of whiteness may be more relevant to understanding Trump's presidency. Additionally, some other factors also prove important in understanding electoral feats. In Trump's case, voter turnout, failures of the Democrat's campaigning and successes, and wider critiques of democratic institutions and campaigning objectives are also important. Whitelash loses even more power as it fails to provide meaningful solutions, compared to populism and the non-Trump factors.

Education was proposed as the response to whitelash to change Trump's voters' beliefs about white glories, superiority, and nationalism. However, that solution is unhelpful, given the irrelevance of knowledge of past glories, if any. In terms of class analysis, studies from Marxist and political psychological perspectives are warranted as the current literature against white privilege misses a lot of important insights. Overall, the paper concludes that whitelash was a part of Trump's presidency but does not work as an explanatory or evaluative framework, lacking external and construct validity, which are essential tenets of political science theories and methods. Nonetheless, whiteness and whitelash can be studied more empirically in the American context for an understanding better than currently extended.

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Thinking Complex about Energy Transitions: Lessons from the Implementation of LPG Gas Bottles in Kenya

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Abstract

In the informal settlement of Langas, Kenya, access to domestic energy for cooking is a complex and multifaceted issue. Political and infrastructural efforts have promoted LPG gas bottles as a cleaner and more efficient alternative to traditional fuels like firewood and kerosene. However, residents demonstrate a diverse set of contextual concerns that challenge gas bottles' uptake and prompt questions about how straightforward these energy transitions can be. The ethnographic study I conducted in Langas reveals a significant gap between the way energy transitions to clean fuels are imagined by energy policies and stakeholders and how these are experienced by end-users. While energy policies often reduce energy transitions to mere technological shifts, local communities show that access to energy is a social rather than a technical issue and requires a more inclusive, context-specific, and culturally sensitive approach so that energy solutions appropriate and responsive to their needs can be developed.

Keywords

Kenya; Energy Transition; Energy Policies; Social Anthropology

Nancy and I had been busy cooking with Corinne all morning. Her house, a precarious mud hut at the edges of Langas, was far from any shop and we had to walk for over two miles to buy some firewood. Once back with a few logs and a packet of kindling, our host embarked on the task of lighting the three-stone fire, a traditional cookstove made of three stones arranged around a flat central hearth (Figure 1). The rain of the past few days, however, had made the kitchen, a small and dark room built next to the main house, incredibly damp. The firewood, sitting on the muddy ground, became wet and only caught fire when Corinne poured some drops of kerosene on top of it. With a thick column of smoke arising from the fire, we realized that the simple procedure of preparing *ugali*, a paste of flour and water considered the main staple food across Kenya, was way more complex than we had anticipated.

Figure 1. Examples of three-stone fires

Corinne had told us that her husband opposed the idea of buying a *meko*, the 3kg LPG gas bottles that had become common to cook across the settlement. They were too expensive to refill, and the household had other financial priorities. While we were waiting for the water to boil, Nancy, who had been accompanying me through Langas as a local fieldworker, took the chance to involve Corinne in some calculations. That morning, we had paid 50 shillings to buy firewood. Multiplied for the days of the month, they summed up to over 1500 shillings. With the cost of a 3kg LPG gas bottle refill at 800 shillings, Nancy wanted to prove that even if she had to refill her *meko* twice a month, the overall cost would be nearly the same. That solution would remove the burden of daily runs to the firewood retailer, the struggles of lighting the fire, and the annoyance of the smoke. Yet, Corinne counterargued saying that even if gas was cheaper, she would still use it only in the mornings and light the fire in the evenings to cook the main meal. She was concerned that her neighbors would accuse her of being a lazy wife if she relied upon the convenience of a modern cookstove.

We had several conversations like that in Langas, the peri-urban informal settlement on the outskirts of Eldoret, the fifth largest city in Kenya, where I was conducting my ethnographic study for my PhD dissertation. I was interested in investigating how access to domestic energy for cooking was experienced, perceived, and signified by the residents of Langas, in the attempt to contextualize and assess the potential for LPG gas bottles to offer an alternative solution to local energy practices. LPG gas bottles are considered a major asset in promoting domestic energy transitions (Figure 2). Sturdy and compact, they are easy to transport and refill, thus able to overcome the institutional, infrastructural, and logistical obstacles that long hampered access to modern sources of energy in the Majority World (Schwittay 2014; Redfield 2012). They rely upon Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), which is released straight from the bottle by turning a handle. LPG burns quickly and effectively, with

no emission of particulate matter and other hazardous products of incomplete combustion. It is therefore considered clean and efficient and, currently, the most easily scalable option to address the health, environmental, and social concerns associated with reliance upon traditional energy practices.

Figure 2. A pile of 3kg LPG gas bottles, locally known as *meko*

The term "traditional energy practices" has gained prominence in narratives of those involved in driving changes toward energy transitions and refers to those energy behaviors that rely on kerosene and solid fuels (firewood, charcoal, sawdust) burnt in rudimentary stoves to procure energy for cooking, lighting, and heating household spaces. According to the International Energy Agency (2022), traditional energy practices are currently employed by over 2.4 million people, mostly in the Majority World. The combustion of traditional fuels generates household air pollution (HAP), the second environmental risk factor in the global burden of disease (Murray et al. 2019). HAP leads to over 3.2 million premature deaths a year (World Health Organization 2022) through associated cardiovascular and respiratory diseases (Smith et al. 2014) and kills more people than HIV/AIDS and malaria (Health Effects Institute 2019). Reliance upon traditional fuels has further effects. It impacts the environment, as collecting firewood and charcoal for domestic energy purposes accounts for 40% of global wood harvest (Food and Agriculture Organization 2018) and cooking with

them releases almost one-third of total black carbon emissions, a score comparable to the emission of the aviation industry (Bailis et al. 2015). Gender equality is another pertinent issue in this context. Women bear the brunt of tending to domestic energy needs. They spend more time close to HAP sources and, as a result, have poorer health (Ellegard 1996; Bruce et al. 1998). Collecting firewood in rural areas exposes them to physical injuries, snakebites, and sexual harassment (Khamati-Njenga and Clancy 2003; Cecelski 2005). Furthermore, being time-consuming, domestic energy tasks prevent them from accessing educational and job opportunities, with consequences for their financial and personal independence (Petrova and Simcock 2021; Sullivan 2018).

Efforts to ensure energy transitions in the Majority World have accelerated since the Sustainable Development Agenda set "clean and affordable energy for all" as the 7th imperative goal to reach by 2030. In Kenya, this goal materialized through a set of interventions to make LPG more accessible and affordable. In 2016, LPG refills were made VAT-exempt and retail licenses, once a monopoly of petrol stations and big supermarkets, were liberalized. The LPG value chain was strengthened through the building of a new terminal for the import of LPG at the port of Mombasa, the construction of refilling plants across the country, and the enforcement of more stringent regulations to the market, that curbed the threat of parasite refillers who long made a living from stealing, refilling, and selling at low prices gas bottles from legitimate companies. On the other hand, the use of traditional fuels was fought on various fronts. An extra tax was placed on kerosene, a moratorium was enforced on logging activities, and a ban was placed on the production and sale of charcoal. These interventions were underpinned by the idea that by making traditional fuels expensive and scarcely available and LPG affordable and accessible, people would naturally transition to the latter.

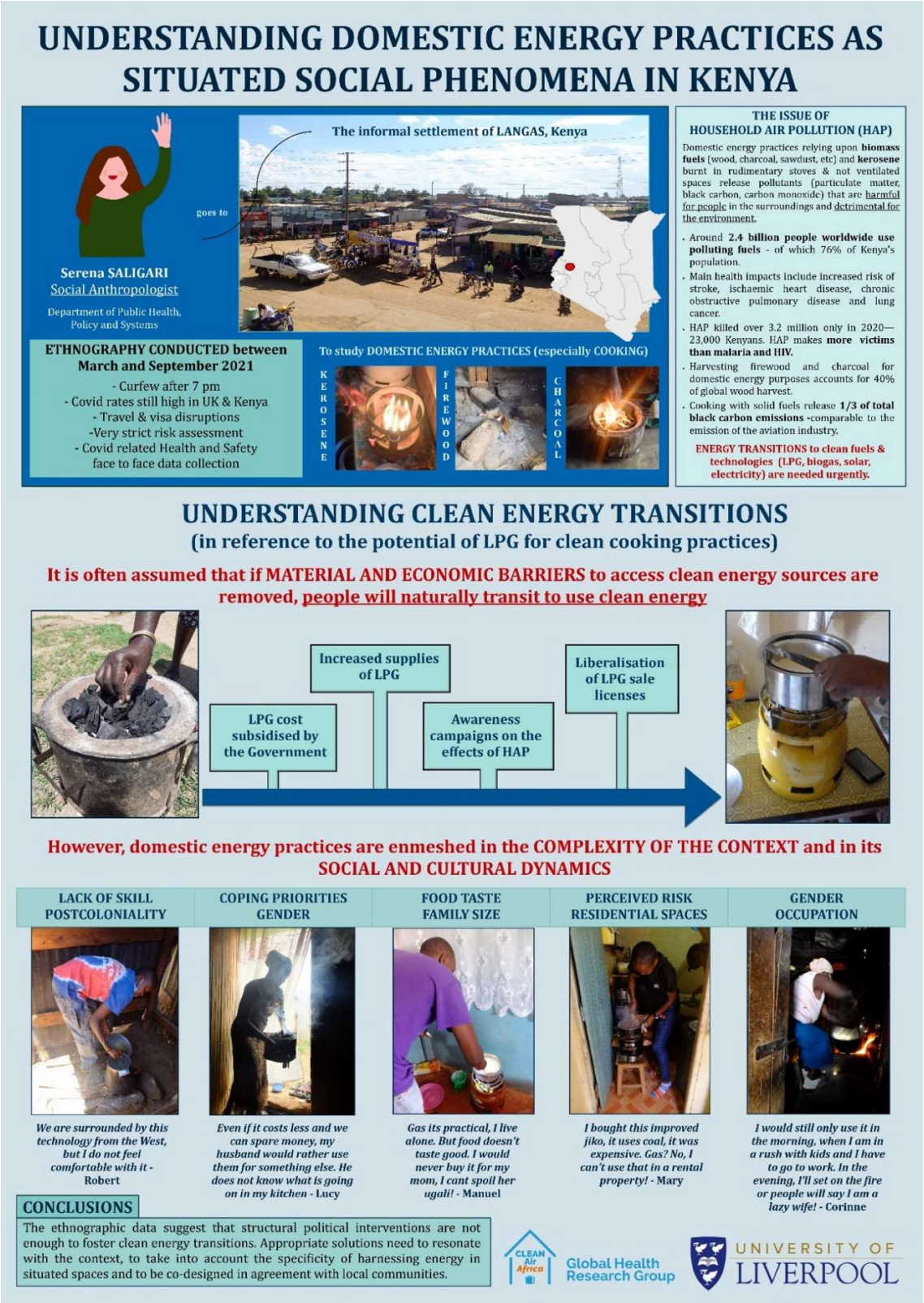
While President Ruto recently announced a plan to convert all public institutions to LPG by 2025 and achieve universal clean cooking by 2028, domestic energy transitions still fall short of what is expected to achieve the 2030 targets (World Bank 2020). The ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in Langas, indeed, proves that households' energy behaviors and choices do not follow predicted patterns, nor can be understood in terms of a linear cause-and-effect relationship uniquely motivated by affordability and accessibility. Rather, people's energy practices are implicated in a set of contextual concerns seldomly accounted for by the "thin simplification" of state policies (Scott 1999). Most residents employed the practice of stacking, intended as the combination of traditional and modern, polluted and clean, time-consuming and efficient energy technologies. Manuel, who was a

bachelor man living alone, found LPG convenient to rewarm or prepare quick meals. However, he could not imagine his mom cooking ugali with anything else but firewood, believed to confer it a unique flavor. Most people used LPG only for short tasks and considered it unsuitable to cook "hard foods," such as meals that require long boiling times. Scared by the possibility that the refill would be exhausted too quickly, they were furthermore intimidated by LPG gas bottles as unfamiliar devices that did not belong to the local socio-technical system. They were concerned about mishandling them and questioned their safety upon the historical reputation that LPG gas bottles could explode. For those living in rental properties, like Mary, this was a substantial concern that triggered worries around the potential scenario of having to pay for damages to the landlords. Intersecting issues of social desirability and gender were enhancing people's ambivalence toward LPG technology. *Mekos* were both desired and confined within households. On one hand, they were status symbols, proof of the enhanced socio-economic status of the family. They provided a quick and efficient solution, which minimized waste of time and fuel. On the other, women were concerned that their reputation would be impacted if they relied upon a modern cookstove. The risk of being labelled as lazy wives went hand in hand with the belief that these "technologies from the West" (Robert, see details on the poster) would make traditional stoves, practices, and knowledge expendable. Finally, LPG adoption was subjected to complicated decision-making processes, with an unbalanced relation of power between females and males leading to women being subjected to what their husbands classed as a priority.

In these respects, the ethnographic accounts I collected in Langas help to understand household energy's use as a complex concern informed by several contextual factors, that the energy transitions anticipated by the policies' design did not account for. They highlight that a fracture exists between the ways in which energy interventions are planned and imagined by energy stakeholders and how those are received, understood, and experienced by final energy users. Such fracture, also known as "social gap" (Batel and Devine-Wright 2015), is underpinned by several criticalities. Despite the increased awareness that effective energy policies urge to reflect the needs and incorporate the points of view of the communities involved (Lennon et al., 2019; Sloot et al., 2018), their development is still delegated to technical experts external from the contexts of implementation. The danger of "expertism" in the energy field has long been proved to conceal the social dimension of "people's energy problem" (Nader and Milleron 1979; Shove and Walker 2014) and, with it, the contextual factors that come to interfere with domestic energy use. Energy policies are

often guided by a "rational plan" (Suchman 2007) elaborated in abstract and detached places. They account for local uses of domestic energy as uniform across social contexts, disowning the extreme variability of energy experiences and values (Frigo 2017). In these respects, they often support the implementation of a one-fits-all solution and account for final energy users as passive and diligent recipients of such proposed alternative. This approach has far-reaching implications, as it places excessive trust in technological solutions (Morozov 2014) and, in turn, oversimplifies energy transitions as mere technological shifts. This technicist orientation disowns the social and cultural dimensions of local energy practices, concealing the much broader arrangements in which they are implicated. The expectation that users would embrace the given technology and follow its script (Woolgar 1991; Akrich 1992) also enforces a deterministic change in energy practices (Wyatt 2008), not negotiated with the communities involved and rather imposed through the imperative of energy transitions, assumed to be universally shared. This approach has political implications and can be understood as a symptom of those "energopolitics" that exercise power over local populations by means of the ways in which energy is delivered and accessed (Boyer 2014).

We have learnt that in Langas people resist energy transitions for several, different reasons, showing that the energy practices they adopt do not follow any economic, health, or environmental logic. While reliance upon traditional fuels and technologies remains a substantial global public health, social, and environmental concern, accusations of NIMBYism are quickly debunked by the evidence that there are often good reasons to oppose energy transitions (Grubert and Hastings-Simon 2022). As argued by Suchman (2007, 70), "every course of action depends in essential ways on its material and social circumstances." Langas residents, who are confronted daily with indeterminant energy concerns (Rittel and Webber 1973), adopt a mix of modern and traditional energy practices based on which fuel and stove better respond to their contextual needs. In these respects, attention to the situated action of energy users and a more nuanced understanding of their needs and priorities can help question, challenge, and reframe the ways in which energy transitions have been imagined and are urged to develop more effective energy policies and interventions to address the concerns with which traditional energy practices are implicated.



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