



DEBATE,
DEFAMATION AND
DIVIDE IN
2024



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A Letter from the Editor

DEAR READER,

It is my immense honor to introduce Penn Political Review's Fall/Winter Edition, entitled Debate, Defamation, and Divide in 2024. I'd like to begin by thanking our staff for making this edition possible.

It seems almost surreal to think that the year has come to an end. While the responsibilities of being a Penn student (classes, extracurriculars, weekend social endeavors not quite fit for print) might've remained predictable, news cycles seemed to move at hyper-speed. What was irrelevant yesterday became the subject of heated debate tomorrow. What dominated the headlines one week felt forgotten the next. There were times I felt overwhelmed by the constant barrage of information. Every belief I'd previously held about the state of politics remained in flux. Certainty felt elusive, almost untouchable. I was forced to contend with the reality that no single moment, no one article, would fully encapsulate the complexity of the world we were navigating. The question for me was no longer just about how to stay informed. It was about how I could engage with the world using purpose, care, and dignity.

The staff at *Penn Political Review* consistently engages with readers in such a way. In this edition, each and every one of our writers sought to go beyond simply reporting what could be found in the headlines. They posed and explored the difficult questions, questions about how we as students can respond to the challenges of our time and make a meaningful difference. We begin this edition with precisely this kind of inquiry. In our piece, "Hear From PPR's Team: Our Thoughts On The 2024 Election," our staff members provided nuanced and thoughtful responses about the issues that mattered most to them during the election season.

The next thirteen pieces examine various political, social, and economic issues. Erina Chowdhury emphasizes the importance of collective international liberation, embedding her stories as a Bangladeshi-American with her call for readers to understand international politics. Jake Craner argues that federalism has exacerbated inequality with regard to Medicaid. Brad Ferdinand analyzes the history and socio-economic conditions in Haiti. Sydney Kim examines the Christian stance on abortion from the 1970s to the present. Ava Ye proposes an intrastate high-speed rail system as a solution to the American public transportation crisis. Om Gandhi discusses fiscal federalism. Linda Zhang describes Philadelphia's recent fight against gentrification: opposition to the city's plan to build a basketball arena in Chinatown. Anuska Singh discusses political violence and ethnic tensions in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Hrishita Mareddy details the rise of Donald Trump and the ideological transformation of the Republican Party. Tony Kim sheds light on the implications of Japanese war crimes during World War II. Alaina Haroon outlines the relations between China-Taiwan, with comparative focus on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Our edition concludes with two interviews. Aaryan Chopra conducted an interview with Philadelphia City Commissioner Omar Sabir about voting and elections in the city. Finally, Nicole Patel talks with Michael Horowitz, the Director of Perry World House, about national security and military technology.

As 2024 formally comes to a close, we invite you to take a step back from your Breaking News alerts and understand today's political landscape in a new way. Whether you're a news junkie or a novice, we hope that these articles will provide a deeper insight into the year we've had. With any luck, we'll be better equipped to face tomorrow, together. Thank you, and I hope you enjoy reading Debate, Defamation, and Divide in 2024.



SONIA BANKER
PPR EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Hear From PPR's Team: Our Thoughts on the 2024 Election

This year's election has shaped up to be one of the most exciting, controversial, and unpredictable series of events in recent memory. With so much at stake, politicians and pundits on both sides of the political spectrum ready themselves for a historic outcome. Today, members of our PPR journalism community take a moment to highlight a few things they look forward to seeing in this election, along with other noteworthy races besides the presidency and other observations that piqued our interest.

Sonia Banker, College '26: I am curious to see what will happen in the Pennsylvania U.S. Senate, State Senate (Northeast Philadelphia), and Attorney General races. The Attorney General's office oversees legal matters from consumer protection to criminal justice reform, and it will be interesting to see how new leadership will influence the state's policies and priorities going forward.

Corey He, Wharton '26: I look forward to seeing what healthcare and foreign policy will look like moving forward. As with any election year, I am interested to see how the swing states pan out — and if there are certain demographics or populations that may “swing” the election one way or another. I will also be closely watching the races for seats in the House and Senate — and how everything shakes up once all the races are called.

Raju Lakhani, College '26: I am excited to gain an understanding of what many Americans want to improve or change in their lives, as well as how they think different policies will affect them. I am also interested in the Nebraska Senate race because of the possibility of an upset. I am really curious if deep red Nebraska is turning purple, or if this is just another example of misleading polling.

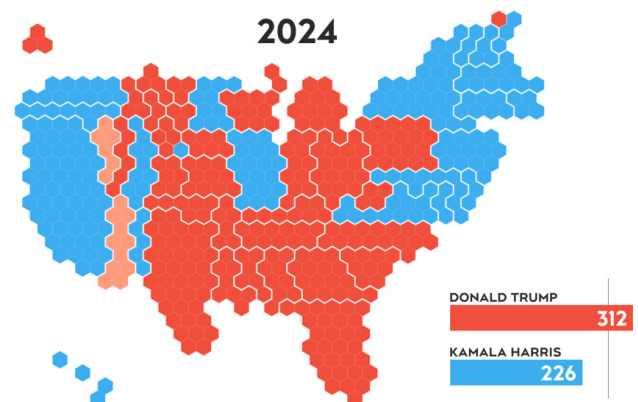
Jack Lakis, College '27: The policies of the Biden-Harris administration have been largely bipartisan, yet have struggled to gain popularity within the electorate. With the election, I am expecting to see a thermostatic red wave that we did not see at the midterms. I think that watching each campaign has been very interesting, but ultimately I expect the Democrats' patterns in governance will decide the outcome in 2024.

Michael Cameron, Huntsman '28: I am interested in seeing the impact both parties' vice presidential picks could have on the outcome of the election. For the Harris campaign, it will be interesting to see if Tim Walz and his “Midwestern coach

vibe” can lock in the rust belt states — or if passing up on Josh Shapiro was a missed opportunity to secure Pennsylvania. I also wonder if the Trump campaign can still successfully win the election with a far-right vice presidential nominee like JD Vance instead of a more moderate candidate like Doug Burgum or Nikki Haley.

Graham Owens, College '28: I am most looking forward to viewing the results in Pennsylvania and Georgia, two of the most critical swing states. It will be interesting to see whether urban democratic areas can outperform the rural conservative counties throughout the states. Additionally, I am hoping that there will be a similar — if not stronger — turnout than in 2020.

Achille Giaretta, College '28: I am very curious to see if the polls are correct — or if there is a general partisan lean in favor of either Democrats (like in 2016 and 2020) or Republicans (like in 2022). I look forward to seeing if the demographic shifts will affect the election and if a certain group will have a higher turnout. I am also curious about the racial depolarization predicted by some journals, and I would like some surprises (could Alaska turn blue?).



Nicole Patel, College '28: With the upcoming election, I am interested in seeing the potential shifts in votes in states such as Pennsylvania. While Texas is a known red state, I am also eager to see whether the percentage points for both the Democrats and Republicans stabilize. I am also curious whether the aftermath of the election will create backlash and a potential protest if results are not optimal for certain groups. I wonder if there will be recounting of ballots or shouts of illegitimacy.

Raeva Patwardhan, College '28: In the final month before election day, I am curious to see data on voter mobility. Penn's campus, situated in one of the more volatile swing states, is flooded with volunteers prompting new eligible voters to send in a ballot. If this is representative of the nationwide spirit, we would expect to see a large proportion of the votes coming from the 18-25 year age range. I am also curious to know how much of the voter turnout would be due to the campaigning strategies of both teams: Harris's social media-centered outreach vs. Trump's rallies.

Tammer Maraqa, College '28. In the run-up to the election, I am keeping an eye on the House elections and the effects that redistricting over the past four years will have on the results. Some states have redistricted for political benefit, while others have been ordered to by federal courts. The incredibly tight House race has been complicated by the effects of redistricting, and I am excited to see the implications on voter blocs and political strategy in various states. If we come to realize that redistricting had an outsized effect, I am curious to see if all-encompassing federal legislative action will be taken to address district policy.

Kaynath Chowdhury, College '26: With the election fast approaching, I am particularly interested in the results in Michigan, where many Muslims are contemplating abstaining from voting due to concerns over the current situation with Israel and Palestine. It will be crucial to see how this impacts voter turnout and political discourse in the state. Understanding this dynamic could provide insight into broader trends of political engagement among marginalized communities.

Aaryan Chopra, College '28: The 2024 presidential election is unique for more than one reason. I am particularly interested to see how artificial intelligence plays a role in how voters perceive the candidates and how this new technology influences the campaigns. Misinformation and fake correspondences to politicians have become rampant, so understanding how stakeholders will attempt to combat these new threats will be fascinating.

Ellie Meyer, College '27: I am interested in understanding if and to what extent Harris' social media presence will impact

election results. She is clearly trying to appeal to a younger group of voters through a presence on TikTok, appearing on traditionally non-serious podcasts, and inviting non-political guests to be featured at rallies. I am curious to see if this will rally young voters enough for her to win the election, or if it will cause those who feel less up-to-date with trends to lean more Republican during this cycle.

Ananya Shah, College '28: I am interested in understanding the role which Southern voters play in determining the end result of this election. More specifically, Georgia has become an increasingly important battleground state (as seen in 2020), and its significance for the 2024 election cannot be understated. There are many misconceptions and generalizations about Southern voters that I am hopeful to see disproved in the next month.



Medic-ain't?: How a Federalist System has Limited the Scope of Health Care in the United States

Jake Craner

Federalism, the system of government adopted by the United States, is characterized by a division of power between a central and local government, with both creating laws that govern the citizens of the United States.¹ Medicaid, the United States' current healthcare option for low-income citizens, is a textbook example of federalism. Medicaid is a program financed both by the federal government and state governments.² While the federal government employs thresholds for both specific groups of people and particular benefits to be enrolled in and offered as a part of Medicaid, states are free to cover additional groups of people and benefits.³ However, this freedom granted by the federal government to the states regarding who and what exactly is covered under Medicaid has led to a troubling level of inequality between citizens of different states.⁴ It is necessary to reform the current Medicaid system to be administered by the federal government alone, as a reform would alleviate the inequality of a federalist system by standardizing both Medicaid access and benefits despite the differing geographic location of citizens.



Across states, the current federalist system of Medicaid promotes inequality both in benefits given to citizens and who receives coverage. The example of dental coverage highlights the large differences between state Medicaid benefits. A Medicaid patient in South Carolina has no dental coverage, while one in Vermont is offered dental exams and cleanings. In the middle ground, a Medicaid patient in Arizona

may only be covered if they receive emergency treatment by physicians for relief of pain or infection.⁵ Another glaring statewide difference is who has access to Medicaid. Enacted in March 2010, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) attempted to expand Medicaid coverage to every citizen below 138% of the federal poverty line.⁶ However in 2012, the US Supreme Court ruled that under a federalist system, states did not have to adopt ACA Medicaid expansion.⁷ Currently, more than fourteen years after the ACA was originally enacted, ten states—Wyoming, Wisconsin, Kansas, Texas, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida—have yet to expand Medicaid coverage under the ACA.⁸ The inequality of who exactly has access to Medicaid is exacerbated when it is considered that Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas make up more than one-third of the top fifteen states with the highest poverty rates as of August 2024.⁹ In the status quo, the citizens of states with people that need expanded Medicaid coverage the most are hung out to dry by their local governments. Political scientist William Riker's argument that federalism is a 'tyranny of the minority'¹⁰ rings true—by not adopting the ACA, a handful of states prevent the national goal of providing quality healthcare to citizens who are low-income. The socio-economic inequality in the current Medicaid system is made possible exclusively by federalism. The best option to remedy this is to nationalize Medicaid.

Under a reformed Medicaid system, the federal government could focus on taking care of citizens without state specific interruptions. By eliminating the federalist healthcare system, the US would standardize spending on citizen services by states.¹¹ As a result, those currently left out of healthcare due to their state not adopting the ACA would be able to receive the care that most of the country has access to. Placing Medicaid under the direct control of the federal government would allow for reforms to be made to the funding process. Instead of the status quo federalist matching program, in which both the federal government and state governments chip in, funding would come directly from the federal government. This would alleviate the federalist predicament

of states that have not adopted the ACA due to budgeting concerns. Certainly, a reform of the status quo would cost money—raising federal tax dollars more than lowering state tax dollars—however, Kettl explains that the majority of the country is on board and ready to spend, identifying with concepts of community and empathy and fear of financial insecurity.¹² Moreover, in recent years, attitudes towards the ACA have shifted in favor of the act: a poll in 2021 showed a 54% national favorability towards the ACA.¹³ Furthermore, a nationalized Medicaid program would streamline the process of healthcare, as national common benefits would eliminate the status quo issue of differing benefits accessible from Medicaid. Gone would be the days of differing depths of dental care, replaced with a common standard of care across the country. A reformed Medicaid system would grant more citizens the access to healthcare that they lack in the status quo.

The most pressing issue that a reform of the status quo could lead to is a nationwide Medicaid that compares more to a state that has not adopted the ACA than a state that is at the forefront of providing benefits and expanding Medicaid coverage. A national Medicaid system might not match the high standards set by states that currently invest the most in Medicaid benefits and coverage. Most likely, a reformed Medicaid system would not only add benefits and expand coverage in states that are currently behind the national average of benefits and coverage but also take away additional benefits and coverage from certain states that offer them currently. It would be challenging for the national government to afford to provide many additional benefits and even more expansion to Medicaid on par with leading progressive states. If some states avoid ACA expansion due to budget concerns, why wouldn't the federal government be wary of the high cost of a national Medicaid program?

the positives (states with many additional benefits and high additional coverage) of the current federalist system. However, it is necessary as a country to first guarantee an overall standard of healthcare for all citizens, regardless of state, before worrying about a regression of leading, progressive states in Medicaid benefits and coverage to the national standard.

The status quo of a federalist system of Medicaid perpetuates a high and growing level of inequality from state to state. Political scientist Donald Kettl points out that American poverty rates from state to state have become more unequal over time¹⁴—a direct result of federalism, which leaves policy decisions that impact citizens up to the discretion of the states. This inequality is true in healthcare, and thus it is no surprise that states that have not expanded Medicaid overlap heavily with states that have high poverty levels. As time goes on, the trend of worsening inequality is sure to continue. Without reform, the trend of worsening inequality is sure to continue.¹⁵ While some states may see a reduction in Medicaid benefits, it will not harm citizens as much as the current system, which prevents many from accessing coverage. It is in the best interest of the country to reform the Medicaid system, leveling the playing field and ushering a new era of federal branch engagement in healthcare.



Furthermore, a federalist system is unique because it highlights the stark differences in the polity of each state. Why break precedent and strip benefits away from progressive states who have chosen to invest more into Medicaid currently? The strongest counter to the adoption of the reform argues that the United States is taking a risky bet by sacrificing

Why International Liberation and Politics Impact Us Collectively

Erina Chowdhury

Global affairs occur throughout the world. Peace treaties, humanitarian crises, war against tyrannical, oppressive forces, and conflict about trivial or nuanced topics—these are some of the many examples of global complexities happening in varied parts of the world. However, there are geographical differences to these events. For example, what’s happening on the Caribbean coast differs from what’s happening in Sub-Saharan Africa. Global issues impact populations in drastic ways, especially in political ones.



An important question arises when understanding the spheres of international relations and the complex patterns between people of the human world: is international politics an important matter for people domestically? Understanding international movements can make us more engaged citizens at home, and it allows us to develop a level of interconnection and community among different groups. Through an international lens, we can understand themes present throughout history that continue to impact people to this day. Liberatory learning allows people to engage with knowledge with an understanding of freedom and autonomy, constructing away from current systems to imagine new realities. From a liberatory lens, communal understanding leads to communal change.

As a Bangladeshi American, I’ve always learned about my family history from my grandparents. My parents shared

their history with me in small chunks, rarely sharing the full story because they weren’t as connected to their roots as 1.5-generation immigrants who came to America during their adolescent years. My grandparents told me the stories of what life was like in Bangladesh, of their communal lifestyle. They emphasized the beauty of their tight-knit culture while highlighting the hardships they’ve faced during tumultuous times of crisis. The beauty was seen through daily conversations with sellers at the local bazaar, hair braiding sessions with coconut oil in their fingers as they laughed with their comforting conversations, and the natural landscape of delicious fruits, like mangoes and lychees, and vegetation that illuminated the lively streets of the country. This sense of community and joy was something my grandmothers, my Dadu and Nanu, always shared with me from time to time to ground me in my cultural heritage.

However, the hardships were pressing. My grandfather, my Nanabhai, served as a liberation fighter during the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. He saw horrific sights of war and lost countless friends and family members at this time. He recalled specific details to me with clear assertions when asked, and he instilled a sense of advocacy into my sister and I through his storytelling that would linger in our thoughts even after the conversation ended. This fight for independence and autonomy was not just a singular protest or act to him. It’s in the culture of being Bengali, he always mentioned. Protesting was a normal reality to him. He described to me the context behind the fight to preserve the mother tongue of Bangladesh, the Bengali language.

In 1947, India and Pakistan were partitioned as a result of religious conflict, where the Hindu-majority state was India and the Muslim-majority state was Pakistan. In 1952, the Pakistani government forced an Urdu-only policy in the country, declaring it the official language of Pakistan. A majority of residents of East Pakistan, soon to become the independent Bangladesh, spoke Bangla. Beginning on February 21st, 1952, students began to protest and demanded Bangla to be considered a state language. The police opened fire, killing five students.¹ More pressure was applied to the government through direct action and mobilization, causing Pakistan to finally recognize Bangla as an official language in the country in 1956. UNESCO declared February 21st as

International Mother Language Day due to the actions these students took to preserve their mother tongue.

My grandfather told me how his parents were involved in the language movement. These liberatory practices have influenced my family deeply. Presently, the protests in Bangladesh that occurred this past summer were devastating. Students were once again at the forefront of the movement, fighting against the quota system that privileged certain groups, including the descendants of those who fought in the Independence War of 1971,² over more well-experienced individuals in the civil service job market. I had cousins who were at the forefront demanding change.

When I asked people if they'd heard of these movements, they'd say that they never took the initiative to learn about these topics outside of their traditional history classroom settings. Movements of advocacy happen all around the world that impact us deeply, particularly in understanding how these past movements implicate our current landscape of advocacy. Have you thought about labor in developing countries and how it relates to Western motives of capitalism and power? The brands Shein and Temu are one of the many examples that portray this case. These two brands offer incredibly cheap items that are increasingly popularized and trending among young people. These prices are extremely low due to the exploitation of garment workers, typically in Southeast Asia, who are gaining little revenue while working

extremely long hours.³ Capitalist motives, particularly for profit and wealth, impact domestic residents in numerous ways. Caring about global issues is pertinent, especially when systems of power are formed, where the domestic sphere benefits from the exploitation of the developing global sphere.

Movements of advocacy are intertwined. While my Nanabhai taught me about the movements of liberation happening in Bangladesh during their time, it has helped me to gain an insightful lens when understanding other global movements. Understanding one advocacy movement can illuminate broader patterns across others. Current protest movements, including most recently Afghanistan's women's rights movement against the strict Taliban laws,⁴ allow me to draw connections between other movements, like the Iranian women's rights movement after the death of Mahsa Amini under Islamic law.⁵ These connections have allowed me to think critically about global conflicts historically and presently on a microlevel while drawing parallels to our current society. Advocating for international issues and understanding politics of different global countries is integral to building a society fostered on long-term community and development. There is no true liberation without the liberation of all countries.



Fiscal Federalism: Balancing Local Autonomy and National Cohesion

Om Gandhi

Fiscal federalism provides a framework to optimize allocation of fiscal responsibilities and resources across levels of government. It proposes that public functions should be executed by the level of government closest to the people — a principle known as subsidiarity.¹ This belief stems from the understanding that local governments can better comprehend and respond to the unique needs and preferences of individual citizens. For instance, while a federal government might struggle to understand the specific transportation needs of a small rural community, local officials in the area are more likely to grasp the nuances of the situation and craft solutions.²

This framework outlines responsibilities based on the scope and nature of public goods and services. National governments bear the responsibility of providing goods that benefit the entire country — such as national defense, foreign policy, and monetary regulation. For example, the Federal Reserve manages the nation’s monetary policy, ensuring currency stability and economic growth. State and local governments deliver services with more localized impacts. In Germany, for instance, the “Länder” (or states) have purview over education, tailoring different learning approaches that reflect regional cultural and economic differences.³

A key tenet of fiscal federalism is the principle of “fiscal equivalence,” which proposes that lower levels of government should fund their activities through taxes and fees collected from citizens who benefit from the services. In Switzerland, for example, “cantons” (or member states) can independently set tax rates and decide on local public services, allowing local taxpayers to directly impact the services they receive as a community.⁴

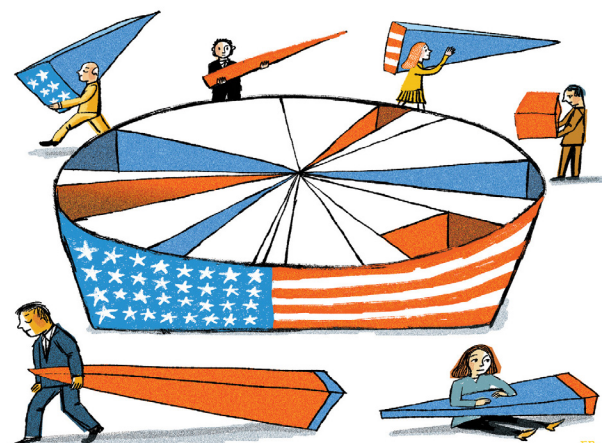
Despite its theoretical appeal, implementing fiscal federalism presents several significant challenges. Many countries face a mismatch between the spending responsibilities and revenue-raising abilities of local governments, known as the vertical fiscal gap. For instance, in India, state governments are responsible for crucial sectors like healthcare and

education but often lack sufficient tax bases to generate adequate revenue.⁵ This leads to a heavy reliance on central government transfers, potentially undermining local autonomy and accountability.

Another challenge arises from economic disparities among regions within a country, creating horizontal fiscal imbalances. In Italy, the stark economic divide between the industrialized north and the less developed south has led to significant variations in the quality and availability of public services, necessitating complex intergovernmental transfer mechanisms.

Furthermore, many public goods and services, such as education and healthcare, have both local and national dimensions, requiring shared responsibilities across different levels of government. In Canada, healthcare is primarily a provincial responsibility. However, the federal government plays a crucial role in setting national standards and providing funding through the Canada Health Transfer; this illustrates the interplay between different levels of government.

Additionally, spillover effects can complicate the implementation of fiscal federalism. For example, a city’s investment in flood control infrastructure might benefit downstream communities in other jurisdictions. This effect would create challenges in fairly allocating costs and benefits.⁶



To navigate these challenges and harness the potential benefits of fiscal federalism, policymakers need to adopt a multifaceted approach. Strengthening local revenue-raising capacity through measures such as property tax reforms and local business taxes can enhance the fiscal autonomy of subnational governments.⁷ For instance, Colombia's recent efforts to modernize its cadastral system and property valuation methods have significantly increased local government revenues.

Designing effective intergovernmental transfers is another crucial strategy. Transfer systems can be structured to provide local governments with flexibility while incentivizing responsible fiscal management. Australia's system of horizontal fiscal equalization aims to ensure that all states have the fiscal capacity to provide comparable levels of public services while maintaining incentives for economic development.

Establishing a stable and clear allocation of expenditure responsibilities among different levels of government is also essential. In Spain, devolution has gradually clarified the roles of the central government and the autonomous communities, although ongoing negotiations continue to refine this division.⁸ Fostering intergovernmental cooperation is equally important. Creating formal and informal mechanisms for coordination between national and subnational governments can help address shared challenges. The German Bundesrat, a legislative body representing the Länder at the federal level, provides a forum for coordinating policies that affect both federal and state interests.

Moreover, balancing autonomy and national cohesion remains a critical consideration. While promoting local autonomy, it is crucial to maintain national unity and address regional disparities. South Africa's system of cooperative governance, enshrined in its constitution, seeks to balance provincial autonomy with the need for national cohesion in a post-apartheid context.

When effectively implemented, fiscal federalism can yield significant benefits. For example, enhanced efficiency aligns service provision with local preferences, allowing for more structured resource allocation. The diverse healthcare systems across U.S. states, for example, allow for experimentation and tailored approaches to local health challenges. Increased accountability is another potential benefit, as the close connection between local tax collection and service provision can foster greater government responsiveness.

In Nordic countries, high levels of fiscal decentralization are associated with strong local democratic participation and government accountability.⁹ Furthermore, local autonomy

can spur innovation in public service delivery as different jurisdictions experiment with novel approaches. For instance, the city-state of Singapore has been at the forefront of smart city innovations, leveraging its unique position to implement cutting-edge urban solutions.

However, realizing these benefits requires ongoing attention to emerging challenges. Technological change, particularly the rise of the digital economy and remote work, is challenging traditional notions of jurisdiction and tax bases, necessitating new approaches to fiscal federalism in the 21st century.¹⁰ Global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, highlight the need for flexible and coordinated responses across all levels of government, testing the resilience of federal systems. Environmental challenges like climate change require coordinated action at multiple levels of government, further complicating traditional divisions of responsibility.

In conclusion, fiscal federalism offers a compelling framework for structuring multi-level governance, promising more efficient, responsive, and accountable public services; however, its successful implementation demands careful consideration of each country's unique historical, institutional, and socioeconomic context. As governments worldwide grapple with complex challenges ranging from urbanization to climate change, the principles of fiscal federalism can provide valuable insights for creating more effective and equitable systems of governance.

The journey towards effective fiscal federalism is ongoing and fraught with complexities. Yet, by fostering a balance between local autonomy and national cohesion and continually adapting to new challenges, countries can work towards governance systems that are both responsive to local needs and capable of addressing broader societal goals. In this endeavor, fiscal federalism serves not as a rigid blueprint, but as a flexible guide for navigating the complex landscape of modern governance.

Lakay Kase: The Perpetual Yet Embraced Disunity of Haiti

Brad Ferdinand

Introduction

Haiti is considered the most populous Caribbean country with an estimated population of 11.4 million. It is also the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. As a nation known for its history of political instability, economic insecurity, and lack of development, the country has been labeled a country in need that cannot be satisfied through foreign intervention or stimulus packages, but only through internal reforms.

Despite Haiti's long history of troubling circumstances, the nation has undoubtedly maintained an indestructible sense of pride, almost proclaiming a sense of comfort within an uncomfortable state. This perseverance of such a sense of pride is the very essence of what has allowed Haiti to prevail despite its odds.

History Briefing

To truly understand what has allowed the Haitian people to persist through such circumstances, one must first understand the country's history. The island Hispanoila, which is currently divided between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, was originally inhabited by the Arawak (Indigenous peoples). Christopher Columbus, an Italian explorer, found the island and, over time, exterminated the indigenous population through disease and slavery. Eventually, the French gained control over the land, founding a multitude of permanent settlements in which they imported enslaved Africans to work on plantations. The French colony's population and economic output grew rapidly during the 18th century, and it became France's most prosperous New World possession, exporting sugar and smaller amounts of coffee, cacao, indigo, and cotton. By the 1780s, nearly two-thirds of France's foreign investments were based on Saint-Domingue, and the number of stopovers by oceangoing vessels sometimes exceeded 700 per year. By 1789, the settlements had an estimated population of over 500,000 enslaved Africans, who endured terrible conditions of labor for years. Yet within this plight, a sense of identity began to form.

Haitian Revolution

The Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) was an internal uprising from the enslaved and freed Haitian population within the island, primarily stemming from social, economic, and racial

tensions in the colony of Saint-Domingue. From the French colonizers' abrasive and nationalistic actions, to egregious offenses to slaves, to unfair treatment of specific subsets of Haitians such as affranchis, tensions between Haitians and the French reached a climax. A large-scale slave rebellion, inspired by the French Revolution of 1789, began, leading to a strategic power struggle that saw Toussaint Louverture, a formerly enslaved military leader, emerge as a key leader with a vision of establishing equality and order in the colony. By managing to play the European powers (France, Spain, and Britain) against each other, the fight for independence was ushered into an opportunistic position. Toussaint and the army eventually aligned with the French Republic after it abolished slavery in 1794, securing support against these external threats.

The French Republic abolished slavery in 1794 in all of its colonies, gaining the support of Black revolutionaries in Saint-Domingue. Under Toussaint's leadership, the revolutionary forces expelled the British and established a relatively autonomous region. However, Napoleon Bonaparte's ambition to restore slavery and colonial profits led to a military expedition in 1802. Though Toussaint was captured and died in France, leaders like Jean-Jacques Dessalines resisted fiercely. Guerrilla warfare and diseases like yellow fever devastated French forces. In 1804, Haiti declared independence, becoming the first Black republic and the first nation to emerge from a successful slave revolt.

Despite this victory, Haiti faced economic and diplomatic challenges. France demanded an indemnity of 150 million francs (later reduced to 90 million) for recognition of Haiti's independence, forcing the nation into crippling debt. To meet payments, Haiti took high-interest loans, stalling its economic development. According to the Guardian, by 1900, 80% of Haiti's budget went to debt repayments, which lasted until 1947, severely limiting Haiti's progress. This came alongside the political instability throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with Haiti experiencing frequent coups, uprisings, the rise of authoritarian leaders, and weakened state institutions. These factors were only further exacerbated by the United States occupation, which aimed to stabilize the country but also reinforced economic dependency.

Unity

Haiti's post-independence situation heavily impacted its ability to develop. Yet, despite these factors of deterrence, Haiti's cultural identity has established Haiti's national character, highlighting a unique sense of pride in such uncertain situations. From the prevalence of Haitian religious identity, language and literature, art, and music, the current Haitian diaspora has made something out of nothing. The mass faith base in Haiti, depicted by the 84% of Christians and 2.1% believing in Vodou, has acted as a foundation of stability for millions of Haitians, interweaving itself into the everyday aspects of life, becoming a form of assurance.

and stability, have imbued themselves into the very diaspora of America, inevitably having a considerable impact on American culture, politics, and arts. The diaspora has also been a crucial source of economic support for Haiti's economy.

From the deep rooted significance of Haiti's independence to the multitude of different mediums of expression displaying Haiti's diverse origins, Haitian culture has established itself as a lived experience. An experience perpetuated through the daily interactions and principles held by Haitians all across the world; it thrives not merely as a static inheritance of



This assurance, coupled with the insurgency of Haitian literature with iconic pieces tracing back to even Oswald Durand's "Rires et Pleurs." Haitian literature has served as a tangible method of expressing the unique essence of freedom and progression Haiti possesses. The essence is even seen through the living language of Haitian Creole. Derived from contact with French colonizers, the Taino, and the enslaved communities leading up to Haiti's formation, Haitian Creole has extended its reach beyond the borders of Haiti, becoming a lifeline for the perseverance of Haitian culture globally. Not only does its very creation embody the very same resilience Haiti needed to overcome generational plight, but it also has acted as a connection between all Haitians throughout the world. As of 2024, there are an "estimated 10-12 million Haitian Creole speakers worldwide." As the Haitian people have continued to grow, so has the Haitian language, becoming a catalyst for connection. Haitian culture in and of itself has kept Haitians grounded in the same principles that provided them their freedom, especially in regards to Haitian migrants, with communities in Miami, New York City, and Boston having vibrant Haitian populations, contributing to the cultural fabric of these cities. Haitian Americans, the fifteenth largest foreign born population in the US, made up of migrants fleeing Haiti in search of better opportunities

the past but as a dynamic force shaping identity, resilience, and community. Haitian culture is woven into the fabric of everyday life, from the rhythms of Creole language spoken in homes and marketplaces to the vibrant artistic expressions that narrate the struggles and triumphs of a people. It is a culture that breathes through faith practices, music, literature, and collective memories of its people, binding them together across borders and generations. In this way, Haitian culture is not simply an artifact to be explained but a vital, evolving presence that continues to inspire and sustain its people in the face of challenges, affirming their enduring pride and unity.

Broken Home

From revolutionaries to modern-day migrants, Haitians have carved out spaces of empowerment and creativity. Despite political, geographical, and economic challenges, Haiti has embraced its disunity—not as weakness, but as a familiar stepping stone of opportunity. Opportunity that allows Haiti and the larger diaspora as a whole to see that a home, no matter how big or small, broken or new, is still a home to cherish.

The History of the Pro-Life Viewpoint: How Evangelicals Were Weaponized Against Abortion

Sydney Kim

One of the most widespread yet misunderstood perceptions about American politics is that the Evangelicals vehemently promoted a pro-life perspective, inseparable from their religion. After all, today, we often link this demographic most closely with the anti-abortion movement; it feels impossible that their aggressive opposition and religious rhetoric could have ever been separated from the Evangelicals. However, the truth of the matter is that the Christian argument against reproductive control was only ignited after years of indoctrination from right wing activists — all to fulfill the larger goal of building conservatism in America. Today, we have become all too accustomed to this automatic association between Evangelicalism and the pro-life movement, consequently misunderstanding where this sentiment had once originated, and how.

Initially, there was little outcry over the legalization of abortion — the evangelicals were very decentralized in their stance on birth control. Over half a century ago, *Roe v. Wade*, the monumental Supreme Court case that established the precedent for national access to abortion, was met with no reactionary protest from them. In fact, they had sparse political involvement altogether — Christians were largely isolated from government affairs.¹

More shockingly, some leaders in the church even backed portions of the decision. The evangelicals that did have an opinion on the matter supported the woman's right to choose, for the most part. For instance, the forefront publication for Evangelicals of the time, *Christianity Today*, wrote in its 1968 issue that terminating a pregnancy could be a “necessity” and “permissible.”² Leading up to the decision and several years after, the Southern Baptist Convention approved of allowing access to abortion.³

Come the early 1980s, however, only a few years after *Roe v. Wade*, the Christian stance became diametrically opposed to where they once stood. This was in reaction to two significant repercussions of *Roe*—first, the nation saw a substantial spike in abortions. This result, though foreseeable, brought

Christians to re-evaluate if this was really what they had wanted.

The second and more important reaction to *Roe* was a rise in feminism. The defense of the woman's right to choose was a huge victory for the feminist movement. This elicited a much more explicit response from the Evangelicals. Christians saw this movement as a threat to the patriarchy, family values, and the role of women as mothers in traditional society—central tenets of their religion.⁴ In other words, Evangelicals, though still far from fighting abortion, were feeling threatened and thus at the cusp of re-evaluating their position.

Simultaneously, these two consequences were paired with the fourth Great Awakening: a tremendous surge in church membership that swept the nation in the 1970s. Millions of young people sought out a new form of Christianity to find peace and truth in a politically turbulent time, between Nixon's presidency and the Pentagon Papers. In other words, Evangelicalism began to rapidly fortify and build its core beliefs.⁵ Evangelicals had reached a point where they had both the perfect amount of susceptibility and a budding power in numbers.

Thus, in 1979, leading up to the 1980 presidential election, conservative political activist Paul Weyrich seized this opportunity, ready to capitalize on the insecurity of the young Evangelicals. Weyrich was the cofounder of the infamous organization, The Heritage Foundation, which spearheaded Project 2025, and was deeply involved in conservative organizing. He began calling on Christians to mobilize against democratic candidate Jimmy Carter, recognizing the vulnerability of this growing group. As Carter's administration targeted segregated institutions that many Christians were directly tied with, Weyrich recognized that the resulting white Evangelical pushback was a catalyst for conservative consolidation.

However, Weyrich also understood that Christians would not be galvanized over an explicitly racist cause. While the roots of resentment against the democrats were planted, he needed

something that these potential republicans could fully get behind. Deftly, he exploited Christian values and insecurity in their religion by labeling anything that intimidated the status quo as a government attack on religious freedom through papers and public speaking.

Eventually, Weyrich found a cause that the Evangelicals would rally around: he capitalized off of the insecurity resulting from Roe by launching the “Moral Majority” alongside other conservatives,” a political interest group that was staunchly anti-abortion and pro-segregation.⁶ The Moral Majority managed to turn Christians against fellow Evangelical Jimmy Carter—whom they stood behind just four years prior—and catapulted candidate Ronald Reagan into the infamous presidency that shaped the Republican Party into what we know it to be today.

Francis Schaeffer, another major architect of the religious right ideology, partnered up with Weyrich in reinforcing the Moral Majority. He intensified the anti-abortion belief by alarming Christians nationwide about what Roe v. Wade could bring with different forms of media. Schaeffer used graphic imagery and storytelling, slippery slope rhetoric, and nightmarish depictions of a future in which infants were murdered gruesomely left and right to amplify conservative concerns about abortion. He managed to captivate his audience and embed new fears about the practice’s immoral implications in them. *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, one of Schaeffer’s infamous anti-abortion film series, erupted with popularity and enabled the deep-seated and stringent adherence to conservatism in his audience.

From the 1980s onwards, anti-abortion became inseparable from Evangelical political beliefs. The combination of Weyrich’s rallying cries and Schaeffer’s media influence cemented the pro-life viewpoint as essential to Evangelical Republicans. Since then, polarization about abortion and Christian support for ending the practice has only become entrenched.

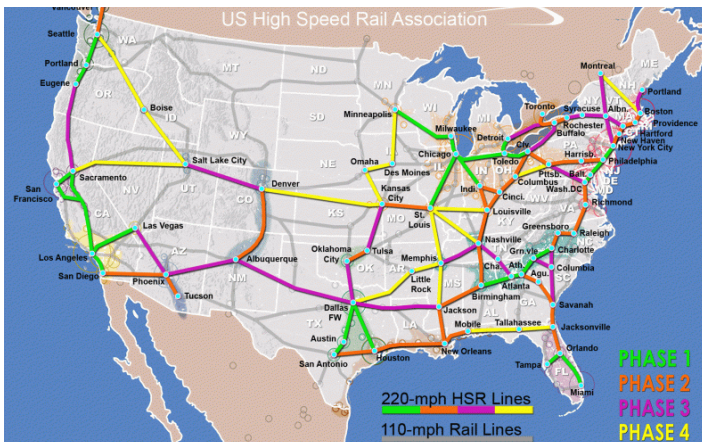
In the wake of the 2022 Dobbs decision and in light of the major upcoming elections, understanding the pro-life and pro-choice perspectives is relevant now more than ever in order to facilitate healthy and informed discussion. The conservative party’s past isolation from the core beliefs it holds today points towards two things: the fact that there could perhaps be nothing inherently religious about this debate, and the potential of returning to a separation between evangelicalism and the woman’s right to choose.



Getting Back on Track: The Case for High-Speed Rail

Ava Ye

In the 1940s, America called itself a global leader in the realm of transportation. Due to war-related conditions involving the rationing of gasoline, mass transit ridership peaked at 23.4 billion in 1946.¹ Today, however, the United States lags behind its peers, particularly in the implementation of passenger rail. While nations like China have installed over 40,500 kilometers of high-speed rail lines, the US ranks eleventh in rail network lengths, one behind Sweden, a country with a population similar to that of North Carolina.² An analysis from the US Census estimates that seventy-seven percent of American commuters drive to work, while only three percent use public transit.³



Heavy reliance on cars can be attributed to America's deteriorating public transportation system: existing rail lines are incredibly inefficient and unreliable. Amtrak, for example, is less a high-speed rail and more a low-speed fail: the Federal Railroad Administration revealed that Amtrak trains travel at an average speed of only forty-eight miles per hour, meaning that driving is often a faster way of commuting.⁴

A stark comparison can be drawn between American and foreign rail systems. The distance between Hangzhou and Fuzhou, two major cities in China, is roughly equivalent to the distance between Los Angeles and San Francisco—both commutes are around seven hours by car. However, while the Chinese high-speed rail can shorten the trip from Hangzhou to Fuzhou to as little as three hours, it takes twelve hours using Amtrak services to get from Los Angeles to San Francisco.

Clearly, American public transportation is in need of change—and the public desires it, too. The demand for a more accessible form of public transit is shared among Americans regardless of party affiliation: sixty percent of eligible voters support the construction of a nationwide high-speed rail system, compared with just seven percent who oppose it and thirty-three percent who neither support nor oppose.⁵

In a world increasingly centered around urban hubs, this strong public backing is for good reason. America's largest cities are becoming overwhelmingly congested, while smaller cities and rural regions become sparsely populated.⁶ Worse, living outside of these hubs is impossible, as cars are the only means of transportation. However, while a three-hour car ride from a rural town to a major urban area is difficult, a thirty-minute train ride via high-speed rail would allow for people to work in these metropolitan areas while living outside of them.⁷ In fact, high-speed rail has empirically decentralized development in Japan, and small cities and rural areas were revitalized as big cities became more habitable.⁸ Congestion between large cities such as Tokyo and Osaka was relieved, and land prices in rural regions declined.

The option to commute to work by high-speed rail is especially imperative in a year of high unemployment and low consumer strength, with economists predicting a roughly sixty percent chance of a US recession in the next 12 months.⁹ High-speed rail can open new doors for families looking for more options for traveling to their jobs. In addition, its construction is also a catalyst for job creation and increased labor demand.¹⁰ In California, for example, the building of high-speed rail alone contributed \$840 million in employment income and \$2.2 billion in economic output.¹¹ Recently proposed plans have projected that a national high-speed rail development would create more than 2.6 million jobs across a number of industries,¹² and a holistic analysis from the Transportation Law Journal finds that "operating new railways will provide jobs to fuel our economy through the recessions of the next fifty years."¹³ With several economic models suggesting that recessions are an inevitable part of the economic cycle, reliable and

profitable public transportation will be imperative in both short-and long-term strategies.

Yet the benefits of a national railway system do not stop there. Rail transport also happens to be the most electrified transport sector, making it uniquely positioned to take advantage of the rise of renewables in the electricity mix.¹⁴ High-speed rail specifically is eight times more energy efficient than airplanes and four times more efficient than cars.¹⁵ With over sixty percent of Americans claiming they would use trains if they were available, a national high-speed rail system could reduce the number of annual car trips by twenty-nine million and significantly cut emissions.¹⁶

A cut in emissions is crucial for the US after backtracking on what was already marginal progress in reducing emissions. In comparison with other countries (e.g., China, Japan, South Korea, and those in the EU) that are announcing ambitious near- and long-term climate targets, the US needs to find another method to become more sustainable. The Environmental Protection Agency explains that emissions from transportation account for about twenty-seven percent of total US greenhouse gasses, and between 1990 and 2020, greenhouse gas emissions in transportation increased more than emissions from any other sector.¹⁷

Though the expansion of public transportation has strong public backing, there exist several cases against a nationwide high-speed rail network. Cost is the first issue, with opponents arguing that construction would cost too much money for it to be profitable in the long run. However, a global analysis of high-speed rail systems finds that the trains can pay off the cost of construction through fare revenue¹⁸ and that high-speed rail is a spending multiplier, with every one dollar invested in high-speed rail systems creating four more in economic benefits.¹⁹ All in all, even if some economic cost is presented in construction, debt is short-term, whereas economic expansion from high-speed rail is long term.

Another more legitimate issue is gentrification. Many cities in the US have a history of clearing low-income minority neighborhoods in order to make space for transportation infrastructure. Though opponents of high-speed rail claim this raises a valid concern, a viable solution would be to upgrade existing tracks, enhancing current railroads rather than building new ones and taking up more land.²⁰ For example, most current federal funding for high-speed rail focuses on improving the existing Seattle-Portland, Chicago-St. Louis, and Northeastern lines. This plan avoids further displacement or division of communities. Especially as current maintenance for subpar trains is costly, upgrading existing infrastructure represents a better way to connect and revitalize communities.

Furthermore, high-speed rail's role in reducing transport-related costs such as fuel would offset property cost increases. In fact, high-speed rail can specifically benefit low-income households that spend up to 15.7 percent of their take-home earnings on transportation and reduce the proportion of income spent on housing.²¹ This benefit can be observed in Japan, where half a century's worth of data finds that high-speed rail made it easier for workers to move out of the city into lower-cost suburbs and rural areas, decentralizing the housing market and consequently lowering housing costs across the region.²²



Lastly, there are policies in place that aim to implement high-speed rail while minimizing gentrification. California recently authorized land banking as a tool to prevent gentrification near rail projects. By buying up land early in its planning process, the mega transit agency can “bank” the property and then sell it to affordable housing developers.²³

Ultimately, many alternatives to high-speed rail present a future in which the country is worse off. Absent high-speed rail construction, highways and airports will have to be expanded because current transportation will not be sufficient to sustain the growing population—roads and airports will be causes for transit-oriented gentrification and debt-funded, as they would cost over twice as much as the construction of a nationwide railway system.²⁴ Thus, opponents of high-speed rail should be wary that whatever cost they attribute to its construction will be doubled with the alternatives they propose.

High-speed rail is America's only hope for getting back on track—and though it is unlikely that the nation regains its global leadership position in public transit, it will need to catch up for the sake of its economy, climate, and communities.

Philadelphia Chinatown's Battle Against Gentrification - The Arena Problem

Linda Zhang

Lively fruit markets. Aroma of roasted duck. The frenzied noise of Chinese dialects blending together. For nearly 3,000 Asian residents, this bustling environment is what they call home.¹ Located in the heart of Philadelphia, Chinatown is a rich cultural tapestry that has long served as a refuge for Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) looking to find acceptance in a welcoming environment. For over 150 years, it has offered AAPI individuals a space to connect with their heritage within a close-knit community.² However, beyond the colorful, forty-foot Friendship Gate lies the struggles and battles fought against projects that prompted major displacements of residents, destruction of small businesses, and threats of gentrification.

One of the first recorded large-scale developments displacing Chinatown residents occurred in 1923, when a telephone company purchased an entire block in the area to demolish existing buildings for a high-rise.³ Later, in 1991, the construction of the Philadelphia Convention Center displaced 200 Chinese residents and seven small businesses.⁴ While it is an unfortunate reality, the inhabitants of Chinatown were all too familiar with the city's and large corporations' projects that entailed the imminent dismantling of their beloved homes and businesses.

Therefore, when the 76ers' proposal to build a new \$1.3 billion arena a block from Chinatown's southern boundary was announced,⁵ residents felt the rise of a new, yet familiar, anger. In fact, the Sixers were not even the first sports team to propose building an arena in Chinatown. In 2000, former Philadelphia Mayor John Street proposed building a fifteen-acre, 44,000-seat Phillies stadium, which sparked immediate outrage within the community.⁶ Just months later, a large group of protesters marched through the streets, resulting in a public outcry large enough to bring a complete halt to the proposal.⁷

The Sixers arena raises concerns of indirect displacement, traffic congestion, and, most notably, economic troubles for small businesses. Most of the businesses in Chinatown—ranging from supermarkets to restaurants to retail—are

deeply rooted in cultural identity, an image that is not particularly appealing to the consumer-base of sports fans or concertgoers. Furthermore, the six years of proposed construction and the horrific traffic issues pose significant threats to the survival of about 300 small businesses.⁸ It could create a less than ideal environment for consumers, with the threat of heightening noise and parking difficulties.

While the arena is not set to be built in an area that brings about the demolition of homes, it does give rise to concerns about gentrification of the area. This could indirectly result in displacement and gradual erasure of cultural identity.⁹ When an area becomes gentrified, old buildings are renovated, which leads to a rise in property value.¹⁰ Consequently, this also leads to a skyrocketing of housing prices, which could force many residents out as they would not be able to afford the new rent costs. Affordable housing would be near impossible to find and the cost of living would be difficult to keep up with. Gentrification brings sleek, modern businesses that replace outdated ones, that often hold the traditions and heritage of previous generations.¹¹ Inevitably, their removal would lead to cultural erosion in the area.¹² Not only would many people be forced out of their cherished communities, but their culture would be displaced as well.



Inhabitants and devoted supporters of Chinatown understood the implications of building the arena and were prepared to fight back since day one of the proposal. Outraged

community members took to social media to organize the movement, resulting in various accounts and groups rallying to support the cause. From plastering posters all across the city to holding large, peaceful protests, supporters are determined to make their voices heard. During past protests, Philly residents were seen marching through downpours from Philadelphia's City Hall to the Friendship Gate, drumming and chanting.¹³

However, the situation became more dire as Philadelphia Mayor Cherelle Parker declared her support for the arena proposal on September 18, 2024, announcing that it was “the best financial deal ever entered into by a Philadelphia mayor for a local sports arena.”¹⁴ Although this was a major blow to the movement, supporters did not let this setback bring down their spirits or muffle their voices. Instead, they chose to fight back stronger.

That was exactly what Taryn Flaherty, a senior at the University of Pennsylvania, fully intended to do.

As a Philadelphia native, Flaherty found the fight against the Sixers' stadium all too familiar. Flaherty described growing up in a time when she frequently saw activism and successful community organizing: “My mom was one of many activists in the city who were active in the Save Chinatown Coalition against the baseball stadium in 2000 and the proposed casino in 2008.” She notes that attending the Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School (FACTS) in Chinatown “shaped” her as a person and activist, and she connected with their mission to “preserve history and protect communities” through the preservation of folk arts.

When the building of the Sixers' stadium was first announced, Flaherty worked closely with the Save Chinatown Coalition, conducting research on the proposed arena. It was during this time that she decided to co-found Students for the Preservation of Chinatown (SPOC) with her friend Kaia Chau. Flaherty explains, “SPOC is a coalition of college students fighting against the proposed arena [...] We did a lot of mobilizing and education on campuses.” However, their work was not just limited to campus environments. She adds that they were able to teach their cause at a prominent law firm, emphasizing that SPOC was mainly an educational and mobilizational branch of the Save Chinatown Coalition.

In addition, SPOC was also active in the protests and were in charge of supplying bullhorns and putting up posters. Flaherty recalls that even on the day Mayor Parker announced her support, there was “a huge protest filled with song and dance” where she spoke and led some of the chants. To her, the most memorable parts of these protests were the scenes of “blocks and blocks” of community members standing together in unwavering support of the cause.



Chinatown has long been a staple in Philadelphia for visitors to indulge in rich culture and for residents to feel safe in a tight-knit community. The activists against the arena proposal, including those in SPOC, know the fight to preserve this essence is going to be difficult. However, they are determined not to back down at the challenge, as they deeply value standing their ground for their beloved home. Regardless of what hurdles may be presented, those who find comfort in the warm embrace of Chinatown will ensure that the long history of gentrification will not be repeated.

Disasters Unfolding in the DRC

Anushka Singh

A pot of Western greed, violence, and forced labor in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has simmered for decades, and its blistering contents are now spilling over, scalding millions. The civilians of the DRC have kneeled under the thumbs of larger political plots and economic pursuits for the greater part of the country's history. The conflict, beginning in the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide,¹ continues to deepen the cyclical political violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo over three decades later. Combinations of armed groups, entrenched poverty, weak governance, and deep ethnic tensions have resulted in one of the world's largest displacement crises. Currently, the number of internally displaced people in the DRC is just under 7.2 million,² and escalating sexual violence has earned the country the grim label of "rape capital of the world."³ The complex geopolitical forces at play continue to grow more muddled, leaving only devastation in its wake.

Riches of Ruin: Congo's Wealth Trap

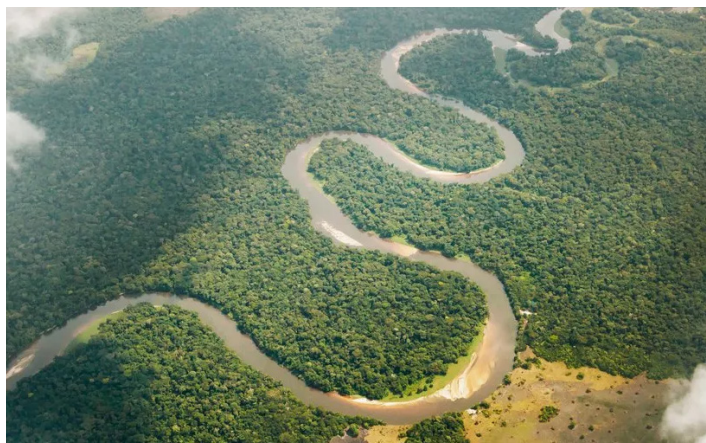
To unravel the factors that have shaped today's reality, we must first tug at the thread of the Congo's natural wealth. The soil that the DRC rests on possesses some of the world's most valuable natural resources, but colonialism, slavery, and corruption have eroded its glory. The DRC is a fairly large country, comparable in size to Western Europe.⁴ With the Congo River (Africa's second largest river),⁵ a genial climate, and rich soil under which abundant deposits of gold, diamonds, coltan, and other valuable minerals rest, the Congo has the makings of one of the world's richest countries. However, nothing could be further from the truth. The UN Human Development Index⁶ ranks the nation just short of last on key dimensions such as health, knowledge, and standard of living. Even some of the DRC's more fortunate citizens live in unyielding poverty.

Dating back to the late fifteenth century, the people had their own aristocracy and civil services. As soon as Portuguese traders from Europe arrived in the 1480s, they saw the land for what it was: rich in resources. In the eyes of the Portuguese, the DRC contained a practically endless supply of strong, disease-resistant slaves. This marked the beginning of a long tradition of exploitation. In the late nineteenth century, the extraction of ivory and rubber, harvested among dastardly conditions, contributed to immense wealth for Europe. In World War Two, uranium from a Congolese mine was used by the United States to build the world's first atomic bomb.⁷ Today, this exploitation continues through coltan mining. Around 60% of global reserves of coltan—a vital mineral used in cell phones, laptops, and other devices—resides in the DRC.⁸ However, the problem lies in the some 40,000 child⁹ miners forced to extract it as cheap labor. Efforts have been made by the Congolese government to curtail this, but the funding to ensure compliance is still lacking.

The Enemy of My Enemy

The Eastern region of the DRC has continued to be afflicted by the violence of multiple armed militant groups for nearly three decades. This region sits right next to Rwanda, a large perpetrator of the power struggle present in the area today. As previously mentioned, this conflict has deep roots in the Rwandan genocide,¹⁰ during which extremist members of the Hutu ethnic group killed around one million Tutsis, a Rwandan native ethnic group, over the span of 100 days in 1994. Following the genocide, nearly 2 million Hutus¹¹ fled and crossed the Congolese border, settling mostly into refugee camps in the North and South Kivu provinces. Tensions rose as small groups of extremists began organizing militias within the Congo, leading to Tutsi groups counter-mobilizing and foreign powers taking stances on the issue.

In the present day, the largest non-state militant group in the Eastern DRC goes by the name of the March 23 Movement,¹² also known as M23. This rebel group mainly consists of ethnic Tutsis who broke away from the Congolese army just over a decade ago. They organized a large offensive in 2012 and took over the provincial capital, Goma, which borders Rwanda, where they were eventually driven out by UN and Congolese forces.



Following this, the group reemerged in 2022 with an upscaled army, further destabilizing the region. Though M23 is a non-state actor, they are supported, funded, and armed by the Rwandan government, as confirmed by UN experts.¹³ Reportedly, the M23¹⁴ is pushing the agenda of securing control over mine sites and decimating the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). The FDLR is an anti-Rwandan rebel group composed of Hutu extremists. The FDLR bears alleged support from the Congolese government and stands as the main opposition to M23.



request, all UN peacekeepers will be leaving by the end of 2024.¹⁷ The heavily convoluted nature of the conflict leaves only one victim: the civilians. At the behest of unyielding political bullets and bombs, 25.4 million people¹⁸ are facing food insecurity and 7 million have suffered internal displacement, many of whom are children. The DRC is a snapshot of poverty, disease, and war. Less than 25% of people have access to clean water. Some face high mortality rates. Others experience malnourishment. And most suffer both. With dwindling international support and humanitarian crises looming larger, the unfolding disasters in the DRC demand urgent attention. These tensions no longer threaten only those in the DRC but the broader region. It is time to stop turning a blind eye. Otherwise, we fail the most vulnerable in our global society and leave festering scars for the generations to come.

The friction between these two groups sparks violent clashes, unfolding into dire humanitarian crises. In conjunction with more than one hundred other militia groups¹⁵ and aggressive government forces, the eastern region remains one of complex turmoil and consequences. A study conducted by the American Journal of Public Health found that forty-eight women and children are raped every hour in the DRC.¹⁶ The list of horrors perpetrated by the M23 and other armed groups continues on, including gang rapes and genital mutilation, among other atrocities.



Conclusion

The failures of the more than two-decade-long UN peacekeeping efforts to stabilize the region rings more true now than ever before. At the Congolese government's

MAGA Mania: Trump's Staggering Grip on the GOP

Hrishita Mareddy

Make America Great Again: a phrase so controversial, yet so ubiquitous in the U.S. political landscape for nearly a decade, quickly became synonymous with President-elect Donald J. Trump and his campaign. Famously dubbed, “the hostile takeover,” Trump’s rapid rise to the top of the GOP is one of the most unique cases of political stardom in American history. During the 2016 presidential election, many questioned why a business mogul such as Trump would even attempt to procure the Republican Ticket.

From Critics to Allies

By leveraging widespread frustration with traditional institutions, Trump didn’t merely win an election. He’d fundamentally transformed the Republican Party’s identity, reshaping its priorities, voter base, and future trajectory. This transformation, built on populism, nationalism, and anti-establishment rhetoric, has forced his critics to adapt or be left behind.

Trump’s outspoken, commentative style and unfiltered remarks clashed with the long-standing image of the Republican Party as a traditional institution. Yet, he managed to turn his vocal critics into his prominent allies. Take, for example, his 2024 vice-presidential pick, JD Vance, who once famously likened Trump to “America’s Hitler” but now stands as one of his most loyal champions, so much so that Biden campaign chair Jen O’Malley Dillon characterized Vance as willing to “bend over backwards to enable Trump and his extreme MAGA agenda.”^{1,2}

JD Vance is just one Republican politician among the likes of Ted Cruz, Anthony Scaramucci, and Mitt Romney who switched from referring to Trump with skepticism to praise.^{3,4} To understand Trump’s rapid rise to political prominence, the erosion of trust in traditional political institutions must be examined — which Trump immediately capitalized on.

Founding Warnings and the Modern Establishment

When George Washington famously left executive office after two terms, he warned extensively against political parties in his 1796 Farewell Address.⁵ In Federalist Papers’ essay No. 10, James Madison regarded political factions as the enemy, suggesting the solution to factions was a large, heterogeneous republic that would make it difficult for

large, oppressive parties to formulate.⁶ As the trend goes, the Founding Fathers would not appreciate the current state of bipartisan U.S. politics, especially the ongoing deterioration of domestic political culture. Despite the warning, American politics have been increasingly defined by polarization.

Amidst this backdrop of growing discontent with traditional political structures, Donald Trump’s emergence as a political outsider equaled the anti-establishment warrior who could bulldoze both the Democratic Party and the Republican old guard. Trump’s alignment with voter grievances over long-standing bipartisan economic policies was central to his appeal, which he framed as emblematic of the failed political elite. 68% of registered Republican voters believed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) had negative impacts on the U.S. economy.⁷ Trump’s eventual replacement of NAFTA with the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) demonstrated his capacity to translate campaign rhetoric into concrete policy.

Similarly, frustration with the Affordable Care Act (ACA) represented another avenue through which Trump capitalized on voter dissatisfaction. A majority of Trump voters enrolled in the ACA marketplaces were frustrated with the costs and complexities of rising premiums and administrative complexities.⁸ While Trump’s proposals to repeal and replace the ACA were often vague and met with legislative resistance, his rhetoric — framing the law as emblematic of Washington’s inefficiency — helped consolidate support among voters seeking alternatives to the perceived failures of establishment policymaking.

For many, Trump was a long-overdue shift — a populist, America-centered rebellion against decades of neoliberal policies and the push toward globalism. Trump’s allure was not about nuanced policy, but instead about revolution — not a traditional ideological realignment but rather a movement that prioritized cultural and economic anxieties over technocratic solutions.

Power of Provocation: Rhetorical Strategy

In the same vein, Trump's rhetoric was designed to shock, offend, and resonate. Lyin' Ted, Crooked Hillary, Sleepy Joe, Pocahontas, Ron DeSanctimonious — his arsenal of nicknames for political rivals was not just name-calling; it was simplifying his opponents to caricatures. By branding mainstream media as "fake news," by dismissing federal investigations and impeachment trials as politically motivated "witch hunts," Trump positioned himself as the sole arbiter of truth and an outsider battling a corrupt system.

Republican distrust of major media outlets like CNN and The New York Times increased significantly during Trump's presidency, with surveys showing a general rise of about 20% in skepticism toward these sources.⁹ This distrust aligned with Trump's broader messaging that traditional institutions, including the press, were working against him and his movement, further cementing his image of being the sole hero between the American people and the chaos of political dishonesty.

While many pundits critique Trump's refusal to filter his words through layers of political correctness, that is precisely why the method worked. "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best...They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists," he famously said in his first speech declaring candidacy, attracting voters who believed that Washington had been too soft on immigration.¹⁰ "Build the Wall!" became more than a policy proposal; it was a symbol of reclaiming national supremacy for those citizens who were frustrated with perceived threats to their security and cultural identity.

When MAGA rallies chanted "Drain the Swamp!," it encapsulated Trump's broader movement to dismantle elite-driven politics, resonating as both a critique and rallying cry for systemic change. And while savants wrung their hands, calling his tactics reckless, Trump's base rallied harder.

Trump's famous MAGA rallies aren't just enthusiastic shows of his dotting fanbase, but performances in their own right. His brash statements, and controversial tweets — whether intentional in the moment or not — only served to aid the image of the stereotypical two-faced politician who had completely reversed into a man so unabashedly blunt and fiercely unapologetic. To his base, these were not gaffes to be excused, but arguably his greatest strength as a politician.

Reshaping the Republican Identity

Included in Trump's ongoing political success is his empirical ability to completely reshape the Republican Party. Under his leadership, the GOP pivoted from its traditional focus on deregulation and fiscal conservatism, and built a platform centered on nationalism and protectionism. Issues

like immigration and trade took center stage, while global engagement was pushed aside, among other policies. In addition to Trump's own criticism of the ongoing U.S. aid sent to Ukraine, nearly half of Republicans contest that the U.S. is providing too much support.¹¹

It is hard to imagine new-era Republicans supporting anything but aiding sovereign nations in their fight against Russian invasion and hegemony. Ironically, the exact opposite is now true, due to the shifting dynamics and divergence from globalism after Trumpian politics. Trump's focus on America First, another one of his famous slogans, reinforces his commitment to protecting American jobs at the expense of global markets, and cements his depiction as a protector of American sovereignty.

Perhaps the most significant change was the realignment of the Republican voter base. Trump's campaign drew significant support from white, working-class voters, many of whom had previously voted Democratic in regions such as the Rust Belt, where economic challenges — such as the decline of manufacturing industries — created discontent with establishment policies.¹²

Such voters were not interested in internationalism, but rather driven by cultural and economic anxieties intrinsically domestic in nature. Trump gave a powerful voice to their frustrations, channeling that into a political movement. In the process, he pushed out the now traditionalist sector of the Republican Party, forcing even his harshest critics to fall in line.

Trump's leadership did more than win him the presidency — it permanently altered the trajectory of the Republican Party. As the party moves forward, the question remains: will the GOP continue to follow Trump's path, or will it revert to its former identity?



The Master of a Judgeless Court

Tony Kim

Introduction

Many people forget that horrid crimes against humanity committed during World War II occurred not only in Europe, but also in Asia. From 1937 to 1945, Imperial Japan maliciously organized sexual slavery, mass democide, and human experimentation, which even to this day, haunts surviving victims and taints the relationship between Japan and its neighbors.

The implications of Japanese war crimes still loom large today. But in the immediate aftermath of World War Two, the prosecution of Japanese war criminals got off to a slow start. In 1946, the best prosecutors from eleven Allied nations came together in the Tokyo Trials, collectively drafting a case defined by one phrase: “crime-based evidence”, which is the principle that the sheer scale of recurring war crimes suggests that a government must have perpetually sponsored them.

However, little evidence tying crimes to the Imperial Japanese government remained by 1946 because Japan systematically destroyed all official orders to execute war crimes. In fact, Tanaka Hiromi, a professor at Japan’s National Defense Academy, estimated that between August 15 and August 28 of 1945, just 0.1 percent of official records survived the two week onslaught of post-war denialism. “Denialism,” considered the last step of genocide or democide in Gregory Stanton’s “Ten Steps of Genocide,” is the process by which governments proactively deny any wrongdoing for potential crimes.

This denialism has been a central policy of the Japanese government from the end of the Tokyo Trials to this very day precisely because it was allowed to happen. Shockingly, America, during the post World War II period, took an active role in helping Japan’s denialist efforts.¹

Rise of Denialism in Japan

Starting in the 1960s, two right-wing forces emerged in Japanese society: the Liberal Democratic Party and convicted World War Two veterans returning from China. Both took advantage of the civil wars in victimized nations like Korea and China as well as widespread American influence in Tokyo to eradicate critical views of Imperial Japan that were prevalent throughout the 1950s.² Nationalist intellectuals such as Nobusuke Kishi, a suspected A-class war criminal and co-signer of the declaration of the war against the United States, ignited this crucial transition under the American

umbrella of post-war reconstruction.

Post-war reconstruction in Japan consisted of both physical and historical reconstruction. America’s sole dictation of the Tokyo Trials, a series of trials in which Japanese war criminals were prosecuted by Western powers, allowed the right-wing to pioneer their radically pro-American stance to convince occupiers like Douglas MacArthur that Japan would provide political value to the US in the Cold War.

General Douglas MacArthur, considering the mistakes made by the Allies during the Treaty of Versailles, knew that harshly punishing defeated nations only led to animosity. His resulting desire to secure a new ally and reconstruct nations with minimal opposition inspired American tolerance to the pro-American Japanese far right, including revisionist Japanese historians, ad hoc nationalist groups, and even war criminal government officials. This gave birth to Japanese right wing nationalists, who for seventy years, have prided themselves as “revolutionaries” carrying Japan through a national crisis by advocating for rearmament and recreating the bushido warrior spirit of Imperial Japan.

The beginning of this nationalist sentiment came from Nobusuke Kishi, the aforementioned A-class war criminal. He indeed rose to power as Japan’s prime minister from 1957-1960, highlighting the influence of war criminals in Japan’s post-war government. In 1959, he remarked to President Eisenhower’s cabinet that “in Indonesia the Japanese are able to take advantage of the reparations agreement as a means of facilitating investment.”³

Just thirteen years after the Tokyo Trials, the prime minister of Japan considered Japan’s reparations to Indonesia for killing almost 4,000,000 civilians an economic investment, illustrating that Japan had every desire to deny and not be morally responsible for their actions.

America’s Role in Denialist Efforts

In 1959, Ambassador Douglass MacArthur II, nephew of General Douglas MacArthur, told Minister Kishi that \$1.2 billion in direct aid towards Indonesia and a “sympathetic consideration for another \$700 million would be of great help... for Japan and the United States.”⁴ The ambassador’s psychology was not necessarily one of active support for denialism, as he planned to use wartime reparations to bring post-colonial societies into the Western economic order.

Kishi's fervent desire to detach guilt from reparations and Douglas' cold pragmatism to achieve a mutually cooperative economic system worked together to produce exactly what both parties wanted: economic cooperation and political alliance. In essence, the exchanges between MacArthur and Kishi clearly outlined America's priorities. Ambassador MacArthur valued the economic integration of Japan more than the moral obligations tied to wartime reparations.

Adoption of Unit 731

The U.S. was willing to even go further in their support for Japanese denialism, as they actively concealed Japanese biological warfare and human experimentation to benefit American science and military. In the botched American investigation of biological warfare units such as Unit 731, a unit where human vivisection was performed, "questions of ethics and morality... never once entered into a single discussion."⁵ While America played a key role in Europe to systematically uncover and publicize Nazi human experimentation, the authorities of Camp Detrick, the organization responsible for the investigation of Japanese biological warfare, only carried out three sporadic, faulty, and counterintuitive investigations of Unit 731.

When American bacteriologist Murray Sanders traveled to Tokyo on behalf of Camp Detrick to interrogate leaders of Unit 731, the translator appointed to him, Col. Ryoichi Naito, gave false translations to Murray Sanders, as Naito himself was a part of Unit 731. This orchestrated dupe repeatedly claimed that all data of human experimentation and Unit 731 itself was destroyed. After Dr. Sanders' failed attempts, the head officer of Unit 731, Ishii Shiro, only handed over evidence of human experimentation to Dr. Nobert Fell, the subsequent investigator, because the Japanese feared that the evidence might fall into the hands of the Soviets.

However, Dr. Fell assured Ishii and his subordinates that all confessions would only be used as classified scientific research, and not as evidence in a prosecution of war crimes. He reported to the technical directors of Camp Detrick: "In a conference... at which the Chief of Chemical Corp, and the representatives of War, State, and Justice departments were present... it was informally agreed that the information gathered would be 'held in intelligence channels and not used for 'War Crime' programs.'"

Historian Sheldon Harris, an authority in post-WWII societies, predicted that this momentous decision also must have been approved by the cabinet, if not President Dwight D. Eisenhower himself. Receiving an 8,000 slide presentation from Ishii's group — with graphic pictures of mutilated victims — the key figures of American government and medicine concurrently agreed to spare Unit 731 from any prosecution. The data, reputation, and well-being of Unit 731 and its workers remained unharmed; our government "adopted" the factory of death and in effect helped Japan avoid any accountability for their war crimes:

"Such information could not be obtained in our own laboratories because of scruples attached to human

*experimentation...It is hoped that the individuals who voluntarily contributed this information will be spared embarrassment because of it and that every effort will be taken to prevent this information from falling into other hands."*⁶

Again, the cynically pragmatic U.S. attitude towards Japanese war crimes are outlined in the non-negotiable objectives of advancing the scientific and militaristic power of the U.S., concurrently preventing such power from benefiting the Soviets. Hill and Victor argued that while the US spent just 250,000 Yen in investigating Ishii, Unit 731 had cost "many millions of dollars and years of work," revealing their cold-hearted negligence towards serving justice.

American Monopoly on Justice

Because the United States had total control of the Unit 731 investigation, Hill and Victor faced no cross-inspection from the Soviet Union like the American investigations of war crimes did in Europe. In fact, in the one instance that the Soviets did request data from Unit 731 for prosecution, the US was torn whether or not to decline this request, fearing international backlash. In response to just one Soviet request, the US formed the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) and admitted internationally that Unit 731 "violated the rules of land warfare."⁷

While most theories suggest that America covered up Japanese war crimes to compete with the Soviets in Asia, I believe that the Russians counterbalanced American hegemony in Japan. Had there been a more significant competition of Soviet and American national interests in Japan, the Soviets would not have allowed for such a blatant cover up of Japanese war crimes. Because the benefit of one state is the loss of another, the Soviets and Americans would not have risked an international incident over the data extracted from Unit 731.

In pursuit of the most minute expansion of national interest, the U.S., a power that claims to have fought for the "liberation of humanity from fascism", mobilized its government to defend war criminals in return for a blood-stained fee — the data of human experimentation. With no honorable justice or prosecutor present, the rhetoric of the American lawyers became the opinion of the court, and soon enough the post-war international order. The single swing of America's gavel in 1946, despite the countless efforts of scholars and politicians alike, still taints the reputation of Japan in the eyes of other East Asian nations.



The China-Taiwan Conflict: Is Now The Optimal Time for Attack?

Alaina Haroon

Introduction

The China-Taiwan conflict has persisted since the 1950s. China sees Taiwan as a territory that must be reclaimed while Taiwan views itself as a distinct island, separate from China. Tensions have escalated in recent years, causing China to consider using force against Taiwan. This is due to increased U.S. support for Taiwan and the newly-elected leaders in China and Taiwan who are constantly at odds. Taiwan has its own democratically-elected leaders and constitution. Additionally, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has prompted China to reconsider its plans to use military action to "reclaim" Taiwan.¹ However, China's intentions regarding its potential plan of attack remain uncertain. While some argue an attack could happen soon, others believe that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has complicated the situation because China might not be able to lead a successful attack.



A Brief Overview of the Conflict

Taiwan, an island located 100 miles away from the coast of Southeast China, has a complex history. After briefly being under Chinese control in the 17th century, Taiwan became a Japanese colony in 1895 following China's defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War. After Japan was defeated in World War II in 1945, China, under a nationalist government led by General Chiang Kai-shek, took control of the island. When the Communist Party took over in 1949, China formally became known as the People's Republic of China (PRC). Chiang, and what was left of the nationalist party fled to Taiwan. They renamed the land the Republic of China (ROC).² Taiwan became a democracy, holding its first elections in 1996.³ Due to this history, the PRC believes Taiwan belongs to them. Taiwan, however, claims that it was not under direct Chinese control when the PRC was created in 1949. Therefore, they view their land as a separate state.⁴ Today, only 12 countries and the Vatican view Taiwan as a distinct country.⁵

In 2000, tensions between the states heightened. Taiwan elected Chen Shui-bian as president, a member of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). This party openly supports Taiwan's independence movement. Chen was reelected in 2004, leading China to introduce an anti-secession law allowing military action should Taiwan attempt to secede.⁶ Though Taiwan did not take any action to secede, this law makes the possibility of a militant attack more likely. China continues to use the anti-secession law to justify efforts to unify the island with the mainland.⁷

The Current Relationship Between the Two States

In the past eight years, the conflict has intensified. In 2016, Tsai Ing-Wen from the DPP was elected president. She refused to accept the unification between Taiwan and China as a possibility. She also did not declare Taiwan's independence as a necessary movement, as she believed it was already independent. Thus, China stopped all official communications with Taiwan. Her presidency occurred at the same time as PRC President Xi Jinping, who fortified Chinese efforts for unification. He set 2049 as a target date for achieving the "Chinese dream," where Taiwan will reunite with mainland China.⁸ Xi's leadership suggests that China may increasingly resort to aggressive tactics as this deadline approaches.

The U.S. plays a pivotal role in the relationship between China and Taiwan. While it maintains official diplomatic ties with China and acknowledges China's "one-China" policy, it is also Taiwan's primary supporter. In fact, the U.S. is legally bound to provide defensive aid to Taiwan if China attacks.⁹

Is Now the Time for Attack?

There were two recent events that may prompt China to attack: Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August 2022 and Taiwan's 2024 Presidential Elections. Pelosi's visit demonstrated the country's support for Taiwan. However, China viewed the engagement as a strengthening of relations between the U.S. and Taiwan. In January, 2024, Taiwan elected William Lai as president, a "separatist" whose views on independence are more extreme than Tsai. In response, China increased the intensity and frequency of its military presence in the Taiwan Strait and regularly crosses into Taiwan's side of the Strait.¹⁰

These two events cause many to believe that China is closer to imposing military action on Taiwan. By law, China can and will use military action to reclaim Taiwan if they

deem it necessary. Moreover, China has been advancing its weaponry with the use of PLA bombers, fighter jets, and surveillance aircraft, which may indicate a plan for attack. Experts, however, disagree on whether these attacks will happen now or in the future. Some believe China's increased military presence suggests preparations for an attack soon.¹¹ In May 2024, China launched a two-day intensive military exercise surrounding Taiwan, which some believe to be their practice attack.¹² Others argue that 2049 will be a critical date, so military actions may wait, and the increased military forces are to keep Taiwan in check.¹³

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, also marked a major shift in China's intentions to attack, as it may now be too challenging to lead a successful invasion. Like Ukraine, Taiwan is a young democracy that's very close in proximity to a much larger and stronger authoritarian power that does not believe it should be an independent state. However, a successful Chinese attack on Taiwan may be more difficult than the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The circumstances between the two conflicts differ. Russia and Ukraine are neighbouring nations. Taiwan, however, is an island not connected to the mainland. In order for China to successfully attack, China would have to cross the Taiwan Strait by boat, which would take weeks. Furthermore, neither Taiwan's east or west coast are ideal for an invading force. If China accomplishes entering the state, the PLA would have to navigate the mountainous terrain and seize control of the capital city of Taipei.¹⁴ These logistical challenges make an attack less likely.

Unlike Russia, China has much more to lose economically, politically, and militarily if it imposes military action on Taiwan. First, it is important to consider that compared to China, Taiwan does not have the forces and ability to defend themselves.¹⁵ If China attacks, Taiwan will need to rely on outside help, specifically from the U.S. or European nations. This means that forces fighting on behalf of Taiwan will have access to many of NATO's advanced weapons. China's weapons, however, rely on Russian designs, and Russia's weapons are less effective than those of NATO. Furthermore, China's foreign relations, particularly with the U.S. and Europe, will be damaged. While many of these allies do not officially recognize Taiwan, it is likely that they - especially the U.S. - will come to Taiwan's rescue, as Taiwan does not have the resources or advanced military to effectively defend themselves. An attack could lead to a war against the U.S., the outcome of which is unpredictable. Military action against Taiwan will also impact China's economy. Currently, Taiwan is one of China's most important trading partners, and if Taiwan stops producing certain goods, it will hurt China's economy. Therefore, the situation in the Russia-Ukraine relationship differs from that of China and Taiwan. China has much more at stake to consider military action, so it is unclear whether Russia's invasion of Ukraine will prompt China to attack.¹⁶



Conclusion

Recent events, such as Pelosi's visit and the 2024 Taiwanese elections, have heightened tensions between China and Taiwan. China has expanded its military presence around Taiwan, indicating they are closer to using force. However, the current war in Russia and Ukraine indicates the opposite, as the circumstances China faces are much different than that of Russia, and military action may leave China in a compromised situation. Thus, China's future intentions remain unclear. It is still too soon to understand whether the recent events will prompt China to attack now.

Interview with Omar Sabir, City Commissioner of Philadelphia

With Aaryan Chopra & Corey He, *Penn Political Review*



As City Commissioner of the County of Philadelphia, Omar Sabir works to empower and enable all Philadelphians to participate in the voting process by addressing voter apathy and educating communities about the importance of civic engagement. Early in his career, he served as a union construction worker where he gained critical insight into the issues and concerns of working families.

Sabir invests in numerous grassroots engagement in community hubs like barbershops and recreation centers, leading the way for initiatives like Humanitarian Heroes and the Octavius Catto Taskforce. He has been featured on international news outlets and programs, and he was recently named one of Philadelphia's Most Influential African Americans by the Philadelphia Tribune. Sabir has received numerous awards from organizations such as The Elvira B. Pierce Scholarship Fund and the Hispanic Media Group and was recently commended by President Biden for his exceptional work in supporting voter participation in Philadelphia elections.

Sabir is a proud graduate of Cheyney University and a graduate of the DiverseForce On Boards Program, an initiative hosted by the University of Pennsylvania designed to train professionals of color on board governance and facilitate their placement on governing boards. He is a husband, father of 6 children and a lifelong Philadelphian.

1. Could you share a bit about your background and career journey — and how has this all led to your work today as Commissioner?

I was born and raised in West Philadelphia in a two parent home, and I graduated from the Philadelphia public school system. My father, a large union leader, passed away when I was just 21, and since then, my life has been about helping the campaigns out and being a part of the political process from a worker standpoint. We started a business in college selling T-shirts, graduated from Cheyney, and I had a lot of political clients, many who were state representatives like Louise Bishop. She had someone younger running against her, and she asked me to be her driver. Everything started from there.

Little did I know that that was the political grooming process. I did a little research: everyone who was elected as an elected official was a driver at some point in time! So to anybody listening, if you want to get into politics, don't always go for the shiny things: *I want to be a policy guy; I want to write legislation or be inside somebody's office.* Servitude plays a major part, and what I noticed from being her driver is that although she's a high profile state representative, she has long standing relationships within her community.

I got to meet her contacts and build relationships, but I wasn't planning on being an elected official. I always wanted to be a teacher or a coach — someone behind the scenes — because I have a speech impediment. After our successful campaign, I saw that a judgeship in one of Philadelphia's traffic municipal courts had opened up. Many of my colleagues encouraged me to run for that seat, and so I did — and was successful! But then, something unprecedented happened: I was the first African American Muslim to hold a judgeship in Pennsylvania at the time, but as soon as I got elected, that position got abolished. There was a lot of corruption going on, and I thought I was going to be the one to revamp and reform: that was my campaign promise. But the legislature did not see that as fit, so they abolished the position.

Then, a high profile senator from the legislature, State Senator Vincent Hughes, wanted me to come work for him. And I said, *Man, come on, they just got rid of my job.* But I took some time to think about it because there are a lot of first-time voters who voted for me. It was a tough time, and I had my doubts about democracy. I had a conversation with Louise Bishop, and she spoke highly of Senator Hughes

— she does not do that often, which made me reconsider. I ended up working for him for six years, and I learned a lot about updating, making it easier to vote for people to vote from a statewide perspective, learning how to appropriate, and learning how to serve citizens from the district and from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

One day a few years later, a former commissioner resigned and was not running again. That's when our leadership said to me, "Hey, we want you to take this position." This was right before the 2020 election, so there was a lot of stake with President Trump in office. People needed someone there who was going to handle the shenanigans that would have come with the election process, and they picked me. I was 39 years old at the time; who would have known?

2. Could you tell me about your role in the get out the vote rally, including the planning it entailed, the demographics you catered to, and the objectives compared with the results?

We wanted to hit every deadline regarding the planning of this rally. We used to do these rallies around 7 or 8 am, but some people asked us why we didn't do them at 5:30 am, so we changed them. In fact, we did so in the process of setting up satellite locations where students can vote early and check the voter registration forms. We actually put one on Penn's campus — right on Market Street! We would tell people, *The primaries are coming up, so please use those satellite locations before you go home.*

In any event, we started our morning meetings at 5:00 am, capitalizing on the news coverage that runs all day long. We reminded people to come out and vote at every deadline; on the forefront, in particular, we partnered with *DJs at the Polls* — an organization where they enlist DJs all across the country to make voting a festive event. We don't want people to be frustrated with the line, so by bringing in the food trucks and music, voters will be more encouraged to stay in the line and not get frustrated. We rotated the DJs all across Philadelphia.

Above all, we love talking to the voters. We have these ideas about what democracy is and who participates, but it's critical that we talk to and meet people on the ground to hear their concerns and get them more engaged. Think about when this country was under a monarchy where Englishmen levied high taxes and did not represent colonists. It was the young people in Boston who stood up to the monarchy. Before Patrick Henry said *Give me liberty, or give me death!*, and before the Framers wrote the Constitution, there were young people in their twenties who stood up to the monarch and gave their lives. It was the Boston Massacre that sparked the revolution, and that sacrifice and energy is what our democracy is made of.

3. How did you combat claims that Philly was "election cheating," and how do you think this rhetoric impacts political efficacy?

The one thing that you want to do is to be direct: you want to vehemently deny it. Then ultimately, you let the numbers decide. If you waste too much energy over-explaining, then you're going to take time away from the citizens of Philadelphia. It takes time to respond to these things, and that's a ploy from people distracting you from your job. This was crucial in 2020, as every procedure that was done from an election standpoint was challenged.

When I first got sworn in and opened up my email, I already had email challenges lined up in my inbox. We understood that every process was going to result in lawsuits and challenges — and it demanded us to be the best version that we could be because we were always under scrutiny. It made you do everything not just better, but well above reproach. That changed the behavior in our department: far too often people do things certain ways, but they aren't pushing themselves to find the most optimal solutions.

This sort of mantra kept us going and made us an example, not just for elections here in the state, but across the world.

People reached out to us, and we showed people our methods and live streams — we kept our work transparent. In fact, you can see all of our meetings online. We did this to combat those claims, and when you have a government that emphasizes transparency, you have a government that runs more efficiently. It's interesting because a lot of people in government don't like transparency. I understand why, but you're always going to get people who say, *I see the way you're doing this — have you ever thought about doing it this way?* By being transparent, you can always get more ideas — and it works because everybody is a tax paying citizen, which separates us from the monarchy.

When more people are informed, they want to be more involved, and that's what we're trying to accomplish with voters — especially students. Whenever there was a movement in any country, university students always played a major part. At the end of the day, it's not your degree that's going to change anything; rather, it's what you do in life that will truly change the world, whether it be your business, nonprofit, or some other ambition. People say things about how Philadelphia is the poorest big city with high violence — but if we're all in the same community, why don't we strive to make those changes together? If we don't answer problems that have been raised for decades, what exactly are we learning for? Once we all believe these problems are something everyone can work on, then we're going to have a better country.

4. Polls show that people vote more if they trust their mainstream media sources. How did you combat misinformation in Philadelphia elections, especially with the advent of AI potentially causing public mistrust in the media?

We're seeing a significant number of Americans distrusting mainstream media itself, so they trust social media. As such, we've invested a little bit more on social media, and this has been helpful in giving people a perspective into our lives and our work — especially since we work with different radio hosts that also have social media. We recently invested in a ray talk radio show with different and original content every week.

In addition, our satellite locations are open inside each one of the communities, so voters don't have to come down to the City Hall any longer. We didn't have satellite locations in the past, so people had to come all the way down to City Hall and park — which can be extremely challenging. Today, you actually have an opportunity to go right to your neighborhood at free parking and talk to someone that actually works from the election. When someone hears misinformation, they can instead go directly to a satellite location, talk to a county board of election staff member, and get the appropriate information.

When it comes to AI-driven misinformation, I think we have to get better at working with social media influencers. Election deniers spend lots of money on this, and most of the messaging is pretty targeted, but social media is where people consume most of their news from today with the growing mistrust in mainstream media. Things move much faster today — rather than getting updates for news stories, people get their updates from social media. These stories then get dissected by influencers and podcasters, all of which are platforms today that no one took seriously 15 to 20 years ago. And these are the people who have influence over voters — making it crucial to take things seriously and work collaboratively with these individuals.

5. Could you take us through Election Day 2024 and give us a glimpse into what happens behind the scenes? How did you and your team navigate security risks at the polls?

Prior to 2019, the election system had never been challenged and was typically underfunded — it worked well, but the people behind the scenes were underpaid, overworked, and unsupported. To address this, we spearheaded an unprecedented partnership between state, federal and local law enforcement agencies to lend these workers more support. For example, if there was a bomb threat, we trained workers on response and how to separate credible information from fake news. On the day of, we were prepared, and the press was there to document our response: we closed down one polling location for a small period of time before opening it back up, minimizing delays and confusion. As you can imagine, Election Day is an extremely long day. We start the day around 4:30 am. The polling workers get to their locations by 6:00 am or earlier to troubleshoot issues with machines. Some workers don't show up, so we have to fill those positions on-the-go. The extraction process starts at 7:00 am, where the staff all take an oath before the day begins. As staff are being sworn in, the pre-canvas starts — this is all a simultaneous workflow, a symphony of people working as one. Our team of workers consists of around

10,000 individuals collaborating to make Election Day a success.

By 10:00 am, I finish fielding calls and take a look at what's actually happening. At lunchtime, I, along with the other commissioners, visit different polling locations to evaluate and troubleshoot hiccups before the evening rush. Around 8:00 pm, we begin receiving counts and uploading the results, including the count from the mail-in votes. With over 3,500 voting machines in 1,700 divisions across 701 polling locations, it's a tremendous effort to upload all of these results onto our website while still organizing the original ballots.

We segregate ballots with errors, and as a board, we vote to see which of these ballots we count or discard. This process continues until we certify the election — usually the following day — and if needed, we run computations because if the statewide vote differential is under 0.5%, it's an automatic recount. We also do internal audits: it's part of a checks-and-balances process to ensure that everything is organized and accounted for.

6. How would you say partisan disputes — if there are any — affect your job within the trifecta of city commissioners?

We have three members — two Democrats and one Republican — and all you need is two people to make a final decision. And the beautiful thing about it is the election boards, which also have elected positions on them as well. You know those divisions where you walk to a poll and you say your name to that person? Those people are also elected via the 1,700+ mini elections that occur all across the county. Everyone you see is elected by the citizens of Philadelphia. In my view, the way such disputes are handled is in the hands of the people.

7. What is your advice to the youth of today who want to pursue politics and effect change? What do you think are the main challenges — in both Philadelphia and the greater community — that today's youth will be confronted with in the coming years?

Never restrict yourself to just the top seat. Some people start out wanting to be mayor or governor — but there aren't that many selections open. In Pennsylvania, you have millions of people for a thousand open positions. If you take that approach, you're not going to be successful. There are better ways to go about this: if someone you know is running for office, support them as a chief of staff — this is a holistic standpoint where you view this as a team effort rather than an individual campaign.

You then think about things like money; especially when special interests come in and offer money, to which you should say, *No, thank you — I have my own money.* And you can leverage your entire financial network: you might think that you don't have \$10,000, but if 100 people are all donating \$100, the effort can be realized. Even things like

selling tickets to a networking Happy Hour will fund not only the campaign, but independently fund a message.

If you're interested in campaigning yourself, look for an elected official who may have been serving for a very long time and learn more about the process. Once you find out that person's political zip code and political address, you can start lobbying council members, state representatives, and your own organizers. Wherever it is you're coming from, you need to find out who represents you — and who you want to represent.

From there, you cannot be afraid to put in the work, and above all, don't listen to people who will tell you to wait your turn. With the stuff that's going on, if we want to effect change, we need to do it now. To the people who say to wait your turn — including your parents, aunts, uncles and friends — you must agree to disagree, which is fine! I knew I had to follow what my gut told me, and my gut told me that if I continue on my current path, I can pass resources forward to the next generation. This way, I can see students that I had in the past becoming involved business-owners and doing certain things.

Another note on raising money: you don't need a whole lot of it, but you need something to where if someone wants to support you, but your finances don't look good on your report, they may try to step over you and make you a puppet. This is not what you want — you don't want to be the young person with the reputation of *oh, you're a young face, but you don't have the infrastructure set up*. If that happens, you're not working for change; you're going to just be another person working on the same agenda that's been in place for the past 20-30 years. Above all, you need to leverage strategic partnerships with different nonpartisan organizations because leadership is probably not going to give you the money they want. Once you have the funding, you can narrate your story with the changes you want to see.

Overall, this is a challenging process. A lot of people will tell you that it's not feasible; otherwise will tell you that if you pursue this, you're getting yourself into trouble. But you have to be fearless and, above all, don't let anyone back you down. If you have the opportunity to become a director, a chief of staff, or a policy person, you can get yourself involved in a movement pushing for the change you and our regular taxpayer citizens want to see: a strong collaboration between the business community, nonpartisan organizations, and policymakers.

Interview with Michael C. Horowitz, Director of Perry World House

With Nicole Patel, *Penn Political Review*



*Michael C. Horowitz is Director of Perry World House and Richard Perry Professor at the University of Pennsylvania. From 2022 to 2024, he served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Development and Emerging Capabilities. He is the author of *The Diffusion of Military Power: Causes and Consequences for International Politics*, and the co-author of *Why Leaders Fight*. He won the Karl Deutsch Award given by the International Studies Association for early career contributions to the fields of international relations and peace research. He has published in a wide array of peer reviewed journals and popular outlets. His research interests include the intersection of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics with global politics, military innovation, the role of leaders in international politics, and geopolitical forecasting methodology. Professor Horowitz worked for the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy as a Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow. He is a life member at the Council on Foreign Relations. Professor Horowitz received his Ph.D. in Government from Harvard University and his B.A. in political science from Emory University.*

1. Could you share some insights into your background and your career path — such as your transition from academia to government service?

I have been a professor at Penn since 2007. I was really fortunate to get a job at Penn after finishing my PhD. I then went into government service in 2013 at the Department of Defense — I was on leave from Penn for a year — and then I returned to Penn in 2014. In 2022, I went back into the government as a political appointee of the Biden administration, working in the Department of Defense to start a new office focused on the future of our military, and returned to Penn in August 2024.

2. How did your role in government service impact your academic journey and your new teachings at the university?

I have spent a lot of my career focused on bridging the gap between academia and the policy world. Even when I was getting my PhD, I was really interested in topics with relevance for both academic research on international relations and real world importance for international security. I have worked at this intersection throughout my career. And I spent the last several years working on topics related to defense innovation and what influences trust and confidence in how militaries and the national security community think about adopting artificial intelligence and robotics for particular uses.

The work that I have done as an academic is part of what led me back into the government in 2022. I had an incredible opportunity then as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Development and Emerging Capabilities — to try to advance some of the ideas that I had worked on as a Political Science professor and at Perry World House with undergraduate research assistants, PhD students, and postdocs at Penn.

Now that I have stepped away from that role, I am really looking forward to sharing some of what I learned with the Penn community, and to provide opportunities for Penn students to get involved if they want. And then, of course, it has given me a whole new set of ideas in the context of defense innovation, emerging technology, and national security — all of which will shape my research moving forward.

3. Looking back on your academic journey and government service, is there any specific moment that you would say impacted the trajectory of your career?

For as long as I can remember, I have been interested in international relations and international security issues, and applying academic research to the field from a public policy perspective. I recall taking an introductory international relations class my first year in college really looked back.

There's no single specific moment, though. It's easy to look back now and say, *Well, this was important, or that was important* — in reality, however, everything you do matters, and the journey is what shapes who we are. In my case, I have been really lucky at Penn to work with an incredible set of research assistants, PhD students, faculty, and folks from all over campus throughout my time here.

These collective experiences taught me so much about both international relations and leadership in ways that prepared me for government service.

4. Can you walk us through a typical day in your role as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense?

I wish there was a typical day! In truth, you have to walk in being ready for anything, depending on whatever is going on in the world. This can include world crises, high stakes budget debates, or conversations between the Defense Department and the White House.

In the midst of all this, one thing always held true: no matter what happened — whether I was pulled into the Deputy Secretary of Defense's office for an impromptu meeting, whether I had a call about something that no one knew was going to happen, whether the National Security Council staff called unannounced and wanted something — I knew that the great people on my team would always have me ready, prepared, and organized.

I had an incredible team of people who have devoted their career to serving the country, including military officers, career civil servants, other appointees, etc. Everybody came to work every single day with the goal of improving American national defense.

5. Given your work at the intersection of technology and international security, what policy reforms do you believe are most urgent in addressing the challenges posed by emerging technologies — such as AI and biotechnology?

From a global perspective, one important policy issue builds on work I did at Perry World House with a former Penn undergraduate on international cooperation in artificial intelligence. We wrote an article advocating for an international agreement on military use of artificial intelligence that I was then able to help move forward in the Pentagon, drafting what is now the Political Declaration on Responsible Military Use of AI and Autonomy. It is the

first ever international agreement in this area, and it is now endorsed by 58 states. Continuing to encourage responsible development and use of AI, both in and outside the military domain, is absolutely vital.

From more of a domestic perspective, my office focused on trying to accelerate U.S. defense innovation in a world where most emerging technologies that will shape the future of warfare are being driven by the commercial sector. Our Defense Department needs to be better, faster, and stronger at integrating commercial technologies into the future of the military at the pace of relevance. My office worked on this every day, collaborating across the Defense Department to advance this agenda.

6. How does the U.S. balance its status as a leader in technological advancement with ethical considerations of incorporating AI or other technologies into defense?

The phrase that I like to use is “responsible speed,” or the idea that given how quickly technology is moving, if we want to be on the cutting edge, then the Defense Department needs to adopt emerging technologies quickly but in ways that are consistent with our values — including freedom, democracy, and privacy.

We cannot just be fast: we have to do it all the right way. In the defense sector, the good news is that often those incentives are aligned: you want both safety and speed because AI that is not safe will not work well or be useful. And the military won't use AI that doesn't work because it won't be reliable enough given that lives are on the line. No actor has a stronger incentive to have validated and trusted AI than the U.S. military, whether you are talking about the back office or the battlefield.

7. What are some of the most pressing challenges you faced in your role?

I think the biggest challenge that we faced from a defense innovation perspective was helping shift the organization to embrace more rapid innovation at scale given the scale of the challenges the United States faces around the world, especially in the Indo-Pacific. The Pentagon is one of the largest bureaucracies in the world. It has hundreds of billions of dollars in its defense budget. The size and the scope of the American military enterprise is difficult to conceive sometimes, and so shifting it to a more institutionally innovative place takes a lot of work.

There have been dozens of reports written on the importance of accelerating innovation in the Defense Department. People on the outside, like me, have been writing about it for years. Once I finally got the chance to enter the government, I knew it would be an exciting challenge to finally work on it. I feel we made progress, though there is still much more to do.

8. In your book, *The Diffusion of Military Power*, you explore the causes and consequences of the spread of military technologies. How do you think the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence and robotics will affect global military dynamics in the coming decades?

Artificial intelligence is a general purpose technology: it is neither a widget nor a weapon. It is closer to something like the railroad or electricity. General purpose technologies have enormous consequences for our societies, economies, and militaries. By definition, we imagine the impact of AI to be tremendous, but there will be both direct and indirect consequences.

The direct consequences involve thinking about advances in AI that one could use in the military today, whether it be autonomous systems closer to the edge of the battlefield, AI decision making aids, or even things in the back office that help move the paperwork in the Pentagon. There are also indirect consequences. One of the reasons why I and others have written about how leadership in AI is so important for American national security is that to the extent AI becomes a key underlying basis for economic and military power, leadership will be

necessary to sustain US military power not just in any given year, but for the next generation.

9. Do you believe leaders' personal beliefs and experiences influence national security policy, especially in a world where technology is increasingly dictating military capabilities?

It's important to keep in mind that technology is a tool. It is the intersection of people, equipment, software, hardware, and planning for how to employ technology which determines military power. But technology does matter. We sometimes see smaller militaries stand up to larger ones — as seen in the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. In particular, the Ukrainians have demonstrated remarkable innovative capacity, capability, and willingness to fight — and their ability to leverage emerging technologies like uncrewed systems has been essential.

Furthermore, I think about technology in the context of a broader system — with people and leaders at the center of it — and how the background experiences of leaders tend to shape the way that they behave in office. Those are the formative experiences that drive how leaders think about risk propensity and likely costs and benefits of actions, especially in military action.

For example, my past research on leadership shows that the more autocratic a country is, the more the individual background of the leader tends to matter in shaping issues — i.e., whether a country goes to war. The more “personalist” a country is, the more the leader's background tends to be a driver. This is in contrast to institutions of other countries, like the United States, that place more constraints, through

checks and balances, on how the beliefs of leaders directly shape outcomes.

The more checks and balances there are in a political system, the more individual beliefs are going to be constrained. The more unfettered a leader is in being able to implement their will, the more their background and experiences will play a role in determining the foreign policy behavior of that country — as seen today in places like North Korea.

10. Can you speak to the U.S.'s approach in maintaining technological leadership and defense, while also managing competition with other countries such as China, Russia?

One thing that has remained mostly consistent across the Trump and Biden administrations in the defense arena is the focus on the challenges presented by China (especially) and Russia, and the way that these key factors drive the U.S. defense strategy. Effective U.S. defense planning and technological leadership must also leverage U.S. economic leadership.

11. Would you say the threat of other countries will guide the United States in what they do in the future, regarding their military capabilities and defense strategies?

Absolutely! The world gets a vote in shaping the character of the international security environment, which naturally shapes the reality that the U.S. will experience. For example, after the terrible attacks on 9/11, we refocused the defense establishment towards counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency. Recently, we have pivoted back to strategic competition with great powers, namely China and Russia. In particular, China's economic development, technological investments, and the pace of their military modernization makes them an enormous challenge. I expect this will be an emphasis for the Trump administration moving forward, just as it has been for the last 8 years.

12. What advice would you give to young students who are interested in pursuing a career at the intersection of international relations, national security and technology?

There are so many different ways to get involved — the question is just how. You can get started by working for technology companies, the government, or for think-tanks. For example, there are numerous think-tanks all across the D.C. ecosystem depending on your interests. These are all viable pathways, whether you are thinking about summer internships, fellowship programs after graduation, or full-time employment.

If you are interested in the policy world, the important thing is to try things out and decide what fits you best: would you prefer working on Capitol Hill or in the State Department? Do you prefer researching international security issues or looking at securities? Do you see yourself serving in the military, or do you envision a place for yourself in the United Nations? These are all active options for anybody interested in the field.

From here, take the opportunity you have at Penn to utilize the resources of the university and figure out your true calling. At the same time, if you graduate college and start a new role only to find that you dislike it, do not be afraid to try something else.

13. For emerging policy makers, what are the most important skills one should cultivate to navigate the increasingly complex global security landscape?

Intellectual flexibility is crucial: the world is a complicated place, and the kind of challenges that you face are going to shift. Although the things that are important today will likely still be important tomorrow, there is an element of irreducible uncertainty in the world that mandates being ready to pivot. It is important to be willing to evolve and learn and change while still hanging onto the core values and principles that guide you. However, we should not be so proud that we cannot update our policy views as we get new information, because the world is constantly changing around us.



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