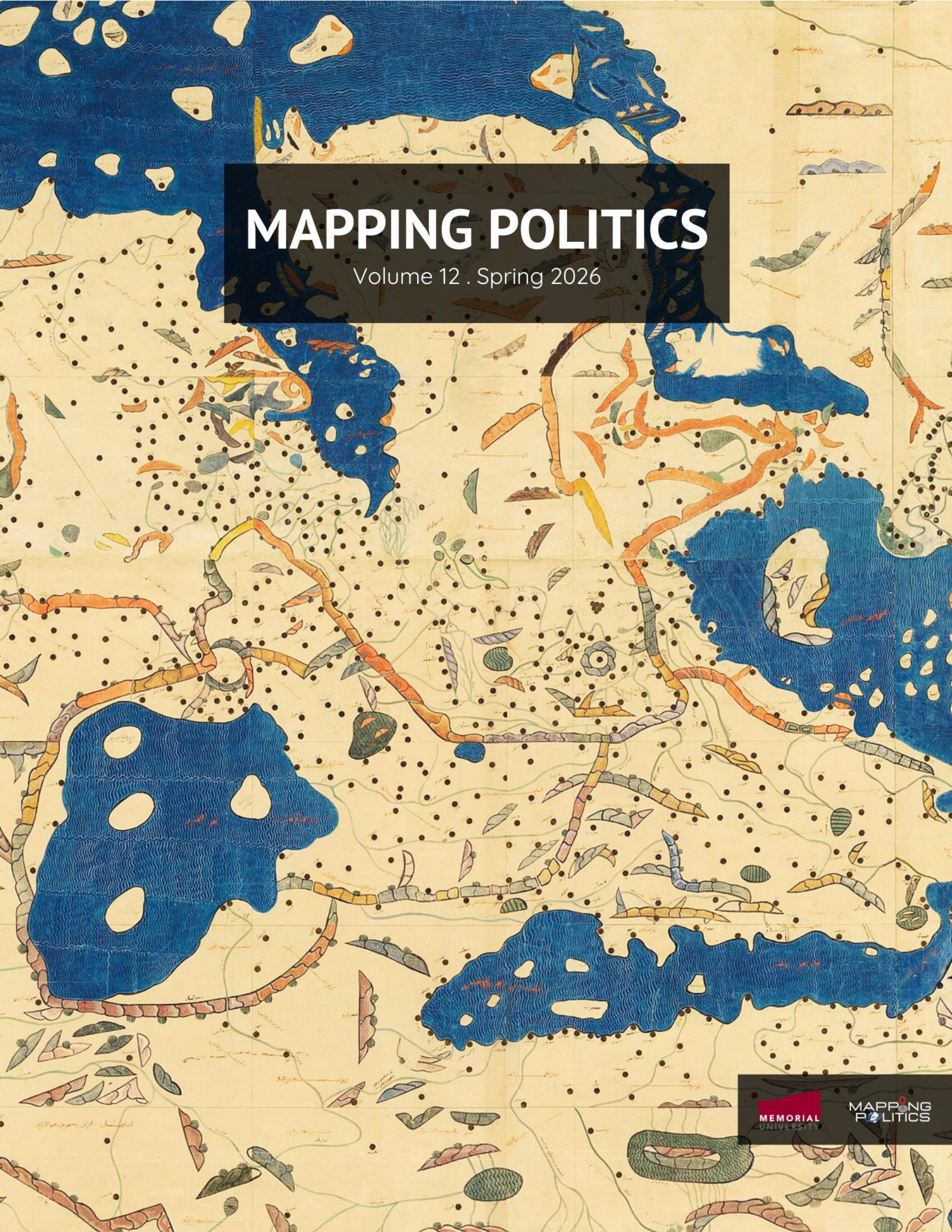

MAPPING POLITICS

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Cover Image: "General map of the globe taken from the geography of El-Edrisi, mid-12th century of the vulgar era." *by* Bibliothèque nationale de France.

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About the Journal

Mapping Politics is the open-access, student-run, peer-reviewed journal of the Department of Political Science at Memorial University (St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador). In publication since 2009, the journal aims to serve as a venue for academic works on politics by undergraduates, graduate students, and recent graduates.

For submissions and queries, reach out to (mappingpolitics@mun.ca).

Contents

Editor's Note: Edges of the Map

Hasan Habib

Memorial University

To say that we are surrounded by crises is perhaps a bit too cliché now. Time and time again over the past few years as an undergraduate, I have found myself wondering: what does it mean to be a student of politics amidst all this? We are halfway through 2026, and even in this relatively brief span of time, we have seen multiple new warfronts erupt, subside, and reignite. Our systems of governance are struggling, and quality of life remains as precarious as ever for everyday people. We are certainly far off from the 'triumphalist' days of the 90s we read about, even further from Francis Fukuyama's much discussed and critiqued 'end of history' with its dreams of stability (even Fukuyama is apparently 'playing defense'[1] these days). What stories do/should we write then, in times like these?

The essays in this twelfth volume of *Mapping Politics* do not claim definitive answers (and who could dare anyway?) on these questions. Instead, they share a common instinct: to begin at the margins. Spanning contexts from Brazil to Bangladesh, these essays shed light on changes unfolding at the edges of our maps. Globalization has come under intense scrutiny in the past few decades, some of it warranted and much of it less so. It is encouraging to see that, despite everything, my fellow young scholars of politics around Canada continue to dream globally.

A key recurring theme in the essays for this issue has been war, unsurprisingly enough. George Chakhunashvili's essay "War and Expansion" offers an exploration of Russia's foreign policy against the backdrop of the invasion of Ukraine. Employing a realist lens, Chakhunashvili looks at Russia's efforts at blocking Ukraine's NATO membership, as well as its relatively underexplored ambitions in the Arctic. "Glossing over the Great War" by Brooke Osmond analyzes and critiques Canadian methods of remembrance and commemoration of the First World War. Emily Bonia's "GDP theory" also touches on this theme of war, theorizing and mapping out the politics of sexual abuse in conflict zones.

Júlia Costa Cruvinel Barbosa's "Structural Litigation and Public Policy-making" offers a view of tensions developing within the Brazilian legal system. Her critique of Bill no. 3 of 2025 as a possible avenue for judicial overreach lays out the delicate balance of power in a complex democracy such as Brazil. "Colonial Legacies and the Politics of Skin Tone" by Quazi Mohammad Abrar Nafis explores the politics of colourism in Bangladesh as a gendered, colonial legacy, and highlights postcolonial feminist resistance against it.

We are also delighted to feature "Barriers to Understanding" by Cale Warren in this issue. Warren's essay critiques the currently centralized regime of disaster management and explores the feasibility of more localized solutions such as managed retreat. The importance of Newfoundland Studies for this province could not be overstated, and it is always a joy to see new scholars focusing on the problems this province faces.

We selected the cover from Muhammad Al-Idrisi's (b. 1100, d. 1165) *Tabula Rogeriana* (or *Nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq*) in keeping with the theme of maps from our journal title. The cover, an inverted medieval map of the known world, produced by the Arab cartographer at the request of the Norman King Roger II, struck us as a fitting symbol of the changing ways of mapping our world, and curious encounters at its edges. Al-Idrisi's work itself reflected a shift in cartography, towards more empirical evidence, critical inquiry, and clarity. May our maps be clearer too, in his spirit.

A huge thank you to the Editorial Board: Precious, Ben, Josh, Sam, Madison, and James, for all the work put into this issue. Special thanks to Josh for designing a sleek, new typeset for this volume. The board would like to thank all the authors who submitted their work for consideration. For those who persevered through the peer review process, we appreciate your patience, and your

willingness to incorporate reviewer feedbacks. We are also incredibly grateful to all of the academics (both at Memorial and other institutions) who agreed to provide reviews for our student authors. Your exceptional care in reviewing the works of these young scholars, while maintaining academic rigour, was inspiring to see firsthand.

I am greatly indebted to Dr. Dimitrios Panagos, our faculty advisor, for all his advice and support in guiding this volume to completion. Over the past year or so, Dr. Panagos has supported us in learning the ropes of journal management, inviting reviewers, securing funding, and clarifying key issues whenever needed. We thank him for all his guidance and assistance. Mapping Politics is the student journal of the Department of Political Science, and I thank the department and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences for continuously supporting us as a venue for student scholarship on politics. Special thanks also to Juanita Lawrence and Fatima Mehdi, for their administrative support. Lastly, I must thank you, dear reader! Readers like you make this whole endeavour worthwhile, and I hope this issue helps enrich your understanding of our complex little world.

With regards,

Hasan Habib

Editor-in-Chief

[1] Varagur, Krithika. "Francis Fukuyama Plays Defense." Under Review. *The New Yorker*, May 25, 2022. https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/francis-fukuyama-plays-defense.

Barriers to Understanding: Channel-Port aux Basques and Managed Retreat

Cale Warren

Memorial University

Abstract

On the 24th of September 2022, Hurricane Fiona decimated the small town of Channel-Port aux Basques. When the storm settled the federal government announced funding to help communities adapt to increasingly hostile weather through armour stones (large rocks along the coastline). However, when Fiona struck there were already armour stones in Channel-Port aux Basques and they did not protect nearby homes or the surrounding coast. Armour stones have conflicting evidence on their effectiveness. A local NGO found that residents of Channel-Port aux Basques know about the risks of building these barriers. For countless communities, barriers would not be the adaptation method of choice, so why are they so common? The federal and provincial governments have control of disaster funding, not local governments. They have become path dependent on barrier building, making better choices such as managed retreat left unconsidered. Managed retreat is a process of the government buying properties built too close to the shore and municipalities zoning areas to stay undeveloped. The process is delicate but has shown great success in low density areas such as Channel-Port aux Basques. Residents of communities affected by natural disasters are not properly consulted on decisions that affect their town's future. Through collaborative planning better policy decisions can be made to help coastal communities adapt to climate change.

Keywords: Climate change adaptation, Managed Retreat, Channel-Port aux Basques, Newfoundland and Labrador

Introduction

On the 24th of September 2022, Hurricane Fiona decimated the small town of Channel-Port aux Basques. Over 100 houses were ravaged by the storm, some ripped from their foundation and swept into the sea (Chughtai & O'Neill-Yates 2022). When the hurricane struck, some residents were still awaiting funding to rebuild from 2021 storm floods (Mullin 2022). The town had survived plenty of storms in the past, however, Hurricane Fiona provided insight into a dark future marked by climate change. Extreme weather is becoming increasingly common making preparation a necessity. Rebuilding is becoming more than giving folks a place to live. Some community members received insurance money, and the provincial government provided emergency funding, but more proactive planning was needed (Government of NL 2022). A new federal green infrastructure program aimed at helping climate adaptation looked to be promising, but the prescriptive nature of the program is inadequate to meet the specific challenges of Port aux Basques' exposed coastline (Government of NL 2024). The federal funding focused on coastal erosion prevention & protection compelled the use of armour stones, which have conflicting rates of success (Yirenkyi 2024), but more importantly for Channel-Port aux Basque, there were already armour stones in the town when Fiona struck, and they did not protect nearby homes or the surrounding coast.

Figure 1: A map of the island of Newfoundland, Port aux Basques is the red dot (Eh Canada Travel n.d.).

In the following article, I argue that a better tool for climate adaptation in municipalities is strategic zoning and buy-back programs as a part of a managed retreat from the coast. This process has been more successfully modeled than hard barrier building but requires a drastic change in perspective on climate change and intensive community collaboration (Yirenkyi 2024). Planning for managed retreat requires economic and social balancing but is more stable long-term (Batterson & Liverman 2010). Allowing the residents of coastal towns agency in their own protection measures will lead to better policy choices. The federal government's bias towards the status quo has led to decision-making that ignores critical variation in coastal communities and the value of local knowledge and furthermore will not aid the longevity of Channel-Port aux Basques, something those living in the community are passionate about.

The Case of Channel-Port aux Basques

Communities in Newfoundland and Labrador do not have the economic resources (due to a small tax base) to implement adaptation plans that suit their needs, making them rely on Provincial and Federal funding (Forecast NL. 2022). These funding programs and their limitations are often crafted without community consultation and assume a common solution to different communities' issues—such as funding for armour stones across NL.

Sharing responsibility in preventative methods is essential to easing harm, but disaster resources are often undistributed until after tragedy strikes (Thistlethwaite & Henstra 2017). In the 1980s flood mapping for NL communities was funded; however, these maps did not account for sea level rise and updates have been sparse (Batterson & Liverman 2010). The lack of mapping makes the Provincial "flood standard" guidelines obsolete as areas that should be forbidden from development are unaccounted for.

Municipal governments face a lack of connection between themselves and the levels of government they receive funding from; there is little support for expert partnership forcing them to adhere to the path other governments are on. Post-Hurricane Fiona, Channel-Port aux Basques highlighted key issues in a community outreach session: "Increased coastal erosion, impact on infrastructure, preparedness for higher intensity and frequency of storms, frequency and severity of flooding, public awareness and understanding of climate change" (The Harris Centre 2023:18). Some of these issues could be addressed by the 2024 funding of coastal barriers. However, the issue of awareness and preparedness, one not completely unique to Port aux Basques, is not being addressed.

Figure 2: Port aux Basques after the state of emergency was lifted post-Hurricane Fiona (King 2022).

For a community committed to never having a disaster like this occur again, there is not a lack of motivation for climate education, just a lack of support (Chughtai & O'Neill-Yates 2022). Those affected by the hurricane have already retreated from the shore, moving rebuilding efforts further inland. The residents of the town have been deeply supportive of one another in the traumatic process of readjustment (Kennedy 2023). If the town was consulted in the administration of funding it is unlikely that only one key issue would be given support. While some retreat has occurred in Channel-Port aux Basques the prioritisation of hard barriers shows an inflexibility of those allocating adaptation support.

Moving Beyond Path Dependency

While Hurricane Fiona gave an opportunity for quick policy change, funding for anything other than reconstruction took two years to pass. The fact that the funding was allotted for an adaption method already in use lends itself to path dependency literature. Pierson uses economic terms to illustrate the phenomenon as a perception of increased yield in making choices aligned with a particular policy and a loss in changing from the original decision (2000). The history of these choices creates a bias towards keeping the status quo despite alternatives being more effective choices. Pierson specifically mentions environmental protections as vulnerable to this process as it becomes increasingly difficult to change course. Path dependency can be understood as an institutional routine. The "routine" is not necessarily the most efficient or effective method, but its familiarity leads to its constant usage.

In researching climate adaptation in rural Australia, Barnett et al. found that path dependency creates limits to how much adaptation can occur (2015). The trade-offs needed to adapt become increasingly difficult to manage as more of a community's limited assets are linked to a particular policy. This overdependence is caused primarily by state or territory governments rather than municipalities (Barnett et al. 2015). As the primary resource holders state and territory governments invest in policies their party has previously supported to create "stability." They create trade-offs that are politically easier for them regardless of the community's needs. Justice frameworks used by Barnett et al. require the decision of what assets to lose in adaptation to be the stakeholders' or community's explicitly, in this case, change is more likely to occur by prioritising new local perspectives. They found that local decision-makers want to collaborate with experts to create change, so their community's future is preserved, but are rarely let into the decision-making process.

The process of path dependency leaves out on-the-ground perspectives that may disagree with what has been committed to. The financial and political efforts already put into barrier building are not hindered by the failures of hard barriers because of the perceived sunk cost. Municipal governments are often left implementing provincial regulations and policies which are outdated for the reality of their local area (Lemmen et al. 2016). Climate adaptation is a highly local process with consequences left on the shoulders of municipalities (Forecast NL. 2022). Municipalities and their citizens want a system that allows them to have input on their future, but their opportunities are limited if they receive any at all. Pierson mentions "exogenous shocks" as a way of creating divergence from a political path, but Hurricane

Figure 3: Channel-Port aux Basques Service Map, Armour stones placed before 2022 are in the area circled in red (Town of Channel-Port aux Basques n.d.).

Fiona did not cause a shift in government ideas of climate adaptation. Although maybe it did shift ideas within Channel-Port aux Basques. In community outreach sessions held by the Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development," the government was critiqued for reactive approaches and clinging to the status quo. The message from participants in the session was clear, a new way of viewing and financing adaptation is needed – as one participant—said, we need to "try to build it better, not just to the way it was before" (2023: 14). Path dependency is standing in the way of innovative adaptation in the community. Because barrier building is already familiar to the Federal government they are neglecting the need for change residents feel.

A Critique of the Hard Barrier Solution

Unfortunately, new solutions were not what was being offered through government funding options. On February 20th, 2024, $4.3 million in funding was announced to help municipalities in Newfoundland and Labrador adapt their coastline to the changing climate through the installation of hard barriers (Gov. NL 2024). This seemingly generous and timely funding program offered by the government was arguably more a reflection of path dependency than a viable solution for communities like Channel-Port aux Basques. Aside from the limited data to support the effectiveness of hard barriers such as armour stones, they can also lead to biodiversity loss by trapping coastal ecosystems and are irreversible, making it an expensive mistake if done incorrectly (Lemmen et al. 2016). Furthermore, federal reports show that flood maps and municipal regulations in NL are outdated and inaccurate, making it entirely possible that mistakes in barrier building will be made. Lastly, and perhaps most critically, in Channel-Port aux Basques there were already armour stones in place before Fiona hit and they did not protect the shoreline (Yirenkyi 2024). Clearly, armour stones were not the solution Channel-Port aux Basques was looking for.

Interestingly, hard barriers have proven themselves functional for one purpose though, promoting continued coastline development as The Harris Centre found during extensive community consultations held in the area:

> You can visibly see properties going into the ocean, because these areas were newly protected by the sea fences people built on this area, but it is no longer safe from the impacts of climate change (without creating the seawalls years ago, people would have never lived there in the first place). After creating a market for land, the town is now faced with a dilemma – should it invest more money to protect these areas when it may not be a suitable area to live further in the future? (2023: 6)

The public input in The Harris Centre report illustrates a unique consequence of hard barrier building. The path of barrier creation reinforces a psychological block people have in risk perception to natural disasters (Greenlees & Cornelius 2021). Coastal hardening projects enable developers to build in unsustainable areas thus encouraging residents to perceive less risk even after a disaster. People do not want to live in fear and thus try to maintain normality by returning to "before." However, the consistency in which funding is focused on redevelopment without expertise or education sessions has dire consequences as Greenlees & Cornelius found through interviews, "They'll take their chances, and they know they'll be fine, and the government will swoop in and build them a new house, so why not enjoy the beach in their view?" (2021: 506). The illusion of protection further incentivises the path as the feeling of safety gives decision-makers political favour regardless of the reality.

Low-income communities are especially at risk in this process as even if they perceive great risk in being near the coast, they do not have the means to move without a funded managed retreat in place. Without educational dialogue involving the risks of various adaptation measures, many may not even know if they are in an at-risk zone or if options other than barriers exist (The Harris Centre 2023). This is not to say that hard barriers never work, there are climate models of sea level rise that show their effectiveness (Yirenkyi 2024). However, the models combine them with other options, especially in long-term scenarios where they may not hold. Funding them as the sole adaption measure is just "kicking the can down the road," a policy mistake for community longevity. The process of path dependency in this sector creates problems that put lives in danger. In avoiding the difficult task of disaster planning with a community, governments both ignore better options, and leave residents in the dark about the realities of natural disasters.

Barriers to Managed Retreat Implementation

If the barriers funded by the federal government are not the answer though, what is? I would argue that despite the associated difficulties, managed retreat is a better option for Channel-Port aux Basques. In urban areas managed retreat is an impossible task as the density of housing makes a buyback program (government purchase of housing to vacate the area) too expensive and re-zoning efforts would be null as there is little coast left to develop (Lemmen et al. 2016). Channel-Port aux Basques, however, has little density and homes destroyed by Fiona are already being built further inland, making it the perfect candidate for this adaptation method.

Adaptation is deeply personal to communities, especially close-knit communities like Channel-Port aux Basques; there is no one-size-fits-all but enabling communities to identify local issues and potential solutions goes a long way in gaining support (Ensor & Berger 2009). Cultural barriers to adaptation are rarely considered in broad solution decision making. In those cases, Ensor & Berger found that widely applied solutions are implemented with less success because they are culturally inappropriate: "In particular, cultures that lack a tradition or history of adaptation (to climate or other environmental challenges) require an approach that builds from existing social forms and is sympathetic to local notions of well-being" (2009: 231). In Channel-Port aux Basques, street names are highly important as they are often named after the families that live there, such as "Warren's Road" (Streets of Canada n.d.). Family lineage is a significant value in the town making movement from ancestral places difficult. Luckily, resilience is also a strong value in Channel-Port aux Basques, which can, with time and care, be connected to climate adaptation. With a mindfully executed managed retreat process, including community participation, deliberation and decision-making, adaptation to the increased risks of climate change can become part of the community's own story of resilience.

The current approach of barrier building does not have to consider community values, making it easy to apply and continue without seeing immediate consequences. Unlike strategies of managed retreat, in barrier building community longevity is not considered which puts towns repeatedly at risk. Re-zoning without community consultation is economically and socially dangerous as citizens tend to feel lost in the process (Greenlees & Cornelius 2021). An approach centered on community values could lead to success because it becomes a source of honour as citizens are continually involved in the process alongside local implementors and funding bodies (Ensor & Berger 2009). Residents of Channel-Port aux Basques supported one another through the disaster but those affected continue to be deeply afraid of the coast, something that was instilling a sense of pride (Chughtai & O'Neill-Yates 2022). Through culturally informed education and collaboration that pride can be renewed through community adaptation.

Current Plans and Community Collaboration

Current plans by the Channel-Port aux Basques municipality do contain managed retreat on a small scale (Yirenkyi 2024). Homes and infrastructure that have been washed away by Hurricane Fiona are being rebuilt away from the coastline and a coastal zone management plan is in development. There was some financial support from the provincial government for the movement of undamaged homes in the disaster zone, but it is very little compared to the $4.3 million given federally to barrier building. The provincial plan was more imposed on residents than made in collaboration with them causing various issues in its implementation (Mullin 2023). The rezoning caused a housing crunch in the area because inland development was not completed for the "move-out" date. Supports for those moving had high requirements making it inaccessible for many. A full managed retreat plan must be better funded, communicated, and partnered. Managed retreat is a delicate process that should be well thought out to mitigate the financial and emotional consequences of abandoning a beloved home. However, it is often considered a "last resort" and is only on the table after major disasters (Lemmen et al. 2016). If managed retreat was considered an option equivalent to any other would there be fewer cases of the process gone wrong? Thistlethwaite & Henstra (2017) observed the use of public participation geographic information systems (PPGIS) to show municipalities and residents digital scenarios of changing risks depending on the instrument employed. Using these accessible mapping systems, potential lot buyers were able to witness the risk through modelling and make choices in line with managed retreat. Visuals make it easier to understand risk, and it can be cheaper and more attainable for municipalities to run online or at community hubs (Thistlethwaite & Henstra 2017). Through an agent-based modelling approach, Yirenkyi found that transdisciplinary adaptation measures which included community outreach and education were more successful than those without (2024). This modelled approach made use of barriers (specifically sea walls) on the coast but did not prioritize them, rather, used them in combination with methods that show more longevity like managed retreat. When adaptation policies are implemented without a varied approach locals are left out in the process creating less effective policy. Education and collaboration are the key to successful adaptation, and it is considered highly important to Channel-Port aux Basques (The Harris Centre 2023). If planned collaboratively locals are more receptive to managed retreat and, "success will see the approach to adaptation become a shared community value or attitude" (Ensor & Berger 2009: 231). This is not to say that the community will want to rush away from their homes if given the chance but if given the time to process the risk and tools to collaboratively plan a retreat it is possible to find success. A managed retreat should be well thought out, slow, and invested in the future of the community.

Newfoundland and Labrador communities should be given more credit for knowing the disadvantages of hard barriers and be listened to when they ask for a better plan (The Harris Centre 2023). They should have the power and information to choose the method most applicable to them or multiple methods as Yirenkyi modeled (2024). Managed retreat is a difficult long-spanning process that is backed by a variety of research methods. It is emotionally and financially difficult but with community collaboration and provincial & federal support it is the more long-term option to prevent a disaster like Fiona from occurring ever again.

Conclusion

Coastal communities are stuck fortifying themselves from the oceans they once cherished. Funding for adaptation before more disasters strike is a good thing, however a broad adaptative solution for many different communities is inadequate. Through community outreach sessions it is evident that people in Channel-Port aux Basques and surrounding communities know the risks of hard barrier solutions and their ability to create future problems (The Harris Centre 2023). This knowledge does not come from theory; they can observe the issue happening in their home with the current barriers installed. Hurricane Fiona continues to be a source of stress in the lives of many making proactive measures essential to wellbeing (Kennedy 2023). The government adherence to barriers and leaving retreat as a last resort is a substandard path that can be broken by allowing more agency to communities. Ultimately, the people of Channel-Port aux Basques care about the future of life near the water, and how it looks should be up to them.

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GDP Theory: Economic Capacity, Inequality, and Wartime Sexual Violence

Emily Bonia

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Abstract

Wartime sexual violence remains one of the most devastating features of contemporary armed conflict. While feminist International Relations scholarship has demonstrated that wartime rape reflects deeply embedded gendered systems of power, and strategic explanations have shown how sexual violence can function as a weapon of terror and social control, existing approaches do not fully explain variation in its prevalence across conflict environments. This article introduces Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Theory, a political economy framework that identifies economic capacity and income inequality as structural conditions shaping the likelihood of wartime sexual violence. It asks how Gross Domestic Product impacts the use of wartime sexual violence in conflict. Specifically, the theory argues that low GDP per capita and high inequality weaken military institutional capacity, increase fragmentation among armed actors, and make low-cost forms of violence, including sexual violence, more structurally available. Drawing on theory-building exploratory analysis of conflict-affected Sub-Saharan African states, this article demonstrates patterns consistent with the expectations of GDP Theory. By integrating feminist International Relations and political economy perspectives, the article provides a clearer understanding of how economic structures interact with gendered power systems to shape patterns of wartime violence.

Keywords: Sexual violence, GDP, War, Economy, Sub-Saharan Africa

Introduction

There are many explanations of wartime rape, none of which fully satisfies the academic, the survivor or the global community in general. This paper serves to expand upon already established theories of wartime rape. It does not attempt to ignore the importance of these perspectives, rather, its main attempt is to find an explanation based in empirical evidence to discuss the likelihood of sexual violence in wartime through the marrying of political economy and feminist scholarship. This article begs the question, how does Gross Domestic Product impact the prevalence of sexual violence in wartime? I posit that wartime rape is not only a problem caused by social factors, but instead a byproduct of underfunded and underdeveloped security sector systems that lend themself to gender-based violence. Gross Domestic Product Theory (GDP theory) analyzes wartime rape through the impacts of income disparity and GDP per capita, both of which are key to understand individual buying and in fragile and conflict affected states (FCAS) especially, individual and state protection power. In this article, I have decided to choose case studies in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) with oil production, and without oil production, that have had active conflicts for a few reasons: First, because these countries are geographically similar which means the citizens of these countries deal with similar problems such as drought, lack of clean water and resources; Secondly, the case studies I have chosen have cultural norms that have allowed for gender inequality to flourish under peaceful times, and exacerbated during wartimes lending themselves to a ground zero of sorts for guerrilla warfare tactics such as sexual violence . Lastly, because oil revenue is a profitable economic resource that the West has commodified and relies upon heavily; thus, ensuring that oil rich SSA states are guaranteed income regardless of other economic ventures possible within the state, and regardless of whether the west is actively exporting oil reserves currently. GDP theory in its essence, is meant to be a model to expand and apply to other case studies outside of SSA and the global south to explain this trend in sexual violence in warfare. In contrast, I believe that GDP theory can be applied to any major export for a country and should be considered from other factors in future like critical minerals, diamonds, wheat, wine, and other desired commodities.

Although there are many other factors to account for, especially in individual instances of sexual violence, at its root, GDP theory offers an explanation of wartime rape recognizing sexual violence as pervasive in countries with less access to individual capital and less government capacity to gain, retain, and prioritize financial mechanisms - especially security forces such as national military and policing forces. It explains that in contexts with lower GDP per capita there is less financial capacity to fund proper military training, and to buy proper weapons; including servicing and maintenance required for the ongoing use of these weapons. But this theory isn't enough alone; GDP theory isn't meant to suggest that social issues are not relevant in understanding instances, or variations to sexual violence in conflict but rather as a complimentary mechanism for understanding the most at risk populations. GDP theory suggests that because of this, soldiers, and militias are trained and authorized indirectly (Wood, 2000: 308) to use less conventional methods of warfare. In particular, in SSA where ethnic tensions tend to be a leading cause for fractures specifically within civil and intra-state wars, rape is one of the most effective methods to evict bloodlines and achieve wartime objectives. Contrastly, this does not equate to territory gain (Meger, 2016: 51). Ethnic tensions are fundamentally intertwined with military objectives, particularly in the case of civil and intra-state wars in SSA making sexual violence in war an effective method of terror and an objective within itself. This isn't to say that SSA countries, or the case studies I've chosen have planned sexual violence in wartime, but it is to say that it is a byproduct of other military objectives which benefit and support para-military organizations' larger goals in complex conflicts.

Existing scholarship has provided important insights into the causes and functions of wartime sexual violence; however, significant gaps remain regarding the role of structural economic conditions. The following literature review examines these debates and identifies the theoretical space

Literature Review

Sexual violence in wartime has increasingly become recognized as a significant issue within international relations and conflict studies. Rather than focusing extensively on competing definitions of wartime sexual violence, this literature review examines the relationship between political economy and sexual violence during armed conflict.

Nevertheless, defining the subject under analysis remains necessary. This paper adopts the definition of rape as defined by the United Nations (UN) International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), whereby rape means:

> [T]he *actus reus* of the crime of rape in international law is constituted by: the sexual penetration, however slight: (a) of the vagina or anus of the victim by the penis of the perpetrator or any other object used by the perpetrator; or (b) the mouth of the victim by the penis of the

> perpetrator; where such sexual penetration occurs without the consent of the victim. Consent for this purpose must be consent given voluntarily, as a result of the victim's free will, assessed in the context of the surrounding circumstances. The *mens rea* is the intention to effect this sexual penetration, and the knowledge that it occurs without the consent of the victim. (Kunarac et al, Appeal Judgement, 2002).

At the same time, sexual violence exists on a spectrum, and any singular definition inevitably excludes forms of violence that remain difficult to capture through existing legal and reporting mechanisms.

The recognition of rape as a weapon of war marked a significant shift in both policy and academic discourse. Until the early 2000s, wartime sexual violence was largely considered outside the domain of foreign policy (Kirby, 2012: 798). Feminist scholars challenged this separation between the "private" and the "international," arguing instead that gendered violence constitutes a matter of public and political concern. As Enloe famously argues, "the personal is the international" (Enloe, 2014: 37). This shift enabled scholars to conceptualize rape not simply as an individual act of defiance, but as a widespread and systematic tactic of war tied to broader political, social, and economic processes. A feminist political economy approach provides an important framework for understanding these dynamics. Rather than treating sexual violence solely as interpersonal violence, feminist political economy scholarship emphasizes its relationship to structures of power, inequality, and resource extraction. Meger argues that conflicts are frequently characterized by attempts to gain control over productive and reproductive resources, making sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) directly connected to the political and economic drivers of conflict. In this framework, sexual violence operates at multiple levels simultaneously: as interpersonal violence that reinforces socially constructed forms of masculinity; as political violence shaped by structural inequalities; and as part of broader processes of global political economy and accumulation by dispossession (Meger, 2016: 51). Kirby's discussion of feminist epistemologies further demonstrates the complexity of analyzing wartime sexual violence. Drawing on Skjelsbaek, Kirby identifies three primary approaches to understanding victims of wartime sexual violence. Essentialist approaches conceptualize women broadly as victims of militarized masculinity, emphasizing the role of patriarchal structures and aggressive forms of masculinity in conflict. Structuralist approaches adopt a group-based perspective, recognizing that some groups of women are more vulnerable to violence than others due to ethnicity, class, religion, or political affiliation. Finally, social constructionist perspectives challenge fixed understandings of gender categories altogether, arguing that both men and women may become victims of wartime sexual violence, and that femininity and masculinity are socially constructed and fluid within conflict settings (Kirby, 2014: 800; Meger, 2016: 40; West and Zimmerman, 1987: 126). These differing epistemological approaches demonstrate that wartime sexual violence cannot be understood solely through biological or essentialized notions of gender but must instead be situated within broader social and political contexts.

This complexity is reinforced by scholarship emphasizing the variation in wartime sexual violence across conflicts. As Wood argues, sexual violence during war is neither universal nor uniform (2006: 308). Drawing on investigations conducted by international tribunals and UN commissions, Wood demonstrates that some conflicts are characterized by widespread and systematic sexual violence, while others exhibit relatively limited occurrences (2006: 312–314). For example, public rape has been used strategically following village takeovers, within refugee camps, and by insurgent groups seeking to terrorize civilian populations. In Sierra Leone, sexual violence targeted women and girls broadly, particularly those associated with insurgent factions. In Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda, wartime rape was deployed systematically as a form of ethnic cleansing intended to terrorize, dismantle, and destroy targeted ethnic communities. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, sexual violence is used as a weapon of war in itself, whereby the prevalence and gravity is unparalleled (Meger 2016: 138).

At the same time, Wood cautions that observed variation in wartime sexual violence may partly reflect limitations in available data rather than actual differences in prevalence. She argues that variation may be "merely an artifact of inadequate knowledge about the empirical patterns present in each case" (Wood 2006: 318). Definitional ambiguity further complicates this issue, as understandings of rape and sexual violence vary significantly across societies and cultural contexts. Consequently, unless international organizations employ standardized definitions and investigative mechanisms, substantial instances of wartime sexual violence may remain undocumented. This presents a significant methodological challenge for scholars seeking to measure and compare sexual violence across cases.

This understanding draws from broader theories of political violence. From a Marxist perspective, political violence is not an end in itself but a coercive mechanism used to pursue political objectives, challenge existing hierarchies, and destabilize social structures in pursuit of power (Meger, 2016: 38). Sexual violence in conflict therefore functions not merely as opportunistic brutality, but as a strategic instrument through which armed actors assert dominance, reorganize social relations, and pursue broader political and economic goals.

Barnett and Duvall's conception of power further strengthens this analysis by demonstrating how power operates through material, institutional, structural, and discursive means (Meger 2016: 39). The first form of power involves direct coercion, where one actor forces another to behave in a certain way through physical capabilities or threats of violence. The latter forms are less visible and operate through institutions, social structures, and dominant ideas that shape actors' opportunities, identities, and perceptions of their interests. Applying this framework to wartime sexual violence highlights how such violence is perpetuated not only through direct coercion but also through structural inequalities and discursive norms that normalize gendered violence as an inevitable byproduct of war (Meger 2016: 39).

Within many conflicts, sexual violence also serves economic functions tied to gender inequality and resource competition. Feminist political economy scholars argue that women's bodies and reproductive capacities become linked to broader struggles over labour, land, and property. In several sub-Saharan African conflicts, women's reproductive labour constitutes a critical economic asset that shapes access to land, livestock, and social status. Tershun argues that wartime rape undermines these assets in multiple ways: through forced pregnancies that dilute bloodlines associated with ethnic or communal identity, through social stigmatization that reduces women's access to marriage and land rights, and through physical violence intended to prevent women from bearing children altogether (Tershun 2005:62).

These dynamics are intensified by broader economic transformations associated with privatization and globalization. As Tershun notes, processes such as formal land registration and privatization have increasingly displaced women from traditional land rights while simultaneously empowering men and multinational corporations (2005: 67). Sexual violence therefore operates not only as a military tactic but also as part of larger systems of dispossession and economic restructuring. Contemporary conflicts frequently rely upon informal economies in which armed groups finance warfare through plunder, black-market trade, and control over valuable commodities. Violence, including SGBV, becomes intertwined with broader processes of capital accumulation and state-building.

The relationship between natural resources and conflict further reinforces this political economy perspective. The "resource curse" thesis suggests that the discovery of valuable resources, particularly oil, often contributes to political instability and violent conflict rather than economic development. Studies by Collier and Hoeffler (2004: 565), alongside United Nations reports, demonstrate that numerous armed conflicts since 1990 have been linked to competition over natural resources in regions such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, and the Middle East. These conflicts are often exacerbated by unequal distributions of wealth, corruption, and the exclusion of local populations from resource revenues.

Importantly, violent conflict deepens poverty, erodes social cohesion, and reinforces unequal power relations between core and peripheral states. Meger argues that violence perpetrated during civil wars, including SGBV, helps reproduce hierarchical international relations by facilitating resource exploitation and capital accumulation. In this sense, wartime sexual violence serves not only interpersonal or military objectives, but also broader political-economic processes tied to global inequality (2016: 51).

This literature raises important questions regarding the relationship between oil wealth, gender hierarchies, and wartime violence. While resource wealth is often associated with corruption and inequality, it may also reinforce existing gender hegemonies and social structures that reduce incentives for certain forms of gender-based violence used to assert masculine dominance during conflict. Nevertheless, scholars such as Darkwah caution that oil wealth rarely translates into equitable social development due to corruption and unequal redistribution. Consequently, resource wealth may simultaneously reinforce patriarchal structures while exacerbating inequalities that contribute to violence and instability (5).

These debates are important for understanding the relationship between wartime sexual violence and political economy. Existing literature frequently explains wartime rape as a strategy used to terrorize and destabilize communities, yet feminist political economy scholarship argues that such violence must also be understood in relation to broader economic structures and inequalities. This article argues that economic conditions may shape the likelihood and forms of wartime violence. In contexts characterized by weak state capacity, low GDP per capita, inadequate military funding, and limited professional training, armed actors may rely more heavily on guerrilla warfare tactics that deliberately target civilian populations through terror and sexual violence.

However, reducing wartime rape solely to economic deprivation or insufficient military discipline risks oversimplifying the issue. Wartime sexual violence emerges from a combination of structural inequality, militarization, gender norms, identity politics, and economic marginalization. Income disparity, weak institutional capacity, social fragmentation, and unequal distributions of wealth all contribute to conditions in which sexual violence becomes normalized or strategically useful during conflict. Feminist political economy therefore emphasizes that wartime sexual violence represents a systemic issue operating across interpersonal, institutional, and global levels simultaneously.

The relationship between natural resource wealth and conflict further complicates these dynamics. Resource curse literature suggests that oil wealth and valuable natural resources can contribute to corruption, inequality, and intra-state violence despite increasing national GDP. Nevertheless, resource-rich states may also experience different gender and social dynamics due to stronger state revenues and greater economic capacity. This raises important questions regarding whether higher levels of economic development and state capacity may reduce reliance on forms of guerrilla warfare associated with widespread wartime sexual violence, even while maintaining existing patriarchal hierarchies. Consequently, examining the relationships between GDP per capita, income inequality, oil production, and wartime sexual violence may provide important insights into how political economy shapes both the prevalence and forms of conflict-related sexual violence in sub-Saharan Africa.

The linking of political economy and sexual violence in wartime requires an understanding of how social cohesion is tied to political and economic wealth, recognizing that social cohesion isn't formed from only informal agreements, but from tangible agreements made between individuals, governments, security services and insurgencies. In an unequal social contract, whereby gender inequality is pervasive, it is evident that political and economic wealth is skewed due to competing and intersecting forms of discrimination (i.e. gender, race, ethnicity, religious).

While Oil rich countries may have more GDP per capita, Darkwah astutely acknowledges that corruption is the main cause of the lack of redistribution of wealth to individuals or to services necessary for increased quality of life (7). Further, oil money may contribute to earlier ideas presented by Meger of increased gender hegemony whereby the motivation for gender-based violence in wartime is reduced due to increased perceived value in men's positions in the situational context.

Building on feminist International Relations scholarship and political economy approaches, this article advances GDP Theory as a structural explanation for variation in wartime sexual violence. The following section outlines the mixed-methods methodology used to examine this relationship across selected Sub-Saharan African cases.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research design that combines quantitative economic indicators with qualitative comparative analysis to explore the structural relationship between economic conditions and wartime sexual violence. The methodological approach draws on the work of Creswell and Plano Clark, who argue that mixed-methods research allows scholars to integrate quantitative and qualitative forms of evidence in order to develop more comprehensive social scientific explanations. Quantitative data from the World Bank, the WomanStats Project, and worldometer are used to identify broader structural patterns relating to GDP, inequality, and wartime sexual violence, while qualitative comparative analysis provides interpretive insight into the institutional and gendered dynamics shaping conflict environments. The study also adopts a theory-building comparative approach informed by George and Bennett, whose work emphasizes the value of case studies in developing and refining theoretical explanations within complex political contexts. This approach is particularly appropriate given the multidimensional and context-dependent nature of wartime sexual violence.

As mentioned in the introduction to this article, I have chosen to use publicly available data from the World Bank GDP Data Sets, Women Stats, and Worldometers to analyze the impact of GDP per capita on wartime sexual violence. Importantly to note, as

Woman Stats has significant data, I have decided to use LRW-Scale-11, which is a comprehensive rape scale which combines other data (LRW scales 4 through 10) for a comprehensive picture of rape within a country; this is because in recognizing the feminist international relations perspective along with other feminist scholarship cited in the above literature review, simply choosing one of the LRW scales would mean contributing to the problem at large whereby rape is seen as a passive action of the past rather than something in which institutions uphold and support by ignoring the social impacts of gender inequality. I have however, chosen to include LRW-Scale-4 in addition to LRW-Scale-11, as LRW-Scale-4 measures per hundred thousand the reported rapes in each country. However, in the case of South Sudan, no data is available.

The qualitative component uses comparative exploratory analysis to examine patterns across conflict-affected Sub-Saharan African states. The study investigates whether lower GDP per capita and higher levels of inequality correspond with environments characterized by weaker institutional control, fragmented armed actors, and higher prevalence of wartime sexual violence. Rather than treating wartime sexual violence solely as an individual or cultural phenomenon, the analysis focuses on how structural economic conditions shape the strategic and institutional contexts in which violence occurs.

I selected Sub-Saharan African cases because the region contains substantial variation in economic development, institutional capacity, inequality, and documented levels of conflict-related sexual violence. This regional focus allows for comparison across relatively similar postcolonial and conflict contexts while still capturing important economic and political variation.

This mixed-methods approach allows for a fulsome understanding of wartime sexual violence; because wartime sexual violence is shaped by interacting structural, political, and gendered dynamics that cannot be fully explained through either quantitative or qualitative analysis alone. Quantitative indicators help identify broad structural patterns, while qualitative analysis allows for interpretation of the institutional and gendered mechanisms linking economic conditions to wartime sexual violence. The goal of the study is therefore theory development and explanatory refinement rather than deterministic causal prediction.

Collectively, these cases provide sufficient variation in economic development, institutional capacity, and conflict dynamics to explore the structural relationships proposed by GDP Theory while maintaining a shared regional context within Sub-Saharan Africa. Together, these cases provide variation in GDP per capita, inequality, state fragility, and conflict intensity, allowing for exploratory comparison consistent with the theory-building goals of GDP Theory.

To examine these relationships, this study utilizes a comparative data table and scatter plot analysis to illustrate the association between wartime sexual violence, GDP per capita, and income inequality across selected Sub-Saharan African states. The analysis also incorporates levels of oil production as an additional political economy variable, given that resource-producing states may experience different developmental and conflict trajectories. In some cases, increased economic capacity associated with resource wealth and state development may contribute to higher living standards, stronger institutional capacity, and reduced levels of intrastate conflict. Consequently, wartime sexual violence may become less structurally prevalent in contexts where governments and populations possess greater economic resources and institutional stability.

The study also recognizes several limitations. Wartime sexual violence remains significantly underreported across many conflict settings due to stigma, insecurity, and institutional weakness. In addition, national GDP measures cannot fully capture localized wartime economies or informal systems of resource extraction. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted as exploratory and theory-generating rather than definitive causal proof.

Using the methodological framework described above, the following section presents the results of the comparative and statistical analysis in order to assess the exploratory expectations of GDP Theory.

Results

GDP per capita ($USD)	**Country**	**Rape per 100,000 (LRW-Scale-4)**	**Comprehensive Rape Scale (LRW-Scale-11)**	**Estimated Gini Coefficient**	**Oil production**	**Distribution of income (Highest 20 per cent share of wealth)**
516	Central African Republic	4	17	43	0 per cent	49.2 per cent
649.4	Democratic Republic of the Congo	4	16	44.7	0.03 per cent	51.1 per cent
Data not available	South Sudan	Data not available	Data not available	44.0	0.15-0.20 per cent	49.5 per cent
629.5	Somalia	1	13	Data not available	0 per cent	Data not available
2727.9	Cote D'Ivoire	1	14	35.3	0.036-0.05per cent	43.3 per cent
1084.2	Nigeria	0	13	33.9	1.5-1.7 per cent	39 per cent
2390.8	Ghana	1	9	43.5	0.2-0.3 per cent	48.8 per cent
961	Chad	4	17	37.4	0.15-0.17 per cent	44.9 per cent

Table 1: Economic Indicators and Wartime Sexual Violence in Selected Sub-Saharan African States

The findings presented in Table 1 suggest a relationship between wartime sexual violence, income inequality, and economic capacity across the selected Sub-Saharan African cases. While GDP per capita initially appeared to provide a useful measure for evaluating GDP Theory, the comparative analysis indicates that wealth distribution, as measured by the Gini coefficient and the concentration of wealth among the highest income groups, may provide a more accurate explanation for variation in wartime sexual violence across conflict environments.

States such as Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Chad demonstrate relatively low GDP per capita alongside high levels of income concentration and elevated wartime rape indicators. These findings are broadly consistent with the expectations of GDP Theory, which argues that weak economic capacity and unequal distribution of resources contribute to institutional fragility, limited military professionalism, and greater reliance on low-cost forms of violence, including sexual violence.

The findings also suggest that GDP per capita alone does not fully capture how economic resources operate within conflict-affected states. In several oil-producing states, national GDP figures may obscure significant internal inequality and uneven access to wealth. As a result, GDP per capita may overestimate actual economic capacity at the societal level, particularly in contexts where wealth remains concentrated among political elites or resource-dependent sectors. The distribution of income variable therefore provides additional insight into how economic resources are concentrated within these states and how this concentration may shape conflict dynamics.

At the same time, the analysis indicates that oil production does not necessarily correspond with lower levels of wartime sexual violence. Although some resource-producing states experience increased economic activity, these benefits are not always distributed evenly across the population or translated into stronger institutional capacity. In some cases, resource wealth may coexist with political instability, armed group fragmentation, and persistent inequality (Darkwah, 6). This finding suggests that the relationship between resource wealth and wartime sexual violence is mediated by governance structures and patterns of wealth distribution rather than economic output alone.

The comparative findings further suggest that GDP Theory must account not only for state-funded militaries, but also for non-state armed actors, militias, and rebel organizations operating within intrastate conflicts. In economically fragile environments, armed groups often lack access to formal military resources, training, and equipment. Under such conditions, sexual violence may become a low-cost and accessible mechanism of intimidation, coercion, and social control. However, the findings do not suggest that wartime rape occurs simply because armed actors lack alternative weapons or resources. Consistent with the work of Wood, wartime sexual violence is also shaped by leadership structures, organizational discipline, ideological objectives, and the absence of accountability within armed groups (308). Economic inequality and institutional weakness therefore interact with broader gendered and strategic dynamics rather than functioning as independent causal explanations on their own.

Overall, the findings provide exploratory support for GDP Theory by demonstrating that political economy conditions, particularly inequality and uneven resource distribution, may contribute to environments in which wartime sexual violence becomes more prevalent during intrastate conflict.

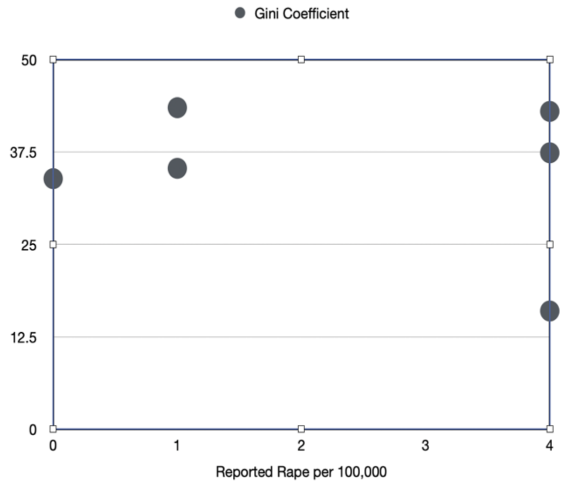

Table 2: Relationship between Income Inequality

The scatter plot in Table 2 is used as an exploratory visual tool to examine the relationship between income inequality and wartime sexual violence across the selected cases. While the limited sample size prevents definitive causal conclusions, the visualization assists in identifying broader structural patterns consistent with GDP Theory.

Visually this table shows the patterns between income inequality (calculated through the Gini coefficient) and LRW-Scale-4 (Reported rape per 100,000), strengthening the argument for considering political economy in wartime rape beyond descriptive narrative. The higher Gini Coefficients tend to align with increased wartime rape indicators; while lower inequality generally shows lower prevalence. Given the small-N exploratory design, statistical tests are used descriptively rather than inferentially. P-values are interpreted cautiously and used to assess general patterns rather than to confirm causal relationships. The Pearson correlation test between income inequality (Gini coefficient) and wartime sexual violence indicators shows a positive but statistically non-significant relationship ($r \approx 0.38$, $p \approx 0.45$). While the direction of the relationship is consistent with GDP Theory's expectations, the limited sample size and missing data reduce the statistical power of the analysis. As a result, the findings should be interpreted as exploratory rather than confirmatory.

While exploratory in nature, the findings suggest a possible relationship between wartime sexual violence and income inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient. This indicates that political economy variables may complement existing feminist approaches by helping explain how structural economic conditions shape patterns of gendered violence in conflict settings.

Cautiously, this could mean that there is an explanation in a rooted empirical method as to how wartime rape can be reduced. Future research should build on this exploratory analysis by employing more robust quantitative and longitudinal methods to further test GDP Theory. In particular, the use of event-based datasets such as those provided by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project would allow for more precise measurement of conflict-related sexual violence over time and across cases. Expanding the analysis beyond Sub-Saharan Africa to include a larger global sample of conflict-affected states would also improve the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, future studies could incorporate multivariate regression models that include GDP per capita, income inequality, resource dependence, and measures of state fragility to better isolate the structural mechanisms proposed by GDP Theory. Finally, in-depth case studies using process tracing could complement quantitative analysis by examining how economic structures interact with armed group organization and gendered power relations in specific conflict settings.

Overall, the findings suggest that wartime sexual violence is shaped not only by gendered and strategic dynamics, but also by broader structural economic conditions. The following conclusion considers the implications of these findings for feminist International Relations scholarship, political economy theory, and future research on conflict-related sexual violence.

Conclusion

This article has argued that wartime sexual violence cannot be understood solely through strategic or gendered explanations without also considering the structural economic conditions that shape conflict environments. By introducing GDP Theory, this study demonstrates how low GDP per capita and high levels of income inequality may contribute to weakened institutional capacity, armed group fragmentation, and the increased prevalence of low-cost forms of violence, including wartime sexual violence. Drawing on a mixed-methods comparative analysis of conflict-affected Sub-Saharan African states, the findings suggest a meaningful relationship between political economy conditions and patterns of wartime sexual violence.

The analysis does not seek to reduce wartime sexual violence to economics alone, nor to replace existing feminist International Relations scholarship. Rather, it demonstrates that political economy factors and gendered systems of power are deeply interconnected. Economic instability, inequality, and weak state capacity may create conditions in which militarized gender violence becomes more structurally available and difficult to prevent. Integrating political economy perspectives into feminist analyses therefore provides a more comprehensive understanding of how wartime sexual violence emerges and persists across different conflict settings.

The literature reviewed throughout this study demonstrates that wartime sexual violence is shaped by multiple interconnected dynamics, including patriarchal power structures, militarization, strategic coercion, and institutional instability. Feminist International Relations scholarship has shown that wartime rape is not incidental to conflict but rather reflects broader systems of gendered domination and violence. At the same time, strategic approaches have emphasized the use of sexual violence as a tool of intimidation, social control, and ethnic homogenization during armed conflict. However, the literature also reveals a relative absence of sustained political economy analysis within existing explanations of wartime sexual violence. This study builds upon these scholarly contributions by arguing that economic inequality, weak institutional capacity, and uneven development may interact with gendered systems of power to shape the prevalence of wartime sexual violence across conflict settings.

At the same time, this study remains exploratory and theory-building in scope. Limitations including underreporting of wartime sexual violence, uneven data availability, and the complexity of conflict environments mean that the findings should not be interpreted as deterministic or universally causal. Future research could expand the dataset beyond Sub-Saharan Africa, incorporate longitudinal statistical analysis, and further examine how resource wealth, governance capacity, and armed group organization influence patterns of conflict-related sexual violence.

Ultimately, this article contributes to broader debates in feminist International Relations and conflict studies by demonstrating that wartime sexual violence is shaped not only by ideology, militarization, and patriarchal power structures, but also by the economic conditions within which conflicts occur. Understanding these structural dynamics is essential for developing more effective approaches to conflict prevention, institutional reform, and the protection of vulnerable populations during armed conflict.

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Glossing over the Great War: Canadian Methods of Remembrance and Commemoration

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Abstract

The following study seeks to provide a critical overview of Canadian methods of remembering and commemorating the First World War. Offering commentary on various memorials, monuments and tributes erected both domestically and internationally, it argues that Canada's way of honouring its fallen soldiers through physical means of commemoration is immensely flawed, failing to accurately encapsulate and communicate the historical reality of World War I (WWI). Analyzing the effectiveness of specific grave sites, artwork, commemorative events and larger-scale memorial pieces dedicated to Canadian soldiers — such as the famed "Grieving Woman" statue located at Vimy Ridge and the epitaphs of mass cemeteries designed and maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) — this paper thus encourages readers to pause and reflect on the shortcomings of deliberately well-polished, tailor-made methods of remembrance that appear in the contemporary era, especially those designed and promoted by Canadian officials to strategically and purposely "glorify" the reality of the First World War by erasing and/or fabricating select narratives, histories and emotions.

Keywords: Remembrance, Commemoration, Canada, Canadian, WWI

Introduction

If you could remember the darkest parts of your history, would you choose to advertise them to others? Would you embellish the truth of particular incidents or lay the gritty details of every setting, action and outcome flat? When it comes to events like war, the international community seems to prefer the former option, commemorating tragedies like World War One (WWI) through a variety of well-polished and tailor-made methods of remembrance. Recognizing the problems that may arise from this overwhelmingly "perfect" framework, however, many citizens across our country may remain skeptical regarding Canada's everyday presentation of WWI, bringing themselves to wonder things like: *Do contemporary methods of remembrance in Canada strategically "glorify" the reality of the First World War?* In hopes of shedding light on such concerns, this paper will seek to answer that question through an in-depth study of "Canadian methods of remembrance and commemoration", providing a critical overview of Canada's WWI tributes and their overall effectiveness. In doing so, it will make reference to an ever-growing body of literature, pursuing three key areas of analysis throughout: (1) "What exactly *are* contemporary methods of remembrance?", (2) "Where do they appear and how do they manifest in a Canadian context?", and (3) "Does Canada's way of honouring its fallen soldiers through physical monuments, memorials and/or other methods of 'remembrance' seem to positively influence public perception of the First World War?"

Methods of Remembrance - A Contemporary Catalogue

In order to conduct an objective analysis of "Canadian methods of remembrance and commemoration" in relation to the First World

War, it is however, first and foremost necessary to outline what the concept of "remembrance" itself means. After all, the act of remembering and/or reflecting upon a particular event, especially one as tragic as WWI, may involve a variety of complex processes and emotions that are hard to pinpoint to a singular definition. Yet, as explained by scholar Jan-Werner Müller, the idea of remembrance, at its core, can best be understood as a powerful, political "tool" (2002: 1) used for the "temporal re-anchoring and … 'recovery of the real'" (2002: 15). Indeed, research shows that memory, and thus, the broader process of recalling *collective* memories (that is, "remembering"), holds widespread transformative power, especially in the aftermath of a global conflict like the First World War, where its relationship with both culture and the broader justice system enables new policies and frameworks (Müller, 2002: 2).

Recognizing this dynamic, the concept of remembrance and its associated effects becomes much more clear, thus providing reason for the various ways in which we see WWI being commemorated in modern society. Notably, things like art, music, literature, video games, movies and museums are methods of contemporary, cultural remembrance that we typically see used in the present era to pay homage to the Great War (Brandt, 2017: 3). Together, these tributes work alongside the means of state-erected memorials, monuments, statues and grave sites to honour the fallen soldiers of WWI. Complimenting one another in this vein, both physical and media-circulated techniques of commemorating the First World War have thus come to contribute to a "popular memory" surrounding WWI (Brandt, 2017: 3), creating a catalogue of imagery that influences how we understand and recall the past century of human history not only individually, but as a broader global community.

Canadian Memorials, Monuments, and Tributes

Having laid this foundation, it is now possible to assess how contemporary methods of remembering and/or commemorating WWI specifically manifest in a Canadian context. As expected, much like the other countries and dominions that fought under the Allied Powers from 1914-1918, Canada does *not* fall short in its ways of honouring its fallen troops, whether it be at home or overseas on the soils of Europe.

This reality is aptly demonstrated through the erection of the famous "Grieving Woman" monument at Vimy Ridge, a statue which contains "the names of 11,285 missing Canadian soldiers" engraved at its base (Brandt, 2017: 13). Combining "classical iconography and composition with contemporary European expressionist influence" (Hucker, 2006: para. 9), this piece maintains a well-polished white finish (CWGC, 2022: Vimy Memorial), gazing over an additional array of like-structured figures strewn about. Yet, despite the critical placement of its body at the heart of Canada's biggest overseas monument, the image of the "Grieving Woman" is overshadowed by the presence of two large, equally as eye-catching twin pillars located to its rear. Altogether, it is thus approximated that the monument as a whole is composed of "6,000 tonnes of Seget limestone" upheld by an 11,000 ton "steel-reinforced" concrete base (CWGC, 2022: Vimy Memorial). Due to its sheer size and symbolic significance, this war site has consequently

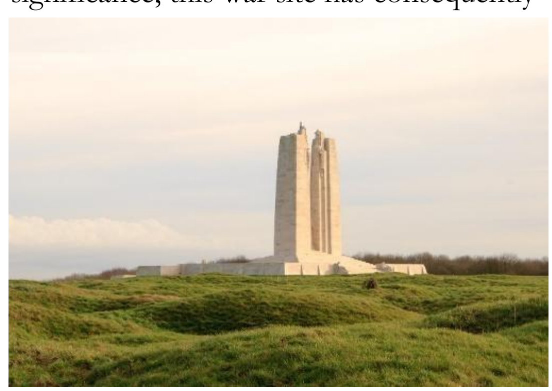

Figure 1. Canada's Vimy Ridge Memorial from a Distance

attracted many tourists over the years, with records showing an attendance of approximately "8,000 [Canadian] pilgrims" at its initial unveiling ceremony (Lloyd, 1998: 158).

Similarly, the construction of the St. Julien Canadian Memorial in northern Belgium has come to garner great attention in the public eye as well. Historically, this site marks the place where Canadians fought and withstood the very first gas attacks of World War I (Veterans Affairs Canada, 2026: para. 1). Composed of granite stone, it features an 11 metre tall shaft that gives way to the construction of a statue known as "The Brooding Soldier" at its summit (VAC, 2026: para. 3). Over time, the image of the bowed head (VAC, 2026: para. 3), folded hands (VAC, 2026: para. 3) and solemn expression of this statue has left a lasting mark on both viewers and historians alike, giving the piece a sort of special feeling that speaks to the tragedies which once occurred near its base. Set in the middle of a well-manicured garden, "The Brooding Soldier" is surrounded by a series of tall cedar trees, each groomed to "match and complement" the towering pedestal upon which he sits (VAC, 2026: para. 3). Originally unveiled on July 8th, 1923 by the Duke of Connaught, the memorial also features a key inscription dedicated to Canadian soldiers at its base, which courtly reads, "*this column marks the battlefield where 18,000 Canadians on the British left withstood the first German gas attacks the 22nd-24th of April 1915. 2,000 fell and here lie buried"* (VAC, 2026: para. 6).

However, despite the popularity of pieces like "The Grieving Woman" and "The Brooding Soldier", the Vimy Ridge Memorial and the St. Julien Memorial are not the only Canadian WWI commemoration sites that exist in Europe. In fact, a full list of battlefield monuments dedicated to Canadian WWI troops can be found on the Government of Canada's official "Remembrance" website, which details a series of memorials situated in France and Belgium that are designed to commemorate the sacrifices of our fallen soldiers. These memorials notably include, but are not strictly limited to, the "Bourlon Wood Canadian Memorial", the "Courcelette Canadian Memorial", the "Dury Canadian Memorial", the "Hill 62 (Sanctuary Wood) Canadian Memorial", the "Le Quesnel Canadian Memorial" and the "Passchendaele Canadian Memorial" (VAC, 2025a: 1). Together, these grounds mark a consistent pattern of commemoration, with each having been chosen and deliberately marked by the Canadian government through the use of identical "granite blocks situated within reflective garden landscapes" (VAC, 2025a: 1).

Following suit in their commemorative practices, many Canadian provinces and territories have also established their *own* individual memorial sites within and across Europe. This is especially true in the case of Newfoundland and Labrador, who not having joined Canada until the 1949 confederation, has taken it upon itself to erect a wide array of monuments specifically dedicated to the men it lost during WWI. The most famous of these pieces is symbolically located in northern France, overlooking the rolling trenches in which the "Battle of Beaumont-Hamel" once claimed the lives of thousands of Newfoundland soldiers. Situated on a "16.5-hectare tract of preserved battleground" (Gough, 2004: 235), this site houses a variety of trees and plants native to Canada's most eastern province, including "white spruce, birch, dogberry and juniper" (Gough, 2004: 243). At its heart, resting on the base of a "raised stone cairn" (Gough, 2004: 242) and surrounded by a series of plaques depicting the names of 821 fallen men "with no known grave" (VAC, 2025b: Section 6), a large bronze caribou statue can be found gazing over the property, its head raised towards the sky in a symbolic image of both strength and defiance. Having served as the official emblem of the "Royal Newfoundland Regiment" for nearly 100 years, this caribou holds great historical significance. Centered as the focal point of five other battlefield memorials located in France, Belgium and Turkey, the bronze Caribou statues mark what is now known as "The Trail of the Caribou" (VAC, 2025b: Section 5), a series of memorial sites dedicated to the commemoration of bygone Newfoundland troops who once fought under the British Commonwealth.

Yet, recognizing the importance of establishing such tributes on the homefront, Canada has also moved to create various memorials and exhibitions within its *own* territorial borders dedicated to honouring the men it lost in WWI. For example, the *Canadian War Memorials Fund* particularly took initiative in putting together a meaningful exhibition "of war paintings and relics", including "photographs, war trophies, souvenirs … artillery pieces and aeroplanes" used by (or at the very least, reflective of) Canada's fallen soldiers (Lloyd, 1998: 147). First displayed in the year of 1919, this exhibition continues to be shown periodically in museums across both Toronto and Montreal (Lloyd, 1998: 147). Designed for similar purposes, the construction of "The Peace Tower" and "The National Memorial Chamber" in Ottawa serves as a further testament to the sacrifices made by Canada's WWI troops (Canadian War Museum, 2008: Section 1). Located at Parliament Hill, this site notably contains the official "First World War Book of Remembrance", a log of names commemorating the loss of more than 66,000 men who fought in WWI, including "all military personnel who died from 4 August 1914 to 31 April 1922" (Canadian War Museum, 2008: Section 1).

Figure 2. Victoria WWI Sea Vessel Memorial

Situated in the eastern city of Halifax, Nova Scotia, similar sites of commemoration have been produced to honour the lives of soldiers, sailors and nurses who died at sea during the Great War. Examples include the aptly titled "Halifax Memorial" and the "Halifax Fort Massey Memorial" (CWGC, 2022: Memorials in Canada), two areas containing large stone cross statues and a well-arranged collection of inscribed plaques/headstones dedicated to eternalizing the many casualties that befell Canada's naval fleet from 1914-1919. Following suit in this idea of honouring Canadian WWI soldiers and sailors who were lost at sea, the city of Victoria, Vancouver has erected a memorial located "within the grounds of the Ross Bay Cemetery" that pays homage to "the only Canadian war vessel lost at sea during World War One" (CWGC, 2022: Memorials in Canada). Simple, yet impactful in its design, this slab of granite bears the names of almost 40 mariners who died in the tragedy (CWGC, 2022: Memorials in Canada).

In total, research suggests that no fewer than 1,300 WWI memorials have been erected within and across Canada (Djebabla, 2023: 38). Of these, approximately 120 memorial sites and/or monuments are based in the province of Quebec (Djebabla, 2023: 38). Traversing the diverse cultures and ideologies of various communities, Canadian methods of commemoration thus span far and wide. Creating and maintaining an abundance of WWI grave sites and cemeteries designed to honour their dead, Canadian citizens have worked diligently to keep the names of their fallen brothers alive, no matter the cost. The physical, albeit temporary, erection of a "Cenotaph" outside the doors of Toronto's

City Hall in 1920 has consequently strengthened this movement, leading to the creation of numerous, like-structured memorial pieces across Canadian provinces in which large crowds of people visit once a year to leave flowers and wreaths (Lloyd, 1998: 149).

Building on the legacy of these tributes, Canada has also shown to adopt broader cultural traditions designed to commemorate the efforts of its fallen soldiers. For instance, borrowing from the British Legion, our government has officially adopted the "Poppy Campaign" (VAC, 2025d: 1), a federally recognized practice designed to honour the sacrifices made by our WWI veterans. Distributed each year in the form of small, wearable pins, poppies have consequently become "a symbol of mourning" over/for Canada's fallen troops (Brandt, 2017: 13), one that continues to be displayed each and every year during the month of November. Likewise, and in conjunction with various other countries and dominions who previously fought under the Allied Powers, Canada has also formally recognized a series of "commemorative events" designed to honour the lives of those who fought in WWI (VAC, 2025c: 1). As outlined by the official Veterans Affairs website, these notably include the national holidays of "Remembrance Day" on November 11th and "Vimy Ridge Day" on April 9th (2025c: 2).

Still more, from a local perspective research shows that many *small-scale* methods of commemorating WWI also manifest from coast to coast. In fact, in Canadian provinces like Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), it has even become custom to name large institutions, streets and/or sports groups in honour of specific troops like the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, a reality demonstrated through not only the title of the region's ruling University, but its at-home hockey team.

Perception & Impacts

Understanding the wide range of Canadian memorials, monuments and tributes that exist, it should come as no surprise that many of the aforementioned statues, exhibits and/or other forms of symbolic commemoration have been critiqued by the general public. Indeed, most (if not all) of these objects and sites have received some sort of negative backlash from their viewers, especially that of the Vimy Ridge monument located in northern France. Accused of perpetuating a solely "Christian view of the world" through not only its twin pylons, which were explicitly designed to represent white colonies, but the structure of its grieving woman statue, the Vimy Ridge monument notably excludes the lives of "First Nations Canadians" that fought there during WWI (Barrett, 2011: 313). This failure to honour Indigenous soldiers proves to be a huge gap, diminishing the monument's success and distorting the reality of what truly happened at the Battle of Vimy Ridge by erasing an entire population of men. Unfortunately, however, such injustice is mirrored throughout a plethora of memorials constructed within and across Britain's colonies (Barrett, 2011: 315), thus situating race and ethnicity as critical factors in shaping how the bodies of soldiers are respected and represented in the contemporary era. A closer analysis of the official Veterans Affairs website proves to strengthen this theme, with only one commemorative event being formally recognized by the Canadian government in honour of its fallen Indigenous troops — "Indigenous Veterans Day", which is held annually on the date of November 8th (2025c: 2).

Likewise, despite their involvement in the First World War, Japanese Canadians have also not "figured prominently in Canada's commemorative sites such as war memorials and cenotaphs, or in the paintings and other visual art representations produced by Canadian artists during and after the war" (Dick, 2010: 440). Notably, there is no statue or holiday specifically dedicated to the sacrifices they made defending the homefront. Their names are not inscribed on any plaques, and their likeness is not reflected through the means of mainstream visual artwork, leaving their legacies to consequently die on the battlefields in which they once took their final breath. Hence, it is easy to see that the image of WWI produced by these commemorative efforts (or lack thereof) is one that is largely flawed in the sense that it paints an increasingly simplified version of the war, excluding entire groups of soldiers that once critically contributed to the success of the Allied Powers.

Unfortunately, applying this lens of erasure to the examination of Canadian war cemeteries produces similarly gut-wrenching results. Indeed, it is evident that the wide array of headstones, inscriptions and plots of earth housed within and across these grave sites are strikingly limited in their representation of WWI and the lives it claimed. While many epitaphs contained therein fail to accurately encapsulate the legacy of the men to whom they are dedicated, blandly reinforcing the vague, time-worn descriptors of "Rest in peace", "Gone but not forgotten," and/or "Son of ... born in …" (McGeer, 2017: 59), others simply do not exist. In fact, research suggests that "of the 66,000 Canadians killed in the Great War, nearly 18,000 have no known grave" (McGeer, 2017: 59). Of those lucky enough to have been commemorated through an unoriginal base plaque or the marking of a cross, the number of inscriptions that offer personalized accounts and/or meaningful "insight into the minds of the bereaved" total about 3,000 (McGeer, 2017: 59). The result? Widespread physical and symbolic erasure of a plethora of WWI heroes, creating a commemorative imbalance that privileges a mere 5 per cent of Canada's war dead (McGeer, 2017: 59).

BRITANNIA, GUARD WELL IN PEACE OUR LOVED ONE'S RESTING PLACE.
Private George Albert Potts, 5th Battalion, November 25th 1917 (age 39)

LEST WE FORGET.
Private Cyril Charles Hill, 24th Battalion, April 30th 1916 (age 19)
Private Horace Hill, 24th Battalion, April 30th 1916 (age 22)

Figure 3. Generic Epitaph Examples

Figure 4. An array of identical CWGC headstones dedicated to fallen Canadian Soldiers

Despite the rather positive perception of modern Canadian artwork focused on themes of the Great War, it is additionally evident that many of the narratives our country has been perpetuating about WWI throughout the course of the past twenty-five years have become deeply entrenched with false images and/or myths created by those who never experienced it (Fussell, 2013: 348). Based on this reality, all forms of contemporary Canadian commemoration, including paintings, literature and memorials should be taken with a grain of salt. This is especially true in the case of more recently produced films, artwork, and poetry written and designed *in honour* of WWI veterans rather than *by* WWI veterans. Reinforcing inaccurate stories/accounts of the war, such tributes are strikingly misleading in structure. But what can be done to stop their influence on unknowing, susceptible viewers? With thousands of tourists a year travelling out of their way to visit sites like Vimy Ridge (Brandt, 2017: 13), there seems to be an overwhelming appreciation for these otherwise "flawed" monuments, as expressed through constant visitation of and appraisal towards their erection. Yet it is important to recognize that these tributes are only so "positively" perceived due to the strategic ways in which they glorify WWI through their shiny stone surfaces, intense watercolours and gold-trimmed plaques. In reality, their failure to accurately communicate the harsh reality of the First World War goes unmarked by the average viewer, thus resulting in the need for more historically-sound, community-aligned WWI memorials. Indeed, as explained through the work of scholar Jay Winter, Canada's larger, federal-based WWI monuments notably fall short of their goal to successfully commemorate the lives of our fallen troops, for it is only possible to honour such a tragedy through meaningful, "small-scale, locally rooted social action" that includes and considers *all* peoples and stories whom have contributed, in one way or another, to the collective memory of the Great War through their kinship and/or shared experiences (2006: 150).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is strikingly evident that contemporary methods of remembrance in Canada strategically glorify or "gloss over" the reality of the First World War. Indeed, manifesting across a variety of locations (including, but not limited to, France, Belgium, Turkey, Quebec, Ontario, and Newfoundland and Labrador), and through a variety of mediums (such as statues, paintings, headstones, plaques, holidays and decorative pins), Canada's way of honouring its fallen soldiers has shown to positively influence public perception of WWI, perhaps behind what is necessary and/or "truthful." Creating and promoting deliberately well-polished, tailor-made methods of remembrance, our country thus fails to accurately encapsulate and communicate the historical reality of the First World War. Recognizing this, viewers of these various monuments, memorials and symbols must therefore be careful in wholly accepting the messages that Canadian tributes perpetuate, taking time to reflect on what meaningful "remembrance" and "commemoration" truly entails for our country. Indeed, as demonstrated by this paper, the "perfect" and prideful image of war that Canada likes to strengthen through its diverse erection of statues, cenotaphs and/or other forms of artwork is notably and unfortunately flawed, leaving out the complex identities, sacrifices and emotions that many WWI soldiers embodied during their time in the trenches.

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Structural Litigation and Public Policy-making: Bill No. 3 of 2025

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Abstract

Bill No. 3 of 2025 is a proposed legislation responsible for setting the procedural aspects of structural litigation in Brazil. This type of litigation differs from ordinary causes due to their aim at resolving multifaceted claims via the restructuring of troubled institutions which, unable to efficiently provide services for the citizens and turn their rights into reality, often pose as the cause for many individual complaints. While at first, it may seem obvious that nipping the problem in the bud is better than just dealing with its undesirable consequences one by one, those problems often touch upon political problems that should be the object of discussion in political arenas rather than appreciation by unelected judicial bodies. In this paper, structural litigation is examined in the context of Bill No. 3 of 2025. It is proposed that these claims result in a type of policy-making by the Judiciary, which tips the scale on the separation of powers in their favour. The limits to which the Judicial Department can act in those scenarios are debated, and the non-adopting of the bill is defended in response to the inevitable exponential increase in judicial discretion in lieu of maintaining policy-making mostly at the Executive and Legislative powers, political by nature.

Keywords: Structural Litigation, Brazil, Bill No. 3, Public Policy

Introduction

Bill No. 3 of 2025 projects itself as a roadmap for structural litigation in Brazil. In its essence, it constitutes a legally imposed and legitimized procedure for restructuring flawed institutions through structural litigation, viewed as a judicial solution to antique and complex problems. Nevertheless, putting crucial aspects of policy-making in the Judicial Department's hands may not be the best solution, as it threatens checks and balances between branches of power.

Scarred by colonization and built over sexist and racist structures, Brazil's institutions are a reflection of the nation's past. Since 1988, the year that marked the end of a military dictatorship and the promulgation of the present Constitution, many fundamental rights have been granted to Brazilian citizens. To fulfil those promises, countless public policies were enacted, and bureaucratic institutions were created to implement those choices. A public and universal healthcare system, looked upon by many other countries, and top-tier tuition-fee-free federal universities are just some prominent examples. However, those initiatives are not enough to make constitutional rights a reality for most people, and Brazilians still face medicine shortages, with 7% of the country's population illiterate (IBGE, 2022a). As a result, many citizens resort to judicial remedies to enforce their rights.

Concerning judicial litigation, there are two main types of claims to which individuals can resort: a singular lawsuit, suitable for targeting a specific demand, or a collective one, in which certain agents within society can file a claim on behalf of different people or interest groups. In both scenarios, a specific, concrete situation is addressed, and the solution entails changing the negative outcomes of the *status quo*.

Nevertheless, many of those problems emerge from structural deficiencies that date back centuries, and treating their consequences case by case will never prevent them from happening again to other individuals or groups. In light of this, the concept of structural injunctions was carved. In those cases, the judiciary is not merely acting on a concrete cause, regardless of the number of interested individuals, but rather is supervising institutions to correct long-term deficiencies and, effectively, making public policy.

Recently, this model has been implemented in Brazil. Bill No. 3 of 2025, currently in Congress, establishes the parameters for structural litigation (Brasil, 2025a). The text emphasizes the procedure's flexibility and the need to construct, implement, and supervise an action plan. There is no linear procedure; rather, the lawsuit is finalized as the plan is put into action satisfactorily.

However, the proposed model for structural injunctions disregards the separation of powers, enabling the judiciary to further control the lawfully exercised discretion of the elected legislative and executive, and to challenge the constitutional limits of the democratic legitimacy of their actions. Besides that, it enhances litigation by bringing to judges discussions earlier (and better) occurred in the political field.

In this paper, structural litigation will be defined, along with its origins — both national and international. Further on, Bill No. 3 of 2025's content will be analyzed, as to whether it actually reflects the procedural standards for structural litigation, and if it does indeed constitute policy-making. Finally, the paper assesses the procedure's compatibility with the rule of law and constitutional values, ultimately arguing for or against its adoption.

Structural Problems, Structural Litigation, and Structural Injunctions

First, it is important to characterize and differentiate structural problems, structural litigation and structural injunctions. Structural problem is a term that describes a continuous and permanent state of structural disorganization and non-conformity with the rule of law, with illicit implications (Didier Jr and Zaneti Jr, 2020). Rather than an individual issue or even a collection of unitary concerns, it is a collective problem intrinsically tied to malfunctioning and/or harmful institutions, understood not only as formal organizational branches of the government, but also as private entities that either have a major public interest or are essential to the functioning of society (Vitorelli, 2018).

In turn, structural litigation refers to any judicial dispute that aims to resolve a structural problem by restructuring a bureaucratic structure or the institution regarded as the root of said problem (Vitorelli, 2018). Instead of treating the inevitable individual or collective consequences of the issue, concretely deduced before the court, its cause is resolved, since it is assumed that the threat or harm posed by those bureaucratic organizations to the effectiveness of constitutional rights cannot be eliminated but with the reform of those institutions (Didier Jr and Zaneti Jr, 2020). Thus, they differ from ordinary judicial remedies precisely because the whole institutional structure is object of ruling, not only what meets the eye in the form of a right violation.

As an example for better understanding, it is useful to address a concrete situation where both a singular or a structural claim could emerge: reiterated medicine shortages on public healthcare. When a citizen needs to obtain a certain medication ordinarily distributed though public healthcare that, for some reason, should be but is not available, they will resort to judicial measures. Before the court, the plaintiff can deduce why they believe the medication should be given to them, as well as prove that their request has been denied. If pertinent, as a cause of action, they can also deem inapplicable or simply invalid (unconstitutional) a norm that prevents them from accessing this specific medicine.

When ruling, if the court grants the request, it may order the public healthcare system, or even certain agencies or agents within, to provide the claimant with the medication. It can also declare the relevant norm unconstitutional, purging it from the legal system, and, based on that, accept the plaintiff's claim.

However, in this type of demand, the Judicial Department will not inquire the administrative reasons why the shortage occurred, let alone directly order the government to reform the distribution system to prevent others from being similarly affected. No case alike of medicine shortages will be addressed *ex officio* just because they represent a similar narrative which falls under the same rationale. There goes public policy and the management of administrative structures operating under budgetary constraints.

Those issues may appear on the reasoning of the decision, but they will make no more than an *obiter dictum*, a judge's pronouncement or opinion not necessary for the conclusion adopted and, therefore, with no binding nature (Peixoto, 2025). The result, as such, is only to compel the healthcare system to supply the claimant with the medicine (however it may happen internally), based on the right they have to it or on the inapplicability or unconstitutionality of the norm that was preventing them from accessing it.

Even if there was a larger problem, which affected many citizens, a class action could be proposed by legal representatives to ensure enough medicine in a certain distribution center or at all. Still in this scenario, there would be a concrete situation deduced (one with many interested parts, true), and the judiciary could condemn the healthcare system to provide the medication and make it available for all, but not decide upon how to internally restructure the system to make that happen.

Nevertheless, if it was a structural litigation, the reasoning and the result would be intrinsically different. The claim would not be to specifically provide the medication, but to restructure the system in order to prevent unlawful shortages in general. Consequently, the ruling would encompass identifying deficiencies and direct orders on how to manage and resolve them — an arguably political decision, thus potentially leading to judicial activism.

This type of litigation has its own attributes, some of which are essential to its characterization as structural. Those are (i) to target a structural problem, (ii) to aim the implementation of an ideal state of things through the restructuring of an institution, substituting the disconformity state that characterizes the structural problem, and to have (iii) a dual-phase procedure (problem identification and solution implementation), (iv) a flexible course, and (v) an emphasized negotiated character (Didier Jr and Zaneti Jr, 2020). It is usually multipolar, collective, and complex (Dos Santos, 2021).

Finally, structural injunctions are judicial decisions arising from structural litigation that impose obligations to implement structural reform within an institution to resolve the previously identified structural problem (Didier Jr and Zaneti Jr, 2020; Dos Santos, 2021).

Structural litigation in Brazilian history

The leading case of structural litigation worldwide is Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (I and II), decided upon by the United States Supreme Court in 1954 and 1955. It involved racial segregation in a public school in Topeka, Kansas, and led to a decision that restructured the whole country's educational system. While Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka I considered that state laws establishing racial segregation in public schools were unconstitutional because they violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (US Supreme Court, 1954), Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka II further developed this idea setting forth the procedure courts nationwide should follow to effectively carry out desegregation (US Supreme Court, 1955).

The distinct character of this decision, which makes it structural, lies precisely on the second ruling. A nation's Judicial Department's duty is "to say what the law is", as those "who apply the rule to particular cases must, of necessity, expound and interpret the rule" (US Supreme Court, 1803). However, they do so by analyzing and deciding a singular case, concretely deduced before the court, regardless if it includes one or many plaintiffs or defendants. As a result, binding is only the norm resulting from such ruling, applicable to a concrete and well-defined situation, plus the reasons used to do so, which create a precedent that, unless later overruled, should apply to all similar cases thenceforth decided upon by lower courts.

In Brazil, it is no different. Whilst no illicit act nor unlawful and harmful conduct will be deprived of judicial analysis (article 5, section XXXV, Brasil, 1988), the jurisdictional function is exercised on demand and on the strict limits of the plaintiff's claim (article 492, Brasil, 2002). Also, the courts shall interpret and apply the law, but binding is only the result for the parties involved (articles 502 and 504, Brasil, 2015) and, under certain circumstances, the interpretation given to the norm. Yet, the administrative structure of the country's institutions is not directly addressed by the judiciary, whose concerns lie merely on the concrete consequences of the action of said institutions which may constitute a violation of rights.

In Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka I, a concrete ruling was made. The judicial precedent that stated the "separate but equal" doctrine was overruled due to its now declared unconstitutionality, as were all other norms with the same rationale. Bown's particular right to attend a nonsegregated school in the public system was acknowledged.

However, in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka II, there was not merely the decision of a case concrete and singularly deduced before a court or the interpretation and validity of a law. There were clear instructions for the restructuring of the system, including guidelines for inferior courts on how to deal with transition on the desegregation and weigh in public and private interests.

The difference from ordinary litigation, even class action, to structural in this case is precisely the direct order to effect change based on set directions and constant supervision. Schools all over the United States were forced to abolish segregation and adapt to the new reality, not because of the unconstitutionality of the norm that caused segregation (which would naturally cause administration to review its course of action on conducting the public educational system), but rather due to a direct judicial command that went as far as to prescribe guidelines on how to do so. About the decision, the Moton School Story - Children of Courage Exibition (tied to the Moton Museum, n.d.) observes:

In this decision, the Court directed federal district courts to supervise the desegregation process in each affected community. These local courts were told to oversee changes in school systems and to ensure that desegregation proceeded "with all deliberate speed." The Court chose this deliberately cautious phrase as a compromise to account for local complexities, political resistance, and logistical concerns, especially in Southern states. [emphasis added]

Judicial precedents may cause significant change in a country's institution as an aftermath, specially those provenient from the Supreme Court. Nevertheless, its newness and structural character is attributed to the ability of directly, and not consequently, restructuring an entire institution — despite the questionable administrative character of the decision, rather than merely limited to judicial functions.

Seeing the impacts and consequences of such rulings and because of the way they handled a single case by means of changing an entire system, the idea of structural litigation — and, therefore, structural injunctions — was carved, improved and spread worldwide. In Brazil, inspired by this decision, as well as by other nations' experience and academic debate over the matter, the interest on regulating and effectively using structural litigation as a form of restructuring the country's flawed institutions grew in recent years.

In 2014, Bill No. 8.058 was presented in the House of Representatives. It was probably the most successful attempt to establish a judicial procedure to address complex issues and intervene in public policy before Bill No. 3 (Vitorelli, 2018), and it illustrated that the topic was already a matter of public concern. However, the bill did not move forward, and the processing was last updated in 2018. This can be attributed to the particular circumstances of the time, when individuals were unsure of the proper extent of judicial control over the executive, as proved by the concerns of some mayors during a public audience discussing the bill (Palmieri, 2015).

Over the last few years, though, the Brazilian judiciary has been granted greater autonomy to act, and the well-defined legal boundaries on judicial discretion have been flexibilized in the name of morality and a subjective form of justice (Faria, 2025). Stable and rational juridic techniques have been replaced by open concepts, filled by the beliefs of whoever gets a say on the matter (Berizonce, 2010). This is a movement based on juridical populism in Brazil (Martins-Costa, 2025), whose most prominent example is the Bill No. 4 (Brasil, 2025b) — a bill already being processed in the Senate that proposes a major reform of Brazil's Civil Code. The proposed legislation includes provisions that expand judges' discretion, exemplified by Article 927-B, which allows magistrates to determine the existence of strict liability for monetary compensation based on their own personal expertise.

In light of this, a policy window opened. A policy window, or opportunity for advocates of proposals to draw attention to their preferred public policy initiatives and push them into the government's agenda, is driven by changes in the political stream (i. e. in ideology, Congress composition, or government administration) or in the problem stream (i. e. how the problems are perceived in society, especially regarding current facts and circumstances) (Kingdon, 1984). As society is currently inclined toward juridical populism and individuals prefer the judiciary to reflect standards of justice rather than pure technical impartiality, an opportunity arose to adopt policies that allow greater judicial discretion and more open tools to resolve complex, highly political problems.

Along with this political stream shift, advocates of regulating structural injunctions were able to pair existing — and nowhere near new — social problems with the policy they wanted the government to decide on, pushing it onto the agenda during this window. Particular attention is paid to certain agents who can be categorized as policy entrepreneurs.

Kingdon (1984) defines policy entrepreneurs as "advocates who are willing to invest their resources - time, energy, reputation, money - to promote a position in return for anticipated future gain in the form of material, purposive, or solidary benefits" (Ibid.: 188). They are responsible for coupling problems to solutions in a favourable political environment, taking advantage of policy windows to materialize their preferred outcomes. Additionally, they are recognized for their persistence, political connections, and ability to be heard due to their expertise, leadership, or decision-making positions (Ibid.: 189-90). Regarding Bill No. 3

of 2025 (Brasil, 2025a), Edilson Vitorelli can be appointed as a key policy entrepreneur.

Responsible for aligning the problem and policy streams, he was the rapporteur for the Bill presented, and possesses all three key essential qualities of an entrepreneur. He is persistent; over the last eight years, he has written over 10 papers on the topic, including a book, now in its 6th edition (Vitorelli, 2025). He has political connections, as he is an ex-prosecutor and, now, a federal judge. Lastly, Edilson Vitorelli holds a PhD in Law from a renowned university in Brazil and is a visiting professor at Stanford Law School, which grants him a claim to a hearing, as he can represent jurists with propriety and ease.

Once those concerns made it onto the agenda, a jurist's commission was swiftly created in the Senate to draft a piece of procedural legislation for structural litigation. Within this committee, it is worth noting the role of an advocacy coalition, which accounted for such a rapidly conceived project — the commission was created in April 2024, and the project was ready less than seven months later. Out of the 22 people that were part of the committee — including prosecutors (not to mention the ex-Prosecutor General of the Republic), magistrates, judges, attorneys, a public servant on the Supreme Court, and a public defender —, 13 are insiders to the government and tied to the judiciary, being therefore interested in its expansion.

On February 4th, 2025, Bill No. 3 of 2025 (Brasil, 2025a) was officially published in the Senate's Diary, marking the beginning of its legislative process, and the context outlined above indicates that the bill is nothing but a result of the proactive engagement of key actors operating within a particularly favourable set of circumstances.

Bill No. 3 of 2025, Structural Litigation and the Policy-Cycle

Moving to the proposed legislation itself, it can be divided into three parts. First, Articles 1 through 4 give a general overview of the procedure. Overall principles and competence are stated, and the term 'structural problem' is defined. In turn, Articles 5 to 12 define the procedural aspects of the litigation, while Articles 13 to 16 are final dispositions, such as other situations in which the legislation may apply and the bill's initial validity date.

In short, the established procedure is as follows: (i) the author files a claim, in which moment they can inform the structural nature of the litigation (Brasil, 2025a: Article 5); (ii) the defendant is notified to respond, opportunity in which they can also address the presence of structural character or lack thereof (Brasil, 2025a: Article 5, §2º); (iii) the dispute is recognized as a structural one, either by judicial ruling or by consensus between the parties (Brasil, 2025a: Article 6); (iv) the judge refers the parties to the drafting of a detailed step-by-step plan to resolve the issue, concerned at all times with actively hearing any interest groups (Brasil, 2025a: Article 9); (v) the plan implementation is constantly supervised, and the draft is revised if necessary (Brasil, 2025a: Articles 9, §4º, and 11); and (iv) the dispute ends whenever proven that the proper measures to ensure protection of the violated rights have been adopted (Brasil, 2025a: Article 11).

All characteristics identified by academics as determinants for a structural litigation to be characterized as such are present in the bill. Flexibility and consensuality are indeed stated as principles of structural litigation in Article 2, clauses I, III, VII, and X. Also, there are two distinct phases in the procedure: (i) the recognition of the structural character of the problem, which can be either by judicial ruling or by consensual agreement as per Articles 5 to 7, and (ii) the elaboration and constant rewriting of a plan to restructure the faulty institution and resolve the issue, as per Articles 9 and 11.

Most importantly, it is structured to mimic the policy cycle, underlining the idea that structural litigation encompasses political decisions and is a form of policy-making by the judiciary. The policy cycle is a methodological tool used for the study of public policy that simplifies the utterly complex policy-making process, dividing it into five steps: agenda setting (choice of which concerns will effectively become problems and be addressed by the decision-makers), policy formulation (proposal of solutions that address the raised problem), decision making (choice of a course of action by an authoritative body), policy implementation (putting solutions into effect), and monitoring and evaluating (process of information and redesign) (Howlett et al., 2009).

When a claim is filed, the problem to be addressed by the authoritative actors is delimited, representing the entering of a concern into the official governmental agenda. Drafting a plan is similar to policy formulation, while the formal approval of the plan by the judiciary is comparable to the decision-making process of authoritative government bodies. The issue of mandatory decisions to fulfill the plan and the performance of such decisions, whether voluntary or enforced, represents policy implementation. Lastly, the constant monitoring and evaluation of the plan and of whether the objectives are being achieved are consistent with the last phase of the policy cycle, as the judicial procedure is finalized only once the judiciary has determined that the objectives are satisfied.

It is worth noting that the policy cycle, being just a methodological tool, in reality exceeds merely input and output stages, extending to monitoring and evaluative activities after outcomes have materialized (Ibid.: 9). As pointed out by deLeon (1992), "policy design represents more than just a product or a new policy. It is a continuous process of both information and action by which policies are proposed and adjusted." (Ibid.: 400). This overlap of steps in actual policy-making is also mimicked in the designed structural injunctions. Under Bill No. 3 of 2025, there is expressly provided for constant monitoring and evaluation, and the plan must be adjusted to reflect those results to best achieve the desired outcome and to correctly and satisfactorily restructure the faulty institution.

Taking policy-making out of the Executive's hands leads to an inversion of constitutionally defined roles. In this context, the Judiciary may become responsible for functions that are essentially administrative in nature, blurring the boundaries between branches of government and creating uncertainty on who is indeed the legitimized actor for inherently political decisions.

Judiciary as the new public policy-maker and the boundaries of judicial discretion

The doctrine of separation of powers, earlier defended by Montesquieu (1748 (2001)), suggests that, in order to safeguard individual liberties and protect against tyranny, the main functions of the state — to produce laws, carry on a determined project of state action, and judge illicit behaviour — must be attributed to different individuals (Benwell and Gay, 2011). Otherwise, "apprehensions may arise, lest the same monarch or senate should enact tyrannical laws, to execute them in a tyrannical manner (...) the life and liberty of the subject would be exposed to arbitrary control (...) (and) the judge might behave with violence and oppression." (Montesquieu, 1748 (2001): 173).

In Brazil, the separation of powers is a constitutional provision contained in an entrenchment clause (Brasil, 1988: Article 60, § 4º). The Legislative, Executive, and Judiciary are recognized as independent institutions (Brasil, 1988: Article 2), with their own attributions and financial autonomy, and are mainly responsible respectively for law formulation, administrative functions, and law enforcement. As such, a project of statal action is designed, implemented, and — if necessary — coercively imposed.

To choose a course of action is to make public policy, and public policy is a key aspect of state administration. To use Thomas Dye's classical definition, public policy is "anything a government chooses to do or not to do" (Dye, 1972 apud Howlett et al., 2009). As a result, it is carried out primarily by the Executive and the Legislative (Berizonce, 2010), legitimate representatives of the people, as staffed by elections, and responsible for general administrative functions. Only exceptionally, when there is a dysfunction in the normal state of things and the Executive and Legislative fail to adopt the necessary measures to materialize fundamental rights, the judiciary is allowed to design public policy (ADPF No. 45, 2004; Zaneti Jr., 2013).

This is justified by the fact that in a democratic country, the choices made by the government — however political or ideological they might be — must be a direct representation of the people's will. This will is manifested indirectly, as the citizens elect those who compose the government, notably the executive and the legislative powers, who, in turn, are responsible for making the decisions, being the main actors in the decision-making phase of the policy-making process. The judiciary, on the contrary, has a countermajoritarian character, exercising a "guarantee function" (Zaneti Jr, 2013) — that is, it does not act in the name of the prevailing group, but precisely against it to preserve the constitutional rights of the oppressed minority (Berizonce, 2010).

When the subject is structural litigation, notably as set out in Bill No. 3, maintaining policy-making primarily in the Executive's and the Legislative's hands becomes an obstacle. As already mentioned, this type of litigation represents judicial control over public policy and effectively gives the judiciary design tools and decision-making power in policy-making. It inverts the logic of administration and control, government and guarantee functions. Instead of interpreting the norm and applying it, or addressing the conformity of an organization's outputs with the rights that they are supposed to guarantee, the judges would be ruling on the institution's internal proceedings to conform it to their liking.

Once the judiciary is staffed not by elections but by public competition, the institution's legitimacy is jeopardized. Judges are to have certain prerogatives particular to regularly elected politicians, such as decisions on funding. The government has a limited amount of resources, meaning that it cannot materialize all rights to their maximum extent at the same time, and strategic decisions on what to prioritize are ultimately political — and, therefore, must not come from the judiciary, which is not responsible for proposing or approving the government's budget (prerrogatives from the Executive and the Legislative, respectively (Brasil, 1988: Articles 48, II and 84, XXIII)).

In response to this concern, Fiss (2008) alleges that the democratic legitimacy of structural injunctions derives "from the unique competence of the judiciary, guided by the strictures of public reason, to give concrete meaning to our constitutional values" (Ibid.: 767). Further, Zaneti Jr. (2013) argues that the legislative omission transfers to judges the responsibility for designing public policy, and, as constitutionally guaranteed rights are not conditioned on efficacy and are immediately juridicizable, there is space for judicial activism. The legitimacy to do so derives from the constitution itself, along with the necessary provocation by the plaintiff.

However, even though the judiciary cannot omit itself from safeguarding fundamental rights (Brasil, 1988: Article 5, XXXV), it must not be put in the position of the main decision-maker regarding major administrative decisions. An institution designed to cushion democracy from abuse by administrators cannot become the main administrator itself. After all, "the Judiciary does not have the task of designing public policies, but rather of confronting the design of adopted policies with the applicable legal standards and — in the event of discrepancies — referring the issue to the competent authorities." (Berizonce, 2010: 73-74). Yet, if unelected judges, who may be beholden to powerful interest groups, can just take the lead on policy decision-making, then those rights of the minority become optional and not rights at all.

Also, although it is provoked by an individual or group, the scope and consequences of a structural litigation are so broad that it is not possible to properly delimit the issue, an essential characteristic of judicial demands. As already mentioned, the judiciary only acts when provoked, and exactly on the limits of such provocation. If it is not possible to precisely define the controversy and the claim, the principle of acting solely on demand in a specific, concrete situation is compromised.

Moreover, this raises concerns about the limits of judicial action. Administrative discretion can be defined as the faculty that the law attributes to public administrators to appreciate the case at hand, according to opportunity and convenience, and to choose between two or more courses of action, both equally as valid (Di Pietro, 2012). Limited by the principles of legality and need for reason and motivation, it constitutes a barrier to judicial appreciation.

However, the judiciary has already been given the prerogative of intervening in administrative decisions, being it by interpreting open legal concepts, or by virtue of the constitutionalization of administrative law — the assumption that constitutional values have a minimum binding effect, deriving directly from the Constitution, enforceable regardless of suplementar legislation or administrative acts, and therefore guaranteed directly by judicial decisions (Di Pietro, 2012). This is exemplified by the binding legal precedent No. 665, from Brazil's Superior Court of Justice (Brasil, 2023), which allowed judges to interfere with administrative discretion so long as there is manifest disproportionality in the sanction administratively imposed.

By enabling formal policymaking and correction upfront, structural litigation tips the scales in each power's ability to fiscalize the other. Too much power is concentrated in the judiciary, and the checks-and-balances doctrine is unable to function properly and prevent abuses.

Lastly, it enhances litigation by bringing to judges discussions previously — and better — had in political arenas, increasing litigiousness and diminishing alternative conflict-resolution methods. This is particularly problematic for Brazil due to its slow, overloaded, and bureaucratic judiciary (there are 76 million lawsuits in progress as of July 2025 (CNJ, 2025), compared to a population of just over 200 million people (IBGE, 2022b)), which gets even more clogged and increase the difficulty for people in need to access the judiciary and materialize their rights.

Conclusion

Guardians of the law, the judiciary cannot turn a blind eye to the ongoing violation of fundamental rights. It is their duty to give concrete meaning to poetic constitutional promises and to serve as the primary barrier against the abuse of power. Judicial intervention in public policy is not new. Interference in administrative discretion has been around for quite some time, and the barrier of judicial action is obscure, as represented by the term "manifest disproportionality" mentioned above.

However, formalizing a direct channel for intervention legitimates the unadvised actions of judges in duties that are supposed to be performed by elected politicians. It is to put them in a position of the primary actors for administration functions, which is inadequate given that there are alternative coercive mechanisms for judges to use in response to the other power's omissions. In those terms, passing a bill that enables the judiciary to be the decision-maker in public policy is not only illegitimate but also does not correspond to the project of a democratic state being built.

As such, the bill should not be adopted. It is but the result of a carefully orchestrated political movement that seized a policy window, whose consequences are so severe for the fragile and delicate balance among the branches of government that may ultimately undermine the effectiveness of the constitutional promise itself.

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Colonial Legacies and the Politics of Skin Tone: Colourism, Whiteness and Postcolonial Feminist Resistance in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This paper examines colourism in Bangladesh as a socially and historically produced form of inequality that is deeply tied to both colonial and gendered systems of power. While hierarchies of skin tone existed in the region prior to European intervention, British colonial rule intensified and reshaped these distinctions by linking lighter skin to whiteness, modernity and social value. In doing so, colourism became more than a cultural preference and evolved into a structural condition that continues to shape how bodies are valued, particularly those of women. Focusing on Bangladesh as a case study, this paper explores how these colonial legacies are reproduced in contemporary society through everyday practices and institutions, including the widespread use of skin-lightening products, discriminatory norms in marriage and employment and the internalization of beauty standards that privilege fairness. These dynamics are examined through a qualitative discourse analysis of academic literature, media and cultural narratives and personal accounts, treating these sources as forms of cultural data. At the same time, the paper engages with postcolonial feminist perspectives to highlight emerging forms of resistance that challenge dominant beauty ideals and create space for alternative representations of brown and dark skin. By situating colourism within broader structures of power, identity and lived experience, this study moves beyond simplified explanations and instead offers a more nuanced and critical understanding of how colonial legacies continue to shape gendered experiences of beauty, value and belonging in contemporary Bangladesh.

Keywords: Colourism, Colonialism, Whiteness, Bangladesh, Postcolonial Feminism, Media Representation

Introduction

Colonialism is often understood as a system of political and economic domination, but its effects extend far beyond formal rule. It continues to shape how identity, value and belonging are understood within everyday life, operating through social norms, institutional structures and cultural expectations. In South Asia, one of the most enduring legacies of British colonial rule is the persistence of colourism, where lighter skin is associated with beauty, success and social mobility, while darker skin is marginalized. Although preferences for lighter skin existed prior to colonization, British rule significantly intensified and reshaped these distinctions by linking lighter skin to whiteness, modernity and broader structures of racial hierarchy (Wolpert, 2024; Kullrich, 2022, pp. 59, 80). In doing so, colonialism did not simply impose new ideals but reorganized existing social hierarchies in ways that continue to influence how bodies are valued. In this context, skin tone became more than a physical attribute. It functioned as a social marker, where proximity to lighter skin came to reflect proximity to power, privilege and opportunity. This shows how ideas about skin tone are tied to deeper systems of power in which value is distributed through racialized hierarchies tied to colonial and postcolonial power structures. In this sense, colourism can be understood as part of a broader system of racialized power that continues to structure social, economic and symbolic hierarchies.

Postcolonial and feminist scholarship helps to frame this process as more than a cultural preference. Frantz Fanon (1967) argues that colonial systems produce internalized hierarchies, where proximity to whiteness becomes associated with worth and desirability. Similarly, Sara Ahmed (2007) explains how whiteness operates as an invisible norm that shapes everyday spaces, influencing who is seen as acceptable, desirable and successful. These perspectives highlight how colonial power persists beyond formal rule, shaping not only institutions but also perceptions of beauty, identity and belonging. Within this framework, colourism can be understood as a historically produced and socially sustained structure of inequality that intersects with gendered expectations, where women's bodies often become key sites of evaluation and control.

While these dynamics unfolded across South Asia, their effects are not uniform. Treating the region as a homogeneous cultural space risks overlooking the specific ways in which colonial legacies are experienced and reproduced in different contexts. This paper therefore focuses on Bangladesh as a primary site of analysis, where colourism continues to shape social and cultural life in distinct ways. In Bangladesh, fairness remains closely tied to ideas of beauty, marriageability and social status, disproportionately affecting women and reinforcing gendered forms of discrimination (Jensen, 2020; Nambiar, 2023). These norms are not only maintained through institutions and economic structures but are also reproduced through every day cultural narratives, including media, advertising and storytelling traditions, which normalize associations between fairness, desirability and success.

This paper examines how colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary experiences of colourism in Bangladesh, particularly in relation to gender, social positioning and access to opportunities. It asks how colonialism restructured colour-based hierarchies, how these hierarchies operate within present-day Bangladeshi society and how postcolonial feminist movements are working to challenge and redefine dominant beauty standards. Drawing on a qualitative discourse analysis of academic literature, media and cultural narratives and personal accounts, this study treats these sources as forms of cultural data to explore how colourism is both reproduced and contested. By bringing together structural analysis and lived experience, the paper seeks to offer a more nuanced understanding of how colonial histories continue to shape beauty, value and belonging in contemporary Bangladesh.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach to examine how colourism is produced, reproduced and challenged within Bangladeshi society. Instead of measuring colourism through numbers, this study focuses on how it is expressed through language, representation and lived experience. For this reason, the paper uses a qualitative discourse analysis to explore how colourism operates across different social and cultural contexts.

The analysis draws on a combination of academic literature, media representations and personal narratives. Academic sources provide the historical and structural grounding for understanding colourism, particularly in relation to colonialism, whiteness and gender. At the same time, media texts such as advertisements, popular culture and storytelling traditions are treated as cultural sites where colour-based hierarchies are both reflected and reinforced. Personal narratives, including blogs and online testimonies, are also included as they offer insight into how individuals experience and make sense of colourism in their everyday lives. These sources are not used simply as illustrative examples but are analyzed as forms of cultural data that reveal broader social patterns and meanings. While these sources are analyzed together, this study recognizes that academic literature and non-peer-reviewed sources carry different levels of authority, with scholarly work forming the primary analytical foundation while media and personal narratives are used to illustrate and contextualize lived experiences rather than to establish theoretical claims.

This paper engages with a range of sources, including scholarship and narratives by women of colour; however, limitations in available literature on Bangladesh-specific colourism reflect broader gaps within academic production.

By bringing together these different types of sources, this approach allows for a more layered understanding of colourism as both a structural and lived phenomenon. It also makes it possible to examine how dominant narratives around fairness are maintained, as well as how they are questioned and resisted within contemporary discourse. At the same time, this study acknowledges its limitations. As it relies on secondary sources and publicly available narratives, it may not capture the full diversity of experiences across different regions, classes and communities within Bangladesh. However, the aim of this paper is not to provide a comprehensive representation of all experiences, but to critically analyze the patterns, meanings and power structures that shape how colourism is understood and sustained.

Colonial Foundations of Colourism

Colour-based distinctions in South Asia did not begin with European colonization. Social hierarchies tied to caste, class and labor had already shaped perceptions of skin tone, where lighter skin was often associated with higher social standing. However, these distinctions were not uniform or rigidly structured across the region and operated within localized cultural contexts rather than a formalized racial hierarchy.

British colonial rule significantly altered these dynamics. Following the consolidation of power after 1858, colonial governance introduced new political, economic and social structures rooted in a framework that privileged lighter skin as a marker of status and advancement (Kullrich, 2022, pp. 59, 80). British colonial rule operated within a broader global system that constructed whiteness as inherently superior and entitled to power. Rather than creating hierarchies from nothing, colonialism intensified and racialized existing social distinctions, embedding them within a broader system structured around whiteness.

This process can be further understood through theoretical frameworks that conceptualize whiteness as a system of power rather than merely a cultural preference. Charles W. Mills (1997) argues that modern societies are structured through a "racial contract," in which political, social and economic systems are organized to privilege those considered white. In this framework, racial hierarchy is not incidental but foundational, shaping who is granted full status, rights and recognition. Similarly, Aníbal Quijano (2000) describes the "coloniality of power" as a lasting structure in which colonial forms of racial classification continue to organize global and local hierarchies. Within this system, whiteness becomes a benchmark of value, authority and modernity, while darker bodies are positioned as inferior.

This shift extended beyond governance into everyday social life. Skin tone became increasingly tied to ideas of aspiration and success, where proximity to lighter skin came to reflect proximity to power. These associations were gradually internalized within society, shaping how individuals understood beauty, value and social mobility. As Kullrich (2022) argues, colonial racial logics not only reinforced earlier caste-based distinctions but also redefined them through a more rigid and visible hierarchy linked to whiteness and desirability (p. 92).

While these transformations occurred across South Asia, their effects were not uniform. In what is now Bangladesh, colonial legacies became embedded within specific cultural and social contexts, interacting with local norms and practices. As a result, colourism in Bangladesh cannot be understood solely as a continuation of pre-existing traditions or as a direct imposition of colonial ideology. Instead, it reflects a layered process in which colonial structures amplified and reshaped existing biases, producing more entrenched forms of inequality that continue to influence social life.

This perspective is important because it moves beyond simplified explanations of colourism. Rather than viewing it as either purely cultural or entirely colonial, it highlights how systems of power operate through reinforcement and adaptation. Colonialism did not act in isolation, but it played a crucial role in shaping the meanings attached to skin tone, linking them to broader hierarchies that continue to affect how identity, value and belonging are experienced in Bangladesh today.

Colourism in Contemporary Bangladesh

Colourism in Bangladesh today reflects a complex continuation of historical hierarchies, shaped by colonial legacies but sustained through contemporary social, cultural and economic practices. It is not simply a remnant of the past, but an active and evolving system that intersects with patriarchy, class and globalization. As Kullrich (2022) argues, colourism in South Asia has become deeply embedded within everyday life, where lighter skin is consistently associated with beauty, success and social mobility (pp. 17, 104).

In Bangladesh, these associations are particularly visible in the ways fairness is tied to social value, especially for women. Skin tone continues to influence how individuals are perceived in both personal and public spaces, often shaping opportunities related to marriage, employment and social acceptance. Jensen (2020) highlights how colour-based preferences are normalized within Bangladeshi society, where lighter skin is often treated as a desirable and expected trait, while darker skin is viewed as a disadvantage. These biases are not always openly acknowledged as discrimination but instead operate as accepted social norms that influence everyday decision-making and interactions.

From a feminist perspective, this normalization reflects how women's bodies become central sites where social expectations are enforced. The pressure to conform to light skin ideals is not only about beauty but also about meeting broader expectations of femininity, desirability and respectability. Women with darker skin tones often face disproportionate scrutiny, where their worth is evaluated through appearance rather than capability or character (Nambiar, 2023). This dynamic highlights how colourism operates not only as a racialized system but also as a gendered one, reinforcing unequal power relations within society.

These norms are further reproduced through cultural and media representations that consistently privilege lighter skin. In both local and global media, lighter-skinned individuals are more prominently featured and associated with success and attractiveness, reinforcing the perception that fairness is a requirement for social advancement (Kullrich, 2022, pp. 104, 164). This pattern is not incidental but reflects a broader system in which visibility and desirability are closely tied to skin tone. As a result, colourism becomes normalized through repeated exposure, shaping perceptions from an early age and embedding itself within everyday cultural narratives.

At the same time, the contemporary landscape of colourism in Bangladesh is also shaped by economic forces, particularly through the expansion of the beauty industry. Skin-lightening products are marketed as tools for self-improvement and social mobility, often targeting women by linking fair skin to confidence, success and acceptance (Kullrich, 2022, pp. 116, 135). As Fatemaa (2023) critiques, the beauty industry capitalizes on deeply rooted insecurities, promoting products that promise transformation while reinforcing the idea that darker skin is something that must be corrected. These marketing strategies do not merely respond to existing preferences but actively reproduce and intensify them.

Together, these dynamics demonstrate that colourism in contemporary Bangladesh is not a static or isolated issue. It is maintained through the interaction of historical legacies, social expectations, cultural representations and economic interests. Understanding colourism in this way allows for a more critical examination of how it continues to shape lived experiences, particularly for women, and why it remains such a persistent and deeply rooted system of inequality. These patterns become especially visible in cultural and media representations.

Cultural Reproduction of Colourism in Media and Popular Culture

Colourism in Bangladesh is not only sustained through social and economic structures but is also continuously reproduced through cultural narratives and media representations. These cultural forms don't just mirror what society values; they help shape and reinforce those ideas over time. Through repeated exposure, ideas about fairness, desirability and success become embedded within everyday life, influencing how individuals come to understand beauty and value from an early age.

One of the most visible ways this occurs is through patterns of representation in media. Across both local and global platforms, lighter-skinned individuals are more frequently portrayed as attractive, successful and desirable, while darker-skinned individuals are often underrepresented or confined to limiting roles. As Kullrich (2022) notes, media industries across South Asia consistently privilege lighter skin tones, reinforcing a narrow and exclusionary standard of beauty (pp. 104, 164). This imbalance is not neutral. It shapes who is seen and who is overlooked, gradually constructing a visual hierarchy where fairness becomes tied to visibility and worth.

These representations are further reinforced through everyday cultural messaging, particularly in advertising and popular discourse. In Bangladesh, these messages are not confined to elite or urban spaces but circulate widely across different social contexts. Fatemaa (2023), writing in the *Dhaka Tribune*, recounts an interaction involving NGO worker Aloka Talukder during a workshop in a rural Bangladeshi village, where an anonymous young girl, instead of asking for snacks like other participants, requested Fair & Lovely cream, explaining that lighter skin would improve her chances of marriage. This moment is not simply anecdotal; it reveals how colourism is internalized at a young age, where even children begin to understand their future value in relation to their appearance. The fact that this interaction takes place in a rural setting further highlights how deeply these ideals have penetrated across class and geographic boundaries.

From a feminist perspective, this internalization reflects how women's bodies become central sites through which social expectations are enforced. The desire for fairness is not only about beauty but also about meeting broader expectations tied to femininity, desirability and social acceptance. As Nambiar (2023) suggests, colourism significantly shapes how South Asian women experience their identities, often positioning appearance as a determining factor in their social opportunities. In this way, colourism operates not only as a racialized hierarchy but also as a gendered system that regulates how women are seen, valued and treated within society.

At the same time, contemporary media also reveals tensions within these dominant narratives. While traditional representations continue to privilege lighter skin, there is growing critique around the lack of authentic and diverse representation of South Asian identities. Agiwal (2024) highlights how South Asians are often reduced to tokenistic portrayals in global media, where a single character is expected to represent an entire community. These representations fail to capture the diversity of South Asian identities, including variations in skin tone, and instead reinforce narrow and often stereotypical images.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that media is not a passive reflection of society but an active site where cultural meanings are produced and reinforced. By shaping how beauty and desirability are defined, media plays a central role in maintaining colour-based hierarchies. At the same time, it also offers a space where these hierarchies can be questioned and challenged, making it a critical arena in both the reproduction and resistance of colourism in Bangladesh.

Fairness Industry and Societal Indoctrination

In Bangladesh, the desire for fair skin is widely treated as a normal and expected part of social life. Ideas about fairness extend beyond media and advertising and are embedded in everyday conversations, family expectations and social interactions. Fair skin is consistently associated with success, desirability and acceptance, making it appear less like a preference and more like a social requirement.

The expansion of the fairness industry reflects how deeply these ideas are rooted. Skin-lightening products are widely available across both urban and rural markets, often priced to remain accessible across different income groups. Their marketing connects lighter skin to life outcomes such as marriage prospects, professional success and confidence. Kullrich (2022) explains that these products are framed as tools for self-improvement, reinforcing the perception that fairness is tied to upward mobility (pp. 116, 135).

These expectations become visible through every day experiences. Fatemaa (2023) describes an interaction involving NGO worker Aloka Talukder in a rural Bangladeshi village, where a young girl asked for Fair and Lovely cream during a workshop, explaining that lighter skin would improve her chances of marriage. This example reveals how colour-based ideals are internalized early in life. The rural setting further shows that these expectations are not confined to urban spaces but circulate across different social and geographic contexts.

The beauty industry and social expectations feed into each other in noticeable ways. The industry draws on existing preferences, while also strengthening them through repeated messaging. Advertising consistently presents fairness as desirable and achievable, encouraging individuals to see lighter skin as a goal. Fatemaa (2023) argues that the industry profits from insecurities that it simultaneously reinforces, turning social pressure into economic demand.

These pressures affect women more directly. Expectations around beauty, marriage and social acceptance are closely tied to women's appearance, making fairness a key factor in how they are evaluated. Nambiar (2023) shows that colourism shapes how South Asian women experience their identities and opportunities, often placing appearance above other qualities. In this context, the use of fairness products reflects an effort to navigate social expectations rather than simply an individual choice.

The consequences of this system also appear in physical health outcomes. The World Health Organization (2019) reports that many skin-lightening products contain harmful substances such as mercury, which can cause kidney damage and severe skin conditions. In Bangladesh, investigations by the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution found dangerously high mercury levels in several widely used creams, leading to the banning of multiple products (Ahamed, 2023; Fatemaa, 2023). Despite these risks, continued demand reflects the strength of social pressures surrounding fairness.

The fairness industry operates within everyday life rather than outside it. It connects cultural expectations, economic systems and personal experiences in ways that reinforce colour-based hierarchies across different levels of society. As a result, ideas about fairness are sustained not only through belief but also through routine practices, making colourism both a social norm and a lived reality in Bangladesh.

Discrimination and Lived Experience

Colourism in Bangladesh is not limited to cultural representation or economic systems. It is experienced directly in everyday life, shaping how individuals are treated within families, communities and institutions. These forms of discrimination often begin early and continue across different stages of life, influencing social relationships, opportunities and self-perception.

In many cases, bias appears within the family itself. Preferences for lighter skin can be expressed through everyday comments, comparisons and expectations, particularly toward girls. Jensen (2020) documents how colour-based preferences are normalized in Bangladeshi society, where lighter skin is often treated as an advantage rather than a bias. These attitudes can shape how children are valued from a young age, influencing their confidence and sense of belonging.

These patterns extend into broader social structures, especially in relation to marriage and employment. In Bangladesh, marriage remains a significant social institution, and women's appearance often plays a central role in determining their perceived suitability. Jensen (2020) highlights how skin colour can influence marriage prospects, where lighter skin is associated with desirability and higher status. In some cases, darker skin is treated as a disadvantage that must be compensated for, often through increased dowry expectations (Sameen, 2022). This creates a system where a woman's value is closely tied to her appearance, reinforcing unequal social standards.

Discrimination is also visible in professional spaces. Preferences for lighter skin can influence hiring decisions, particularly in roles that involve public interaction. Jensen (2020) notes that individuals with lighter complexions are often overrepresented in such positions, suggesting that appearance can take precedence over merit. These patterns show how colourism operates within institutional settings, shaping access to opportunities and reinforcing social hierarchies.

The impact of colourism is particularly severe for marginalized groups. A study on Dalit women in Bangladesh found that darker-skinned women experience multiple layers of discrimination based on both caste and appearance, leading to social exclusion and limited opportunities (Rifat-Ur-Rahman et al., 2021). These experiences highlight how colourism intersects with other forms of inequality, intensifying its effects for those already in vulnerable positions.

Beyond structural outcomes, colourism also affects mental and emotional well-being. Personal narratives provide insight into how these experiences are lived and internalized. Mudabbir (2020), writing in a personal blog reflecting on her experiences growing up in a South Asian context, describes how comments about her dark complexion from family members and peers shaped her self-image from an early age. She recalls constant comparisons and criticism, which led to feelings of inadequacy and a desire to conform to Eurocentric beauty ideals. These experiences show how colourism operates not only externally but also internally, influencing how individuals come to see themselves.

Similar patterns appear in other accounts. Sameen (2022) discusses how dark-skinned women in Bangladesh often face heightened scrutiny in matrimonial contexts, where concerns about skin tone can affect both their own prospects and perceptions about future children. In some cases, these pressures contribute to significant psychological distress. Some reports suggest severe emotional consequences, including instances of suicide linked to persistent colour-based ridicule in South Asia (Pandey, 2019; Mitra, 2023; India Today, 2014). These cases reflect the depth of emotional harm that can result from sustained social stigma.

These experiences show that colourism is not only a social preference but a system that shapes how individuals are treated and how they understand themselves. From a feminist perspective, this system places disproportionate pressure on women, whose bodies become central to social evaluation and judgment. Appearance is often used as a measure of worth, limiting how women are perceived and how they navigate opportunities within society.

At the same time, these lived experiences also reveal the persistence of colourism across different spaces, from private family settings to public institutions. The continuity of these patterns shows how deeply embedded colour-based hierarchies remain in Bangladesh. Understanding these experiences is essential for recognizing colourism not only as a structural issue but also as a lived reality that affects individuals on a daily basis.

Postcolonial Feminist Resistance in Bangladesh

Colourism remains deeply embedded within social and cultural life in Bangladesh. Across different spaces, individuals and communities are actively questioning and challenging the standards that have long defined beauty, value and belonging. These efforts are shaped by postcolonial feminist perspectives that seek to confront both colonial legacies and the gendered inequalities that sustain them.

One important form of resistance emerges through personal narratives and everyday acts of refusal. These responses are often grounded in lived experience, where individuals begin to question and push back against normalized forms of colour-based discrimination. Mudabbir (2020), for example, reflects on her own experiences with colourism within family and social settings and describes how she chose to confront derogatory comments rather than accept them. Her response illustrates how resistance can begin at the level of everyday interaction, where challenging normalized behavior becomes a way of disrupting broader social patterns.

At the same time, collective efforts are also reshaping how colourism is understood and addressed. Postcolonial feminist thought in South Asia emphasizes the importance of storytelling, representation and community engagement as tools for change (Tyagi, 2014). By creating space for marginalized voices, these approaches challenge dominant narratives that have historically privileged lighter skin. This shift is particularly visible in digital and media spaces, where individuals and groups are using platforms to share experiences, raise awareness and build solidarity.

Representation has become a key site of this resistance. Writers and commentators have pointed to the lack of authentic portrayals of South Asian identities, particularly in relation to skin tone. Agiwal (2024) highlights how South Asians are often reduced to tokenistic representations in global media, where diversity is limited and superficial. In response, there has been a growing effort to produce more inclusive and nuanced representations that reflect the diversity of South Asian experiences.

Critiques of representation extend beyond media into the beauty industry itself, where South Asian women often find their needs poorly served by mainstream products. Suhrawardi et al. (2021) describe how the beauty industry's failure to address the specific needs of brown skin, from foundation shades to skincare formulated for melanated skin, reflects a broader pattern of exclusion, one that mirrors the same Eurocentric standards being challenged elsewhere in media and advertising. This critique reframes resistance not only as a matter of visibility but also of material access, highlighting how postcolonial feminist pushback operates across both symbolic and practical dimensions of beauty culture.

Creative and community-driven initiatives have also played an important role. Malala Fund (2022) highlights Nila Varman's project "Brown Is," which centers the visibility of diverse South Asian skin tones and challenges narrow beauty standards through visual storytelling. Similarly, the Bangladeshi initiative AmaderSkin represents a community-driven effort to challenge colourism and body shaming through storytelling and digital engagement. As documented by Gani et al. (2023), the platform creates space for individuals to share personal experiences related to skin tone, appearance and social pressure, fostering dialogue around acceptance and self-worth. By centering these narratives, AmaderSkin challenges dominant beauty standards and promotes alternative understandings of identity that move beyond Eurocentric ideals as a measure of value. This form of collective storytelling highlights how resistance can emerge through every day experiences, transforming personal struggles into shared awareness and social critique.

From a feminist perspective, these forms of resistance are significant because they shift the focus from conformity to self-definition. Rather than accepting externally imposed standards, individuals and communities are redefining beauty in ways that center diversity, cultural identity and lived experience. This process does not occur in isolation. It involves ongoing negotiation within social structures that continue to privilege certain appearances over others.

At the same time, these efforts also reveal the limitations and challenges of resistance. While awareness has increased, deeply embedded norms around Eurocentric beauty standards remain difficult to change. Social expectations, economic pressures and institutional practices continue to reinforce colour-based hierarchies, making resistance an ongoing and uneven process. However, the growing visibility of these counter-narratives signals a shift in how colourism is being understood and addressed.

Postcolonial feminist resistance in Bangladesh does not offer a single solution to colourism, but it creates space for alternative ways of thinking about beauty, identity and value. By centering lived experiences and challenging dominant narratives, these efforts contribute to a broader transformation in how individuals understand themselves and others. In this sense, resistance is not only about opposing existing structures but also about imagining and building more inclusive possibilities for the future.

Conclusion

This paper has explored how colourism in Bangladesh is shaped by a combination of historical, cultural and structural forces. While preferences for lighter skin existed prior to colonial rule, British colonialism intensified and reorganized these distinctions by linking fairness to whiteness, modernity and social value. These associations did not disappear with the end of colonial rule. They continue to influence how beauty, desirability and success are understood within contemporary society.

The analysis has shown that colourism operates across multiple levels. It is reinforced through media and cultural narratives that normalize Eurocentric beauty standards as desirable, sustained by the beauty industry that turns these preferences into economic demand, and experienced directly in everyday life through discrimination in families, social institutions, and professional spaces. These dynamics are particularly significant for women, whose bodies are often evaluated in relation to appearance, shaping their opportunities, relationships and sense of self.

At the same time, colourism is increasingly being challenged through postcolonial feminist efforts in Bangladesh and across South Asia. Norms like colourism are increasingly being questioned through storytelling, representation and community-based initiatives. These forms of resistance do not eliminate colourism, but they create space for alternative ways of understanding beauty and identity, where value is no longer tied to fairness alone.

Understanding colourism as a layered and ongoing process allows for a more nuanced perspective that moves beyond simplified explanations. It highlights how colonial legacies continue to operate through everyday practices, shaping both structural conditions and lived experiences. Addressing colourism therefore requires more than individual change. It calls for broader shifts in how beauty is represented, how value is assigned and how social expectations are constructed and maintained. This also requires recognizing how whiteness continues to function as an invisible standard within these systems, shaping both institutional structures and everyday perceptions.

At the same time, this study is limited by its reliance on secondary sources and publicly available narratives, which may not capture the full diversity of experiences across different regions, classes and communities in Bangladesh. Future research could build on this work by focusing on more localized or intersectional experiences, particularly those that remain underrepresented in existing literature.

Despite these limitations, this paper contributes to a growing conversation about colourism by bringing together historical analysis, contemporary examples and feminist perspectives. Addressing colourism requires challenging not only individual perceptions but also the structural and cultural systems that continue to assign value based on skin tone.

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War and Expansion: Russian Foreign Policy and Predictions on Its Next Direction

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Abstract

The twenty-first century has been marked by escalating geopolitical instability, with conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan contributing to a broader atmosphere of global uncertainty. Against this backdrop, Russia's foreign policy trajectory has become an increasingly critical subject of analysis. This paper examines Russia's strategic vision and likely future actions by evaluating current geopolitical trends alongside historical patterns of Russian behaviour. This investigation will employ a realist lens to explain the underlying motivations driving Russian foreign policy and its pursuit of geopolitical expansion. The paper will focus on two principal areas: the potential outcomes of the Russia–Ukraine war and their implications for Russia's efforts to counter NATO, and Russia's expanding ambitions in the Arctic, a region of growing strategic and economic significance. While not exhaustive, this study highlights the central dynamics shaping Russia's long-term geopolitical posture. It concludes with policy recommendations aimed at addressing the challenges posed by Russia's increasingly assertive role on the world stage.

Keywords: Russian Foreign Policy, Imperialism, Arctic Expansion, Policy Recommendations, War

Introduction

The global political development of the 21st century is characterized by risk and danger. There is a war in Europe between Russia and Ukraine that has been active for years now. Recent developments in the Gaza and Palestine conflicts have shown a wave of global protest that have further produced a degree of political instability and a sense of chaos. Civil war in Sudan is further putting pressure on the Middle East and has produced not only a humanitarian crisis but also another choke point of danger and escalation. Humanity is clearly not living through an age of peace, and it's impossible to ignore how Winston Churchill's warning still echoes today. His words, "They have only to repeat the same well-meaning, short-sighted behaviour… to bring about a third convulsion from which none may live to tell the tale." now carry an even heavier weight. Churchill's statement sharpens our awareness of how fragile global stability has become and deepens the sense of danger looming over the twenty-first century. The purpose of this research paper is to outline the strategic vision and future direction of one of the world's most influential global power players – Russia, through an examination of its foreign policy and long-term development. This paper aims to provide a forward-looking assessment that draws on current geopolitical trends to better understand what Russia may do next on the international stage. The key to understanding the power dynamic and the desire for everlasting growth of Russian foreign influence lays through the lens of realism, which suggests that national interest, power, and state survival are not ideals, but rather the primary drivers behind shaping its political behaviour. This lens will be used to guide a reader to better understand the reasoning behind Russian foreign expansion.

The first section of the investigation will briefly evaluate the potential outcome of the Russia–Ukraine war and consider how this outcome may influence Russia's efforts to push NATO further from its borders. The second section will examine Arctic security, focusing on the measures Russia is likely to pursue to consolidate its position in a region defined by abundant natural resources, strategic logistical advantages, and emerging geopolitical pressure points. It is important to note that this research paper does not attempt to address every possible dimension of Russian foreign policy. Instead, it concentrates on several key examples grounded in available information and informed by historical patterns of Russian behaviour, which often demonstrate a tendency to repeat themselves. The conclusion will present a set of policy recommendations aimed at mitigating Russia's increasingly assertive geopolitical posture.

Outcome of the Russia-Ukraine War: Blocking the Path to NATO and Setting an Example

The most recent Russian-Ukrainian war started in February 2022; the conflict has taken hundreds of thousands of lives as well as displaced 3.7 million people within Ukraine and has created 6.7 million refugees internationally, according to the UN refugee agency. The damage that has been done internally to the infrastructure of Ukraine is significant and will be long-lasting. This is not the first time Russian had open conflict with Ukraine; event of 2014 Crimea war has been a shadow that has followed Ukraine into war with Russia in February 2022. In November 2013, the Ukrainian government led by the pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych declined to sign a planned Association Agreement with the European Union. This decision sparked large-scale demonstrations in Kyiv, known as the "Euromaidan protests," which escalated into violent clashes in early 2014. By February, several European foreign ministers intervened to negotiate a compromise that proposed forming a unity government and holding early elections. Later that month, unidentified armed personnel, later acknowledged to be Russian forces, took control of key sites in Crimea, including the peninsula's airports, and pro-Russian groups seized the Crimean autonomous parliament. In March 2014, the parliament declared independence and organized a referendum on joining Russia. Russian officials reported that 97.47% of voters supported annexation, but the international community has not recognized the legitimacy of this vote. Following these events, Russia consolidated its control over Crimea and provided support to pro-Russian separatists who seized territory in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine (the Donbas) in 2014, entrenching a conflict that would continue for years. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is a multi-stage process that has been heavily influenced and triggered by Ukraine's desire to be a member of NATO. From a Russian foreign policy perspective, having a bordering country as a member of NATO is jeopardizing its border security due to having a non-ally sharing a border with an opposing global power.

Hans J. Morgenthau, the father of classical realism, argues in Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace, that the central driving force behind a state's actions is its will to maintain power. He emphasizes that this pursuit of power can be implemented through various methods, and he underlines "All political activity, whether domestic or international, can ultimately be distilled into three fundamental dynamics: the pursuit of maintaining power, the expansion of power, or the projection of power." For Russia, demonstrating power through destruction, fear, or the potential expansion of its dominion is nothing new. Through these methods, it preserves and extends its political reach while simultaneously sending a stark warning to other states. The message is unmistakable: Russia is not afraid to advance its interests against those it perceives as threatening its power. This pattern of behaviour evokes a sense of Déjà Vu in relation to Russian foreign affairs dating back to the late 1990s, when relations between NATO and Ukraine deepened with the 1997 Charter on a Distinctive Partnership and were further strengthened in 2009 through the Declaration to Complement the Charter. Together, these developments reaffirmed NATO's 2008 Bucharest Summit commitment that Ukraine would eventually become a member of the Alliance. For Russia, these steps signalled a steady movement of NATO toward its borders, reinforcing long-standing concerns in Moscow about Ukraine's westward trajectory and the strategic implications of potential NATO expansion. As Ukraine's orientation toward the West has deepened over the years, it has become increasingly clear to Moscow that none of the post-Soviet states should be left free to determine their own political trajectory, given the risk that the West could gain additional allies in what Russia regards as the core of its strategic backyard. This, in essence, underscores an imperial mindset that Russia has maintained since the fall of the Soviet Union. From a realist perspective, Russia's refusal to relinquish even an inch of territory it once controlled is a fundamental component of its functioning as a state, as well as a core driver of its political ambitions in foreign affairs. This is further well underlined by Hans J. Morgenthau, in his work Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace, the author states, "Imperialism becomes identified with the maintenance of defence and stabilization of an empire already in existence rather than with the dynamic process of acquiring one." For Russia, the empire it inherited is not one it intends to relinquish; consequently, any risk of Western influence encroaching on its borders is viewed as intolerable and fundamentally unacceptable. Unfortunately, history tends to repeat itself, and the lessons that could have been learned from the 2008 Russia-Georgia war were largely overlooked.

Georgia, being a small country with limited media attention and far less NATO support than Ukraine, did not receive the international focus it needed. Yet the events of 2008 were a clear precursor to Russia's later foreign policy decisions toward any state seeking closer ties with the West. By 2008, Georgia's increasingly close relationship with the West had begun to generate serious tension with its much larger northern neighbour - Russia. Following the Bucharest Declaration which signalled that NATO viewed both Georgia and Ukraine as future members, Russia concluded that these two states, given their history as former Soviet republics, were too strategically significant to be permitted entry into the Alliance. Their importance to Moscow was evident in the stark contrast between Russia's reaction to their potential membership and its comparatively muted response to the earlier accession of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. The prospect of NATO's presence directly on Russia's border fundamentally altered the geopolitical stakes, and the seemingly routine discussion of Georgian and Ukrainian membership at Bucharest crossed a threshold that Russian leaders had long warned the West not to approach. From a realist point of view, Moscow's strategy of preventing two former Soviet republics from becoming fully Westernized reflects a logic of self-preservation, rooted in the desire to maintain regional influence and safeguard the power it believes essential to its security. The Russia sought to make an example of both Georgia and later Ukraine, initiating wars with these two states to signal to others and to their own populations that any path toward the West would be bloody and effectively impossible so long as Russia retained the power to obstruct it. In both cases, Russians and Georgians suffered enormously, and the prospects of either country moving closer to NATO have diminished as a result. For Georgia, the desire for NATO membership now triggers painful memories of a war that cost the country 20 percent of its territory. For Ukraine, which remains engulfed in a far larger and ongoing conflict, the eventual outcome of the war will shape not only its security trajectory but its future path towards westernization.

Judging by Russia's past actions, Ukraine's future appears increasingly uncertain, as the possibility of achieving a decisive military victory is becoming slim. Russia is likely to retain control over the territories it currently occupies, a pattern consistent with its previous behaviour. For Ukraine, the only viable path to long-term survival short of total devastation may ultimately involve negotiating or formally ceding the territories now under Russian control. According to the Association of the United States Army (AUSA), The Russo-Ukrainian War: A Strategic Assessment Two Years into the Conflict states that "Russo-Ukrainian War leads to the conclusion that Russia has the upper hand and in 2024, Ukraine has limited prospects for overturning Russian territorial annexations, or dislodging reinforced Russian positions in the occupied regions." This underscores that the most likely outcome of the Russia-Ukraine war will favour Russia, potentially resulting in further territorial annexation similar to what occurred in Crimea in 2014 and in Abkhazia and South Ossetia during the 2008 war in Georgia. The most reasonable option for Ukraine at this stage may be a strategy of hard diplomacy, which could involve relinquishing certain territories to protect its population and economy from further damage and catastrophic outcomes. This is not a decision any leader wishes to make, yet it may be the only path that preserves the possibility for Ukraine to rebuild itself as a functioning state in the future. With this outcome, the potential for Ukraine to join NATO is slim to none, as the Alliance will not place itself in a situation where one of its members is in an active war with a global power. Thus, in the same way that Ukraine may be forced to forfeit territory, it may also be compelled to forfeit its path to NATO membership. If Ukraine continues its resistance to free itself from Russia's grip, the country will suffer not only economically but also in terms of population loss, leading to even greater devastation. One way or another, Russia intends to make an example of Ukraine, a state that resisted but ultimately succumbed to the overwhelming pressure of Russian imperial power.

Arctic Exploration: Russia's Next Target

The Arctic region is not only a mysterious land covered in ice and snow but also a geopolitical strategic location that promises great potential and resource capabilities to those who manage to capture it first. It is a strategically significant region shaped by intersecting environmental, political, economic, and military dynamics. During the Cold War, it served as a critical arena of competition between the United States, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the Soviet Union. After the Cold War, Arctic states attempted to maintain the region as a space for cooperation. Yet over the past decade, intensifying strategic rivalry among the U.S, Russia, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) has dramatically heightened its geopolitical relevance. Great powers, whether China, the United States, or Russia, are inherently suspicious of one another from a realist point of view. In realism, such distrust is not only expected but rational, because no state can ever be certain that another will not undermine its sovereignty in pursuit of greater power. The safest assumption, therefore, is that other major states may one day become threats. This logic produces a strategic environment in which the best defence is often seen as offence: striking first or gaining dominance over another actor can shift the political balance in favour of the aggressor. This dynamic is sharply articulated by John J. Mearsheimer, an American political scientist and leading realist scholar, who, in a book, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, develops the concept of offensive realism. In essence, he argues that great powers seek to maximize their power because, under anarchy, survival can never be guaranteed. In his book, he states "Given the difficulty of determining how much power is enough for today and tomorrow, great powers recognize that the best way to ensure their security is to achieve hegemony now, thus eliminating any possibility of a challenge by another great power."

Within the logic of offensive realism, the maximization of power becomes essential for both expansion and long-term survival. For Russia, this dynamic extends to the Arctic, where further expansion is viewed as another opportunity to consolidate and enhance its power. Building on this principle, Russia's and the PRC's rapid military modernization outpacing the comparatively slower responses of the United States and NATO has further transformed the Arctic into a focal point of strategic competition. The region has become increasingly defined by security concerns, intensified resource extraction efforts, and the struggle for control over newly accessible maritime routes. Global attention to the region surged in 2009 when the US Geological Survey estimated that the Arctic contains 13 percent of the world's undiscovered oil and 30 percent of its untapped natural gas reserves. That same year, the U.S hosted the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting to reaffirm commitments to cooperation. However, Russia's increasingly assertive territorial posture soon shifted the atmosphere from collaboration to competition. This assertiveness was not new; in 2007, Russian submarines famously planted a flag on the seabed beneath the North Pole, symbolically declaring, "The Arctic is Russian." Russia's pursuit of dominance in the Arctic is best understood as a modern expression of imperial ambition rather than a benign extension of national interests. Its actions echo the rhetoric of Kaiser Wilhelm II's 1901 "A Place in the Sun" speech, in which he declared, "Although we have no such fleet as we should have, we have conquered for ourselves a place in the sun. It will now be my task to see to it that this place in the sun shall remain our undisputed possession." Russia's contemporary behaviour mirrors this sentiment: it seeks to expand its global influence, secure strategic advantages, and entrench its control over the region. In doing so, Moscow is not only reviving but surpassing the imperial reach it exercised during the Soviet era, leveraging the Arctic as a platform to project power and reshape the geopolitical landscape of the twenty-first century.

Due to Climate change, the Arctic has been dramatically reshaped, opening areas that were once inaccessible and enabling new economic and strategic activity. Emerging maritime corridors such as the Northern Sea Route (NSR) and the Northwest Passage (NWP) are projected to become commercially viable, potentially diverting global shipping away from traditional routes like the Suez Canal. As resource availability increases, states are recalibrating their strategies and intensifying competition over the region's expanding economic and military value. This rivalry has been amplified by accelerating militarization. As stated by John J. Mearsheimer in The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, "Great powers aim to maximize the amount of the world's wealth that they control. States care about relative wealth, because economic might is the foundation of military might." From a realist perspective, access to new forms of resources, positions a state more favourably to accumulate and project power, thereby strengthening its capacity to defend its status quo and pursue additional strategic gains. In this logic, economic expansion and resource acquisition are not merely material advantages, but essential components of a state's long-term survival strategy within an anarchic international system.

Over the past decade, Russia has upgraded its Arctic military infrastructure, deployed advanced missile systems, modernized its submarine fleet, and expanded its fisheries, energy, and mineral extraction capabilities. By 2020, the Russian Ministry of Defence had taken part in rebuilding sixteen ports and nineteen airfields across the Arctic. Many of the upgraded or newly constructed airfields in the Arctic archipelagos are intended solely for military use. However, at Alykel (an isolated city of Norilsk, Russia) and Anadyr (a town in Russia), the Ministry is expanding existing civilian airports with additional military infrastructure. This further illustrates expansion on arctic and preparation of Russia to have overall control of arctic mission. The desire to be ready is a good sign of active policy development that focuses on militarization, infrastructure development and readiness for new expeditions. A similar pattern is visible along the Northern Sea Route (NSR), where several civilian ports are being modernized to support a broader range of functions. For instance, the port of Dikson (a Russian port town on the Taymyr Peninsula) is set to undergo a major overhaul and become a dual-use facility by 2022, while comparable upgrades to the port infrastructure in Tiksi (a city in Russia) are planned for completion by 2025. Parallel to these developments, the Russian Marine Rescue Service is enlarging its network of search and rescue stations along the Arctic coast and updating its fleet, more than doubling the number of ice-class vessels. Even more ambitious is the renewal of Russia's nuclear-powered icebreaker fleet, which is expected to be almost entirely modernized by the mid-2020s. On the other hand, the United States' recent interest in Greenland is a strong indicator that Washington is paying closer attention to Russia's expanding foreign policy activities in the Arctic. This shift suggests that the U.S. wants to ensure Russia does not continue widening its strategic reach in the region unchecked.

There are two main reasons behind U.S. engagement in the Arctic: a) Like Russia and China, the United States seeks access to the Arctic's natural resources and the strategic advantages offered by newly emerging maritime trade routes near Europe and Russia. b) The United States also aims to prevent Russia from becoming the dominant power in the region. Allowing Russia and increasingly China to shape the Arctic unilaterally would place the U.S. at a strategic disadvantage, leaving a critical emerging region under the influence of competing global powers. This is well illustrated by document published by U.S. Department of Defense arctic strategy (2024) in which it underlines that "In addition to nuclear, conventional, and special operations threats, Russia seeks to carry out lower-level destabilizing activities in the Arctic against the United States and our Allies, including through Global Positioning System jamming and military flights that are conducted in an unprofessional manner inconsistent with international law and custom." These recent documents highlight a growing emphasis on security and strategic competition, portraying Russia's assertive actions and China's expanding influence in the Arctic as major challenges. This framing once again underscores a counter-policy approach aimed at limiting Russia's ambitions to extend its reach in the region. Given the intensified engagement of major global powers in the Arctic region in recent years, it is evident that Russia's forthcoming foreign-policy initiatives are likely to focus on expanding its presence in the Arctic and consolidating ground-based control in this strategically significant area. This development highlights the adaptability of Russia's policy approach: it is not only a state capable of undertaking military incursions, but also one that actively seeks to exploit emerging opportunities in regions where influence and authority cannot be secured solely through conventional military means.

Policy Mitigation: How to Deal With Russia – Theory and Brief Recommendation

Managing a state that possesses the capability to devastate the world with the push of a button is an extraordinarily complex challenge. Yet, meaningful progress is possible by developing informed recommendations that help policymakers better anticipate and mitigate Russia's strategic behaviour. The following section outlines two policy recommendations. Together, these approaches offer complementary pathways for reducing risk, improving prediction, and shaping more stable long-term relations with Russia. To pursue these goals effectively, policymakers must first abandon wishful thinking and instead adopt the cold rationalism of realism. Rather than if states will prioritize morality, cooperation, or the stabilizing influence of international institutions, John J. Mearsheimer argues that the international system remains fundamentally competitive and dangerous. As he writes in The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, "international politics has always been a ruthless and dangerous business, and it is likely to remain that way." This realist perspective highlights a critical point: strategic judgment becomes compromised when policymakers rely on optimistic assumptions about state behaviour instead of acknowledging the enduring struggle for power and security that shapes Russia's actions. For the sake of clear policy recommendations, one must abandon wishful thinking and confront reality.

Countering Russian Imperialism

Russia needs to be viewed as a Tsar empire that is led by a war machine of imperialism; it is not an ordinary state, and for sure, it is not acting like one. Russia's foreign policy follows the notion of imperialism, understood as" The desire of the state to expand its territorial (colonial) possessions, mainly in other parts of the world." Whether it is expansion toward Ukraine, Georgia, or the Arctic, the idea of imperialism guides Moscow's foreign policy decision-making. To counter this imperialist expansion, there must be a global counterweight of alliances, whether from NATO, the European Union, or the broader Western community that can limit Russia's expansionist ambitions. It is also important to undermine the financial gains of the Russian war machine, which operates through a command and conquer approach. This requires creating barriers to trade and enforcing strict sanctions that prevent the rebranding of products and gradually weaken Russia's economic capacity over time. According to André Härtel's and his research "EU Actorness in the Conflict in Ukraine: Between 'Comprehensive' Ambitions and the Contradictory Realities of an Enlarged 'Technical' Role," his works shows that, unlike its largely symbolic response to the 2008 Georgia–Russia war, the EU's post-2014 sanctions against Russia enabled a more coherent political strategy and a more active role in European conflict management. By strengthening its sanctions infrastructure and investing in Ukraine through its mediation efforts, the EU positioned itself as a more capable security actor in the post-Soviet region.

The sanctions do have an effect, and when they are consistently enforced and reinforced with sustained pressure, they can help cultivate an anti-imperialist approach in Russian foreign policy by removing the economic incentives for attacking other states. EU sanctions had a measurable impact on Russia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Following the introduction of these measures, Russia's GDP growth declined sharply—from 2.3% before the annexation of Crimea to just 0.8% between 2014 and 2015. The second round of EU financial sanctions, implemented in August 2014, delivered the most severe economic blow. These restrictions significantly disrupted Russia's international trade and financial operations, leading to a notable reduction in capital inflows. This contraction appears to have reinforced Russia's perception that the EU possessed both the capacity and the willingness to impose further economic harm if necessary. The key to success is a multi-lens strategy led jointly by the EU, NATO, and the United States, an alliance strong enough to generate a credible counterweight to Russia's imperialist foreign policy. Without a coordinated and collaborative approach, it will be impossible to design and sustain an effective policy framework capable of constraining Russian behaviour.

Why Realism Must Guide Western Strategy Toward Russia?

Russia, as an empire, carries a long and vivid history marked by conquest, imperial ambition, violence, and collapse. Yet history has a habit of repeating itself, and any nation that finds itself confronting Russia must relearn the nature of the adversary it faces on the battlefield. Modern Russia commands significant military power. Its armed forces include roughly 1.32 million active personnel, supported by a navy, an air force, special operations units, and the largest nuclear arsenal on the planet. Understanding the scale and weight of this capability is essential before challenging it in any military or geopolitical arena. This is precisely why policy recommendations aimed at countering Russian influence must be grounded in realism rather than wishful thinking. The theory of realism suggests that states, from a realist perspective, operate in an anarchic international environment where no higher authority can guarantee their security. As a result, they must rely on their own power and capabilities to pursue national interests. Above all, the primary national interest is ensuring the state's survival, protecting its population, political institutions, and territorial boundaries. Building on this reasoning, it becomes evident that Russia is acting primarily to safeguard its own national interests. Consequently, any effort to resist Russian expansion must adopt an equally survival-oriented and rational approach, ensuring that policy responses remain strategic and do not escalate into a protracted or destabilizing conflict.

An effective strategy requires acknowledging Russia's strengths, its historical patterns, and the hard limits of deterrence and confrontation. Only by approaching the problem with clear eyes and sober judgment can one hope to counter its actions and mitigate its impact. A useful way to visualize the dangers involved is to revisit Niccolò Machiavelli's ‚The Prince, particularly Chapter XVIII, "How Princes Should Keep Faith," in which he writes: "A prince must imitate the fox and the lion, for the lion cannot protect itself from traps, and the fox cannot defend itself from wolves. " One must therefore be a fox to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten wolves. The central lesson of this chapter is that a leader must know when to act with the strength and decisiveness of a lion, and when to employ the cunning and subtlety of a fox. This logic resonates strongly when considering Russian foreign policy and its aggressive posture. Confronting Russia directly as a single state is difficult, given its power and sheer military capacity. Therefore, the most effective way to manage and de-escalate the situation is through diplomacy grounded in pragmatic solutions that prevent the conflict from expanding.

Concluding Thought

In the modern era, it is essential to address any expanding and aggressive foreign policy with strategies that mitigate risk and prevent the potential outbreak of a third world war. The military capabilities of major powers have grown to unprecedented, mass-destructive levels, making it imperative to preserve stability in a chaotic environment where a single decision could have catastrophic consequences. Diplomacy and a measured, rational approach must therefore guide responses not only to Russia, but to any state that pursues aggressive or predatory policies. Only through restraint, strategic clarity, and sustained diplomatic engagement can the international community reduce the likelihood of escalation and maintain global peace. Within this broader context, it is important to recognize that this research paper has focused specifically on Russian foreign affairs and the likely direction of its future geopolitical behaviour. It has presented several examples of potential foreign-policy expansion, whether through blocking Ukraine's access to NATO and using that outcome as a warning to other neighbouring states, or through Russia's accelerating push into the Arctic as it seeks to secure strategic and economic advantages. These cases illustrate only a portion of the possibilities. With Russia exerting such significant influence on global affairs, it is crucial to understand that Moscow may pursue additional avenues of expansion that have not yet been fully revealed or publicly articulated. Remaining vigilant, closely monitoring political developments, and maintaining a clear understanding of Russia's long-term strategic patterns will be essential for crafting informed and effective policy decisions in the years ahead.

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