

# Fair Observer

Monthly

May 2019

**FAIR OBSERVER**<sup>o</sup>  
make sense of the world

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# Fair Observer Monthly



May 2019

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# ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

Fair Observer is a US-based nonprofit media organization that aims to inform and educate global citizens of today and tomorrow. We publish a crowdsourced multimedia journal that provides a 360° view to help you make sense of the world. We also conduct educational and training programs for students, young professionals and business executives on subjects like journalism, geopolitics, the global economy, diversity and more.

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# The Decision against Caster Semenya Plunges Sport into a Moral Maelstrom

Ellis Cashmore

May 1, 2019

*The significance of the CAS ruling in the Caster Semenya case will be felt across the world of sport for years to come.*

“For me, she is not a woman. ... It is useless to compete with this, and it is not fair,” Italian athlete Elisa Cusma Piccione told reporters, pointing toward the winner of the women’s 800-meter race at the World Athletics Championships in 2009. She was referring to Caster Semenya, a formidable looking South African athlete, 5 foot 10 inches tall, broad-shouldered and muscular. In the early 20th century, they would have called Semenya “mannish” — having the bearing and characteristics of a man.

Officials reacted by demanding that Semenya undergo unspecified sex testing. After reportedly determining she was “intersex” — possessing both male and female characteristics — the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) declared her ineligible. Semenya was excluded from competition for the rest of 2009 and 2010, then reinstated without explanation. In 2011, the IAAF instituted new standards, establishing a testosterone limit below the normal male range of 7 to 30 nanomoles per liter of blood (nanomoles are chemical units of measurement). Testosterone is the

androgen responsible for strength and muscular development.

Since then, Semenya has been object of scrutiny. Her body has been pored over, but, more intrusively, her levels of testosterone have been tested and questioned. There were reports that Semenya had been allowed to compete, but only on the condition that she took approved drugs. Her form suffered, and she took only silver at the 2012 Olympics in London. Semenya was upgraded to gold in 2017 when the winner, Mariya Savinova, of Russia, was stripped of the title after a doping violation.

No one suspects that Semenya has taken dope — though many athletes from many sports have taken synthetic forms of testosterone, of course — but the presumed fact remains: Semenya’s natural secretions of testosterone are above the normal parameters for women, a condition known as hyperandrogenism. This has led many, especially her track rivals, to claim she has an unfair advantage. Semenya’s reply was simple and to the point: “I am a woman and I am fast.”

## BY MEN, FOR MEN

Olympic sport was created by men, for men. Its founder, Pierre de Coubertin, announced in 1894 that the Olympic spectacle was an “exultation of male athleticism ... with female applause as a reward.” There was no place for female competitors in de Coubertin’s vision: “No matter how toughened a sportswoman

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may be, her organism is not cut out to sustain shocks.”

The modern Olympics started in 1896, but didn't allow women to compete properly until 1928 and, even then, only in a limited number of their own events. And so started a separation of males and females that has remained in place ever since. Not that a strict division based on the then-novel sexual binary was without problems. Hormones were not discovered until 1902, and up to that point there was no scientific way of explaining scientifically why women were different to men.

Over the years, doubts have been raised about several women who appeared to have mannish qualities. They included Stella Walsh, of Poland, who was shot dead (the suspects were never identified) and later revealed to have ambiguous genitalia. Many athletes faced humiliating visual examinations, which were superseded by cheek swab tests, which were not as humiliating, but dehumanizing nevertheless. At least two athletes were known to have been disqualified after such tests, which were designed to detect the inactive X chromosome that typically presents in females. This test was dropped by the IAAF in 1991 and by the International Olympic Committee in 1999, after protests that it did not account for some rare conditions.

The hormone standard introduced in 2011 was challenged by Indian sprinter Dutee Chand. The case was heard in 2015 by the Court of Arbitration for

Sport (CAS), which requested more unequivocal evidence that higher levels of testosterone equate to a competitive advantage across the spectrum of sports. Interestingly, no sport psychologists offered the kind of proof they typically use to justify their livelihood: that excellence in sports depends as much, if not more, on psychological as physical factors like emotional intelligence, goal orientation, mental toughness, motivational climate, self-concept — the list is near-endless.

The IAAF was forced to lift its hyperandrogenism policy, which enabled Semenya to run without taking hormone-reducing drugs. She went on to win gold at the 2016 Rio Olympics. But last year, the IAAF reintroduced its policy for some events, specifically women's distances between 400 and 1,500 meters, basing the decision on research that claimed that testosterone confers significant advantage. “We have seen in a decade and more of research that 7.1 in every 1000 elite female athletes in our sport have elevated testosterone levels, the majority are in the restricted events covered by these regulations,” stated the head of the IAAF's Health and Science Department, Stephane Bermon.

Semenya has been made to take drugs, which would otherwise get her banned from competition (we presume), that reduce her testosterone level. Understandably, she resented this and appealed to CAS. Armed with a force of experts on testosterone and its effects,



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she challenged the IAAF and wanted to be allowed to compete drugs-free.

## FLUIDITY AND INCLUSION

Intuitively, one can sympathize with the legions of women who feel disadvantaged when they look along the start line and see the imposing figure of Semenya or, for that matter, other female athletes who enjoy the supposed advantage of elevated natural testosterone. After all, 7.1 in every 1,000 elite female athletes is about 140 greater than in the general population.

But the rest of society is moving away from division and segregation and toward fluidity and inclusion. The traditional sex binary is being challenged almost daily. Unlike when de Coubertin was contemplating allowing women into the Olympics, sex is no longer regarded as a straightforward twofold scheme, but a spectrum. Sex reassignment either through surgery or hormone treatment also makes it changeable. So it could be argued our understanding of sex itself is in the throes of change. Perhaps sport will be forced to dissolve its historical division and start to integrate all people regardless of sex, natal or assigned, into the same competitions.

After years of legal back and forth, the Court of Arbitration for Sport's decision on May 1 has put to rest any doubt over Semenya's eligibility to compete in female events. The decision to maintain the status quo and effectively snub Semenya plunges sport into a moral

maelstrom. People will argue persuasively that insisting that an athlete takes testosterone-suppressing medication to change a natural condition is a violation not only of individual human rights, but of its own rules. After all, since the 1970s, the vast majority of sports have affirmed and strengthened strictures on doping. To force an athlete to change her body chemistry artificially seems monstrously hypocritical.

It also seems oddly out of sync with the zeitgeist, which has spirited to us a newish term — gender fluidity. This means that people are annexing the right to define their own sex and gender, perhaps swapping as they move through life, or even from one situation to the next. By opposing Semenya, sport confirms its commitment to the durable but outmoded binary model of two sexes at the very time when the rest of society is discarding it.

This legal battle has concluded with a decision that will have consequences as impactful and far reaching as the 1970s ruling that prohibited performance enhancing drugs. Semenya is now the symbol of a very modern debate over gender classifications, with the pronouncement sure to have implications for intersex and transgender women across sport.

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**Ellis Cashmore** is the author of "Elizabeth Taylor," "Beyond Black" and "Celebrity Culture." He is honorary professor of sociology at Aston University and has previously worked at

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the universities of Hong Kong and Tampa.

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## **Bahrain: King Hamad Moves on Reconciliation Bid**

Bill Law

May 1, 2019

*If the release of prisoners includes Nabeel Rajab, King Hamad will have signaled that he is serious about ending the cycle of repression in Bahrain.*

The decision on April 22 by Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa to restore the citizenship of 551 individuals may be a first step in what remains a long and difficult road toward dialogue and reconciliation. Bahrain has been wracked by more than eight years of civil unrest that has severely damaged the kingdom's economy, seen thousands of protesters jailed and nearly 1,000 stripped of their citizenship.

The Gulf island's main political opposition groups have been banned and their leaders jailed. In June 2017, Al-Wasat, Bahrain's only independent news site was shuttered, effectively silencing free media. Freedom of expression, too, has been severely curtailed.

The human rights activist Nabeel Rajab is currently serving a five-year sentence for tweets that criticized the war in Yemen and conditions in the country's main prison, Jau. Another activist, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, is serving a life sentence and Sheikh Ali Salman, the

leader of al-Wefaq, the largest opposition movement, was jailed for 15 years which on appeal was altered to life. Other oppositionists and human rights activists are either in prison in Bahrain or in exile in the West.

The vast majority of those affected by the government's crackdown on dissent are Shia Muslims, the majority indigenous community in a kingdom ruled for more than two centuries by the Sunni al-Khalifa family. Shia Bahrainis have long complained of discrimination in job hiring, housing, education and other facilities provided by the state. They point to a gerrymandered political system entrenching the status quo and the failure of the ruling family to deliver on promises made in 2001 for a more equitable power-sharing arrangement. When those concerns boil over and lead to unrest, the government responds with harsh measures.

## **POST-INDEPENDENCE**

Indeed, the history of Bahrain since it gained independence from Britain in 1971 has been one of persistent cycles of reform and repression, intrinsically linked one to the other. When reform demands go too far and threaten the position of the ruling family, repression kicks in. That in turn becomes excessive and a process of reform begins anew.

Bahrain elected its first parliament in 1973. But after legislators refused to approve a draconian state security law, parliament was dissolved just two years later. The then and still prime minister,

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Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa, together with his brother Isa, the emir, ruled with a firm hand. They were aided by Ian Henderson, a Scotsman who ran the state security apparatus with such ruthless efficiency that he earned the sobriquet “Butcher of Bahrain” from regime opponents.

A coup attempt in 1981 and an uprising in the 1990s calling for democratic reform led to periods of intense repression. However, the repression eased when the emir died in 1999 and his son, Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, succeeded him. Hamad introduced a reform program that saw the state of emergency, in place since 1975, lifted. The state security law was abolished. Political opponents and human rights activists were released from prison, and others were allowed and encouraged to return from exile under a general amnesty. Restrictions on the media were loosened.

In February 2001, a referendum was held in which Bahrainis voted overwhelmingly in support of the National Action Charter, a roadmap toward the creation of a constitutional monarchy. In 2002, Bahrain adopted a new constitution along the lines of the charter’s provisions, with Hamad declaring himself king.

For the next several years, though many Shia continued to feel marginalized and discriminated against, the reform agenda was the order of the day, a state of affairs that benefited the country both economically and politically.

## **ARAB SPRING**

The Arab Spring and the events of February and March 2011 saw the cycle of repression return with a vengeance. Peaceful calls for a faster pace of reform gained huge support in the kingdom across sectarian lines. In a country with an indigenous population of less than 700,000, it is estimated more than 100,000 people took to the streets of the capital, Manama. The ruling family saw the reform demands as a major threat, the most serious it had ever faced. There was good reason for concern: Popular protests had already toppled two Arab strongmen in North Africa.

For its part, Saudi Arabia feared that should the Khalifa family give ground, that would serve to empower its own Shia community, heavily discriminated against and the majority population in the oil-rich Eastern Province adjacent to Bahrain.

On March 14, 2011, Saudi Arabia, joined by the United Arab Emirates, sent troops down the causeway linking Bahrain to the Saudi mainland. Demonstrations were crushed and protesters routed by Bahraini security and military forces. Dozens were killed, hundreds wounded and thousands arbitrarily jailed. Torture in detention was widespread with at least two detainees being beaten to death.

King Hamad, facing international criticism, commissioned a tribunal of human rights experts chaired by the distinguished law professor, Cherif

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Bassiouni. The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry was, and remains, the only independent analysis of its kind dealing with the events of the Arab Spring, and it is to the king's credit that he commissioned it.

Bassiouni's report, released in November 2011, was a damning indictment of how the government had handled what had been a largely peaceful call for democratic reform. The king accepted the report in full and promised to carry out all its recommendations, many of which relate to the police and security forces. Critics argue that in the years since the report, very few of the recommendations have been fully implemented. The government takes the position that most have.

## **DIALOGUE AND RECONCILIATION**

What is not in dispute is that the regime, citing security concerns, has continued to bear down hard on any form of dissent. Dialogue and trust between the opposition and the ruling family has completely broken down. However, that may be about to change. On April 26, Hasan Shafaei, an official at the Bahraini Embassy in London met with this author. He said that King Hamad wants to "encourage opportunities to create a better situation." Shafaei is a former activist. In 2002, he was a founding member of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights with Nabeel Rajab and Abdulhadi al-Khawaja. He said that, in his opinion, the opposition had "missed opportunities in the past" and

urged it to "take advantage of this goodwill from the king."

The citizenship restoration decree should be seen as King Hamad's signal that now is the time to move forward to dialogue. Significantly, included in the 551 were 138 names of individuals who had been stripped of their citizenship and sentenced to between three years and life in a mass trial just a few days earlier, on April 16.

Though the prison sentences stand, King Hamad could not have stated more clearly that citizenship stripping should not be used by the courts as punishment. It is a step that will not have pleased some within the ruling family, but it is as strong an indication as any that the cycle of repression could end and an agenda of reconciliation begin.

To speed up the process of reconciliation, Shafaei, a human rights adviser to the embassy, said that "more good news was coming." That could include the release of political prisoners, including Rajab. He noted several recent meetings between the prime minister and a senior religious leader of the Shia community, Sheikh Abdullah al-Ghurifi. Those meetings, this author was told, had the full approval of the ailing Ayatollah Isa Qassim, the highest religious authority for Bahraini Shias. (However, Sheikh Qassim was not among those who had his citizenship restored by the king after having it revoked in 2016.)

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Shafaei also pointed to a new alternative sentencing law passed last year that includes the imposition of community service sentences, house arrest, electronic tagging and attending training and rehabilitation programs. Although it was not a point Shafaei made, the new law has the virtue of helping to deal with serious overcrowding and the consequent poor conditions faced by inmates at Jau Prison.

Ali Alaswad is a senior al-Wefaq politician, now in exile in London. When told of Shafaei's comments, he played down the significance of both the meetings with the prime minister and the restoration of citizenship. "[King Hamad] wants us to say thank you when their citizenship was taken for no reason." Alaswad told this author there are 4,500 political prisoners in detention, adding "we will not be happy till they are back home."

At the same time, though, Alaswad signaled there is room for some optimism. Though al-Wefaq is not willing to enter into a formal dialogue with the government simply on the basis of the king's citizenship decision, that could change. "Release some political prisoners and we are ready to reconsider. A prisoner release is a good opportunity for dialogue," he said.

Within that statement lurks the potential to break the long and damaging stalemate that, since 2011, has affected every level of Bahraini society. Should the king follow through on what Hasan

Shafaei has called "good news" and release some of the prisoners over the Islamic month of Ramadan, the arduous task of building trust and finding common ground can begin. It will be a sign for all Bahrainis that they can dare to hope there is an end to an awful period in their history. It would be useful, too, to restore Sheikh Isa Qassem's nationality.

Finally, should the release of prisoners include Nabeel Rajab, an internationally-recognized human rights voice, King Hamad will have signaled to the world that he is serious about ending the cycle of repression.

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**Bill Law** is a Sony award-winning journalist. He joined the BBC in 1995 and, since 2002, has reported extensively from the Middle East. In 2003, he was one of the first journalists to cover the beginnings of the insurgency that engulfed Iraq. His documentary, "The Gulf: Armed & Dangerous," which aired in late 2010, anticipated the revolutions that became the Arab Spring. He then covered the uprisings in Egypt, Libya and Bahrain. He has also reported from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Before leaving the BBC in 2014, Law was the corporation's Gulf analyst. He now works as a freelance journalist focusing on the Gulf, and he is a regular contributor to The Independent, Middle East Eye, Monocle Radio, Gulf States News, the BBC and The New Arab.

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# Climate Emergency: Rise of a Civil Disobedience Movement

Vasundhara Saravade

May 4, 2019

*What has prompted more than a million young individuals around the world to mobilize into a civil march for action on climate change?*

“We have a climate emergency” was the overwhelming chant echoing through the streets of Waterloo, in Canada’s Ontario province, on March 15. An estimated 1.4 million young people, in Canada and all over the world, collectively skipped school that Friday to raise their voices against the biggest existential threat humanity faces. Civil disobedience protests like the Extinction Rebellion are bringing major cities like London to a standstill and shining a spotlight on just how harmful business-as-usual is for the planet.

This type of large-scale global youth mobilization is indicative of the palpable frustration about the lack of sustained action on tackling climate change that is now reverberating through the younger generations. Given the widespread coverage the global media now dedicate to climate change, the rest of the world is beginning to catch up on the various studies documenting our impact on the planet and the consequences we face if there is no change in the status quo.

It all depends on whether we choose to limit our global average temperature rise

by even half a degree Celsius. A 2019 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report outlines how even a 1.5-degree rise in global average temperatures above pre-industrial levels can be detrimental to global socio-economic stability.

Another interesting infographic by the World Resources Institute compares the rise in temperatures and its impact on humans and ecosystems. For example, at a rise of 1.5°C, extreme heat events increase by 14% (or once every five years), sea level rises by 0.40 meters, species extinction rises by 4%, crop yields reduce by 3%, and fisheries decline by 1.5 million tons. At 2°C, these impacts become much more severe, namely 2.6 times worse for heat waves, bringing with it a 0.46-meter sea level rise, a doubled rate of species loss and fisheries decline, as well as 2.3 times lower crop yields.

## GLOBAL MARCH FOR CLIMATE

What has prompted more than a million young individuals around the world to mobilize into a civil march for action on climate change? Simply put, for the younger generations climate impacts will increasingly get worse and disrupt a chance for a peaceful and stable life enjoyed by the previous generations. Climate protests like Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion believe that climate change is an emergency that needs to be prevented — now. For the young people of today, the stakes are high, as carbon budgets will get ever smaller with more extreme climate

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impacts. That is why young leaders like climate activist Greta Thunberg or US Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez are some of the leading voices when it comes to talking about climate change and its effects on the younger and future generations.

It is also due to protest movements such as these that 450 local governments and city councils around the world have declared a “climate emergency.” These local governments represent 40 million people from across Australia, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States and Canada. Although it is a local win for most climate activists, according to The Climate Mobilization local governments are often the starting place for progress on bigger issues like minimum wage or civil rights. By declaring a climate emergency, such campaigns are a starting point for passing declarations on climate commitments, creating a transition pathway and mobilizing local policy changes.

As we can see from The Climate Mobilization data, a growing number of people in several countries is becoming concerned with climate change. For example, over 35% of Britain’s population and 28% of Canadians supported their local councils in declaring a climate emergency in their towns and cities.

It is especially interesting to see these local climate movements being led in places like the UK and Canada, where a rise of populist national and provincial

governments — which do not necessarily support adaptation or mitigation efforts — might make for an interesting reaction to how people perceive climate change. As some studies suggest, higher levels of concern are a direct result of experiences with climate impacts like super hurricanes, unending wildfires or regular flooding. However, as a CBC article points out, experience may be a poor teacher, given how deeply entrenched climate change is as a partisan issue.

As demonstrated by the fraught debate on the subject in the United States, this partisan divide is not unique to Canada. However, analysis from The Climate Mobilization points out to an interesting finding that shows the highest number of responses from Canadian local councils — 379 as compared to 16 in the US or 91 in the UK — declaring a climate emergency. As various governments around the world go into their election cycles either this year or next, we will start to see if climate change translates into a real voting issue or not.

## **INTERGENERATIONAL EQUITY DEBATE**

However, the biggest part of the world’s population that faces impacts from climate change is the generation that may not even be of voting age yet. An interesting tool from the Carbon Brief combines data from emissions and population changes with climate modeling. By doing so, it can calculate the carbon budget of an average citizen

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over his or her lifetime in order to keep the temperature rise below 1.5°C or 2°C. If the world is to meet these targets to avoid catastrophic climate impacts, current and future generations will need to make drastic changes to their emission levels. Some of these include reduction in flying, meat consumption and the use of fossil fuels, among other things. And it gets worse with every generation: Children born now have a lifetime carbon budget that is 90% less than their grandparents.

The lack of climate action further impacts other socio-economic aspects like “employment, access to housing, availability of pensions” and the overall stability of our current lifestyles. This is a classic example of an intergenerational equity debate — one that environmentalists hear so often but rarely get to see in reality. Do we make the switch, or do we let future generations deal with the impacts as and when they happen?

To make it simple, as pointed out by the Extinction Rebellion infographic, the baby boomer generation (born between the mid-1940s to mid-1960s) and Generation X (born between the mid-1960s and early 1980s) is not likely to experience temperature anomalies. However, lifetime change for millennials (1980s-2000s) and Generation Z (mid-2000s) is going to look very different due to projected temperatures under different climate scenarios.

The problem of dealing with climate change or environmental degradation is

not up to the future generations. It is a decision that we all, including baby boomers, Generation Xers and millennials, have to make in the present because it is about our families’ futures. We are still in the safe zone of climate impact, and this gives us the room to adapt our economies to being low-carbon, our consumptive habits to being sustainable, and our behavior to thinking long-term.

Although humans are more often reactive than proactive when it comes to change, it now becomes a question of whether we want to lead better lives than our parents, or an existence that is plagued of social, economic and climate emergencies. The widespread growth of these global youth-led climate movements is an important lesson to the older generations: Bottom-up, sustainable, green change is coming, whether you like it or not.

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## Will Zelensky Deliver Much Needed Reform for Ukraine?

Alona Anokhina, Kateryna Parkhomei & Iván Farías Pelcastre  
May 6, 2019

*The election of an inexperienced politician to Ukraine's highest office should be taken as a signal that the country's patience is running thin.*

On April 21, Ukrainians voted in the final round of the country's presidential elections. Its result was devastating for the incumbent, President Petro Poroshenko, who ran for his second term in office but only managed to secure less than a quarter of the votes. Yulia Tymoshenko, Ukraine's former prime minister and second-time presidential hopeful, did not manage to get past the first round. Instead, Ukrainians overwhelmingly elected Volodymyr Zelensky, a 41-year-old actor, who just became the country's youngest ever — as well as the least experienced — president-elect.

Despite having never held public office or worked in public service, running as the only candidate for a political party that did not exist 18 months ago, Zelensky still managed to win more than 73% of the popular vote. His overwhelming victory is as unconventional as his rise to power: Prior to running for president, Zelensky's political experience was only a fictional one.

A lawyer by training and comedy writer, director and actor by profession,

Zelensky's track record was limited to playing a president in the highly popular Ukrainian TV series *Servant of the People*. Zelensky character, Vasyl Petrovych Goloborodko, is a history teacher who is catapulted to the presidency after a video of his anti-corruption rant goes viral. With no previous experience in public service, Goloborodko relies on humor, naiveté, and “common guy” knowledge to make sense of his new — and very much unexpected — responsibilities as a head of state.

The fictional character's efforts at making government work for “the people,” however, are soon met with the harsh political and socio-economic realities of the country, which include the misuse of the law by public servants, the abuse of power by political leaders and a widespread corruption in the public administration. Rather than dissuading him, however, these challenges encourage Goloborodko to make good on his promise of reforming the country.

### STRANGER THAN FICTION

The fact that fictional Goloborodko's and real-life Zelensky's careers are so successful, despite their lack of experience, tells a lot about the disenchantment that Ukrainians feel about politics. More than five years after the Euromaidan revolution in February 2014, change in the country's political system and institutions has been snail-paced. Since the uprising ousted the pro-Moscow president, Viktor

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Yanukovich, Ukraine has been slowly pursuing a series of constitutional reforms, mainly aimed at curbing presidential powers, strengthening the role of the country's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, and increasing the overall efficiency of the state.

According to some analysts, the undertaking of the reforms that Euromaidan — also called the “Revolution of Dignity” — protesters sought did in fact start in 2014, but slowed down soon after. Some of the reasons for the delay include the resistance to changes by oligarchs whose interests are prioritized by the government, the presence of pro-government members on the constitutional court, opposition and conflict within parliament itself, and the continued state of warfare in the country's eastern Donbas region following the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014.

Despite all these challenges, some of the reforms were successful. These included decentralization, the establishment of a public procurement system and making the economy less reliant on bureaucracy. Some of the tangible changes brought about by these reforms include a 2011 decision by parliament to simplify and/or abolish the requirements for the registration and licensing of small businesses.

In 2012, the constitutional court, in response to a judicial challenge on whether the setting up of voting stations abroad at Ukraine's diplomatic missions

was legal, decided to uphold the principles of equal voting right and equal public participation in the elections. Together these measures contributed to increasing the democratic legitimacy of the state.

Other reforms were not as successful. These include land reform, the privatization of large enterprises, the reform of security services and fiscal reform. Regardless of their success, it can be said that ordinary people in Ukraine have not yet felt a significant positive change in government, expressing in a 2017 national survey that “they neither feel the change in the general state of affairs in the country nor on the everyday life level.”

The poll, conducted by the Democratic Initiatives Foundation, showed that 42% of the respondents claimed to support government decentralization reform, but only 16% of them indicated that they felt a positive change as a result of its implementation. In contrast, more than half of the respondents (55%) indicated they felt no change at all.

According to the authorities, the main reason for the perception of failure is the time that the reforms will take to deliver visible results. Given that most of them require a long-term approach and changes, their effects will not be seen anytime soon. To determine whether these reforms will be a long-term success — or are already a failure — it is possible to look closer at what is happening in the education and health care sectors.

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## HEALTH AND EDUCATION

Firstly, public health financing is ineffective, since funds are paid to medical institutions rather than spent directly on the provision of medical care for patients. Despite the guaranteed free health care, state funding accounts only for half of the total amount of medical expenses. The rest is funded from the pockets of patients, and often such a fee is not officially registered or even considered. Families often complain that it is difficult for them to pay for medication and services.

To make up for these shortcomings, it is not uncommon to bribe medical doctors in order to secure better treatment than that which would be commonly provided. Under this practice, patients or their families encourage the general practitioner in charge to secure better and preferential treatment.

Currently, Ukraine is among the world's worst countries in terms of equality of access to medical care and is one of five countries that do not have a specific policy aimed at providing access to medical services for children. For instance, according to The Lancet's Healthcare Access and Quality Index, Ukraine ranks second to last among Central and Eastern European countries, with only Russia scoring below. This is why health care reform is probably the one with the highest priority among them all.

Secondly, but not less importantly, the education reform's implementation is of

crucial importance to the country. The new law, which the Ministry of Education deputies and experts have been preparing for almost three years, will supersede the one that has been in force since 1991. The government has committed to at least 7% of GDP to be allocated for education every year from now on; comparatively, in 2016, this figure was about 5%. Although by Western European standards the amount allocated to education is substantial, these financial resources will only be sufficient to implement educational reform if the use of resources remains under continued scrutiny.

Moreover, one of the main changes brought about by the reform is the return to a 12-year education system, which prevails in other countries. Although by 1999 Ukraine had already switched to 12-year education, in 2010 the Ministry of Education implemented a return to the 11-year system.

Now, the ministry is doing yet another U-turn as new teaching methods could not be "squeezed" into 11 years of study. This newest extension will enable schools to increase the duration of vocational training for one year, hence launching a full-fledged senior specialized school model, which will be closer to the Western European education models.

### A CASE FOR THE INEXPERIENCED

By other countries' standards, the Ukrainian political system is a tricky one.

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It can be argued that, although the majority of the Ukrainian population is eager for change, various sectors of it are neither ready for, nor willing to pursue, such changes. Depending on which reform one talks about, opposition comes from either the rural communities, the older generations or even individuals involved in the so-called shadow economy. The question regarding whether the implementation of these reforms will be successful remains therefore an open one.

The high levels of corruption prevalent in almost all sectors of the economy, the post-Soviet mentality and nostalgia held in certain strata of society, and the economic challenges involved in the redistribution and reallocation of material and human resources are still some of the major obstacles to the implementation of reforms in Ukraine.

However, for various other groups and the younger generation, the immediate implementation of such reforms is crucial. Should the reforms slow down further or stop, they could bring back the dynamics of corruption that prevailed in previous decades.

The election of an inexperienced politician to Ukraine's highest office should be taken as a signal that the country's patience is running thin. All things considered, real-life Volodymyr Zelensky's political career and party might have emerged from a televised political satire. But his fictional alter ego still provides wise advice for the president-elect: "Stop it. You laughed, I

laughed, we all had some fun. [But] a common guy can't become president in our country." Until he did.

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## Blasphemy Laws: Sacrilege in God's Name

Khwaja Saadat Noor  
May 7, 2019

*Blasphemy laws create religious extremism, repress the people, bind the hands of government and paralyze the country at will.*

On February 25, 2018, Rome's ancient Colosseum was lit in red to condemn Asia Noreen's death sentence. Commonly known as Asia Bibi, Noreen is a Christian woman in Pakistan who faced the death sentence under the country's blasphemy laws. A farm laborer from the Ittan Wali village in Pakistan's Punjab province, she was involved in an argument with a group of Muslim women in 2010 over water and accused of insulting Prophet Muhammad. On the basis of this charge, she was arrested and imprisoned under Section 295C of Pakistan's Penal Code. Later that year, she was tried and sentenced to death.

In October 2018, the Supreme Court of Pakistan confirmed her acquittal from the charge of blasphemy after she languished for many years in prison. Yet a simple question arises: How free is Asia Bibi to live in her own country with the ever-present fear of being killed or lynched by so-called defenders of Islam?

That almost everyone seems reconciled to the idea that her only shot at safety is to seek refuge outside Pakistan speaks volumes about the state of affairs in the

country. Pakistan's blasphemy laws carry strict punishments for anyone convicted of having "insulted" Islam. Punishments range from a heavy fine to the death penalty. Alarming, convictions and the ensuing punishments can be based on as little as a single man's testimony.

Obviously, such a terrible due process leaves the blasphemy laws open to abuses. Today, these laws are regularly used as the means of waging personal vendettas and settling scores. Again and again, these laws are used to persecute people from religious minorities. Pakistan's 2.5 million Christians have suffered disproportionately, as have members of the Ahmadi Muslim sect.

### **BLASPHEMY LAWS IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT**

Long before Pakistan was created in 1947, the Indian subcontinent had blasphemy laws. These were mainly the work of Muslim rulers. British colonizers repealed these laws to enable Christian missionaries to evangelize in the subcontinent. After the revolt of 1857, blasphemy laws made a comeback in the 1860 Indian Penal Code. Section 295 still gives protection to worship places, scriptures and personages of all religions of India. Later in 1927, two Sections 295 (A) and (B) were inserted, which prescribed punishment for outraging religious feelings of any class or religious group with deliberate and malicious intentions. Pakistan and Bangladesh inherited this penal code,

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and blasphemy laws live on in all three children of British India.

Over the last few decades, Pakistan has experienced a strong wave of Islamization. Its constitution has been amended and its judiciary has turned more fanatical. As a result, Pakistan has taken the lead in instituting some of the strictest blasphemy laws among all Muslim-majority states. An amendment was introduced to 295 (B) of its penal code in 1982 that extended penalty options to include life imprisonment. In 1986, an amendment inserted Section 295 (C) that makes defamation against Prophet Muhammad punishable by death. In 1992, a judgment of the Federal Shariat Court made the death sentence the only punishment for blasphemy.

Yet blasphemy laws are not a South Asian monopoly. As per a 2014 Pew Research Center report, over a quarter of the world's countries and territories, 26% to be precise, had anti-blasphemy laws or policies, and that more than one in ten (13%) nations had laws or policies penalizing apostasy. The report found that "the legal punishments for such transgressions vary from fines to death."

As of 2014, there were 50 countries around the world outlawing blasphemy. Thirty out of those countries had a majority Muslim population. As expected, theocracies like Saudi Arabia were part of this list, but more surprising were the names of countries supposed to be modern, such as Turkey, Egypt, Malaysia, Pakistan and Indonesia. To

top it all, the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), which is based in Saudi Arabia, has been campaigning for a global blasphemy law to ostensibly protect Muslims from what it calls Islamophobia.

The reality is that blasphemy laws cause great injustice to some of the greatest Muslim minds. The famous Egyptian poet Fatima Naut has been facing a three-year blasphemy sentence for criticizing the slaughter of animals on Eid al-Adha, an Islamic festival. In Malaysia, a man was charged with blasphemy simply because he posed questions to his religious teacher. And, of course, we cannot forget the brutal lynching of an Afghan woman who argued with a cleric "about his practice of selling charms to women at a shrine." The killing of Mashal Khan within a university precinct in Pakistan is too fresh in memory.

There is no dearth of examples. Take that of Jakarta's governor, popularly called Ahok, who was given a two-year jail term on charges of blasphemy. In fact, blasphemy charges have risen steadily in Indonesia over the last decade and have a nearly 100% conviction rate.

It is a similar situation in Egypt where blasphemy accusations have risen manifold since the ouster of Hosni Mubarak in 2011 and, like Pakistan, have been used "as a form of anti-minority oppression." Even Bangladesh has seen deadly marches in favor of a more stringent blasphemy law.

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Blasphemy laws are meant to protect Muslims. However, it would not be an overstatement to say that these laws have targeted those at the margins of their respective Muslim societies instead of protecting ordinary people.

## **BLASPHEMY AND THE QURAN**

As per the Quran, blasphemy is a serious offense against God, but no earthly legal penalty is ever mentioned in the holy book. Rather, it emphasizes that God will ultimately punish blasphemers, though not through any human law. The Quran tells the Prophet Muhammad directly that it is foolish to expect everyone to follow him, as only God knows who will find guidance and that humans, including messengers of God, have no ability to control this.

As per the Quran, “the life of this world is nothing but play and amusement.” The pious, the polytheists and the wrongdoers are all to be punished by God in the hereafter. In fact, God asks Prophet Muhammad to be patient with al-jahilun (the ignorant). It is God who has the right to punish disbelievers, not the prophet. This punishment is reserved for the afterlife, not this life.

Given the lack of any mention of earthly punishment at all for this crime in the Quran, how can traditional Islamic law justify punishing blasphemy with death? The answer is that traditional Islamic law is not derived only from the Quran, but also from the prophetic practice or sunnah, which is established by the hadith, the sayings of the Prophet

Muhammad. A narrative of prophetic actions, and hence of sunnah, can also be derived from the sirah, the biographies of the Prophet.

As Islamic jurisprudence developed over the centuries, much was added to the spirit of the Quran, based often on dubious reports about the words and deeds of the prophet. Blasphemy, and in particular the crime of “insulting the prophet,” gradually became a capital offense. Yet this happened despite objections from prominent jurists like Abu Hanifa, the eighth-century founder of one of the four main schools of Sunni thought. He argued that a bigger sin than insulting the prophet is disbelief in God, but Islam decrees no punishment for that.

Today, Pakistani liberals, most of whom are faithful Muslims, refer to such sources in the Islamic tradition to argue against blasphemy laws. They are right. Those laws should be abandoned — in Pakistan and elsewhere — on Islamic grounds alone.

There is also another important point. The Quran conceives of an omnipotent and omnipresent God. The logical implication of this point is that God cannot be harmed even a jot. Therefore, blasphemy laws are not required for God’s protection.

## **ISLAM AND MODERNITY**

Blasphemy laws prevent one of the world’s major religions from reconciling with modernity. This issue goes much

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deeper than irreverent cartoons, which have received much media attention. It includes controversy over Pope Benedict XVI's erudite speech at Regensburg University to an academic audience. This speech caused international uproar, triggered riots, many killings and even the murder of a nun. Even more significantly, Muslims themselves who express liberal ideas can be killed or intimidated, even in the West.

A good example of a Muslim who has suffered because of anti-blasphemy laws is Raif Badawi of Saudi Arabia. He wrote a blog post arguing that clerics should not have a monopoly on the truth. For this, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes in 2012. In Iran, Ayatollah Hossein Kazemeyni Boroujerdi said something similar, and he is now rotting away in Evin Prison. His real crime was not blasphemy, but opposing political Islam and clerical rule. There are plenty of other examples from Iran, which beats Pakistan to gain top position in blasphemy laws. The country has decreed an entire religious minority, the Baha'i, blasphemous. The Baha'i are afforded no protections for their life or their property under the Iranian Constitution. They are true second-class citizens.

The best people who can address blasphemy laws are Muslim theologians and religious leaders. They are aware of the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad himself. People insulted the prophet personally. They threw trash at his

home and called him all sorts of names. Yet the he did not execute or imprison them. He demonstrated that the message of Islam is spread through compassion, not through punishing people who disagree with you.

In 2019, it is time that Muslim theologians, religious leaders and intellectuals help their societies understand that blasphemy laws serve not the honor of Islam, but much more mundane interests. They help the powerful persecute non-Muslim minorities out of greed or jealousy, and silence Muslims themselves who criticize or challenge the powers that be. Importantly, they have no basis in the Quran.

All Muslims of good faith should stand up more forcefully for people like Asia Bibi, who was falsely accused of blasphemy. Also, they should tolerate those who really do blaspheme and "not sit with them" as the Quran itself counsels. Muslim societies must simultaneously return to their roots and embrace modernity by repealing irreligious and unjust blasphemy laws.

Till then, let peace be upon us all.

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double master's in international development and philosophy.

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## The End of the Iran Nuclear Deal

Gary Grappo  
May 10, 2019

*Iran's economy is set to plunge and the much strained JCPOA with it. But the Islamic Republic will likely remain defiant.*

Iran's announcement on May 8 that it will "partially" withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — aka the Iran nuclear deal concluded in 2015 between the Iranians and the P5+1 group — marks yet another step in the landmark accord's slow death.

The demise became inevitable a year ago when President Donald Trump pulled the US out of the agreement and re-imposed onerous sanctions on Iran and its economy.

In announcing his government's action, President Hassan Rouhani said Iran will cease its sales of enriched uranium, meaning its stocks will begin to exceed set JCPOA limits. He also warned that if the other still-compliant signatories — clearly signaling the Europeans — don't come up with a mechanism for Iran to recapture the economic benefits of the JCPOA in 60 days, then Tehran will resume production of highly-enriched uranium — likely above the 3.67% level permitted under the accord.

## DESPERATE GAMBIT TO FIGHT "KING DOLLAR"

Throwing the future of the deal at the feet of the Europeans illustrates the desperation of Iran's leadership and its economy. Iranian hardliners had always maintained that the JCPOA was a Western plot to undermine the Islamic Revolution, which was all but confirmed by the US withdrawal in 2018. Moderates are at whit's end to prove them wrong. Bereft of options short of caving to the Americans, they are effectively beseeching, if not begging, the Europeans to save them and the JCPOA.

American sanctions have begun to bite deep into Iran's economy with oil exports halved even before the May expiration of US waivers — from a high of 3.8 million barrels per day (bpd) at the start of 2018 to 1.1 million bpd by in March 2019. The waivers had been granted to major economic partners and allies of the US still importing Iranian oil, including China, India, South Korea, Japan, Italy, Turkey and others. With the expiration of those waivers, oil exports could now plummet by as much as another 50%. Losses to Iran already reach well into the tens of billions of dollars. Trump's announcement also on May 8 to impose sanctions on Iran's mining and minerals sectors, including copper, steel and others, will exact further pain on the country.

Iran's leadership realizes the futility of fighting "king dollar," the all-powerful currency in which most of the world's

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financial and trade transactions take place. The facts are incontrovertible. The US dollar makes up nearly 62% of all known central bank foreign exchange reserves, making it the de facto global currency.

According to SWIFT, the payment services company, in 2018, the dollar accounted for 90% of global trade based on the value of letters of credit issued, up from 81% three years earlier. (Even the European Union pays for 80% of its energy imports in dollars.) Any nation, financial institution or company doing business in dollars or with the US risks an effective death sentence in defying American sanctions.

But Iran's gambit of dumping the problem on the Europeans effectively amounts to blackmail: You fix this or we're gone. Read: we are helpless and you must help us or else. Yet the Europeans have already sought financial work-arounds to US sanctions — China made a futile attempt as well — but to little effect. Supplanting the dollar, which has been the global currency since the end of World War II, may be possible, but it would take extraordinary efforts and much time. Iran's economy, now in a steep nosedive — from negative 3.9% last year to an estimated minus 6% in 2019 — doesn't have time.

## **IRAN'S OWN DOING**

The European signatories of the JCPOA — Britain, France, Germany and the EU

— quickly rejected Iran's hapless "ultimatum."

First, Europe recognizes the Islamic Republic's vain attempt to drive a wider wedge between themselves and the US. Europe's economic and strategic ties to the US, frayed though they may be in the era of Donald Trump, are simply too strong. Second, despite the Trump administration's ill-considered withdrawal from the agreement, many of its justifications for doing so ring true.

Iran's continued testing of intermediate-range ballistic missiles, backing for terrorist organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas, support for the brutal Syrian regime and the Houthi rebels in Yemen, interference in the internal affairs of regional nations like Iraq and Lebanon, threatening harangues against Israel and Saudi Arabia, and abysmal human rights record are all self-inflicted wounds, which the Europeans recognize and cannot fix.

Only Iran's ruling clique of clerics and toady henchmen, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, can right these and other wrongs.

Trump's decisions — driven by hardliner Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and uber-hardliner National Security Adviser John Bolton — unfortunately play right into the hands of those same Iranian hardliners who complained all along of the JCPOA sell-out to the West. They and their master, the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, have no intention of reversing the course of the

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revolution. They would rather see the economy tank first and with it the enormous potential and aspirations of the Middle East's most capable population.

## **EXIT JCPOA BUT NOT THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION**

Nevertheless, the capacity of Iranians for suffering, undergirded by Shia Islam's martyr ethos, will suffer through this, just as they did for the 35 years prior to the JCPOA. And just as it did during that time, the leadership will blame all the woes of its own theocratic mismanagement and corruption on the "Great Satan," aka the US. It will likely work again, sadly.

Iran may hold on to the JCPOA till 2020 in a false hope of change in US policy following the presidential election. But President Trump's defeat is not assured — certainly not in the glow of America's vibrant economy and low unemployment rate, two drivers in any election. Moreover, even a winning Democratic candidate would be loath to re-enter the JCPOA without changes.

Such a candidate would wisely seek to avoid the division sparked by Barack Obama's acceptance of the accord in the face of fierce resistance not only from the Republicans, but also many Democrats. A Democratic president would insist on Iran meeting conditions substantially higher than the current JCPOA stipulates before signing back on.

The JCPOA was always about the US and Iran. Including the other global economic powers was a solid strategy. But, in the end, it was always about the US and the long reach of its economic power embodied in the dollar.

So, without the US, the JCPOA withers. Iran and the rest of the world revert to the pre-comprehensive sanctions period preceding 2007. History repeats itself and Iranians ultimately pay the price. The Islamic Revolution, crippled as it may be, blunders on.

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# US Can No Longer Rely on Its Historic Clout in Latin America

Sofia Ramirez

May 13, 2019

*Instead of attempting to undermine China's Latin America plan, the United States needs to construct one of its own.*

On April 12, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo kickstarted a week of travel to several Latin American countries, where he did not fail to warn of the dangers of a close relationship with China. This message came on the heels of strong US pressure on the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to move its annual general assembly from Chengdu, China, just one week before the event was scheduled to take place.

Although the Trump administration was able to sway decision-makers in this instance, China continues to make commercial and diplomatic inroads in Latin America that are quickly eroding the United States' historical foothold in the region. Instead of attempting to undermine China's Latin America plan, the US needs to construct one of its own.

China is aggressively seeking to deepen its commercial relationships with Latin America, courting 12 countries to join its global infrastructure investment project, commonly known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This has resulted in a yearly average of over \$10 billion in

annual investments in the region over the last five years. Even going back to 2005, China's Export-Import Bank and Development Bank has lent a cumulative \$150 billion to Latin American countries, exceeding amounts provided by the World Bank, IDB and the Andean Development Corporation combined.

## DEBT TRAP

Most of Washington's criticisms of China's involvement in the region are based on its checkered lending record. Dubbed "debt trap diplomacy," China's lending practices often compound a country's financial distress, with governments pressured into putting natural resources on the chopping block as collateral. The best known case of debt trap diplomacy in Latin America is Venezuela, which owes China some \$20 billion in loans that is now being paid back in oil. Ecuador is also on the hook, now surrendering 80% percent of its oil exports to China to settle its outstanding debt of \$6.5 billion.

Although most Latin American governments align closely with the US on many diplomatic issues, most notably on Venezuela, many have shown they can compartmentalize their relationship with China, especially when it comes to money.

Since the Trump administration took over in 2017, US policy toward Latin America has been disinterested at best, and hostile at worst. President Donald Trump postponed visits to the region for

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nearly two years before appearing at the G20 summit in Buenos Aires at the end of 2018, and his frequent and antagonizing comments regarding immigrants and trade have caused a rift in Washington's relationship with Mexico and other Central American states.

The United States must reinvigorate its Latin America policy by first re-establishing diplomatic presence in the region. While senior diplomatic posts in regionally influential countries such as Brazil and Mexico remain unfilled, the White House chose to recall top diplomats from El Salvador, the Dominican Republic and Panama over those governments' decisions to cut ties with Taiwan. Actions like these only serve to isolate and push these countries into a closer relationship with China.

The United States benefits from having predominantly democratic governments south of its border to build consensus on humanitarian, political and diplomatic issues that may arise across the region. There are already instances of China exporting its repressive tactics, with Ecuador employing surveillance methods against its citizens using Chinese software. It is also conceivable that Latin American countries will be swayed to vote more closely with China at the United Nations and other international forums as Beijing propels its diplomatic relationship with the region forward, further eroding US influence on a global scale. Filling senior diplomatic posts in Latin America will put the US in

a stronger position to counter these maneuvers.

## **NOSEDIVE OR RESURGE**

Eager to attract foreign investment, many countries in the region have made a concerted effort to improve their business environments by simplifying tax regimes, establishing trade zones and seeking trade agreements. US companies have benefited from these arrangements, but as the opinion of the United States among the region's citizens continues to fall, China will quickly become the main benefactor of these opportunities.

The Trump administration's continued efforts to slash and, more recently, cut off foreign aid to Central America also makes Chinese financing much more attractive. Rather, the United States should seek to double down on its economic aid programs to rival China's offers. Pursuing trade agreements, such as joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership or negotiating a free trade agreement with Brazil, will also help cement strong relationships in the future.

With a promise to increase investment to \$250 billion and trade flows to \$500 billion in the next six years, China is actively seeking to increase its influence in Latin America. The United States can no longer comfortably rely on its historic clout in the region. In an era where China is becoming a major player on all global fronts, it has never been more

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vital for the US to have a strong relationship with the states in its own backyard. Whether or not Washington continues to nosedive or resurge will depend entirely on the Trump administration's implementation of a strong diplomatic and economic regional strategy.

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## **Leaving the INF Treaty Wasn't the Problem — It's How We Did It**

Cole A. Baker  
May 22, 2019

*While the United States was motivated to pull out of the agreement because of Russia's noncompliance, it should also be noted that the INF Treaty had significant flaws.*

On February 1, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that, due to the Russian development of an intermediate-range cruise missile system, the United States was

immediately suspending its obligations to the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty, planning a full withdrawal from the agreement within six months. This move has been widely opposed, most recently by the House Appropriations Committee. The committee released a budget report on May 20, stating its intent not to fund any research or development systems that would violate the restrictions of the INF Treaty.

However, this opposition may be misplaced, as the Trump administration's choice to withdraw from the treaty was justified. What is concerning, however, is how they did it.

The INF Treaty, signed by the United States and Russia in 1987, eliminated both countries' arsenals of short and intermediate-range missiles, highlighting its importance as key bilateral agreement between the biggest nuclear powers. Due to the treaty's importance, many critics of the withdrawal contend that the United States is actively endangering global nuclear stability and arms control efforts. However, these critics are disregarding one fact: Russia has been cheating.

The United States has known that Russia was developing intermediate-range missiles prohibited by the INF Treaty since 2013. The Obama administration actively pursued diplomatic means to return Russia to compliance, including a 2014 public acknowledgment that Russia was in violation of the INF Treaty. These

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diplomatic efforts continued through 2018, to no avail.

While the United States was motivated to pull out of the agreement because of Russia's noncompliance, it should also be noted that the INF Treaty had significant flaws. As the treaty was bilateral, it only addressed Russian and American intermediate-range land missiles, but had no authority over other nuclear powers. While China was happy with that arrangement, the rest of the world had every reason not to be.

Yet even in the context of this flaw and Russia's noncompliance, critics still contend that a broken treaty is better than no treaty, which is simply not true. By allowing Russia to remain party to a treaty that it was blatantly disregarding, the United States was implicitly suggesting that signing the correct agreements is more important than following those agreements. Such a message jeopardizes international stability far more than the withdrawal from an individual treaty.

For instance, the United States and Russia are party to the New START treaty, which limits the number of deployed strategic warheads held by either country. Prior to the United States pulling out of the INF Treaty, it was plausible that Russia believed it could also violate the New START treaty without suffering repercussions. Unfortunately, the opportunity to communicate this narrative was not seized upon by the Trump administration.

As Brookings' author Frank A. Rose recently noted, when the United States withdrew from the INF Treaty, its ultimate objective should have been to place the blame for the failed treaty firmly on Russia. A strategic approach, similar to the US denouncement of Russian violations in 2014, should have preceded any talk of withdrawing from the treaty. This messaging would have focused the attention of the international community on Russian violations, ultimately making the withdrawal announcement a seemingly rational final step.

Moreover, the United States' allies should have been at the very least informed of the administration's intentions before any announcement was made. Not only is that a common courtesy, but it would also have provided those allies the opportunity to prepare unified statements denouncing Russian actions. Instead, President Donald Trump, after a campaign rally in Nevada in October 2018, spoke publicly about his plan to withdraw from the INF Treaty without first notifying America's allies. International attention then immediately focused on how the United States was going to end the treaty rather than why it was going to end.

By not laying the proper groundwork, the United States lost control of the narrative. To many, controlling the narrative may seem inconsequential given that the treaty was between the United States and Russia. Russia now understands that violating a treaty with the United States has consequences.

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But despite this understanding, the perspective of the international community matters.

In the 21st century, interstate competition is most commonly found in the gray zone between diplomatic interactions and direct military conflict. According to US Navy Captain (ret) Philip Kapusta's white paper, "The Gray Zone," this competition is characterized by challenges that are aggressive, ambiguous and perspective-dependent. Due to these characteristics, effective operations in the gray zone often require actors to construct favorable narratives. The stronger the narrative, the greater the ability to dictate international and local support, direct public outrage and define the very conflict itself.

Controlling the narrative not only applies to the nuclear political paradigm, but it has also become equally as important as the decision-making pertaining to the treaties themselves. Inherent in the ability to construct new treaties and maneuver other nuclear powers into entering those treaties is the ability to control international opinion. If the United States wants to continue providing the benchmark for global nuclear stability, then it must embrace two points of understanding — namely, that there exist repercussions for not only violating treaties, but also for not controlling the narrative.

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## **Narendra Modi Wins Again as India Rejects the Nehru Dynasty**

Atul Singh

May 24, 2019

*Revulsion for corruption and nepotism makes Indians vote for a leader with humble roots despite his poor track record and authoritarian tendencies.*

In April, this author called Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's economic record abysmal. Yet he has now been re-elected with a thumping majority. His ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has increased its tally from 282 to 303 of the 543 seats in the Lok Sabha, India's lower house of Parliament.

Not since Indira Gandhi of the Indian National Congress has the country had such a powerful leader. So, what does Modi's victory mean for India and the world?



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## THE VIEW OF THE FOREIGN PRESS

Newspapers and television channels from the Anglo-Saxon world are not thrilled with the outcome of the election. They have long viewed the BJP with suspicion and Modi with hostility. His resounding victory has aroused unusual pathos in London, New York and elsewhere.

The Guardian has deemed Modi's victory as "bad news for India and the world." It sees Modi as yet another nationalist populist demagogue who is pro-business, anti-minority and untruthful. The Guardian sees the BJP as a conservative, misogynistic and upper-caste party. As per this venerable left-leaning British publication, the victory of the Modi-led BJP is "bad for India's soul."

The Economist, the center-right British magazine of 1843 vintage, appositely eschews the spiritual language of its left-leaning counterpart. Yet even it cannot avoid spiritual references. The Economist features a photo of Modi meditating in saffron in the stunning backdrop of the snow-capped Himalayas. Calling him a "half Olympian god and half kung fu wizard," it pays tribute to Modi's charisma but says he is "a vessel of anger."

Unlike The Guardian that curiously reposes faith in the Nehru dynasty and exhorts it to rethink its strategy, The Economist argues that the BJP's "opponents aided their own defeat."

The New York Times published an editorial by the noted novelist Pankaj Mishra. He claims that Modi has seduced India with envy and hate. The writer passionately argues that Modi won thanks to "violence, fake news and resentment." Mishra aptly diagnoses why Modi won. He points out that India is "a grotesquely unequal society" riven "by caste as well as class divisions" where dynasties dominate both politics and Bollywood. In such a society, Modi's humble roots are seductive to ordinary voters.

Mishra astutely observes that Modi has exploited the resentment against India's "metropolitan ruling class." This class has "such Godlike aloofness" that it leaves most Indians stranded "in history while itself moving serenely toward convergence with the prosperous West." Modi's "rhetoric of meritocracy and lusty assaults on hereditary privilege" is intoxicating to India's toiling and suffering millions.

The writer damns Rahul Gandhi, the grandson of Indira and the leader of the Congress party, as "a live mascot of India's defunct dynastic politics and insolvent ideological centrism." He bemoans Modi's unleashing of the Nietzschean "men of resentment" with their "whole tremulous realm of subterranean revenge, inexhaustible and insatiable in outbursts." Mishra blames Modi for the "savage assault on not just democratic institutions and rational discourse but also ordinary human decency." Modi's victory makes him "fear the future."

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## THE SENTIMENT AT HOME

Even as the foreign press largely takes the view that Modi's election might not entirely be a good thing, most people at home are trumpeting the dynamism of India's democracy.

To his credit, Gandhi has conceded defeat. So have other parties. A vast majority of observers agree that the Indian elections were free and fair. For all its faults, the world's largest democracy seems to be more functional than Brexit-ridden Britain or the deeply-divided US, homes to *The Guardian*, *The Economist* and *The New York Times*.

Of course, many Indians worry. Most Muslims feel marginalized and are rattled by Modi's second victory. Many of India's finest public servants fear the further decline of the country's fragile institutions. Others worry that Modi's incompetent cronies might drive the economy into deep recession. Some fear war with Pakistan or even China. And a few worry that the country might split apart.

There are good reasons for such worries. Yet they are dwarfed by one big issue. Indians have voted against their metropolitan elite. In its fulminations, the foreign press forgets that Modi is the first backward caste prime minister of India who began life as a chaiwala, selling tea by the railway station. Voters resonate with this. They no longer identify with Gandhi, the fifth-generation,

half-Italian scion of an incorrigibly corrupt dynasty.

Mishra is right about Rahul Gandhi's uselessness. The dynast lost his parliamentary seat of Amethi, hitherto an impregnable family fiefdom. However, Mishra fails to realize a key phenomenon sweeping the country. Indians no longer buy into the myth of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister and Rahul's great grandfather. Unlike George Washington or Nelson Mandela, Nehru did not hand over power to a successor. India's dapper leader blundered horribly on China and was responsible for India's catastrophic defeat in 1962. Yet he failed to resign and died in office. Finally, Indians are questioning his legacy not only vis-à-vis China, but also the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter and Rahul's grandmother, threw every opposition leader and independent journalist into jail when she declared the Emergency in 1975. Rajiv Gandhi, her son and Rahul's father, had his name dragged through the mud in the Bofors gun scandal. In the age of WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube, powerful videos showing the murky past of the Nehru dynasty have reached millions, often spiced up with rumors, exaggerations and even untruths.

This is in stark contrast to the time when this author was growing up. Back then, the legend of the Nehru dynasty ran strong. It was perpetrated through an elaborate network of patronage.

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Humanities departments in Indian universities and the English-speaking media supported the dynasty overtly or covertly. The leading humanities school was suitably named Jawaharlal Nehru University. Many leading academics and journalists in India were dynasts themselves. They identified with the Nehru family and scorned the rough-edged upstarts from small towns who spoke English with an absolutely godawful accent.

To borrow an idea from Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci, the Nehru family benefited from cultural hegemony for decades. This author remembers fellow schoolchildren offering prayers to members of the Nehru clan. Sadly for Rahul Gandhi and the Congress party, deference to dynasties has declined fast. They may still command wealth and power, but Indians want ladders of upward mobility. Modi symbolizes this desirable ladder while Gandhi personifies the hated glass ceiling.

Many Indians delight in the fact that Modi is a bachelor with no children and does not promote his family. This makes him immune from what they call the “Dhritarashtra syndrome,” a term named after a character in India’s greatest epic, The Mahabharata, who was blind and blindly loved his son. Nepotism is the bane of Indian society, and the spiritual bachelor with few worldly attachments has powerful appeal.

It is important to note that almost all relatives of this author have voted for the BJP even when they do not like

Modi. They cannot stand the prospects of the “weak, vacillating and vacuous” Rahul Gandhi as prime minister. The foreign press misses the intensity of this emotion against entrenched privilege in a country where more than 65% of the population is below 35.

## **THE MESSY AND MIGHTY CHALLENGES AHEAD**

As in the days of Indira Gandhi, this election has been a presidential election, not a parliamentary one. Like Indira, Modi believes in a strong and expansive state. This author has termed his economic policy as one of “Sanatan socialism,” a pun on Sanatan dharma that devout Hindus use to describe their faith. Like Nehru’s Fabian socialism, Modi’s Sanatan socialism is failing too.

The agricultural sector is in a funk, industrial production is declining, small enterprises are dying, jobs are vanishing and even consumption is falling. The government may trumpet healthy growth figures that seduce the International Monetary Fund, but it hides the painful reality that the economy might have contracted. As the author observed last month, the huge informal economy has collapsed.

Once, James Carville coined the term, “the economy, stupid.” In 1992, it led to George H.W. Bush’s defeat and Bill Clinton’s victory in the US. In 2019, it had no effect on Modi. That does not mean it will not affect him in 2024 or later. Indians still repose faith in Modi and have great expectations. They want

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prosperity, jobs and justice. It is impossible for any elected government to deliver them without reforming India's crumbling postcolonial apparatus of the state.

More than 15 years ago, this author resigned from civil service because of "the corruption, inertia and inefficiency" in the government. Since then, matters have got worse. Selection, training and evaluation of bureaucrats have ossified. Sycophancy, not competence, determines upward mobility in government. As a result, policy briefs are written awfully and laws are drafted terribly.

In fact, India functions through rule by law instead of rule of law. India has one of the worst police-population ratios and millions of pending cases lie pending in the courts. When Modi was elected in 2014, Kiran Bedi and a few other citizens, including this author, petitioned his government to institute long overdue police and judicial reforms. Till date, Modi has not cared for reforms. Instead, he has played political football with the Central Bureau of Investigation and interfered in an ad hoc manner in the functioning of the judiciary.

In 2019, India is increasingly a land of irreconcilable incongruities. It talks tough but Indian defense forces are still short of officers. Many of its politicians and citizens dream of world power status but the country faces a shortage of diplomats, of which it has far too few in the first place. The privatization of education, health care and public

services is proceeding at an alarming pace. The Indian bureaucracy continues to be exploitative and extractive. If one is not in the government then one is up against it unless, of course, one can buy it.

Modi's way out of this morass has been to rule like a strongman, riding roughshod over admittedly highly imperfect institutions. It is eerily reminiscent of Indira Gandhi who began the post-independence decline of Indian institutions. In his first term, Modi's cabinet was full of pygmies. Like Indira, he is fond of sycophants and has appointed one as the governor of the Reserve Bank of India. There is real fear that his second term might be more of the same, or much worse.

Indira weakened India's economy, eviscerated her own party and, as mentioned above, decimated the nation's institutions. She perpetuated a personality cult, which led a crony to declare, "Indira Is India, India Is Indira." Even Shashi Tharoor, a palace poodle of Rahul and a Congress MP, could not resist calling Indira Priya Duryodhani. Those unfamiliar with The Mahabharat might be interested to learn that Duryodhan was the epic's grand villain and the son of Dhritarahtra.

With Prime Minister Modi's resounding victory, one hopes history is not repeating itself either as a tragedy or as a farce. India cannot afford another Indira. It needs efficient, accountable and robust institutions, not more

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dynastic worship or another personality cult.

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## **Despite Recent Attacks, Anti-Semitism in the US Remains Low**

Leonard Weinberg  
May 30, 2019

*How should we reconcile the historically low level of Americans' negative feelings about Jews with the recent surge in attacks?*

The April 27 attack on the Chabad synagogue in Poway, a suburb of San Diego, California, set off alarms within American Jewish communities. The attack came six months after another lone-wolf assault that killed 11 worshippers at the Tree of Life

synagogue in Pittsburgh. Both these events followed the August 2017 Unite the Right rally (and subsequent rioting) in Charlottesville, Virginia, during which a variety of neo-Nazi, KKK and white supremacists chanted "The Jews will not replace us" before an assemblage of anti-fascist counterprotesters, curious onlookers and, most importantly, television cameras.

From the point of the country's leading watchdog organizations, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), these were not isolated incidents.

Both the ADL and the SPLC, along with other hate-crime monitors, report high levels of attacks on Jews and their institutions throughout the country over the last few years. (The Community Security Trust in the UK reports a similar upsurge.) The ADL, for example, reports that "There were 1,986 anti-Semitic incidents reported across the United States in 2017, including physical assaults, vandalism, and attacks on Jewish institutions. This figure represents a 57 percent increase over the 1,267 incidents in 2016." Alarm bells are certainly ringing.

Does this increase in violence against American Jews reflect a mounting level of popular hostility toward them by Americans in general? Were the attacks like the proverbial canary in the coal mine, a forecast of worse to come? The answer, so far as I'm able to discern, is certainly not. Some years before these anti-Semitic attacks, the ADL was able

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to carry out a worldwide survey of anti-Semitic attitudes in some 100 countries dispersed across all continents. The attitude survey employed the same 11-item scale the ADL has used over the years to measure the prevalence of anti-Semitism in the US and elsewhere.

Taken in 2015, the survey found that 9% of American adults qualified as anti-Semites. Further, this relatively modest figure represented a decline in the level of anti-Semitism from previous years. Other survey evidence suggests that, on balance, Americans like Jews, regarding them as hard-working and family-oriented people. If anything, Americans overall tend to be philo-Semitic. In the long term there has been a steady decline in anti-Semitic attitudes among Americans since the 1940s and 1950s, when a substantial segment of the public expressed highly negative attitudes about Jews.

If we consider American anti-Semitism in comparative perspective, its modest level becomes more apparent. Aside from the United Kingdom, where the survey recorded that 8% of Britons expressed significant anti-Semitic attitudes, Americans were the least hostile to Jews than any population among Western countries, according to the ADL's survey. Some 37% of the French population, for example, was recorded as anti-Semitic. In Greece the figure reached a staggering 69%.

How then should we reconcile the historically low level of Americans' negative feelings about Jews with the

recent surge in attacks on Jews? In statistical terms, the lines seem to be going in opposite directions. One way of looking at what is seemingly hard to reconcile is by referring to what we might label a "cultic milieu." That is, we are dealing with a small cluster of conspiracy-minded individuals, typically single men, strung together by the internet, whose negative views about Jews have been reinforced by online "opinion leaders" and an awareness there are others like them operating in cyberspace.

The fact that anti-Semitic attitudes are waning among the general American population constitutes a spur to action. Individuals inside this anti-Semitic milieu feel compelled to warn the public about the threat Jews pose to white, native-born Americans. Their violence is, at least in part, intended to ignite more widespread Jew-hating operations, such as those depicted in William Pierce's call to violence, *The Turner Diaries*.

Can this tactic work? The reality appears to be that the violence has the opposite effect. The public responses to these attacks are collective expressions of solidarity with the Jewish community by local and national religious and political leaders as well as members of the general public, large numbers of whom are seen on television screens throughout the country offering their condolences.

The situation in continental Europe seems different. At least in some countries, like Greece or Russia, anti-

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Semitism enjoys a mass base of support, reinforced presently by hostility to the state of Israel and its behavior toward the Palestinians (this is particularly the case in countries with large Muslim populations). In these locales, attacks on Jews may stimulate more of the same and the formation of a more substantial political movement. The likelihood of a similar development in the United States appears pretty remote.

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