

THE
FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL



A (NOT-SO-) BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DONALD TRUMP'S LEGAL MINEFIELD

BY ADIA STOKES

It feels like every time we look at the news, there are new updates concerning former President Donald Trump being on trial. Yet somehow, the topics of the articles always seem different. The reason for this is that Trump is on trial in four different cases for crimes ranging from election interference to hoarding classified documents to falsifying business records. Additionally, Trump is also involved in a civil case in Colorado after the state ruled to keep him off ballots in the 2024 election. This comes to a total of five cases, all of which are occurring simultaneously. The five are in different states across the country, meaning that much of Trump's time this election season will be spent in court. Each case has unique characteristics though all could be pivotal to the upcoming presidential election. Only the Colorado case has been decided; that still leaves ongoing changes and updates for all of the other four. Staying informed on these events is important, as the entire landscape of American politics could see major shifts in the coming months and years depending on the outcome of this election and these cases.

FEDERAL ELECTION INTERFERENCE

Even before the 2020 election results were confirmed Trump had launched a campaign discrediting Joe Biden's victory. This campaign culminated in the January 6th storming of the US Capitol, in which five people lost their lives, including one police officer, while four more officers later committed suicide within months of the insurrection.



Trump addressing a crowd of supporters, January 6th, 2021 (CNN, 2021)

CNN reports hundreds of protestors and officers were injured, leading to questions about how this could have happened. These "patriots" were led to believe that there had been widespread election fraud and therefore, the result was illegitimate. The primary purveyor was Donald Trump himself.

Along with cabinet members, advisors, and various members of his party, Trump encouraged election officials to overturn the result and when that wasn't possible, spurred his supporters to rise up against democracy.

Trump was indicted on August 1, 2023 by a Washington DC grand jury. The process clearly took years, as it went from the House Select Committee to the Washington courts. Trump was charged with four total felonies: two for disrupting the shift of power to Biden: "obstructing an official proceeding," one for encouraging the insurrection: "conspiracy to defraud the United States," and one for attempting to disallow citizens' votes through claiming election fraud. Indictment is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "a formal charge of accusation of a serious crime." Essentially, indictment is acknowledgment by a court that the accused has committed a crime. This is a big deal because it marks the first time in US history that a president or former president has been charged. Trump has been charged as a criminal, but the case has yet to go to trial. It seems likely that Trump will be found guilty given the amount of evidence from the prosecution so his defense team has decided to weaponize time.

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

A (NOT-SO-) BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DONALD TRUMP'S LEGAL MINEFIELD

By ADIA STOKES

One of the responsibilities of the president is to pardon federal criminals (those who have wronged the country). Since all of these charges are federal, if Trump won the presidency and then was found guilty, he could simply pardon himself. There may be difficulties with this since it is unprecedented, but that is the idea that Trump's defense team, Todd Blanche and John Lauro, is going off of. However, if the case goes to trial and Trump is convicted before the election, his chances of winning diminish. He could, however, still run for president. The head of prosecution, Jack Smith, is attempting to hurry the case along, as is the norm.

GEORGIA ELECTION INTERFERENCE

The Georgia Election Interference case is related to the Federal Election Interference case, although it zooms in a bit on Trump's post-loss actions specifically in the state of Georgia. This was one of the closest states and one of the most meaningful, as Georgia holds 16 electoral college votes. Refusing the loss, Trump threatened officials if they did not produce enough votes to sway the count in his favor. These votes did not exist.

He went so far as to try to send fake electors to Washington DC to try and overturn the result. These electors would lie and claim that Trump had won the state. Biden won the national election at a score of 306 to 232 electoral votes, so merely overturning Georgia would not have been enough to change the results of the election, as it would be 290 to 248, but doing so would set a precedent and increase Trump's power to continue threatening other states until he did get to 270. On top of this, all of these threats and plots were plain illegal, as evidenced in Trump's indictment on August 14, 2023.

This indictment covered 19 defendants (Trump and many of his colleagues and advisors) and 41 felony charges, all at a state level. This is important to note because if Trump is found guilty of state felonies, he would be unable to pardon himself should he win the 2024 election. Only 13 of the 41 charges are against Trump himself, although in March of 2024 Scott McAfee, the judge on the case, dismissed six total charges, three of which were against Trump. This development means that there are still ten remaining charges: the most serious of which are for breaking the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act as well as two counts of planning to create forged documents ("conspiracy to commit forgery in the first degree").

Additionally, Trump has also been charged with one count of planning to send fake electors to D.C. ("conspiracy to commit impersonating a public officer"), two counts of conspiracy to create fake documents, two counts of actually creating fake documents ("false statements and writings"), one count of planning to commit filing false documents, and one count of actually filing those false documents. The RICO charge could heighten the effect of the other charges if found guilty since it is an organized crime act. In Georgia, Trump and the other 18 defendants could be found guilty of longstanding organized crime, for which they would likely receive much more dire consequences than the other charges.

This case, like many of these cases, is completely unprecedented. Firstly because the lead prosecutor, Fani Willis, is the district attorney of Fulton County but not the Attorney General of the state. Additionally, this is an extremely high-profile case, with many of the defendants holding high offices both at the federal and state levels.



Trump alongside Georgia co-defendants, Fulton County, GA (Fulton County Sheriff's Office, 2023)

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

A (NOT-SO-) BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DONALD TRUMP'S LEGAL MINEFIELD

By ADIA STOKES

This case is potentially more complicated than others because of issues within the prosecution team. Prior to March 15th, Nathan Wade was a special prosecutor but stepped down after it came to light that he and Willis were in a relationship. Willis hired Wade to serve as part of the prosecution team in early November 2021, and although it is unknown when exactly the relationship began, it is suspected to have been around this time, as Wade filed for divorce from his former wife the next day, November 2. Trump's attorney, Steven Sadow, and his team have been trying to remove Willis from the case since March of last year, although it is unknown under what circumstances. The relationship between Wade and Willis was confirmed by Willis in early February of 2024. After the lengthy disqualification hearing that Trump's team launched, Judge McAfee ruled that Willis would stay on the case as long as Wade resigned. This entire scandal is a huge blemish on the case, diminishing Willis' credibility.

With the case now back on track, Sadow is claiming protection by the first amendment for free speech, although the prosecution has argued that his actions go beyond speech and so this claim doesn't hold. We have yet to see what the hearing holds, but I encourage all to keep up with the case as it is one of the most pivotal of the five.

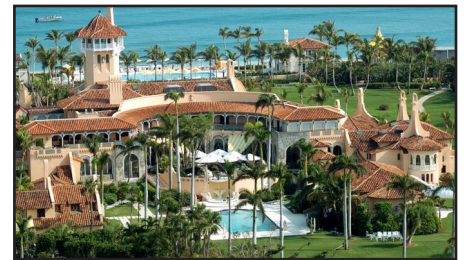
CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS

After the transfer of power from Trump to Biden, it was found that Trump held onto classified documents that he was no longer privy to. Trump stored these files at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida. Trump refused to return these files and even allegedly shared some with others who also did not have clearance; the FBI found 102 classified documents during a raid. Jack Smith is the special prosecutor in this case and has led the prosecution team.

Trump was indicted for the first time in Florida on June 9th of 2023 with 37 felonies, while a longtime aide of Trump's named Walt Nauta was charged with six felonies for aiding him. A second indictment was revealed on July 27, charging Trump with three additional felonies and Nauta with two. This indictment also charged a Mar-a-Lago employee named Carlos de Oliveira with four felonies, bringing the grand total to 52 charges.

The charges against Trump are for keeping the documents, lying about it, and various "obstruction-related crimes." He was charged for each of the 32 documents found that he refused to return, all but one of which was classified. Many presidents and former presidents store documents in personal locations that are later found and are not brought to court.

However, the thing that sets Trump apart is his behavior with the files. Between refusing to return the files and sharing them with others, Trump has broken the Espionage Act, which outlaws sharing classified documents. Additionally, Trump ordered Nauta to move the files around to avoid being found - thus criminalizing Nauta.



Mar-A-Lago, Trump's Palm Beach mansion (Getty Images)

These are all federal crimes, so similarly to the Federal Election Interference case, should Trump win the presidency, he could potentially pardon himself of all crimes. The case was assigned to Judge Aileen Cannon of the Southern District of Florida. This assignment is a highly controversial topic given that Trump appointed Cannon to this district after he had lost the 2020 election. This is, of course, the district that Mar-a-Lago is in and so the only district where Trump could be tried for this. Cannon is a historically fervent supporter of Trump, having ruled in his favor before in a civil case. There is a court date set for May 20, 2024, and Smith's case is considered very strong, but it is extremely difficult to fight against a judge's predisposition toward the defendant.

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

A (NOT-SO-) BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DONALD TRUMP'S LEGAL MINEFIELD

By ADIA STOKES

One of Trump's best defenses in this case is once again, time. Time is one of the things that Cannon has power over and it is expected that she will stall the trial until after the election.

HUSH MONEY

Stormy Daniels was a name we all heard a couple of years ago when it came to light that Trump was involved in a sex scandal in 2006. This was only a year after Trump married Melania, his third wife, who had just given birth. While having an affair is obviously morally incorrect, it is not illegal. It was later revealed that Michael Cohen, Trump's former attorney, paid Daniels \$130,000 in 2015 to keep quiet ahead of the 2016 election. Again, this is legal since the money was not paid to cover up a crime. While nothing I've covered so far is illegal, the funds that Trump used to reimburse Cohen were filed as "legal fees" as part of his 2016 election campaign. The money was paid by Trump's company to Cohen and was paid right before the 2016 election in the hopes that by hiding the affair, Trump would be more likely to win.

Donald Trump was indicted on March 30th of 2023 in Manhattan. He was charged with 34 counts of "falsifying business records in the first degree."

Trump's legal team denies both the affair and the cover-up, claiming that the funds were credible. Although it is legal to organize hush funds, it is not legal to do so in order to influence a federal election. Alvin Bragg, Manhattan's District Attorney, argues that Trump's attempt to "corrupt" the election was a repeated offense: the prosecution team allegedly has evidence that this was part of an orchestrated effort to cover up multiple stories rather than a solitary incident. All of these examples occurred within close proximity to the 2016 election, demonstrating correlation and intention in the timing. If this were a one-off event, the stakes would be lower: he would be tried for a misdemeanor offense rather than a felony.



Donald Trump (left) and Stormy Daniels (right) pictured together in 2006 (The Wall Street Journal, 2018)

However, because of the continuance of these actions, they escalate into felony severity. Potential consequences differentiate misdemeanors and felonies: depending on the state, felonies are crimes for which the punishment is prison time longer than one year or elevated fines, whereas misdemeanors are less severe: prison time more than 15 days but less than one year. They can also come with smaller fines than felonies.

Presidential campaigns have specific rules to regulate the flow of money including transparency laws in order to keep track of where money is spent. These laws are all state-by-state, meaning that the federal government does not regulate them. Trump and Cohen filed this hush payment as a campaign fund, hiding the true nature of the sum. New York law requires campaigns to make expenses public and keep track of the money going in and out. Since Trump's campaign was launched in New York City, he was required to follow New York laws. This case is seen as both the most complicated and the least likely to rule against Trump. This is also the first case to go to trial. Declining the defense team's appeal to dismiss, Judge Juan Merchen set the court date for April 15th, 2024. Originally, the trial was scheduled to start on March 25th but was delayed after Judge Merchen received last-minute information. The defense team attempted to permanently dismiss the case on the basis that these late documents could assist the prosecution, but Merchen denied this request and decided to go ahead with the trial.

The prosecutors are relying on testimony from Michael Cohen, who has chosen to speak out against Trump, as well as alleged evidence of repeated criminal activity to prove Trump is a felon.

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

A (NOT-SO-) BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DONALD TRUMP'S LEGAL MINEFIELD

BY ADIA STOKES

However, the defense will likely argue that the charges brought against Trump were misclassified and are instead mere bookkeeping issues which, while illegal for the normal person, are not significant enough to bring against a former president. Additionally, since the laws against systematic crime and falsifying records are state and federal laws, respectively, there is little precedent for how those laws interact. A person is generally charged with either a state or federal crime. This issue could prove a weak point in the prosecution's case.



Donald Trump sits with legal team, April 4th 2024, New York City (AP Photo/Seth Wenig, Pool)

At the end of the day, Trump has been charged with a state crime, meaning that if Judge Merchen were to rule in favor of the prosecution, Trump would still be able to run for president but if he were to run, would not be able to pardon himself. Only the governor of New York has the ability to do so, meaning that this would be the first time in US history that a sitting president serves a punishment for a crime.

However, since the charges themselves are not particularly severe, Trump would be likely to receive probation or lighter since he would be a first-time offender and a nonviolent defendant. It is highly unlikely that he would serve time in prison, but being on trial during the election season could have a negative effect on his campaign and hurt his chances at winning office come November.

COLORADO BALLOTS

Trump v. Anderson is a case that started in Colorado, intending to use Section III of the 14th Amendment to take Trump off the 2024 presidential election ballot.

The Section in question reads,

“No person shall be a Senator or Representative in Congress, or elector of President and Vice-President, or hold any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any State, who, having previously taken an oath, as a member of Congress, or as an officer of the United States, or as a member of any State legislature, or as an executive or judicial officer of any State, to support the Constitution of the United States, shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof.”

Essentially, no sworn government employee can serve if they have turned against the country in insurrection.

Colorado courts had ruled that Trump would not appear on the 2024 presidential ballot, a highly controversial decision given the lack of bipartisan decision-making in modern American politics. Although more than half of all states have seen objections to Trump's credibility as a presidential option, only Colorado has ruled in favor so far. However, instead of filing criminal charges, lawyers are invoking the “disqualification clause,” which seeks to remove Trump from the ballot, requiring voters to either write him in or choose another eligible candidate. However, after Colorado passed this motion, Trump's representatives appealed and it went to the U.S. Supreme Court who unanimously ruled that no state could take Trump off the ballot, protecting his eligibility for the 2024 election.

The Supreme Court Justices did not argue over whether or not Trump engaged in the insurrection, but rather if as president, this section of the amendment applies to him. The wording lists many positions and offices such as electors, senators, officers, etc. but does not include the president. Thus, Justice Ketanji Jackson asks, “Why would we construe it...against democracy?” This quote beautifully sums up bipartisan justice.

A (NOT-SO-) BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DONALD TRUMP'S LEGAL MINEFIELD

By ADIA STOKES

Jackson is a liberal-leaning justice, but taking Trump off of the ballots creates a precedent of expanding the divide and furthering the means to which both parties are willing to go to fight each other, losing focus of the true intentions of the country. We can dispute the wording of the section all we like, but at the end of the day, the Supreme Court decided to keep Trump on the ballots in Colorado and every other state.

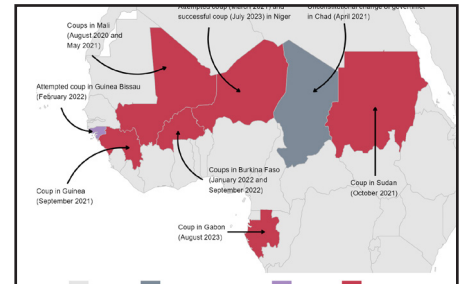
How can we call ourselves a land of equality if we cannot hold a man who once held the highest seat of power in our country accountable for his crimes? It is impossible to predict the outcomes of any of these cases given how many factors are at work. We have to trust that justice will prevail but also be prepared to respond if it does not. This is a country of free speech and liberty but also of imperfection, as much as many try to convince themselves otherwise. This is also a country where the people have power and can create change, if they are willing to do so. Staying informed and following these cases as they progress is the first step to creating these changes.

LOOKING BACK FOR THE FUTURE: BURKINA FASO'S HISTORY OF REVOLUTION

By THEO SULLIVAN

In his well-known essay “The End of History?”, economist Francis Fukuyama wrote: “it matters very little to us what strange thoughts occur to the people of Burkina Faso...” He was wrong. It matters a great deal what goes on in Burkina Faso: to the 22 million Burkina-be, to the more than 1.2 billion Africans, and to all people concerned with the future of the Earth’s fastest-growing continent.

In some respect, though, Fukuyama had a point; Burkina Faso is a nation which very rarely, if ever, graces the consciousness of the non-Francophone world. The country is perhaps only known for its wonderfully named capital city (Ouagadougou), and, amongst leftists in particular, its playing host to revolutionary leader Thomas Sankara in the mid 1980s. More recently though, Burkina Faso has gained notoriety for toppling its democratically elected government, adding another link to the “coup belt” – a string of seven African states which, beginning in 2021, have deposed their governments and installed military juntas – which now stretches the width of North Africa, the Red Sea to the Atlantic.



A map of the “coup belt” as of August 2023 (IDEA, 2023)

COLONIAL PAST / SANKARA [EARLY KINGDOMS-1983]

What is today Burkina Faso has throughout its history been a part of a variety of imperial projects, some imposed regionally (such as the relatively well known Mossi and in particular Songhai kingdoms) and others, more specifically the French, imposed from the smoke, dust, and foreign antiquity-filled map rooms of late 19th century Berlin. The nomenclature of the area has likewise changed dramatically over time, first being referred to as Upper Senegal-Niger (1904-1920), and later by the name Upper Volta (1920-1984) – derived from the red, white, and black Volta rivers. As is made apparent by the ‘84 name change, the 1980s marks a seismic shift in the political history of the country, a shift enacted by the aforementioned Capt. Thomas Sankara.

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

LOOKING BACK FOR THE FUTURE: BURKINA FASO'S HISTORY OF REVOLUTION

By THEO SULLIVAN

Following French-granted independence – a term which should be used loosely in this context – in 1958, a series of unpopular puppet leaders, their strings comfortably in the pocket of French private interest, battled for power over the Voltanese and their resources; coups took place in 1966, 1980, 1982, and finally, for our present purposes, in 1983, during which Sankara and his supporters gained control over the country.

An outspoken Marxist, Pan-Africanist, and Anti-Imperialist, almost all of Sankara's political projects were aimed at maximally improving the lives of the Voltanese people. In a matter of weeks, his government vaccinated some 2.5 million children for meningitis, yellow fever, and measles. Literacy, which lay dormant at an appalling 13% in 1983, was raised nearly sixfold in five years. Women were appointed to high ranking government positions and encouraged to seek political and professional life, the barbaric practice of female genital mutilation was outlawed, and maternity leave was instituted nationwide. Keenly aware of the Sahel's* threatening expansion into the tropics, he planted 10 million trees to safeguard Voltanese agriculture and wildlife from desertification.

Dismantling corruption was at the forefront of Sankara's political agenda; the old Voltanese government's fleet of Mercedes cars was sold off and replaced with the cheapest vehicle available for purchase in the country at that time: the tiny Renault 5; the salaries of all public servants, including his own, were lowered (the president's salary to a mere \$450 a month); government officials were barred from purchasing first-class airline tickets and hiring chauffeurs. Even Sankara's already-modest personal office was deprived of air conditioning, the cost of which was deemed to be too steep.



The awe-inspiring might of engineering which is the Renault 5 (Wikimedia Commons, 1972)

Skepticism of foreign aid, especially those loans “graciously” and never-endingly doled out by the International Monetary Fund, was another hallmark of his governance; during his time in office, the country received precisely \$0 in foreign funding. Despite this, rail and roadways were built both efficiently and effectively, linking rural villages, as were more than 350 schools – all in a span of just four years.

Feudal landlords, always much too enticed by the glint of the French treasury, were stripped of all political power, their land redistributed to the peasantry – the effect of which was a massive spike in food production (wheat production, for example, rose from 1700 kg per hectare in 1983 to 3800 kg per hectare by 1987) and inevitable food self-sufficiency.

Not already in love with the man? Readers should make note of his love for guitar (even single-handedly composing the national anthem) and all-female, motorcycle-bound personal guard. Whilst his seemingly endless list of accomplishments speaks volumes to his legacy, so too does perhaps his most superficial, and simultaneously most intensely significant, policy, a further and final change to the country's moniker: “Burkina Faso,” derived from a combination of the country's three most widely-spoken languages, which translates to “the land of upright (or incorruptible) men.”



Thomas Sankara in 1986 (Progressive International, 2021)

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

LOOKING BACK FOR THE FUTURE: BURKINA FASO'S HISTORY OF REVOLUTION

By THEO SULLIVAN

1987 COUP, 2015 ELECTION, 2020 ELECTION, AND 2021 COUP [1987-2021]

Unfortunately, name alone was not sufficient to deter the resurgence of corruption in Burkina Faso. Sankara was murdered, shot in a French-sponsored coup by henchmen of former ally and high-ranking official Blaise Compaoré, who soon assumed the presidency. Compaoré's grip on power was notably tighter than Sankara's, and the man led the country for the following three decades, presiding over a period of political and economic instability, the gradual undoing of Sankarist reforms, and ever-lengthening term limits for his office. In 2014, following a further attempt by the Compaoré administration to extend the presidential term limit, mass protest broke out across the country; demonstrators proved to be immensely successful, torching the ruling Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP) headquarters in addition to the National Assembly among other government buildings, eventually forcing Compaoré into exile in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire.

Despite the chaos of 2014, the year marked a turning point for democracy in Burkina Faso. A general election was staged following Compaoré's exile, the results of which produced a victory for the MPP's* Roch Marc Christian Kaboré. Kaboré, alongside fellow high-ranking officials, jumped from the sinking CDP ship in 2014, founding and filling seats in the newly-created MPP in a Theseus-esque move. The re-brand won over Burkinabè, with the MPP winning nearly twice as many votes as the runner-up party. Despite having served in one political office or another since 1989 (even working as Prime Minister from 1994-1996), Kaboré's background was comfortably financial in nature, having headed Burkina Faso's largest bank since the days of Sankara. His background in finance, abandoning of the corrupt CDP, and landslide electoral victory all gave the impression that Ouagadougou was heading in a new, exciting, direction. The optimism which the MPP was able to inject into the country in 2015, however, was short lived. By 2020, the likelihood of re-election was by no means promising, in particular due to the rising threat posed, especially to the country's north, by Jihadist rebels. The military in particular came to strongly oppose Kaboré's handling of the situation, and when widespread protest erupted following allegations of improper election practice, they seized the opportunity.

On January 24th, 2021, a group of army officers banded under the newly formed PMSR† took control of the government, placing Kaboré under house arrest.

2021 COUP, COUNTERCOUP, AND THE FUTURE OF TRAORÉ'S LEADERSHIP [2021-2024]

Now in charge was Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, a man who, in the years leading up to the 2021 coup, had spent his days working diligently up the ranks of the Burkinabé military. He had previously come into direct conflict with Kaboré, especially over the role of the Russian Wagner Group, a paramilitary organization operating from Syria to Venezuela, though most notably in Ukraine, in tackling Jihadists. Kaboré's opposition to the involvement of Wagner forces, stemming from a fear of alienating the West, is a position both increasingly untenable and unpopular in West Africa. Russian flags were even spotted being flown by supporters of the coup in Ouagadougou, sparking much domestic debate as well as fear abroad.



Opposition supporters attend a protest to denounce the government's handling of the security situation (Reuters, 2021)

* Mouvement du Peuple pour le Progrès (People's Movement for Progress)

† Mouvement Patriotique pour la Sauvegarde et la Restauration (Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration)

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

LOOKING BACK FOR THE FUTURE: BURKINA FASO'S HISTORY OF REVOLUTION

By THEO SULLIVAN

The junta's *raison d'être* is based entirely around the threat of Sahelian rebels; the interim government has routinely promised that democratic elections are on the horizon, though only after military forces have sufficiently dispatched of the northern threat. So it did not bode well for Damiba's government, therefore, when only eight months after seizing power more than 40% of the country had fallen to the rebels, an increase since Kaboré's deposition. In response to the crisis, Damiba blamed other elements of the PMSR government, scattering early supporters to the political winds and personally assuming the office of defense minister while simultaneously appointing a new head of national defense. Unsurprisingly, losing half the county, blaming your friends, and promoting yourself is not a particularly savvy string of political moves, and the PMSR hastily deposed Damiba less than a year after he had assumed office; his whereabouts are presently unknown, though three officers were tried for allegedly aiding his escape.

By September 30th, 2021, the 35 year old Ibrahim Traoré had assumed the office of interim president – by now one of the world's statistically most dangerous jobs. Scholars of Sankara are quick to draw parallels between Traoré's government and that of 1983-1987;

in addition to his youth, Traoré is often spotted sporting a dashing red beret in proper Sankaraist fashion. On a slightly less superficial note, the man is intensely vocal in his opposition to corruption, claiming to have witnessed "suitcases of money" change hands under the Kaboré government. Well known for his rigidity and intense belief in government transparency, Traoré has proven to be an intensely popular figure both domestically and in neighboring states.



President of Burkina Faso Ibrahim Traoré (Medium, 2023)

Traoré is similarly influenced by Marxist and anti-Imperialist thought, having expelled all French troops stationed in Burkina Faso early last year. Unsurprisingly, the French have never been a popular presence in their former colonial holdings, though they have certainly proved to be an unrelenting one; France has permanently pegged the currencies of 14 African states, including Burkina Faso, to the Euro through a modern-day colonial currency known as the CFA Franc. In addition to being unpopular, the CFA Franc severely limits economic self-determination, effectively placing monetary policy for supposedly independent states firmly in the hands of the European Central Bank.

To add further injury to injury, the "agreement" requires that CFA Franc-using nations deposit half their foreign currency reserves in the French treasury.*

Whatever his reasons may be for opposing French influence, Traoré's position is a popular one, though observers are concerned about his alienation of the West potentially leading to Russia establishing a firm bulwark in West Africa. Although he never received it, Sankara was never opposed to monetary aid from the Second World during his time in office, and Traoré ascribes to similar thinking. While the junta denies a Wagner presence in the country, it has purchased arms from Russia in addition to recruiting Russian military instructors.

But despite forging new ties with autocrats abroad, Traoré's government maintains its promise to hold elections in July of this year. And considering Burkina Faso's abundance of profitable mines – chiefly gold, zinc, copper, manganese, phosphate, and limestone – as well as its inconcrete position in a polarizing global system, both the world's most and least powerful will soon be looking to the country and the future of Traoré's leadership, as well as the future of socialist ideas on the continent perhaps most in need of them. After all, Burkina Faso is a rich country, and, to quote Michael Parenti, "it is only the people that are poor."

* An arrangement a certain former US president might describe as "The worst deal in the history of deals, maybe ever."

CONSERVATIVE MYTHMAKING AND THE LEGACY OF RONALD REAGAN

BY ZEKE TESLER

The American Right is obsessed with Ronald Reagan. He is the ultimate conservative hero: the actor turned politician who saved the United States from the disasters and disillusionments with New Deal liberalism. His name to be invoked on the debate stage, not just with praise, but with reverence. He is a 20th century conservative messiah, the man who restored the American dream and, in his own words, brought “morning again in America.” However, the Reagan presidency, despite the apotheosis it receives from conservatives, was incredibly harmful to the social and economic landscape of the United States; its legacy continues to unsettle and destabilize in our own era. Tracing the policies and legacy of the Reagan administration sheds light on the despicability of his “Reaganology” and its wider place within the context of the United States.

Reagan’s trickle down economic policy, coined Reaganomics, has had deep consequences for both conservative policy and the wider economic state of the U.S. over the past four decades. The main tenets of Reaganomics were as follows: raising defense spending, cutting other government spending, reducing federal income and capital gains taxes, reducing government regulation, and attempting to reduce inflation. In other words, it was a free market Neoliberal supply side economic jump start of entrepreneurial talent and innovation fueled often by political favoritism. It was unabashedly pro-business, unabashedly a counter revolution to the progressivism of prior decades and the remnants of the New Deal left. At the start of his presidency, Reagan signed the Economic Recovery Act of 1981, lowering the top marginal tax bracket by 20%, slashing estate taxes, and lowering taxes on corporations by 150 billion dollars over five years. Reagan’s presidency also saw an increase in national debt from 997 billion to 2.85 trillion dollars, changing the position of the United States on a global economic scale.

These changes and cuts set out to stimulate the economy, marketed as a method for causing a mythological “trickle-down” effect for the middle and working class people of America. The idea was pretty simple: by cutting taxes on big business and the ultra-rich, the money they saved would inevitably “trickle down” to the American worker.

The problem with Reaganomics is that it didn’t work. That may be a bit of an over-exaggeration; in reality, Reaganomics worked very well for the wealthy and corporations. While it is true that unemployment declined, GDP growth rose, and inflation bettered throughout Reagan’s eight years in office, homelessness also increased due to cuts on housing and social services, and income inequality massively accelerated. Later, as the AIDS epidemic hit, further divides and inequalities surfaced in American life, revealing the vast underbelly of underserved citizens. The deregulation aspect of Reaganomics continued to dominate federal economic policy in the decades to come.



President Reagan speaks at the graduation ceremony for the United States Coast Guard, Connecticut, May 18, 1988. (White House Archive, 1988)

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

CONSERVATIVE MYTHMAKING AND THE LEGACY OF RONALD REAGAN

By Zeke Tesler

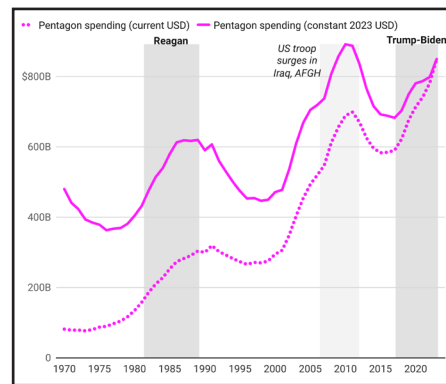
Deregulation of the financial sector that occurred after Reagan left office but had roots in his ideas led to the breakdown of laws like the Glass-Steagall Act, which had prevented commercial banks from speculating with other peoples' money, and the removal of the prohibition on interstate banking. The majority repeal of the act has been at least partially linked to the 2008 financial crisis.

The repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act highlights the main issue with Reaganomics: its takeover of American economic policy long after Reagan's time in power. While there were issues with Reaganomics during the Reagan era, his prioritization of deregulation and low taxes for the wealthy have stayed in place. Not only do these ideas persist, but they have persisted across party lines no matter how much Democrats may forswear their Republican colleagues. No one can deny that Bill Clinton signed the law that killed Glass-Steagall.

The most obvious consequence of Reaganomics' staying power is the hypocritical and twisted way in which government spending is either justified or derided. During Reagan's tenure, defense spending, unlike social spending, health and the environment, was never on the chopping block.

II

Today, the United States' defense budget is in the hundreds of billions and takes up a large percentage of America's annual federal spending, while spending on policy that would actually benefit the American people is always met with the question of "how do we pay for it?" This whole dissonant situation is all the more frustrating with the reminder that the ultra-wealthy and corporations are rarely forced to pay their fair share in taxes. From Reagan, our most prominent gift has been mind-numbing rhetoric and roadblocks served with a side platter of wealth that never quite seems to trickle down.



Defence spending since 1970, with Reagan's terms highlighted in grey (Stephen Semler, 2022)

Apart from wide economic policy consequences, Reagan dabbled in social issues like drug use with disastrous consequences. The United States' War on Drugs has destroyed millions of lives in an attempt to crack down on illegal drug distribution and use. It has cost the United States upwards of a trillion dollars and has consistently led to the mass incarceration of black and brown Americans.

While Reagan didn't start the idea of a "war on drugs", he helped expand and escalate it on the national scale. Reagan increased the budget for the FBI's drug enforcement units from eight to 95 million dollars and passed the Comprehensive Crime Control Act in 1984, which created harsher prosecution penalties around marijuana and included a program that allowed local law enforcement to receive proceeds from asset seizures. First Lady Nancy Reagan began the youth-targeted "Just Say No" anti-drug campaign, which created a prominent slogan that helped fearmongers while utterly failing to change youth drug use. Most effectively, Reagan fostered fear and negative public opinion on the severity of crack cocaine and encouraged the Drug Enforcement Administration to focus on spreading the message of its harmful effects. This fearmongering allowed him to criminalize drug use to an extreme level by passing the Anti-Drug Abuse Act. The act in effect targeted non-white drug users by creating harsher punishments for possession of crack and not methamphetamine, which was as much of a problem with low-income white Americans.

The War on Drugs did not die with Reagan; on the contrary, it continued into the 21st century and only recently has more attention gone into decriminalizing marijuana use.

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

CONSERVATIVE MYTHMAKING AND THE LEGACY OF RONALD REAGAN

By ZEKE TESLER

Even so, drug use is still highly stigmatized and criminalized across the country, with hundreds of thousands of people currently in jail on drug-related charges and obvious racial disparities persisting.

Reagan was also one of the foremost contributors to a late blooming cold war American imperialist cause. Reagan was the Anti-Jimmy Carter. If Carter returned the Panama Canal to shed the image of the Yankee Imperialist, Reagan wanted to hold onto The Americas a little more tightly. If Carter wanted a “moral foreign policy” accountable to congress, Reagan was all about clandestine operations and big nuclear build ups. The Reagan Doctrine was delivered in his 1985 State of the Union Address and commanded that “We must not break faith with those who are risking their lives—on every continent from Afghanistan to Nicaragua—to defy Soviet-supported aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth.” To Reagan, this ideology meant that supporting right-wing terrorist insurgent groups trying to overthrow leftist leaders in Latin America was the obvious next step.

Most infamous is his backing of the Contras in Nicaragua who, financially and militarily supported by the U.S. to fight a war against the leftist Sandinista provisional government, notoriously committed over 1,000 terrorist attacks and numerous human rights violations as part of their campaign. Not only were the Contras supported by the Reagan administration legally, but even after Congress banned support, the Reagan administration continued in secret. Nicaragua was just one example of the bloodshed Reagan helped spread outside of the U.S. To Reagan, any end to leftist power justified the means, regardless of the human rights violated in the process.

The places where Reagan decided not to act created just as many issues as where he did. AIDS has killed millions of people since 1981. It was during that year, Reagan’s first in office, that the AIDS crisis started in the U.S. However, AIDS was not publicly mentioned by Reagan until four years later in 1985. By that point, thousands had died and thousands more were infected. The Reagan administration’s incredible mishandling of the AIDS epidemic remains one of the defining atrocities of his career. Health officials had been aware of the severity of the situation for years, yet the administration consistently ignored pleas from both protesters and health officials to address it.

Additionally, Reagan cut the budgets of both the CDC and NIH as part of his plan to cut down on federal government spending, hindering funding for AIDS research. Not only did Reagan ignore the AIDS epidemic, but his flawed economic policies actively helped worsen it.



Americans protest Reagan's handling of the AIDS epidemic, California, 1981 (UCSF, 2021)

Despite (or more likely because of) this context, the way the Right speaks of Reagan has consistently been full of praise. The term “Reagan Republican” has been thrown around as a badge of honor, a symbol of standing up to threats to American safety and promoting a triumphant and popular conservatism. Hear the late John McCain shame fellow Republicans with a Reagan reference when talking about sending aid to Ukraine back in 2014. Hear bigots praise Reagan for his “small government ideas”, often code for destructive social policies. Hear proponents of supply-side economics cite his tax cuts. Reagan offers a little something for every type of conservative, and they handily ignore or outright support any harm he did.

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

CONSERVATIVE MYTHMAKING AND THE LEGACY OF RONALD REAGAN

By ZEKE TESLER

Recently, trouble has been brewing in the field of Reaganology. The Reagan Foundation and Trump do not get along, which seems to pose a problem for Reagan's legacy in a Republican party still dominated by Trump. Higher ups within the foundation have frequently ridiculed and derided the former president, while Trump himself has in turn made jabs. While Trump has occasionally brought up Reagan in public, it has usually been in comparison to himself and never quite seems to mimic the rhetoric of Reagan Republicanism.

While this apparent animosity may seem like a shift away from Reagan Republicanism in the age of Trump, that picture is surface level. In 1980, Reagan's campaign slogan was "Let's Make America Great Again." While Trump may have often been in conflict with Republican establishment and Reagan's legacy, especially while in office, there is no mistaking this obvious correlation and antecedent to "Make America Great Again". While this is a small example of Reagan's continued presence, it serves as a reminder that Reagan's legacy still looms large.

Policy and politics don't care about what Trump and the Reagan Foundation think about

It's no coincidence that social events at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum are filled with "ordinary Republicans who hold Reagan in enough esteem to patronize his library" but when asked about the 2024 election still say that "Overwhelmingly, their choice [is] Trump" (Source: Politico). Since the end of last summer, discussions around the Republican "Presidential Transition Project" and policy agenda known as Project 2025 have raged across the political spectrum, especially in online spaces. Even this "modern" representation of the terrifying goals of the Republican Party has deep roots in Reagan's Right. Technically, the main policy agenda document of Project 2025 is just the latest in a series by The Heritage Foundation known as Mandate for Leadership, which started with the first Mandate during Reagan's first term in office. The first Mandate gained approval from the Reagan campaign just before the election, and consisted of 3,000 pages of suggestions on how to shift the political landscape to the Right. The Mandate and the Reagan presidency went hand-in-hand; Reagan passed out copies of the Mandate at his first cabinet meeting and his administration was full of its contributors. The Mandate and the continuing influence of The Heritage Foundation demonstrate the staying power of Reagan-era conservative policymaking in the modern era. Trump does not mean the end of Reagan by a long shot.

Ronald Reagan may have died 20 years ago, but we are still forced to live with the consequences of his presidency. While the Republican party is in a strange position right now that is only sure to get stranger following the 2024 election, Raegen's influence on conservative politics has remained consistent. There is no other more defining Republican president, besides perhaps Trump, that conservatives can mythologize to the same degree--and it's telling that a man like Reagan who has destroyed so much has received that mantle.

Most importantly, it's integral to remember that Reagan and his legacy is a product of the American political and economic system rather than an outlier. It's easy and accurate to point to Reagan and his mythification as evidence of the repulsiveness of a Republican Party that essentially praises social harm, but his legacy has only lasted the way that it has because it fits so neatly within more systemic American issues. Reagan-esque tax cuts for the wealthy would not have the same impact if the American capitalist system did not create incentive for the ultra-wealthy to use those tax cuts for the purposes of lobbying and political maneuvering to increase their wealth even further. The Reagan Doctrine exemplifies a broader American capitalist insecurity about ideologies, particularly leftist ones, that contradict its own and may offer an alternative to capitalism.

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

CONSERVATIVE MYTHMAKING AND THE LEGACY OF RONALD REAGAN

By ZEKE TESLER

In the political establishment, Democratic Party definitely included, it's rare to find those that completely rebuke many of the lingering outgrowths of Reaganomics. Reagan and his legacy can be a tough pill to swallow, and should serve as both a crucial reminder of what the United States can produce at its worst and an inspiration to strive for something more.



Ronald Reagan (left) shakes hands with Donald Trump (right) (The Wall Street Journal, 2015)

JAVIER MILEI AND THE HOPE OF ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN ARGENTINA

By JACKSON WANG

Javier Milei, the recently elected ultra-right-wing president of Argentina, infamous for his wild rhetoric, has shaken the political fabric of the nation and the world. Milei's political and economic stances are vastly controversial and differ starkly from those of the past century's ruling parties.

His rise to power was sudden and unexpected but comes at a time in which Argentina's economy is experiencing record high inflation and slow economic growth. So the question that must be asked is: Can Javier Milei spark a crucial turnaround in Argentina's economic and political state, or will the country fall deeper into ruin?



Javier Milei brandishes a chainsaw during a campaign event in La Plata, Argentina, Tuesday, Sept. 12, 2023. (Natacha Pisarenko, AP)

On November 19th, 2023, Javier Gerardo Milei, a 53-year old Argentine native, beat fellow candidate Sergio Massa with 55.69% of the votes in a historic landslide election to assume the presidency of Argentina. His election suddenly disrupted the country's traditionally two-party electoral system. Prior to his election, the Unión por la Patria (Union for the Homeland), a political coalition that follows a center-left political ideology called Peronism, and the Juntos por el Cambio (Together for Change), a vaguely centrist/right-wing coalition, dominated Argentina's political stage in past years. This political environment remained rigid until Milei and his own coalition called La Libertad Avanza (Freedom Advances) rapidly rose in popularity, stealing the spotlight from the prior two parties.

While there are many different factors that led to his political rise, such as how he gained the endorsement of former President Mauricio Macri, a key player in Argentine politics and the founder of the Juntos por el Cambio, and how he utilizes disruptive rhetoric to catch the eye of the public, especially of many young men, the biggest factor that led to his election was his promises of economic change and his exploitation of the political and economic failures of past Peronist leaders.

So why is that a big deal? Well, Argentina has been in a state of economic ruin for decades. Inflation has been rising at a constant rate for over twenty years, with the past four years seeing some of its fastest ever inflation growth as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and internationally higher food and energy prices. Prior to Javier Milei's takeover, inflation was at roughly 160%, its highest since 1989-1990.

The beginning of Argentina's rapid inflation can be attributed to a 1980s debt crisis that forced the central bank to increase the money supply and decrease interest rates, resulting in rapid inflation that has refused to quit to this day. That being said, deeper economic issues have stemmed all the way back to Juan Perón, president of Argentina during 1946-1955 and 1973-1974 and the man Peronist ideology is based off of.

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

JAVIER MILEI AND THE HOPE OF ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN ARGENTINA

By JACKSON WANG

During his presidency, Perón adopted protectionist values: he nationalized key industries and increased trade barriers all to promote domestic corporations and goods. These ultimately limited access to foreign products and investment, severely draining the nation's treasury. Furthermore, while he improved working conditions and advocated for women's rights, these efforts involved increased social spending and worker benefits, resulting in greater inflationary



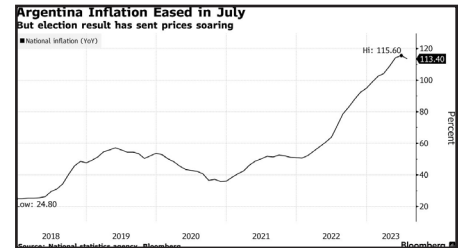
Juan Perón with his third wife, Maria Estela (Bettmann/CORBIS, 2014)

However, many of Argentina's economic troubles are also a result of strong British economic influences in the 19th and 20th century. For instance, the U.K., under Prime Minister Clement Attlee, refused to execute a planned transfer of British pounds to dollars which Perón knew would have strengthened Argentina's international trade and investments.

All of this has resulted in deeply seeded economic issues that have contributed to the high inflation Argentina is experiencing today. High inflation means each unit of money, the peso for Argentina, has a lower value. As a result, Argentina's ultra-high inflation has resulted in a massively diminished purchasing power among civilians causing many to hoard U.S. dollars instead. The central bank has been forced to increase its benchmark interest rates parallel with inflation with the most recent rate being at an astonishing 80%

On top of this, Argentine leaders have implemented financially unsustainable programs. For instance, Argentina has massively subsidized healthcare, energy, education, and transportation, all of which the government afforded through printing more pesos which resulted in even greater inflation. High inflation and high interest rates, among a gamut of other issues, has made it much more difficult for Argentina to pay off debt, resulting in a multitude of defaults with its largest being in 2001 when the government defaulted on \$132 billion. Argentina during these defaults relied on IMF (International Monetary Fund) bailouts, which have added roughly \$30 billion of more debt onto the nation. As a result of all of this, foreign nations have withdrawn or reduced their financial support and investments in Argentina. The fraud, bribery, and a lack of transparency among Argentina's Peronist leaders have further worsened the nation's economic plight.

As a result of all of this, Argentina's economy has long contended with frequent recessions, limited reserves, high poverty rates (45% as of the year prior to Milei's election), and large levels of debt.



Argentina's inflation rate 2018-2023 (Bloomberg, 2023)

Javier Milei promises to change all of this. Often described as an "anarcho-capitalist," Milei plans to cut government spending by 15% of GDP, remove almost half of government ministries, dollarize (replace the local currency with the USD) Argentina's \$600 billion economy, eliminate the nation's central bank, and privatize many domestic corporations. As roughly 90% of Argentines benefit from government subsidized social programs, transportation, and more, Milei's drastic cuts will certainly impact the living standards of many. At the same time, diminished spending would decelerate the nation's spiraling inflation. Milei's plans to dollarize the economy would also reduce inflation by replacing the depreciating peso with the more stable dollar, eliminating the need for the central bank. However, this poses many problems.

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

JAVIER MILEI AND THE HOPE OF ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN ARGENTINA

By Jackson Wang

For one, the central bank lacks sufficient dollars to cover the pesos currently in circulation. Furthermore, eliminating the central bank would make Argentina's economy dependent on the stability of the U.S. economy and the Federal Reserve.

While he dislikes this title, Javier Milei is a Neoliberal. His economic stances fall in line with Neoliberal ideology, which calls for deregulation, increased privatization, free trade, tax cuts, and reduced government spending. The ideas behind each of these are as follows: deregulation allows corporations to operate more freely and efficiently, leading to lower costs and therefore lower prices for consumers; privatization, which means selling state-owned enterprises to private owners, introduces competition and profit incentives, driving efficiency and quality; free trade removes trade barriers, increasing competition and reducing prices for consumers; tax cuts incentivizes investment and job creation for wealthier individuals or businesses; and lastly, reduced government spending decreases inflation, lowers interest rates, and stimulates economic growth. Javier Milei's economic proposals certainly fall in line with many of these policies.

So what has Javier Milei done during his presidency so far? He followed through on his promise of minimizing governmental control by slashing 9 of the 18 ministries. Milei also devalued the nation's currency by 50%, cut state fuel and transportation subsidies, paused public infrastructure projects, and eliminated regulatory rules. On December 20th, 2023, Milei declared an economic emergency, allowing him to bypass Congress to pass various measures. The emergency decree that Milei created is composed of 366 different articles.



People take part in a demonstration at the National Flag Memorial during a national strike against the government of President Javier Milei in Rosario, Argentina, January 24, 2024 (AFP, 2024)

Among these measures are steps to privatize Argentina's state-owned companies, to reduce regulation around health-care and other sectors, steps against labor rights and unions, and more. However, this emergency decree was struck down by a labor court who argued the decree did not meet the standard of emergency necessary to bypass such a legislature. While Milei's administration has since appealed the decision, the decree has yet to pass.

Milei also introduced an omnibus bill of 644 articles. Among these are measures to privatize 41 public companies, a 15% tax on most exports, and a proposal declaring a one-year state of emergency that would grant Milei power he otherwise would not have had. In the future, it is almost-certain that many of his proposed bills and policies will not pass Congress. His coalition, La Libertad Avanza, has only 7 senators in the 72-seat upper house, just 38 deputies in the 257 Chamber of Deputies, the lower house, and lacks any governorships in the nation's 23 states. His omnibus bill, through several days of debate in Congress, was reduced to only roughly 300 articles, with many related to fiscal reforms being removed. As a result, Milei withdrew the bill from consideration after many critical measures and articles were further removed from the bill.



Javier Milei's emergency decree suffers setbacks in court Erica Canepa via Bloomberg, 2023)

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

JAVIER MILEI AND THE HOPE OF ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN ARGENTINA

By Jackson Wang

In the short-time frame of Javier Milei's presidency, Argentina's economy has already experienced some drastic changes, and it's for the worst. Inflation is now currently at a staggering 276%, a three-decade high, and poverty at almost 60%, a two-decade high. Milei claims that these economic downturns were the fault of prior administrations, not his own. Considering the fact that two of his biggest acts, the emergency decree and omnibus bill, have been blocked or withdrawn, there might be truth to Milei's statement. In order to see the effects of Milei's Neoliberal economic policies, we will have to wait and see. However, in recent months, inflation has decelerated on a monthly basis to 13.2% in February from 25.5% in December, something that Milei has taken credit for.

At the moment, Javier Milei has been unable to successfully implement his desired economic policies and Argentina's economy has only worsened since the start of his presidency. However, looking at examples of Neoliberalism throughout history offers a glimmer of hope. The U.S. under former President Ronald Reagan's economic policies, called Reaganomics, led to significant economic growth in the 1980s and reduced inflation.

The U.K., under former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, experienced similar economic growth in the 70s and 80s from her own Neoliberal policies, called Thatcherism. That being said, Argentina's economy is worse off than either the U.S. or U.K. during their respective periods of economic growth. Thus, Javier Milei has a far more difficult task in reviving Argentina's economy. But Javier Milei is a breath of fresh air for most Argentines and his economic policies are undoubtedly radical. Perhaps Javier Milei is just the man to pull it off.

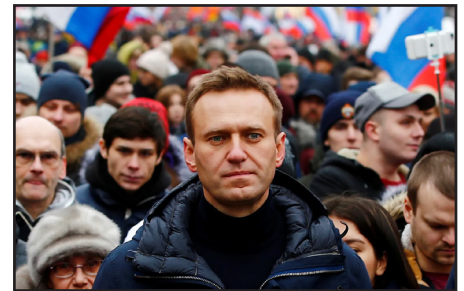
ALEXEI NAVALNY'S LIFE AND LEGACY AS A FEARLESS CHALLENGER OF RUSSIAN CORRUPTION AND AUTHORITARIANISM

By Mia Newman

On February 16th, 2024, longtime political and anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny died in a Russian prison located in a penal colony in the Arctic Circle. He is remembered as a great husband, father, anti-corruption activist, and a man who changed the face of Russia, and the world, by challenging the power of ruthless dictator Vladimir Putin.

Alexei Navalny was born on June 4th, 1976 just outside of Moscow, 25 years after his biggest opponent, Putin. His father was a Soviet officer, and his mother was an economist.

He grew up going to his grandparents' country home near Chernobyl, Ukraine. After the Chernobyl nuclear power plant explosion near his grandparents home, Navalny and his family watched as the Soviet government attempted to cover up the dire effects of the explosion and downplay the radiation and damage. After the Soviet Union fell, the Russian government formed, and the corruption remained constant.



Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny participates in a march in memory of Russian politician and opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, Moscow, February 24th, 2019 (Forigen Policy, 2024)

Navalny received a law degree from the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia in 1998 and became a practicing lawyer. As a lawyer, Navalny discovered that Russia's court systems weren't able to function as they should unless the governmental structure changed completely.

In 2000, Navalny entered into politics when he joined the centre-left party, Yabloko, which advocated for a market economy and liberal democracy.

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

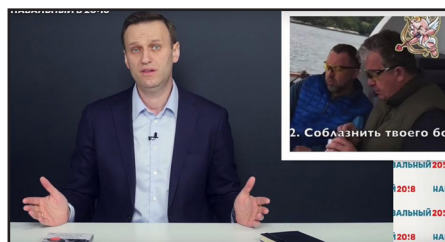
ALEXEI NAVALNY'S LIFE AND LEGACY AS A FEARLESS CHALLENGER OF RUSSIAN CORRUPTION AND AUTHORITARIANISM

BY MIA NEWMAN

Years later though, in 2007, he was expelled from the party for what party officials deemed “nationalistic activities” such as attending far-right marches earlier on in his life. Navalny insisted that these claims weren’t true and that he was actually kicked out due to internal disputes with Yabloko party leader Grigory Yavlinsky.

In 2008, Navalny set foot into what would be a lifetime battle against corruption in Russia. He started a stakeholder activism campaign that attempted to target state-owned entities and expose their corruption. His strategy was to purchase small amounts of stock in a multitude of different companies. This way, he would be able to gain access to their individual shareholder meetings. In the shareholder meetings, Navalny would confront corporate officers about inconsistencies that he noticed in their financial reporting, management, and bookkeeping. Many of the executives that he confronted happened to be close allies with Putin, introducing Putin to who Navalny was. He also further developed his anti-corruption lens by focusing on exposing state-run corporations for their corruption, such as the Russian gas company Gazprom.

After his first attempts at exposing corruption, he began a blog and the Anti-Corruption Foundation to document his future efforts. His blog quickly gained popularity, and millions of Russians tuned in to see Navalny’s latest investigations into corruption. His blog was so popular that it forced former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to admit that each year, a trillion rubles were embezzled from the state procurement system. Navalny also used the internet to create a popular Youtube channel, which gained millions of subscribers. On his Youtube channel, he convinced Russian citizens that they deserved a better life and a better government. He believed they deserved a democracy where their rights wouldn’t be curtailed, rather than Putin’s authoritarian and corrupt regime. Navalny had hope and love for Russia, and wanted to change it for the better. As he once said, “I want to live in a normal country and refuse to accept any talk about Russia being doomed to be a bad, poor, or servile country. I want to live here, and I can’t tolerate the injustice that for many people has become routine.”



A frame from Navalny's YouTube channel (The Moscow Times, 2018)

After seeing the success of his anti-corruption efforts, Navalny created the website RosPil, which was short for “Russian Saw”. The website functioned as a whistleblowing resource, where people could anonymously publish accounts of corruption and dubious government deals. Through this website, Navalny invented the term “party of crooks and thieves” to describe Putin’s United Russia party. This term was used at many political demonstrations attended by Navalny supporters.

As the parliamentary elections of 2011 approached, Navalny urged his supporters to vote for any political party except for the United Russia party. Even so, the United Russia Party gained the majority of parliamentary seats. In response, Navalny, as well as 25,000 others, participated in street demonstrations, and he received jail time of 15 days. This sentence would be the first of many that Navalny served.

In 2012, after four years of Medvedev’s rule, Putin returned as the president of Russia. He used his presidential powers to squash his enemies and potential threats. Navalny, as well as other prominent opposition leaders, were deemed threats and their homes were raided.

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

ALEXEI NAVALNY'S LIFE AND LEGACY AS A FEARLESS CHALLENGER OF RUSSIAN CORRUPTION AND AUTHORITARIANISM

BY MIA NEWMAN

On July 17th, 2013, Navalny decided to officially enter politics and he declared himself a candidate for the Mayor of Moscow. One day later, on July 18th, the Kremlin found that Navalny was guilty of embezzlement. Many argued that the accusations were false, but that Putin wanted to incriminate Navalny to eliminate him as a political threat. Navalny knew from the start that he never stood a chance in his trial, as the presiding judge had never found anyone innocent before.

Navalny's trial further exposed the corruption plaguing Russia, as it revealed that conviction rates in Russia are around 99%, meaning that basically everyone accused of a crime gets convicted. During the trial, he received a sentence of five years in prison. Upon hearing his sentence, his supporters became outraged and hit the streets in thousands to protest. Surprisingly, he was released from prison, pending the hearing of his appeal.

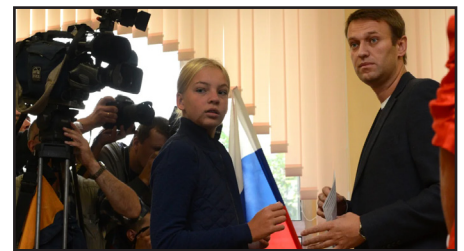
After he was released from prison, Navalny continued in the race for Mayor of Moscow.

He adopted a style of campaign that was different from most other Russian politicians, who usually utilized the media and newspaper. Since many TV channels denied him, Navalny talked to voters on the streets, spread posters of him and his family, and used the internet to promote himself. Although he worked extremely hard, Navalny lost the mayoral election to an ally of Putin, Sergey Sobyenin.

After he lost the election, Russian courts officially convicted Navalny of embezzlement but stated that he wouldn't serve a prison sentence. Even though Navalny wasn't forced to serve a sentence, he was tarnished with a criminal record, one that would prevent him from ever personally entering into politics, marking the 2013 mayoral race as his first and last ever political race.

In 2014, Navalny faced another set of charges from the Kremlin, this time for fraud. He had to serve three and a half years in prison due to this alleged fraud. During this time, Putin began a process called "managed democracy," where Russian elections would appear to be democratic, but internally, they would be secretly rigged. In the 2016 election, the United Russia party won, but some citizens observed strange activity by Russian officials, such as the stuffing of ballot boxes and even repeat voting. Putin continued to rig elections, and he won the 2018 election which he organized to take place on the fourth anniversary of his annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea.

In 2020, the political rivalry between Navalny and Putin turned fatal, as Navalny suddenly grew ill on a flight from Tomsk to Moscow, where he had been in Siberia campaigning for the upcoming elections. Passengers on the plane captured video footage of Navalny's moans of pain and anguish. The plane was forced to make an emergency landing in Omsk, where Navalny received immediate medical attention. Doctors initially didn't allow his family to see him and insisted that everything was fine. The Russian public suspected that the doctors were puppets of the Kremlin and weren't treating him. Eventually, his family organized for him to be taken to Germany to receive medical treatment. In Germany, Navalny was placed into a medical coma for five months to allow him to heal. It was revealed that Navalny's sudden illness was caused by being poisoned with a Soviet nerve agent called Novichok.



Alexei Navalny prepares to cast his ballot during a mayoral election, Moscow, September 8, 2013, with his daughter, Dasha. (CNN, 2013)

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

ALEXEI NAVALNY'S LIFE AND LEGACY AS A FEARLESS CHALLENGER OF RUSSIAN CORRUPTION AND AUTHORITARIANISM

BY MIA NEWMAN

As he recovered from his poisoning, Navalny worked with German investigative journalist Christo Grozev to uncover the role that Russian authorities played in his poisoning, which they ultimately found out by having Navalny pose as a Kremlin official and call a Russian political figure, Konstantin Kudryavtsev. He pretended to ask for a report about his poisoning, and Kudryavtsev revealed information about Navalny's poisoning. This call was a breakthrough, as Navalny was able to hear key details about his poisoning and who exactly was involved. Navalny also figured out that without the plane's emergency landing in Omsk, he likely would have died.

After five months of recovering in Germany, Navalny made the brave decision to return to Russia in January of 2021. Knowing that he would likely be imprisoned and arrested upon his arrival, his return held more of a symbolic meaning. As he said to a crowd of Russian supporters in a Moscow airport right before he was detained by Russian police, he was not afraid. He decided to face his threats fearlessly and continue to challenge the corruption of the Russian government by showing that he would not hide in exile.

Instead, he would stand up to his opponents and face them eye to eye. Immediately upon touching down in Russia, Navalny was arrested by Russian authorities and sentenced to three and a half years in a penal colony. They arrested him based on his failure to report to Russian prison officials during his time in Germany, violating the terms of his 2014 conviction.

Even from behind bars, Navalny continued the fight against corruption. He organized strikes and protests through social media, urging his followers to protest on the streets. Seeing the influence that Navalny had over the people of Russia, the courts banned any political groups tied to Navalny and declared them extremist. The courts also banned Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, claiming it was extremist. In 2022, Navalny faced new charges of fraud and contempt of court. His sentence was extended to three decades and he was placed in a maximum security prison where most of his time was spent in solitary confinement. Navalny continued to urge his supporters to protest against the war in Ukraine. When they did, they were arrested and forced to report for military duty.

During his time in prison, Navalny exchanged letters with Natan Sharansky, who was a political prisoner during the Soviet Union. He stayed in the same gulag that Navalny did, and Navalny read his book, "Fear No Evil", while in imprisonment. In his letters to Sharansky, Navalny wrote, "I understand that I am not the first, but I really want to become the last, or at least one of the last, who are forced to endure this."

Sharansky wrote back to him, "I wish to you- no matter how hard it may be physically- to maintain your inner freedom...By remaining a free person in prison, you, Aleksei, influence the souls of millions of people worldwide."

In December 2023, after failing to contact him, Navalny's lawyers learned that Russian authorities relocated him to a penal colony in the Arctic Circle. Two months later, he died, leaving behind his heartbroken family and a heartbroken Russia. Russian officials claimed that he died after losing consciousness after going on a walk, but many others, such as his family, believe that Putin murdered him. Russian authorities refuse to release his body despite the many requests from his family. Many believe that they are waiting for any remnants of poison to leave his body before handing it over to his family. Democratic leaders all over the world are deeply upset by his death, as he represented opposition to authoritarianism and corruption. His death, though, is not the death of his movement and his ideas. His wife and constant supporter Yulia Navalnaya has vowed to continue the fight for his movement, despite spending most of her life out of the spotlight. In a video message to the Russian public, she said, "The main thing we can do for Alexei and for ourselves is to continue to fight. I will continue the work of Alexei Navalny, continue to fight for our country, and I urge you to stand next to me...We all need to get together in one strong fist and strike that mad regime."

A CLOSER LOOK AT YEMEN

BY NOAH LEVINE

Recently the Houthis have drawn global attention to themselves by launching nearly 50 missiles and drones against commercial and Naval ships, sailing under American and allied flags. These attacks have surprised and perplexed many Americans, who do not know much about the Houthis and the country they come from—Yemen.

Any thumbnail sketch of Yemen would point out that as of 2021, its population numbers 32.98 million and occupies almost 530,000 km²—roughly the size of Pennsylvania and California combined. The country is located at the southern end of the Arabian peninsula and borders the Red Sea to the west, the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea to the south, and Oman to the east. Half of the population is under 15 years old and 2.7% are above 65 years. The country is mainly Muslim—65% Sunni and 35% Shia.

Yemen has been marked by violent internal conflict for decades. Recently (since 2014), Yemen has been engulfed in civil war, pitting government forces against Houthi rebels, a Shiite Islamist military organization with Iranian affiliations. In 2014 the Houthis overran the nation's capital and largest city, Sanaa, demanding reduced fuel prices and regime change.

After unsuccessful talks, the rebels overtook the presidential palace in January 2015, resulting in the resignation of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi and his cabinet. The civil war continues.



Children sit in a classroom at Aal Okab school in the city of Sa'ada, 2017 (The Guardian, 2021)

Outside powers have a stake in the conflict in Yemen with Iran and a Saudi-led Gulf coalition on opposite sides. In March 2015, numerous Gulf states placed economic sanctions on Yemen and ordered airstrikes targeting the Houthi rebels, with assistance from the United States. In June of 2015, Saudi Arabia initiated a naval blockade aimed to cut off Iranian support to the Houthis, prompting Iran to challenge this with a naval convoy, escalating military tensions. The increased militarization in the region prompted the United States to intervene, also intercepting arms shipments to Yemen.

Taking inspiration from Hezbollah, the Houthis embrace slogans opposing the United States, Israel, and all Jews, proclaiming “God Is the Greatest, Death to America, Death to Israel, A Curse Upon the Jews, Victory to Islam.” Their ideological intensity coupled with the backing of Iran explains the recent attacks we have seen in the Red Sea.

The ongoing tensions in Yemen have devastated its population, displacing millions and forcing over two-thirds of the population into need for critical humanitarian aid. Even before the conflict, Yemen was recognized as the most fragile state in the Middle East. The blockade stands as a major factor driving the crisis, perpetuating the humanitarian crisis. Furthermore, a relentless air assault by Saudi Arabia and the UAE has led to over 19,000 civilian deaths, with the Houthis launching drone attacks on these countries in retaliation.

However, the severe humanitarian crisis is often underreported. In 2023, it was estimated that 21.6 million people in Yemen required humanitarian assistance; the numbers have only increased as the conflict with the Houthi rebels continues, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian crisis marked by widespread hunger, displacement, and a non-existent healthcare system.

A CLOSER LOOK AT YEMEN

By Noah Levine

According to the United Nations Population Fund, “a woman dies during pregnancy and childbirth every two hours from causes which are almost entirely preventable with access to services.” As UNICEF.org spotlights on their “emergencies” page: over 11 million children are in need of at least one form of humanitarian aid; the national socio-economic systems of Yemen are on the brink of collapse. Millions lack access to safe drinking water and proper hygiene as the country experiences regular outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases: cholera, measles, and diphtheria.

In the face of the devastating crisis in Yemen, there are tangible steps individuals can take to make a difference. While we may not be able to assist hands-on, our contributions through donations to organizations like the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Yemen Relief and Reconstruction Foundation can provide critical support, helping to supply emergency aid, healthcare, clean water, and food to those in desperate need of humanitarian aid in Yemen.

CONGESTION PRICING: BOUND TO TAKE A TOLL

By Freyalise Matasar

Traffic in New York City is more than an inconvenience. New York City continues to report increased end-to-end response times from the NYPD, NYFD, and EMS year after year. According to a statement from a City Hall spokesperson, this increase in response times is largely due to increased traffic congestion. The latest effort to combat congestion and improve air quality comes in the form of congestion pricing, a controversial tolling program that will charge drivers entering Manhattan below 60th Street. The toll, which would charge passenger vehicles 15 dollars a day, with a nighttime discount, has received criticism for a multitude of reasons. While there is much public outcry at the establishment of what many see as yet another fee to pay while trying to live and work in the city, the plan has other significant drawbacks as well. According to critics of congestion pricing, it is a textbook example of environmental racism. It is hard to disagree with their assessment.

According to the non-profit environmental advocacy group NRDC, the Natural Resources Defense Council, environmental racism is defined as the intentional polluting of areas and communities that are primarily populated by non-white or lower-income people. This encompasses a wide range of things, from Louisiana’s so-called “Cancer Alley,” an 85-mile stretch of majority Black and lower-income communities that has some of the highest cancer rates from air pollution in the country, to an oil pipeline being constructed just upstream of the Standing Rock Sioux’s main water supply, to lower-income neighborhoods having roughly 15% less tree coverage than higher-income neighborhoods nationwide. Congestion pricing is the next instance of the race and class divide in the USA.

The main problem with congestion pricing is that people who want to avoid tolls won’t necessarily avoid driving. The nearly 4,000-page environmental assessment released by the MTA in 2022 on congestion pricing raises concerns that once the tolls are enacted, drivers will instead reroute through the South Bronx and Staten Island to avoid the tolls in Lower Manhattan.



Map of congestion pricing zone (CBS News, 2023)

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

CONGESTION PRICING: BOUND TO TAKE A TOLL

By Freyalise Matasar

While this may still improve air quality and reduce gridlock in Manhattan, it may shift the burden of pollution onto other boroughs. According to the environmental assessment, congestion pricing could lead to over 700 more trucks on the Cross Bronx Expressway daily, increasing overall truck soot by 5 percent. Given that the South Bronx already has disproportionately high asthma rates, experts have raised concerns that this change in traffic patterns will likely compound health risks for Bronx residents. Francesca Dominici, a professor of public health at Harvard, says that “the South Bronx is an area with already high asthma rates and other pre-existing conditions, [and] even a small increase in long term exposure to particulate matter will exacerbate these health [issues].”

In an effort to address some of these concerns, the MTA has promised at least 30 million dollars worth of investments in the Bronx for communities most negatively impacted by congestion pricing. While their anticipated 20 million dollar program to fight asthma and 10 million dollar program to install air filtration systems in schools near highways in an effort to lower exposure to pollutants is a step in the right direction, it does not fully address the root of the problem.

There’s no doubt that asthma care is beneficial, but it doesn’t change the fact that someone has asthma. Air filters in schools are good preventative steps, but will they be installed in houses? What about businesses, or on the open street? Additionally, the MTA aims to collect 1 billion dollars in tolls from congestion pricing annually, but according to their latest statements and guarantees, only roughly 3% of these proceeds will help minimize the negative impact on the people who are footing the environmental bill for the plan.



Taxi drivers with the New York Taxi Workers Alliance rally outside of MTA headquarters, 2023 (NY Daily News, 2023)

Some critics of the measure argue that congestion pricing will disproportionately affect people in lower-income neighborhoods where public transportation isn’t as readily available as it is in Manhattan - neighborhoods that include Staten Island and the South Bronx. These residents often are left to rely on driving as an alternative to public transportation as a result of this scarcity, but now that, too, is being made less accessible.

A lawsuit has been filed by Staten Island leaders and the United Federation of Teachers, complaining that the lack of a subway or commuter rail means that, by necessity, most residents drive to work. To try and address this issue, the MTA has announced toll subsidies for people who earn less than \$50,000 annually. They will be charged half price once they’ve paid their first 10 congestion tolls each month in full. Residents of the congestion zone who earn less than \$60,000 annually are also eligible to apply for a state tax credit.

Despite these adjustments, there are still concerns about the economic drain inflicted by the tolls. Some of these concerns have been raised by taxi and rideshare drivers and small business owners. Taxi and rideshare drivers, specifically, have more to worry about, as trip fares increase by \$1.25 and \$2.50 respectively for rides entering, leaving, or within the tolled area. The executive director of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, Bhairavi Desai, warned that this increase in fares will “devastate an entire work force.” When viewed in conjunction with another congestion surcharge imposed on taxis in 2019, and with the fact that the MTA’s environmental assessment predicted that the fare increases could drop demand for for-hire vehicles by up to 17%, it’s no wonder that taxi and rideshare drivers are concerned about their futures.

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

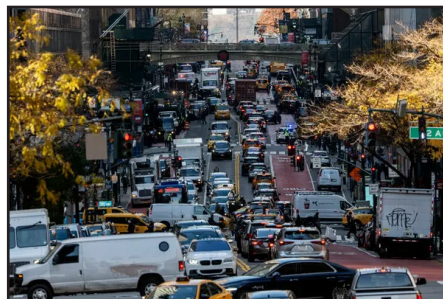
CONGESTION PRICING: BOUND TO TAKE A TOLL

By FREYALISE MATASAR

As the plan was being developed, many groups argued the new tolls should not apply to them. Teachers, transit workers, utility companies, electric vehicle drivers, and more had been looking to get an exemption, but no such concessions were granted. Farmers have also been advocating that they should be exempt from the tolls. Complaining that the fees will adversely affect them and their ability to deliver food to Lower Manhattan, they have found support among some Republican lawmakers who argue that New York state already charges its farmers more than many other states. As Republican Assemblyman Joe Angelino, who is one of the supporters of exempting farmers from the tolls notes, it's time for New York to start supporting their farmers.

Other criticism regarding congestion pricing has arisen within the GOP, which has included skepticism at the MTA's motives in implementing the plan. Republican New York State Senator Steven Rhoads warns, "This isn't about cleaner air, this isn't about less traffic. This is about nothing more than money – money being thrown into the black hole that is the MTA." In Long Island, Republican lawmakers are pushing for New York Governor Kathy Hochul to withdraw support for congestion pricing.

Much of this opposition is now taking place in the courts. New Jersey Governor Phillip D. Murphy has announced a lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Transportation, attempting to delay congestion pricing by forcing the MTA to complete requirements that may take years to accomplish. The United Federation of Teachers, the Staten Island borough president, the Rockland County executive, and more have also filed lawsuits attempting to halt the finalization of congestion pricing. The trial for the case brought by New Jersey, which the New York Times considers to be "the most significant legal challenge," is scheduled to start in early April. Governor Murphy argues that "You are not eliminating pollution, you are just displacing it from Manhattan to New Jersey," echoing sentiments from South Bronx and Staten Island advocates. He has also criticized the program for unfairly affecting New Jersey residents by charging them a toll they won't see the benefits of. The MTA has responded by pointing out that New Jersey collects millions from New York drivers on the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway.



Traffic piles up in Manhattan, NYC (The New York Times, 2023)

Despite the flaws in congestion pricing, it remains a good idea conceptually. It is a noble and important goal to reduce reliance on cars and reduce traffic to speed up buses and emergency response. The plan would also provide much-needed revenue that would help improve an aging transit system that desperately needs it. However, the way in which the MTA is going about its goal clearly has consequences and would result in significantly negative impacts, especially on lower-income communities. Again, these goals are admirable – but congestion pricing may not be the way to reach them.

THE U.S. BANS ON CHINESE IMPORTS: ESCALATING TRADE TENSIONS

By ISHAAN AKILESWAR

In a move that has sent shockwaves through the global economy, the United States government has implemented a series of bans and restrictions on Chinese goods and products. This ongoing trade dispute between the world's two largest economies has been steadily escalating over the past several years, with each side imposing tariffs and other punitive measures on the other.

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

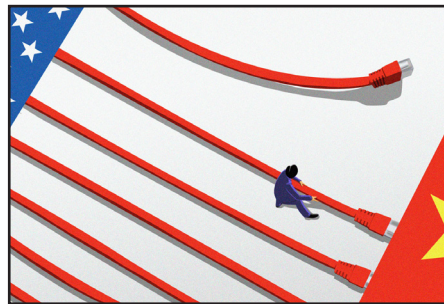
THE U.S. BANS ON CHINESE IMPORTS: ESCALATING TRADE TENSIONS

By ISHAAN AKILESWAR

While the roots of this conflict can be traced back to the intricacies of great power relations, tensions came to a head in 2018, when the Trump administration first levied tariffs on Chinese imports, citing concerns over unfair trade practices, intellectual property theft, and the massive U.S. trade deficit with China. The tariffs specifically targeted products produced in China's Xinjiang region, especially labor-intensive goods such as tomatoes and cotton. The year prior to the ban, it was estimated that \$9-\$10 million worth of product was imported from China and that since the DHP would not "tolerate forced labor of any kind", they started pressuring companies to cut out Chinese products from the Xinjiang from their supply chain. And despite attempts at negotiation, the tensions only continued to worsen, with both sides digging in and expanding the scope of their economic countermeasures.

In 2022, the Biden administration initiated a more comprehensive crackdown, banning the import of a wide range of Chinese products. This included restrictions on telecommunications equipment, surveillance technology, solar panel components, and other high-tech goods that the U.S. deemed as posing national security risks.

The administration also moved to limit exports of certain advanced semiconductors and chip-making equipment to China in an ongoing effort to hinder the development of China's burgeoning tech industry. The impacts of these bans have been far-reaching. American consumers have faced higher prices and limited availability of many consumer goods, from electronics to household appliances. Businesses that rely on Chinese imports have had to scramble to find alternative suppliers, disrupting supply chains and, in some cases, forcing them to scale back operations. Meanwhile, the Chinese government has retaliated with its own set of restrictions, further escalating the trade war.



(Politico, 2022)

Critics of the U.S. approach argue that the bans have done more harm than good, hurting American consumers and businesses while failing to significantly alter China's economic policies. Proponents, however, contend that such measures are necessary to protect American jobs, safeguard national security, and counter China's growing global influence.

As the two economic superpowers continue to spar, the long-term implications of this trade conflict remain uncertain. As of March 2024, more Chinese companies have been accused of having connections to forced labor. According to Homeland Security policy advisor Laura Murphy, "we're [Homeland Security and the Biden administration] really focused on enhancing and expanding the entity list. We expect many more entities to be coming in the next few months." What both those in favor of and those opposed to tariffs can agree on, however, is that the decisions made in the coming years will have far-reaching consequences, not just for the U.S. and China, but for the entire global economy.

THE GROWING THREAT OF ISOLATIONIST FOREIGN POLICY

By CONSTANTINE SVORONOS

As we in the United States approach our November 2024 election, many around the country and the world are left wondering what will happen to Ukraine and our other allies if former President Trump returns to office. This is because he is at the forefront of a segment of Republican politicians in contemporary American politics that are becoming increasingly hostile to any American involvement in global affairs.

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

THE GROWING THREAT OF ISOLATIONIST FOREIGN POLICY

By CONSTANTINE SVORONOS

Under the guise of an “America first” agenda, these political leaders insist that any time or money spent on the defense or support of our allies is wasted. Instead, they subscribe to the surface-level worldview that the only way to benefit the national security of the United States is to close off our external connections and look entirely inwards.



German Chancellor Angela Merkel, center, speaks with U.S. President Donald Trump, seated at right, during the G7 Leaders Summit in Quebec, Canada, 2018 (German Government, 2018)

Particularly vulnerable to a potential isolationist American foreign policy is the existence of a free and democratic Ukrainian nation-state. So far, since being invaded by Russia in February 2022, Ukraine has received around \$75 billion worth of aid from the United States for various purposes. While having also received large amounts of aid from countries like the United Kingdom and Germany and from the EU, Ukraine needs American help.

Ukrainian President Zelenskyy continued to reiterate in late March that Ukraine would lose the war without the support of the United States. As of now, the American people and government stand, for the most part, with Ukraine. However, a Trump presidency could turn all of that onto its head, given both the special veto powers of the presidency and the complete power Trump holds over the Republican party. Trump does not seem particularly passionate about the idea of continuing the string of American support for Ukraine in its defense of its homeland. In fact, he seems quite ready to give up on the struggle for Ukrainian national sovereignty altogether.

While the messages coming from Trump and his campaign haven't been entirely clear, it is likely that overall his return to office would be unfortunate for Ukraine. After meeting with Trump in early March, Viktor Orban, the semi-autocratic prime minister of Hungary and Putin's lone friend in the EU, said that Trump, “will not give a penny into the Ukraine-Russia war and therefore the war will end.” This particular piece of information has yet to be confirmed or denied by the Trump campaign, but if true, would be a strange position for a leader supposedly acting in the best interest of the United States.

Orban's description clearly indicates that Trump is aware that a discontinuance of American support would likely force Ukraine to eventually surrender to the Russian onslaught and agree to whatever terms the victorious invading side desires.

Ukraine is not the only region at risk from a potential loss of American support. NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), a mutual defense alliance made up of 30 European countries in addition to the United States and Canada, may reach a tipping point under a second Trump term. In its more than 70 years history of trans-Atlantic cooperation, the alliance may face its biggest internal threat yet. Throughout his presidency, Trump complained time and time again about NATO countries not paying their fair share of dues to the alliance. While many of the European members (20 of the 32 total members), especially those further away from Russia, do indeed not spend the 2% of GDP on their own defense, a condition required for NATO (which, to be fair, they should be spending), the continuity of the alliance, which has been responsible for the defense of free Europe for more than 70 years, is infinitely more important than trivial issues like who is spending what. Trump, on the other hand, seems to care entirely about whether or not countries are contributing exactly their fair share.

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

THE GROWING THREAT OF ISOLATIONIST FOREIGN POLICY

By CONSTANTINE SVORONOS

In fact, his concern for some European allies only comes down to whether or not they are contributing to NATO, appearing to be apathetic to whether these nations remain under democratic hands. He even went a step further in early February when he said that he would encourage groups like Russia, “to do whatever the hell they want” to European countries not following the required terms of NATO. Not only does this imply that in the case of a Russian invasion of NATO territory, Trump would abstain from defending our allies, something we are obliged to do under NATO Article 5, but it also shows that his first priority is not the defense of our friends but rather hyper fixating on minor details at best and wishing for the success of our enemies at worst. If we assume the less pessimistic of the two and assert that Trump may just be naïve, what he fails to understand is that the cost of our allies not contributing the full 2% of their GDP to defense is nothing in the face of the threat of losing some of our most important historical, economic, military, and cultural partners.

Important to note, however, is Trump’s recent assurance that the United States would not leave the alliance as long as our European partners “play fair.” While this is a low bar, since an American departure from NATO could lead to horrific consequences for much of Europe, it does mean that a Trump presidency will not necessarily doom the future of our democratic allies across the Atlantic.



Leaders of NATO member nations pose for a photo at NATO headquarters in Brussels, 2022 (NPR, 2022)

All of Trump’s rhetoric is shocking to many. The increasingly popular idea of isolationism is unprecedented in American politics, especially within the context of the modern Republican party. In fact, isolationism has not been this popular since the days before World War II, when it was almost entirely put to rest by an attack on American soil that brought the United States into the largest war in world history. Since that point, a vast majority of both Republicans and Democrats have agreed that the United States ought to play an active role in global affairs. Moreover, Trump and his allies’ anti-NATO and soft-on-Russia rhetoric is particularly surprising when compared to his Republican predecessors

of Reagan, Bush Sr., and Bush Jr., some of the more hawkish figures in recent American history. However, Trump’s position is not in spite of his party’s former position, but largely because of it. The recent wars fought in Iraq and Afghanistan became quite unpopular, and that presented an opportunity for Trump to capitalize on an America that had gone too far in the interventionist direction. His unprecedented hardline political movement has reinvented American politics altogether, potentially bringing about a new age in which the United States ceases to participate in international affairs. Such a future would not bode well for the world.

Whatever actually does end up happening, the rhetoric of Trump and some of his more radical isolationist allies is damaging as is. It sends the message that under Trump, the United States is not a reliable ally or partner, not just for our European allies, but for all of our allies. Being seen this way greatly harms the United States. It destroys the relationships we have forged over many years and opens our potentially former allies to rely upon and align themselves with other strong countries instead. Thus it weakens the power of the United States abroad and in the long term could open the gate for the Russia-China-Iran alliance to exert increasing amounts of influence in the world, destroying democracy and human rights in their wake.

WA: THE UNOFFICIAL MICROSTATE WHICH DEFTLY NAVIGATES GREAT POWER POLITICS

BY FELIX STEELE

It sounds like the basis of an ill-conceived TV program: a rogue state embedded within the jungles of Southeast Asia and whose primary business (controlled by a bombastic dictator) is drug-running. Yet, in Myanmar, just such a place exists, and it isn't a Hollywood set or fictional fief. Wa State, a remote region, sits along the high Burman-Chinese-Thai borders, a commanding position from which it smuggles illicit substances around the Indochinese Peninsula. Wa is fiercely independent, highly militarized, and (for those in power) an extraordinary source of wealth. It is also a case study in the deft navigation of great power politics.



UWSA soldiers rehearse for the 30th anniversary of the group's ceasefire in the Wa State capital Panghsang, 15 April, 2019. (Steve Tickner, 2019)

The first recorded contact between the West and the ethnic Wa people came in 1893, when a British colonial bigwig, George Scott, set off into the Burmese mountains to survey the lands and peoples which his empire claimed.

“They are an extremely well-behaved, industrious, and estimable race,” wrote Scott upon meeting the Wa, “were it not for the one foible of cutting strangers’ heads off.” The latter part of this sentence sounds like a delusion. Yet, Scott recorded the practice of headhunting carefully. Such beheadings (which are thought to ward off disease and famine) continued deep into the 1970s. Though the Wa no longer sever heads, they undoubtedly remain “estimable,” and have retained the ferocious reputation which Scott recorded.

Wa State has a population of perhaps one million people. Yet, it has raised a formidable standing army larger than that of Sweden — 30,000 troops armed with surface-to-air missiles, helicopters, artillery-pieces, and armored vehicles. Wa manufactures automatic weapons for sale on the international black market, and smuggles weapons from Thailand and Cambodia, while China has supplied much of the high-end technology. Wa State has assembled the requisite manpower for its military by requiring that every household send at minimum one to two male members for armed service in the United Wa State Army (UWSA), depending on the size of a family. UWSA troops are paid \$0.25 US per day in exchange for their loyalty.

Primarily, the UWSA guards the more than 40 manufacturing facilities which constitute Wa's primary source of income — drugs.

Wa State is among the world's largest producers of methamphetamines and raw opium. Trade in these deadliest of commodities (for which the Wa have 250,000 customers in Thailand alone) nets the UWSA \$550 million US per year. In the past two decades, the Wa have also expanded beyond drugs — having established their micronation as a global hub for trafficking in poached animals and established offices where as many as 100,000 telephone scammers conduct business. Wa is a criminal organization first, and a state second.

It is in some ways surprising that a mini-nation so thoroughly entangled in the world of international crime has eluded international attention for so long. But the Wa nation has cunningly framed itself as an ethnic minority seeking independence, rather than a criminal cartel whose only true pursuit is profit. Wa foreign policy has centered around appeasing major powers, i.e. China and the U.S., the Burmese government, which nominally controls their territory, and the Southeast Asian nations which suffer most from its crimes.

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SPRING EDITION 2024

WA: THE UNOFFICIAL MICROSTATE WHICH DEFTLY NAVIGATES GREAT POWER POLITICS

By FELIX STEELE

The formal diplomatic history of Wa State began in the 1940s, when the Wa became embroiled in the Chinese civil war. Forces of the retreating Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalists who opposed Mao and would go on to establish Taiwan) set up fortified positions in the hills of Wa State in preparation for a counterattack against the CCP-controlled mainland that would never materialize. The Chinese Communists were far from blind, however, to the presence of KMT forces, and began to wage a campaign against the nationalists from across the Chinese border. The primary tactic employed by the Chinese communists was simple: they would arm ethnic minorities, including the Wa, who in return would oppose the KMT and be allowed to exercise sovereignty over their territory.

When KMT forces finally retreated from Burma, the Wa found themselves closely aligned with the Burmese Communist Party, and its Chinese cousin. In the 1960s, the Burmese Communists were pushed out of that nation's center and into Wa territory. Pangsang, which is the capital of Wa State, became the Communist base of operations.

Although some Wa guerillas joined forces with the BCP, their power was diluted not only by Burmese communists, but also by the Chinese intellectuals who comprised its upper crust.

By the end of 1988, the Burmese socialist government had toppled. Wa took advantage of the resultant chaos to evict Communist forces and establish its independence under the snappy aegis of "Shan State Special Region No. 2." Although Wa remained a nominal part of Burma, the Burmese state was (and remains) too weak to exert any genuine authority over the Wa region.

Remarkably, despite the defenestration of BCP leadership in Wa, the Wa have remained close allies of China. After the 1988 student protests which ended in the loss of Communist control over Burma, the Wa framed themselves as a single-party socialist republic in the vein of Maoist China. Bao Youxiang, the Wa leader who retains control even today, proclaimed himself "Chairman Bao," and established a Politburo. This ensured Chinese military support for the Wa — which in turn would solidify Wa independence from Burma proper. Yet Bao is not by conviction a radical socialist: he has a range of business holdings in Myanmar and the West that comfortably repudiate any assertion of genuine Marxist-Leninist praxis.

But coziness with China — and Wa's increasing drug production — would also draw American attention. Starting in the 1990s, Wa State took dramatic steps to repair its relationship with the West. It began by seizing vast tracts of land along the Burmese-Thai border, and forcibly resettled some 80,000 opium farmers onto new farms that were ostensibly restricted to producing only food staples. In 2006, Wa State agreed to ban opium production.



United Wa State Army leader Bao Youxiang waves to the crowd at a military parade to commemorate 30 years of a ceasefire signed with the Myanmar military in Wa State, in Pangsang, April 17, 2019. (Ye Aung Thu, 2019)

Yet even before the ban, its focus was already transitioning away from opium cultivation — and regardless of Chairman Bao's promises, opium production never ceased entirely. Nevertheless, U.S. diplomats were largely satisfied with the agreement, and now look elsewhere for tussles over drug-running.

China has continued to associate with Wa, in spite of the aforementioned scams, wild-life-smuggling, and drug-running. It has also supplied paved roads and telecommunications. The result has been dangerous: a sovereign criminal cartel that is increasingly connected to the outside world. That being said, the Wa have leveraged diplomacy to completely evade the attention of the West — as well as the control of China, whom it threatens to flood with drugs and restive ethnic minorities. No other nation, official or imagined, can make such a claim. However unpleasant and criminal, the Wa have played both sides in foreign policy for seventy-five years. Look to them for lessons in great-power diplomacy.

OUR STAFF:

Theo Sullivan - Editor-in-Chief

Talia Waxman - Editor-in-Chief

Felix Steele - Editor

Adia Stokes - Editor

Zeke Tesler - Editor

Iris Sullivan - Social Media Manager

Robert Montera - Faculty Advisor

Thanks to Carl Smith and Kirk
Ruebenson in the Design Center

If you are interested in writing for the next edition, please contact
25arstokes@ecfs.org and 25zetesler@ecfs.org for additional
information. Thanks!

Check out our Insagram: [@fieldstonpoliticaljournal](https://www.instagram.com/fieldstonpoliticaljournal)

Read more on our website: <https://fieldstonpoliticaljournal.com>

