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About *Dialectics*

Dialectics is the student-led academic journal of the Department of Political Science, St. Thomas College Palai Autonomous, founded with the aim of fostering a vibrant culture of critical inquiry and scholarly engagement. The journal is dedicated to advancing rigorous debates across the fields of political science, political theory, contemporary politics, and international relations, offering a platform through which students and early-career scholars can reflect on and interrogate the pressing political questions of our time. In an era marked by rapid political transformations, shifting global power dynamics, and renewed contestations over democracy, identity, and justice, Dialectics seeks to encourage original, evidence-based, and theoretically informed contributions that move beyond surface-level commentary toward deeper analytical understanding. By bringing together diverse perspectives and methodological approaches, the journal aspires to cultivate an intellectual community committed to examining the workings of state power, the role of institutions, the dynamics of global conflicts, and the emergence of new political ideas through sustained, critical, and reflective scholarship.

Editors' Note

The inaugural issue of *Dialectics* emerges from a shared conviction that meaningful engagement with politics requires more than commentary; it demands careful inquiry, theoretical reflection, and a willingness to confront complexity. At a moment marked by shifting global orders, contestations over identity and power, and the rapid transformation of political life, this journal seeks to provide a space where students and emerging scholars can critically examine the forces shaping our world. The contributions in this issue reflect a commitment to analytical rigour and intellectual curiosity, exploring questions that span geopolitics, democratic challenges, development, and evolving forms of authority. By bringing these perspectives together, *Dialectics* aspires to foster thoughtful dialogue and nurture a culture of scholarship that not only interprets political realities but also encourages deeper reflection on the responsibilities of engaged and informed citizenship.

- Antony Joseph and Gaurav Amar James
Editors-in-Chief

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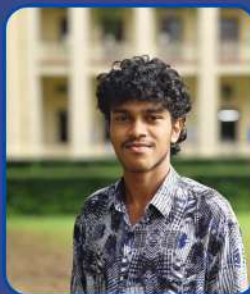
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Shadows Across the Desert: Proxy Wars in West Asia

Devika Baiju¹

Abstract

In the evolving world of geopolitics, proxy war is a strategic tool that great powers and states employ readily to pursue their objective indirectly by avoiding direct confrontation, at the same time inflicting damage on their rivals. This strategy enables the players the opportunity to widen their strategic reach without dipping their feet in the turbulent waters of direct conflict. While looking into the contemporary state of affairs in West Asian geopolitics, this strategic instrument has become handy in the interstate rivalries that are transforming the domestic upheavals into regionalized conflicts backed by ideological and geopolitical contestation with external sponsorship. This led to the intensification of problems in a region already torn by political instabilities and sectarian disputes. This work will look into the long standing rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the two major powers in the region, that has transformed the security landscape. Especially since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the feud between these countries became regionalized through proxy wars in Iraq, Yemen, Syria and beyond, spilling the seeds of conflict throughout the region. The centuries-old friction between the Sunni and Shia sects in Islam became clearly reflected in the dynamics between these two states, with the 1979 revolution that led to the establishment of a Shia state in Iran posing ideological and political challenges to Sunni monarchy in Saudi Arabia. These events, exacerbated with the security concerns and ambition for regional domination, turned the neighbouring countries into a battlefield. The study tries to synthesise and understand the proxy dynamics and the factors driving it along with discussing the implication of this on regional stability.

Keywords: Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry, Proxy warfare, Non-state actors, West Asia regional security, Regionalization

A region that once held the mysteries of human existence has now turned into a scene of bloodbath for power and domination. West Asia for many years has been going through a swirl of instability and upheavals. The region being a mosaic of identities, has always remained entangled in a series of conflicts, where the

sectarian tension is being capitalized by the regional powers to assert their regional hegemony. These conflict transcends conventional warfare to become what is known as proxy warfare. This work will look into the long standing rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the two major powers in the region, that has transformed

the security landscape.

Beyond the Battlefield

Before getting into the intricacies of this dynamic, let us understand what proxy warfare is. In his article named 'Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict', Andrew Mumford has defined proxy wars as "conflicts in which a third party intervenes indirectly in order to influence the strategic outcome in favour of its preferred faction" (Mumford 2013, p.40). From this definition, we can understand that in this dynamic we can see a benefactor who is external to the existing conflict coming into the mix and trying to influence the outcome. Through this mechanism, states can support factions that are aligned to them, politically or ideologically, enabling them to expand their influence without being dragged into the burdens of a conventional war.

Tracing the Seeds of Rivalry

The underlying factor that is considered to have paved the way for the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran is the ideological tension that exists between them, that is, the Sunni-Shia schism (Tzemprin et al., 2015, p.188). The kingdom of Saudi Arabia shortly after its creation, has constructed a national identity for itself through an alliance between the Al Saud royal family and an 18th century revivalist Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab by reviving Wahhabism, an orthodox Islamic sect (Tzemprin et al., 2015; Nuruzzaman, 2019). Further, being the birthplace of Islam with two holiest sites for Muslims, Mecca and Medina, the Sunni Kingdom began to be seen as the true representative of Islam (Tzemprin et al., 2015, p.189).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Ruling Monarchy led by the Pahlavi Dynasty in Iran had a balanced relationship between them till 1979 as they faced threats from the spread of both communism and Arab Nationalism (Gul, A., Abbasi, R. K., & Haider, S. A. 2021. p.18). Both the countries had a working relationship

though they had their differences (Gaub, 2016, p.2). And this remained unchallenged till the rise of Islamic Republic of Iran after the Iranian revolution of 1979. With Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as the Supreme Leader of the new republic, the Pahlavi Dynasty was replaced with a Shia Authority which questioned the legitimacy of the Saudi Monarchy. Khomeini has expressed staunch criticism against the Saudi monarchy by calling them as "illegitimate puppets who propagate an anti Quranic version of Islam" (Crepy, 2019, p.25). After the revolution, both the states wanted to become the leader of the Muslim world. Though Saudi Arabia had at the outset welcomed the Islamic Republic, the reaction from the latter side was not positive. One of the Iranian parliamentarians even commented that "The Saudi rulers have chosen an evil path, and we will send them to hell and that Mecca is in the hands of a band of heretics" (Gaub, 2016, p.2). This led to increased mistrust leading to a strategic competition between the two states (Sharma, 2016). Gulf monarchies began to see Iran as an "existential threat" in the region (Escobar Stemmann & Arana, 2024, p.4). From this, it became clear to us that, with the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of the Islamic republic in Iran, the leadership and legitimacy of Saudi Arabia in the Islamic world was questioned and it was not just a change of government but a fundamental change in the regional dynamics. Iran began to portray itself as someone spreading the wave of revolutionary Islam that also supports anti imperialism and anti west policies while, Saudi Kingdom reasserted its role as the defender of Sunni orthodoxy and this became the tool in the hands of the state for mobilizing factions in the sectarian divides across the region for furthering their individual gains and influence. Added to this equation was the desire to establish dominance in the region.

The Many Fronts of One Rivalry

This raises the question of whether ideological divergence alone explains the rivalry, I would say no, because it just lays the ground, above it comes the regional geopolitical ambitions and interests and the mistrust that aggravates the competition between the two states. The ideological factor had its spill over into the spheres of influence. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran began supporting and providing patronage to Sunni and Shia factions across the region. If we take up the case of Bahrain, having a Shia majority population with a Sunni Al-Khalifa ruling family who hold close relations with Saudi Arabia, and with Iran supporting the Shia factions to rise up against the Bahraini Kingdom especially during the Arab Spring, eventually led to an intervention from Saudi Arabia by sending their troops. According to scholars, “Saudi Arabia’s main fear lying behind the Bahraini crisis is the spillover of sectarian upheaval into its own territory and to the neighbouring countries” (Tzemprin et al., 2015, p.192).

Turning to Iraq, a country with a Shia majority population and a minority Sunni leadership, Saudi Arabia along with the United States, extended their support to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). However, the story changed when the Saddam regime was toppled by the US in 2003. This proved to be beneficial to Iran as they tried to fill up the vacancy with Iraqi Shias. Though the Shia factions were gaining a foothold after Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990, it was during the post-Saddam era that Iran gained more control over Iraq (Crepay, 2019, p.26; Tzemprin et al., 2015, p.192). Interestingly, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) formed in 1981 is said to have been created to protect Gulf states from Iranian activities (Maria Maddalena & Settembrini, 2019, p.19).

Yemen, a country that is of vital importance to both Saudi Arabia and Iran, has been a ground for their rivalry. Ensuring stability in Yemen is of critical importance to the former as they have to protect their domestic

security and regional interests, while for the latter it is the perfect place to assert its power where Saudi holds most of the influence. The political instability within Yemen has led to prolonged conflict between the Yemeni state backed by Saudi Arabia and various opposing factions like the Houthis who have been supported by Iran. This unrest has urged Saudis to react, which led to an intervention known as the Operation Decisive Storm in 2015. The already existing domestic situation got worsened with the Saudi-Iran rivalry even pushing the country into a humanitarian crisis. Now if we shift our glance to Syria, a country that has gone through one of the bloodiest civil wars in the region. Strategically and politically, Syria is critical for Iran as it provides it with a link to Lebanese Hezbollah and it has been its ally since the 1979 Revolution. In response to the growing Iranian influence in Syria, Saudi Arabia began supporting various oppositional factions and rebel groups. After the Arab Spring, the sectarian divide intensified to a point where Sunni groups and Shia groups have turned towards Saudi and Iran for support, further aggravating the tension (Crepay, 2019, p. 29-32).

Thus, when we analyse the above situations we can see that both the countries are considering the gaining of influence and power in the region as a zero sum game, which means if one country gains the other loses. Saudi Arabia always had this fear that Iran might export its revolutionary ideology that might hurt its interest in the region and therefore Saudi tries to hinder Iranian advances in the region (Boucek & Sadjadpour, 2011, p. 6). In addition, after the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action by Iran and UNSC+1, a nuclear deal that lifted the sanctions, the Gulf countries considered it a further imperative that would strengthen Iran (Escobar Stemmann & Arana, 2024). Though the sectarian divide in the region provides States with a mobilizing narrative, it is the security dilemma that leads to the spiralling of mistrust and competitive interventions throughout the region. All these elements push

the region into the pitfall of a self-perpetuating cycle of instability leading to protracted struggles.

Conclusion

In a region torn by instabilities and institutional weakness, the use of proxy warfare has become a convenient tool in the hands of powers who wish to protect their interest and influence. Iran and Saudi Arabia capitalised and appealed to various factions in the already existing sectarian tension in the region to reap the benefits. With the indirect external interventions, the domestic conflicts turned into more intractable struggles leading to grave humanitarian crises. Regional stability thus requires more than mere photo ops and diplomatic gestures as the problem runs deep and instead States should focus on addressing the security dilemma that causes this competition and rivalry. With mutual threat perception, and competing regional visions, though the intensity of this dynamic may ease up, there might not be a complete end in sight.

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The Leaky Pipeline: Addressing Gender Exclusion in India's Cadre of Justice

Nivedya Murali¹

Abstract

The Supreme Court of India, often referred to as the Temple of Justice, has failed considerably in ensuring gender equality within its ranks despite its splendid achievements in many sectors. This article examines the underrepresentation of women in the Court, which is the guardian of the Constitution. It explores the structural, institutional, economic, cultural, and patriarchal factors contributing to this underrepresentation. Very little focus is given to the pipeline for women from lower courts to the Supreme Court being a leaky one, and to the gender inclusion that can help and has helped in many judicial rulings. Using Collegium records and available data, including the recent dissent by Justice B.V. Nagarathna against the appointment of two judges to the Supreme Court, surpassing many senior judges, this paper traces the reasons behind this lacuna in the higher judiciary. Case studies of terminated women judges and collegial selections substantiate the gender exclusion in the upper court. It's paradoxical that a body meant to uphold gender inclusion has become a gender exclusionary body, warranting attention and reform.

Keywords: Temple of justice, Gender inclusion, Underrepresentation, Pipeline, Collegium records

Often called the temple of justice, the Supreme Court of India acts as a guardian of the Constitution, which is meant for the people. It holds both constitutional authority and moral legitimacy. However, it is unfortunate that this hall of justice struggles to be gender inclusive. This striking reality shows that the protector of the Constitution is one of the most gender-imbalanced institutions in the world's largest democracy. Despite its claims of supporting women's rights and equality, the conscience keeper of the nation reflects a glass ceiling and a hidden patriarchal outlook.

The Leaky Pipeline

Since its inception, women's representation in the Supreme Court has been persistently low. Statistics from the 1950s indicate that only 11 women have been appointed to the Supreme Court, making up less than 4% of the total number of judges. An article titled "Where Are the Women Judges?" published by Outlook India confirms that among the 268 judges appointed, only 11 are women. Currently, the Supreme Court operates at its full strength of 33 judges, but only 2 of them are women, which is a mere 6.6%. For the past 75 years, there has not been a single woman among the 51 Chief

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Justices. Women in India became eligible to practice law in 1923, with Cornelia Sorabjee being the first to graduate in law. Even lower courts are not free from this issue; in India's high courts, less than 14% of judges are women. This situation reveals that the so-called pipeline is leaking, creating a significant gap in the internal structure. Not a single woman is consistently advancing, even over the course of a year, to address this gender exclusion. This leads to a serious consequence: the judiciary does not reflect social diversity.

The Structural and Institutional Barriers

Many factors, both known and unknown, contribute to the underrepresentation of women. The metaphors of the glass ceiling and leaky pipeline highlight the severity of a system that disproportionately favors men. As mentioned by IndiaSpend (2025, para. 6), "The absence of institutional support to help lawyers balance their professional and personal responsibilities makes it harder for women to sustain long-term careers in litigation, which is the traditional path to becoming a judge". As we emphasize a citizen-centred approach in a democracy, the large number of pending cases in the judicial system remains a significant barrier. The saying "justice delayed is justice denied" holds true. The doctrine of laches prevents a layperson from seeking judicial help for personal matters after a certain delay, suggesting it is their civic duty to approach the court on time. But what if the judiciary itself causes the delays? Isn't that a form of injustice? Several factors contribute to this problem. Some scholars argue that the Indian judiciary's bureaucratic structure, inherited from the British colonial system may be a reason for its slow response. Along with this the appointment process under the collegium system. System is fraught with issues, as the seniority of judges, often women, is influenced by a masculinized institutional culture. A gender-inclusive approach is largely absent within the system.

The Curious Case of Justice Nagarathna and the Question of Merit

Justice Nagarathna, a woman judge of the Supreme Court, recently expressed dissent, highlighting ongoing controversies. The Supreme Court Bar Association noted that since 2021, no women judges have been appointed. Justice Nagarathna, the only female voice in the collegium, pointed out that two male judges with less seniority were elevated over two qualified women candidates. This reflects a gender-biased interpretation of merit, where less senior men can overshadow capable women. The concept of merit cannot be separated from institutional culture. If a woman were not part of the collegial system, would India recognize this important issue? Would a man stop such unjust practices affecting women? Who knows? Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg of the U.S. Supreme Court once said, "Women belong in all places where decisions are being made." It's time to evaluate this statement.

When the Supreme Court Falters, the Constitution Trembles

This situation is highly paradoxical. An institution meant to protect equality is often the most unequal. The underrepresentation of women represents not only an injustice to the entire community but also a betrayal of democratic ideals. The case of Justice Pushpa Ganeswari, who faced severe criticism over her ruling in a sexual assault case under the POCSO act, illustrates the point. The rapid and harsh backlash against her career and the collegium's decision to withdraw her appointment raise questions. Did male judges with similar controversial rulings face such severe consequences? Probably not. This demonstrates the double standards in how women are treated. The leaflet *Double Standards in Judicial Accountability: The Case of Justice Pushpa Ganeswari* (2022) serves as a reference (Satish Ragde v. State of Maharashtra, 2021). Additionally, Justice Vijaya K. Tahilramani's transfer from Chief Justice of the

Madras High Court to the Meghalaya High Court without her consent shows the challenges women face in a non-supportive environment.

Conclusion

It is highly paradoxical and troubling that the Temple of Justice, which is supposed to uphold constitutional principles, remains a place of gender exclusion. Addressing these major issues requires changing the overall structural and institutional flaws that exist. Though citizens may seek justice in different ways, the roots of their journey are the same. “The Supreme Court stands committed, consistent, and compassionate—a custodian of the citizen’s cause.”

Let me finish with the timeless words of Justice B.V. Nagarathna: “The judiciary is the guardian of the Constitution, and its conscience must forever remain awake to the needs of the people.” These words remind us that justice cannot be static; it is a promise to all citizens in the world’s largest democracy!

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Platforms, Powers and Liberty in the 21st Century

Ron Stephen¹

Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital platforms in the twenty-first century has transformed not only everyday social and economic practices but also the structure of political authority. Platforms such as Google, Meta, and Amazon increasingly function as powerful intermediaries that shape access to information, communication, and public discourse. This commentary examines the growing influence of digital platforms through the lens of republican political theory, particularly Philip Pettit's concept of freedom as non-domination. While classical liberal approaches define freedom primarily as the absence of interference, a republican perspective highlights the risks posed by arbitrary and unaccountable power, even when it is not directly exercised. Drawing on insights from Hobbes, Machiavelli, and contemporary scholars of digital governance, the commentary argues that platforms operate as quasi-sovereign actors whose algorithmic systems regulate behaviour, curate visibility, and influence political participation in ways that remain largely opaque to users. The discussion situates platform power within broader debates on surveillance capitalism, algorithmic governance, and democratic accountability, emphasising how data monopolies, behavioural prediction, and content moderation reshape the conditions of freedom in digital societies. By conceptualising platforms as potential sources of domination, the commentary calls for renewed attention to transparency, regulatory oversight, and digital rights as necessary safeguards for preserving democratic autonomy in an era of technologically mediated power.

Keywords: Digital liberty, Sovereignty, Surveillance, Tech giants, Algorithmic governance

The 21st century has seen a rapid expansion of digital platforms among the common people. Almost the whole world population relies on Google, Meta, Amazon and numerous platforms for acquiring information, ensuring communication. Nowadays, people can even buy groceries just by sitting at home using Amazon, Blinkit, Flipkart and such other apps. The presence of digital platforms in every aspect of life shows

their severe influence. More than just a technological convenience, it represents a shift in political and social power. Historically, political authority was mainly understood as concentrated in the laws and frameworks of the state. Governments were seen as the main forces that create laws, regulate society, and determine the boundaries of freedom (Hobbes, 1909). Today, private platforms have also become new centres of authority.

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They decide what content circulates, which voices are amplified or silenced, and how public debates evolve. Scholars such as Sunstein (2017) and Gillespie (2018) show that these decisions-whether technical or deliberative-have severe political consequences.

Through this analysis, I aim to examine the shift in power through the lens of republican political theory, particularly the concept of freedom as non-domination (Pettit, 1997). While liberal theory defines freedom as the absence of direct interference, republican thinkers argue that individuals remain unfree if they are subject to arbitrary power, even if that power is not exercised (Pettit, 1997). This is particularly relevant in analysing digital environments, where users appear free but are continuously regulated by algorithmic systems that cannot be seen or challenged (Zuboff, 2019). Digital platforms function as quasi-sovereign actors, operating without the safeguards normally applied to governments. Their power resembles a new kind of sovereignty-built on data extraction, algorithmic governance, and behavioural influence.

In the book 'Leviathan', Thomas Hobbes argued that people gave up some freedoms to a powerful ruler to avoid chaos (Hobbes, 1909). The "Leviathan" represents central, unquestioned power. Even though Hobbes talked about states, his idea helps us understand how big platforms today can control large numbers of people at once. Niccolò Machiavelli, in his book 'Discourses on Livy', believed that freedom is possible only when citizens actively participate in ruling themselves (Machiavelli, 1996). He stated that people must stay alert and keep leaders in check. His ideas matter today because platforms exercise power without much public oversight.

In modern political theory, Philip Pettit gives an important idea called 'freedom as non-domination' (Pettit, 1997). He says that a person is not free not only when someone directly interferes with them, but also when someone has the power to interfere whenever they

want. Even though this control does not feel forceful, it still influences what users choose and do.

Shoshana Zuboff talks about surveillance capitalism, where companies collect our behavioural data to predict and influence what we do (Zuboff, 2019). Nick Srnicek explains that large digital platforms use their economic power and control over the internet's infrastructure to strengthen their position (Srnicek, 2017). Cass Sunstein shows how algorithms create filter bubbles, making society more divided and breaking shared public discussion (Sunstein, 2017). Tarleton Gillespie, a Senior Principal Researcher at Microsoft Research New England, in his work *Custodians of the Internet*, examines how content moderation shapes public discourse (Gillespie, 2018). Manuel Castells analyses how digital networks alter social movements (Castells, 2012). Evgeny Morozov warns that digital technologies can create more authoritarian control instead of supporting democracy (Morozov, 2011).

Philip Pettit's idea of freedom as non-domination means freedom should not be controlled by powerful actors like big tech platforms. Using this theory we can witness how companies like Google, Meta, and Amazon influence people's online behaviours and political participation. The various platform-based companies emerged and reached their current stage through continuous evolution and changes (Pettit, 1997). They have also acquired an intense level of power. This occurs because companies like Google control access to most of the world's information, apps by Meta influence how people communicate and discuss politics, and Amazon affects the working of economies (Srnicek, 2017; Zuboff, 2019). These companies are powerful because of 1. Data monopoly 2. Behavioural prediction 3. Algorithmic control 4. Integrated digital ecosystems (Srnicek, 2017)

These platforms can shape our identity, our relationships, and how we understand political systems (Gillespie, 2018). Thomas Hobbes imagined the Leviathan

as a powerful state. But today, the modern digital platforms act as new “Leviathans.” They make their own rules (like terms and conditions), they give punishments such as bans and restrictions, they regulate content, and they surveil citizens (Hobbes, 1909; Morozov, 2011). These platforms exercise powers like governments, but without being accountable to the people. Platforms use hidden forms of power. Their algorithms decide things like: i) Which posts gain the most reach ii) Which political ideas spread online iii) Which posts are ignored. Users are controlled because they cannot fully understand, question, or change how these systems work (Sunstein, 2017; Gillespie, 2018). Digital platforms can help democracy by making it easier for people to access information. But they can also harm democracy by spreading misinformation, promoting divisive content, and allowing political ads targeted at specific individuals (Zuboff, 2019; Sunstein, 2017).

Digital platforms act like private rulers by using algorithms to control what people see and do. This reflects earlier concerns about algorithmic power and manipulation (Sunstein, 2017). In this digital era, to stay free, people need protection not only from the uncontrolled powers of government, but also from the growing powers of large tech companies (Pettit, 1997; Zuboff, 2019). The republican idea of liberty helps us understand the kind of power these platforms hold, especially the risk of arbitrary, unseen control (Pettit, 1997). Democracy becomes weaker when platforms control public conversations without any checks or supervision, particularly through content moderation and algorithmic curation (Gillespie, 2018; Sunstein, 2017).

To protect freedom today, we need transparency, accountability, and strong digital rights, which many scholars argue are essential for regulating platform power (Srnicek, 2017; Zuboff, 2019). The digital platforms can shape people’s political opinions by promoting some posts and hiding others. Social media helps people mobilise and participate in politics - showing

how strongly platforms influence political engagement. Platforms collect a huge amount of user data, which allows them to predict and influence people’s online behaviour (Zuboff, 2019). However, most of them do not trust platforms with their data and privacy. This suggests strong public concern about how platforms use personal information. A few big companies dominate the digital world, limiting user choice and increasing dependence on their services (Srnicek, 2017). Most people rely heavily on major platforms for everyday activities. Platforms can also worsen the quality of public discussion by pushing emotional or divisive content to increase engagement (Sunstein, 2017).

Digital platforms hold a lot of power, and this challenges our usual ideas of freedom and democracy. Using the idea of freedom as non-domination (Pettit, 1997), we can see that people can become dependent on platforms even if they are not being directly forced. Algorithms decide what people see, how they interact, and which political messages become popular. This means modern control or domination can happen through technology design, not only through laws or governments (Sunstein, 2017; Gillespie, 2018). Another key idea is the conflict between democracy and platform power. While digital platforms help people to come together and share their views, they are also worried about things like misinformation, algorithmic manipulation, and unequal visibility of political content (Sunstein, 2017; Morozov, 2011). These concerns support the idea that freedom is not just the absence of interference; it must include protection from arbitrary technological power (Pettit, 1997). It raises fundamental questions about accountability, transparency, and the conditions necessary for maintaining genuine freedom. There is a need for updated regulations on platforms, stronger digital rights, and greater public involvement in shaping how platforms operate .

The deep control over information, communication, and even human behaviour challenges the classical un-

derstanding of freedom (Hobbes, 1651). From a republican perspective, these platforms create a new form of domination—quiet, invisible, and technologically embedded (Pettit, 1997). The powers and capabilities of platforms in the contemporary period are far beyond what earlier thinkers could have anticipated. Their influence has crossed geographical, political, and social boundaries, expanding at an unprecedented scale. In such a context, protecting freedom today requires more than safeguarding privacy or individual rights. It demands broader democratic oversight, stronger regulation, and clearly defined limits on platform power (Zuboff, 2019; Srnicek, 2017). Ensuring transparency, accountability, and fairness in the digital sphere is essential. Only by establishing such frameworks can society preserve the core ideals of liberty and democracy in the 21st century.

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Resurgence of Far-right parties and Anti-Immigration wave in Eastern Germany: Antisemitism and Narrative Building

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Abstract

In recent years, Europe has witnessed a significant rise in anti-immigration sentiment alongside the resurgence of far-right political parties. This trend is particularly pronounced in Eastern Germany, where parties such as Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) have garnered substantial public support. This study conducts a comprehensive secondary analysis of existing literature, newspaper articles, and academic research to understand how far-right parties have shaped public narratives around migration in Eastern Germany. This research highlights the region's unique historical and socio-economic context, such as its position in the former Eastern Bloc during the Cold War and its higher unemployment and poverty rates, which contribute to public disillusionment. Findings suggest that far-right parties strategically manipulate economic anxieties and historical narratives to amplify anti-immigration sentiment. Additionally, this analysis explores the complex relationship between anti-immigration rhetoric and antisemitism, considering Germany's historical legacy of the Holocaust. The study argues that far-right parties do not merely reflect existing public opinion but actively distort and reshape it through media channels and political discourse. Furthermore, the success of far-right parties influences mainstream political parties to adopt stricter immigration stances, thereby altering the broader political landscape. This secondary research offers important insights into the mechanisms of political narrative construction in the context of migration and extremism in Germany. It provides a foundational understanding of how anti-immigration waves are interlinked with far-right political strategies, emphasising the need for further empirical research to investigate voter behaviour and the role of media in perpetuating these narratives.

Keywords: Anti-immigration, Far-right parties, Eastern Germany, AfD, Antisemitism, Political discourse, Migration narratives, Secondary research

2015 marked a year of great significance for the European Union, representing both the onset of the immigration crisis and the beginning of heightened anti-immigration sentiments (Krzyżanowski, et. al., 2018). Over the past decade, this development has coincided with the rise of far-right populist movements across the

continent (Mudde, 2019). Germany, although traditionally positioned with the liberal bloc of the European Union, has not been immune to this shift in public sentiment (Arzheimer, 2018). The rise of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), particularly in Eastern Germany, signals a profound transformation in the nation's

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political discourse surrounding migration, identity, and nationalism (Weisskircher, 2020). This paper examines how far-right parties, especially the AfD, have shaped public narratives around migration in Eastern Germany through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, newspapers, and academic research.

The study situates this phenomenon within the region's unique historical, political, and socio-economic contexts. As a former part of the Eastern bloc during the Cold War, Eastern Germany has continued to experience disparities in terms of higher unemployment, economic stagnation, and social alienation compared to Western Germany (Weisskircher, 2020). These conditions have served as a foundation for the growth of exclusionary political ideologies that diverge significantly from those dominant in the West. This paper builds its argument along these lines, asserting that far-right parties exploit these conditions by manipulating economic grievances, historical narratives, and national identity anxieties to construct anti-immigration discourses that resonate deeply with disaffected citizens (Wodak, 2015). The core of this research paper is to understand how anti-immigration sentiment intersects with antisemitism and broader xenophobic tendencies in Germany's political culture. By analysing Germany's legacy of the Holocaust, the study investigates the tensions between the nation's post-war commitment to democratic tolerance and the resurgence of extremist narratives. The paper concludes by examining how far-right movements influence mainstream political actors, compelling them to recalibrate their policies and discourse on immigration. Through a secondary analysis, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how political narratives are constructed, circulated, and normalised in contemporary German society.

Historical and Socio-Economic Context of Eastern Germany

To understand the rise of far-right political parties in

Eastern Germany, it is very important to unravel the historical and socio-economic factors that have shaped the region's political atmosphere (Weisskircher, 2020). The fall of the Berlin Wall is a good starting point to really understand the nuances of this issue. When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, it was remarked as a symbol of liberation and celebrated widely, but these very events led to economic and psychological upheavals in the East. This was essentially because the transition from a planned socialist economy to a market-oriented capitalist system resulted in widespread factory closures, job losses, and mass emigration of young people to Western states (Weisskircher, 2020). Within a day, the lives of the people on the eastern side had to change, which did not really solve the root problems when compared to the western counterparts in terms of unemployment and poverty (Weisskircher, 2020).

Scholars such as Pickel and Pickel (2026) note that this transition created enduring resentment and feelings of marginalisation among the Eastern Germans, who across years, felt they were second-class citizens in a unified Germany. The social fabric of many regions in the Eastern part weakened as communities experienced depopulation, ageing, and the erosion of social safety nets that had characterised life in the German Democratic Republic (Pickel & Pickel, 2026). These conditions created a perfect pathway for far-right parties to slide through by offering narratives of cultural preservation and national revival (Wodak, 2015).

This information on the socio-economic background of Germany is key in this study of the rise of far-right parties in Germany, as the AfD's success cannot be attributed to an isolated political phenomenon (Mudde, 2019). This is the outcome of decades-long socio-economic disparities and historical grievances that have manifested into extreme nationalistic ideas (Rensmann, 2017). The party's ability to translate economic frustration into cultural resentment against migrants and refugees represents a strategic narrative construction deeply

rooted in post-reunification anxieties (Schilling & Stillman, 2024).

Literature Review: Migration, Populism, and Narrative Construction

Migration is one of the highly discussed and contested topics in Europe, and the relationship to populism has also attracted significant scholarly attention. Many scholars, including Cas Mudde (2007), have discussed how far-right populism thrives on the dichotomy between “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite,” often identifying migrants and minorities as threats to national integrity. Ruth Wodak, in her work *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (2015), argues that far-right discourse operates through what she calls the “politics of fear,” which frames migration as a crisis that endangers cultural homogeneity and economic stability. She says that this narrative creates a sense of emergency by depicting refugees or asylum seekers as threats that are destroying the very social fabric of the country and taking away free benefits that were built on the labour of its own citizens. Through various means such as emotional appeals, scapegoating, and the strategic use of crisis language, far-right political parties have normalised exclusionary politics and legitimised authoritarian policy responses. Wodak emphasises that these narratives rely on symbolic boundary-making, defining who belongs and who does not, and draw on historically embedded xenophobic tropes while maintaining ambiguous, publicly defensible language. In the German context, her framework helps explain how the AfD has leveraged fear-based communication to shift public debate, mobilise resentment, and portray itself as the sole protector of national order and identity.

In 2013, the AfD emerged as an anti-Euro party but later evolved into a xenophobic and anti-immigrant party following the 2015 refugee crisis. Scholars like Dennison and Geddes emphasise that the refugee influx served as a catalytic event that redefined politics in

the EU, with migration becoming the symbolic battleground for broader anxieties about globalisation, identity, and sovereignty.

As explained previously in the historical context, one of the key reasons that Eastern Germany provides a very distinct electoral base for the AfD is due to its post-socialist identity crisis that has deep roots in the society. Research by Pickel and Pickel (2026) provides an even deeper analysis of these regions; they explain that weaker democratic institutions and lower immigrant populations are also key reasons why far-right parties gain traction. What is ironic about this is that regions with very little immigrant population have higher anti-immigration sentiment, suggesting that perceptions are shaped less by direct contact and more by mediated narratives and political framing.

Media ecosystems play a big role in amplifying far-right narratives. Studies by Krämer (2017) and Engesser et al. (2017) show that digital media platforms such as Facebook and other social media platforms have become essential parts of the far-right winged party’s communication strategy to reach wider masses. It is through these platforms that the AfD spreads news that is emotionally charged to frame migrants as cultural and economic threats, often invoking historical analogies to Germany’s past.

Finally, the literature links anti-immigration sentiment with the re-emergence of antisemitic and racist tropes. Despite Germany’s extensive efforts toward Holocaust remembrance and education, far-right groups strategically evoke revisionist interpretations of history, portraying Germans as “victims” of post-war guilt politics. This rhetorical inversion allows them to connect present-day migration debates with deeper narratives of national humiliation and identity loss.

Far-Right Strategies in Shaping Migration Narratives

One of the key reasons for the rise of the far-right po-

litical parties in Europe lies in the AfD's ability to dominate public discourse. The party's strategic framing of immigration as a security threat and cultural invasion made it easier to connect with the people in Eastern Germany. Framing migration as a danger appeals to the general public on a much more emotional level. Marcus, Neuman & MacKuen (2000), in their *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgment* argues that citizens do not only make decisions based on rational choices, but emotional sentiments as well. Fear activates a "surveillance system," making people more attentive to threats and more receptive to messages promising order and security. Their model indicates that emotional triggers, especially anxiety, shape how individuals interpret political cues and decide whom to support. The AfD presents itself as the defender of a threatened national identity juxtaposed against what it labels as the "liberal elite" and "globalist" political establishment that prioritises refugees over "native Germans."

This strategy, used by the AfD, operates on various levels. The first being that AfD consistently links migration to crime, even when empirical evidence provides contradicting results to such associations. Media analysis reveals that far-right political parties like the AfD amplify isolated migrant criminal incidents to construct a narrative of chaos and insecurity (Hestermann & Hoven, 2020). These narratives are particularly effective in economically distressed areas, wherein the public has little to no trust in the public institutions. In these areas, it is very easy to frame the migrants as the issue due to the low economic conditions of their regions.

The second thing that the AfD does is that it employs symbolic nostalgia, idealising the social cohesion of pre-1990's and criticising how there is now an erosion of traditional values. They invoke an imagery of their homeland as being very pure and portray immigrants as an existential threat to their cultural purity. This symbolic dimension resonates strongly in Eastern Germany, where post-reunification modernisation is often per-

ceived as a form of Western domination rather than national progress. When analysing speech patterns and public discourse of the AfD Terms like "remigration," "Überfremdung," or "Lügenpresse," which once carried strong far-right connotations, now appear more frequently in public debates. By constantly repeating these concepts, the party lowered the social stigma attached to them and shifted what is considered "acceptable" speech in mainstream politics (Wodak, 2015).

Third, the AfD presents itself as an unbiased and corrective force against the biased and politically manipulated mainstream media landscape. They frame the established news outlets as untrustworthy and elitist in suppressing the dissenting views, which taps into the existing reservoir of public scepticism toward traditional journalism. This positioning is reinforced through its extensive use of alternative media ecosystems, including far-right blogs, partisan news portals, encrypted messaging channels, and highly coordinated social-media networks. These platforms enable the AfD to amplify conspiracy narratives, anti-globalist critiques, and xenophobic messaging without the editorial constraints or factual scrutiny that conventional media impose. Over time, this communication strategy cultivates tightly insulated echo chambers in which supporters encounter largely homogeneous information flows that validate their fears and grievances. The result is a parallel sphere of political communication that not only deepens polarisation but also steadily erodes the authority of evidence-based reporting and democratic deliberation, making it more difficult for fact-based public debate to function effectively.

The Interlinkage of Anti-Immigration and Antisemitic Discourses

While overt antisemitism remains a taboo in mainstream German politics, the far-right parties have found loopholes and ways around the law to change narratives through either coded or implicit forms of

antisemitic rhetoric. Far-right organisations continue to disseminate similar ideas in indirect ways, even though overtly antisemitic remarks are socially unacceptable in Germany. They suggest that powerful foreigners are behind migration policies and attempting to undermine the country by using coded terms like “global elites” or “hidden interests,” rather than specifically mentioning Jews. Old antisemitic conspiracy theories are thus recycled without being explicitly stated. Creating such narratives draws in classical antisemitic tropes that frame Jews as threats to national cohesion (Rensmann 2017). These narratives find more receptive audiences in Eastern Germany, where the collective memory of the Holocaust is occasionally less institutionalised than in the West. In contrast to Western Germany’s strict post-war denazification, far-right organisations take advantage of the historical discontinuity of memory politics in the area. As a result, it becomes harder to distinguish between xenophobia and more general extremist ideologies as antisemitic undercurrents resurface under the cover of anti-globalist or anti-elite sentiments.

The AfD’s instrumentalisation of the historical narratives, a major one being that Germany no longer feels and should not collectively feel the guilt of the Holocaust, really reflects efforts to normalise nationalistic pride. Party leaders, including Alexander Gauland, have publicly referred to Nazi crimes as mere “bird droppings in history,” signalling an attempt to rehabilitate nationalist discourse (Associated Press, 2018). This normalisation process not only undermines Germany’s memory culture but also provides moral legitimacy to anti-immigration and racist rhetoric.

Mainstreaming Far-Right Discourse: Political and Media Impact

The most consequential outcome of the rise of AfD is that it has changed the public discourse and their opinion on immigration to their standpoints. This is very evident in how many mainstream political parties, such

as the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD), have increasingly adopted tougher immigration policies and rhetoric in response to the AfD’s growing electoral influence. Policy debates around border controls, refugee quotas and deportation have become central themes even within centrist coalitions as well. This process, termed “contagion from the right” by political scientist Cas Mudde (2019), illustrates how far-right movements reshape political competition not merely by winning votes but by redefining what counts as politically legitimate. Through this process, far-right narratives have essentially become embedded in policy agendas, public debates and electoral strategies. In Germany, this has been evident in the intensification of debates on asylum reform, accelerated deportations, and expanded police powers, demonstrating how far-right ideas permeate mainstream agendas even when political elites claim to resist them.

Media institutions have simultaneously contributed to this normalisation, albeit often unintentionally. This is mainly because of the visibility the mainstream media provides these parties with, while they view these parties through a critical lens, their continuous coverage of far-right actors, controversies, and provocations has contributed to a steady expansion of their visibility and perceived relevance. Scholars on political communication note that the media in Germany has struggled to find a balance between reporting critically on far-right movements and avoiding the amplification of their frames. This is essentially because they provide AfD with exactly what they want to be known for, such as sensationalist headlines and audience engagement. This constant loop of engagement with the public creates a space for these parties in people’s minds. As critique and amplification become increasingly difficult to disentangle, a feedback loop emerges in which the AfD’s anti-immigration messages circulate far beyond their core base. This dynamic illustrates how media and political actors interact in mutually reinforcing ways, shaping

public narratives around migration and contributing to the mainstreaming of exclusionary discourse.

The Role of Identity and Emotional Politics

Economic hardship is not the only factor contributing to the enduring anti-immigration sentiment in Eastern Germany. Emotional mobilisation and identity politics are the deeper drivers as well. By effectively encapsulating fears of cultural loss, political marginalisation, and national decline, the AfD has turned migration into a symbolic issue that has gained traction in the past decade.

People who feel cut off from the cosmopolitan narratives that predominate in urban Western Germany will find great resonance in this emotional dimension. Far-right actors turn structural inequality into cultural resentment by portraying themselves as the true voice of the “forgotten East.” According to sociologist Andreas Reckwitz (2020), this is known as the “culturalization of inequality,” in which economic disadvantages are reframed as moral divisions between “liberal elites” and “ordinary citizens.”

In this way, anti-immigration sentiment turns into a stand-in for more general societal annoyances, including factors such as unemployment, disregard for local communities, and mistrust of the political system. The strength of far-right movements resides in their capacity to transform these disparate complaints into a cohesive, emotionally charged story that provides scapegoats as well as a feeling of community.

Conclusion

This research paper underscores that the rise of anti-immigration sentiment and far-right politics in Eastern Germany is not merely a reaction to migration itself but a complex sociopolitical process rooted in historical, economic, and identity-based dynamics. Far-right political parties such as the AfD have capitalised on the religious economic marginalisation and histor-

ical discourse to craft powerful narratives against the immigrants. These parties actively create and reshape preexisting opinions through media engagement and strategic political communication by playing on public fears and cultural insecurities.

Furthermore, the interaction of hidden antisemitism and anti-immigration rhetoric emphasises how fragile Germany’s democratic memory culture remains. The entire political landscape is being altered by the AfD’s discursive tactics, which normalise exclusionary worldviews and put pressure on mainstream parties to take more aggressive positions on immigration.

This study also reveals that the battle over migration in Germany is not only about borders or policies but about the politics of belonging, who is seen as part of the nation and who is excluded from it. Understanding these dynamics is vital for designing effective counter-narratives that reinforce democratic values, social cohesion, and inclusivity. Future empirical research should investigate how voters internalise far-right messages, the role of local media ecosystems, and potential interventions that can rebuild trust in democratic institutions.

In conclusion, the resurgence of far-right populism in Eastern Germany serves as a cautionary tale for Europe at large. It suggests that when economic insecurity and historical memory intertwine with cultural fear, political extremism has roots, and it is easier to cultivate anti-immigrant sentiments. Confronting this challenge requires not only policy reforms but also a sustained commitment to narrative reconstruction, one that reasserts solidarity, empathy, and shared citizenship as the cornerstones of a pluralistic European democracy.

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Comparing Foreign Lobbying in the U.S. : Pro-Israel and Pro-Ukraine Advocacy

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Abstract

This paper examines and compares the lobbying activities of Israel and Ukraine in shaping United States foreign policy. Lobbying has become an integral component of democratic governance and is widely recognised as a legitimate means of interest representation in major democracies. In the United States, both the Israel and Ukraine lobbies play significant roles in influencing foreign policy debates, though they differ considerably in their historical development, organisational depth, and strategic approaches. The study analyses these two lobbies by exploring their lobbying strategies, policy outcomes, and structural limitations. It finds that Israel's influence over U.S. policy is longstanding and highly institutionalised, underpinned by strong bipartisan support in Congress, predictable aid frameworks, sophisticated advocacy networks, and deeply embedded political relationships. By contrast, Ukrainian lobbying is relatively recent, gaining prominence particularly after 2022, and relies more heavily on crisis narratives, extensive media engagement, coalition-building, and the mobilisation of emergency legislative measures. Through this comparative analysis, the paper highlights the institutional and strategic differences between the Israel and Ukraine lobbies and assesses their respective capacities to shape U.S. foreign policy. It argues that Ukraine faces greater constraints than Israel in securing sustained military and economic assistance as well as consistent diplomatic backing from the United States. Drawing on think-tank reports, media analyses, scholarly literature, and policy documents, the study investigates the complex processes through which these actors seek to influence legislators, public opinion, and policy outcomes.

Keywords: Advocacy, Ukraine, Lobbying, Israel, Aid Politics

Mearsheimer et al. (2006) argue that the United States has a divided system of government that provides multiple avenues to influence the political process. As a result, interest groups and lobbies can shape policy through various methods, including lobbying elected representatives and members of the executive branch,

making campaign donations, participating in elections, and shaping public opinion. Israel and Ukraine are two among many countries that seek to influence U.S. foreign policy through diverse strategies. Other prominent countries engaged in lobbying efforts include Saudi Arabia, India, Russia, and China.

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Kim et al. (2025) state that Special Interest Groups (SIGs) participate in a wide range of political activities, including supporting, opposing, amending, and monitoring policies. These groups include corporations, labour unions, and advocacy organisations. Foreign lobbies are among the most prominent examples of advocacy groups, assisting different nations in shaping policy decisions in Washington in ways that favour their national interests.

Diplomatic relations between the United States and Israel were established on May 14, 1948, immediately following Israel's declaration of independence. The United States was among the first countries to recognise the newly formed State of Israel. President Harry S. Truman stated:

This government has been informed that a Jewish state has been proclaimed in Palestine, and recognition has been requested by the provisional government thereof. The United States recognizes the provisional government as the de facto authority of the new State of Israel. (Truman Library, 1948).

The U.S.–Israel relationship is grounded in shared democratic values, security interests, and cultural ties. The United States has been Israel's strongest ally, providing extensive military, economic, and diplomatic support. In return, Israel has served as a strategic partner for the United States in West Asia, offering valuable intelligence cooperation and technological collaboration (Firdaus, 2023).

The diplomatic relationship between the United States and Ukraine began after the United States recognised Ukraine's independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. According to the U.S. Department of State (2025), the United States views Ukraine as a key regional strategic partner and recognises its territorial integrity and sovereignty over its land, airspace, and maritime domains. The United States has provided military assistance through mechanisms such as the Presidential Drawdown Authority. It has also engaged in military

equipment sales, supported Ukraine in strengthening border security, conducted joint bilateral military exercises, and delivered broader security assistance. U.S. security initiatives significantly increased following the 2014 annexation of Crimea and further expanded after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The Israel Lobby

The influence of the Israel lobby emerged prominently after the 1967 Arab–Israeli War, when Israel became a central security partner of the United States. Over the decades, organisations such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) developed extensive networks of donors, activists, policy experts, and political allies. AIPAC is one of several organisations that aim to strengthen U.S.–Israel relations through sustained lobbying efforts.

According to the U.S. Department of State, one of the key pillars of interdependence between the United States and Israel lies in the realm of security cooperation. The United States has long been a major provider of military assistance to Israel. In 2016, the two countries signed a ten-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) committing \$38 billion in military aid to Israel (2021).

Israel continues to seek the support of the United States to maintain its security architecture. Numerous organisations work to reinforce the bilateral relationship, with AIPAC being the most prominent among them.

Lobbying Strategies

According to Washington Morning (2025), Israel influences U.S. politics through multiple channels. AIPAC remains the most prominent and influential lobbying group, but other mechanisms also play significant roles. These include substantial political contributions amounting to millions of dollars from donors, the involvement of think tanks and research institutes, strategic media and public relations campaigns, strong congressional support, and the mobilisation of Jewish

American associations.

One of the most significant indicators of the durability of the Israel lobby's influence is the ten-year military aid Memorandum of Understanding, which guarantees stable, multi-billion-dollar support irrespective of which administration is in power. This predictable and institutionalised aid framework contrasts with the supplemental and emergency aid model largely applied to Ukraine (U.S. Department of State, 2025).

Policy Outcomes and Limits

The U.S. Department of State (2025) reports that Washington has delivered \$3.4 billion in funding for missile defence systems, including \$1.3 billion for Iron Dome support beginning in 2011. Since 1992, the United States has provided \$6.6 billion worth of military equipment to Israel. Furthermore, Israel has been designated as a "Major Non-NATO Ally" of the United States under U.S. legislation.

Compared to Ukraine, Israel faces relatively fewer policy limitations. While Israeli advocacy is deeply institutionalised and longstanding, Ukrainian lobbying is more recent and gained significant momentum only after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Pro-Ukraine Advocacy

Before 2022, Ukraine's lobbying presence in the United States was relatively fragmented. However, Russia's full-scale invasion created an immediate moral and geopolitical crisis. In response, Ukraine undertook unprecedented efforts to influence U.S. policy (Mathews, 2022). The pro-Ukraine advocacy ecosystem includes Ukrainian government lobbyists, diaspora organisations, human rights NGOs, national security think tanks, advocacy groups formed after 2022, and defence industry stakeholders. Unlike the Israel lobby, these actors had not previously functioned as a cohesive coalition but rapidly coordinated their efforts following the invasion (Hudson, 2024).

Lobbying Strategies

Cohen (2022) highlights Ukraine's strategic use of moral narratives, framing the conflict as democracy versus authoritarianism, emphasising civilian suffering, and portraying the war as an existential threat, to generate urgency for assistance from democratic Western nations.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy's direct virtual addresses to the U.S. Congress created powerful symbolic moments that galvanised bipartisan support. Ukraine effectively leveraged extensive news coverage to sustain high levels of public awareness. Humanitarian groups, military representatives, and diaspora organisations coordinated messaging to maximise impact (Hudson, 2024). Influential diaspora organisations in the United States include the American Coalition for Ukraine and the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America.

Cancian (2023) notes that aid to Ukraine also revitalised segments of U.S. defence production, creating institutional and economic incentives within the United States to sustain support.

Policy Outcomes and Limits

Ukraine secured tens of billions of dollars in U.S. assistance, representing one of the fastest mobilisations of American military support for a non-treaty partner in decades. However, following political changes in Washington, support for Ukraine showed signs of fluctuation. Military aid became increasingly debated, and discussions emerged about conditional assistance, including proposals linking aid to access to Ukraine's rare earth mineral resources.

Comparative Analysis

Durability

Israel maintains long-standing relationships with donors, think tanks, and research institutions in the United States. These organisations produce policy research, host events, and provide expertise to lawmakers, thereby shaping legislation and public opinion (Washington

Morning, 2025). Ukraine, in contrast, lacks an equally extensive and institutionalised network of research institutes and policy organisations supporting its cause, relying more heavily on diaspora mobilisation and crisis-driven advocacy.

Crisis Management

According to the U.S. Department of State (2025), the U.S. Congress has approved \$4.65 billion in Foreign Military Financing for Ukraine to date. Meanwhile, the Council on Foreign Relations (2025) reports that Israel is the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign aid since its founding, having received over \$300 billion in total economic and military assistance (adjusted for inflation).

This disparity highlights the structural gap in foreign aid allocation and reflects the long-term, institutionalised commitment of the United States to Israel, in contrast to the more crisis-driven and time-bound support extended to Ukraine.

Media Framing

Israel invests significantly in media and public relations campaigns to shape public opinion and sustain policy support. This includes advertising initiatives, media engagements by Israeli officials (including ambassadors) and advocacy by aligned organisations.

Ukraine was able to generate widespread support in U.S. and European media following the 2022 invasion. However, it does not possess a comparably entrenched presence within the U.S. media and policy ecosystem.

Conclusion

This research provides a comparative analysis of two prominent lobbies influencing U.S. foreign policy. The Israel lobby reflects the strength of organisational depth, institutionalised research networks, established media relationships, and coordinated funding mechanisms. These factors contribute to Israel's position as a durable and stable partner of the United States, particularly in terms of receiving sustained diplomatic and

financial support from bipartisan legislators.

In contrast, pro-Ukraine lobbying has been largely contingent upon external aggression and ongoing conflict, making it more crisis-driven and conditional rather than structurally embedded as a long-term alliance like that of Israel. Ukraine has influenced American legislators through moral narratives, appeals to democratic values, a strong diaspora presence, and high-visibility public diplomacy, including direct virtual addresses to Congress. This study demonstrates the advantages of established, institutionalised networks and stable aid mechanisms in comparison to emergent, crisis-driven advocacy efforts. By examining these differences, the research contributes to existing literature by highlighting the structural dynamics of foreign lobbies in the United States and their varying capacities to shape foreign policy outcomes.

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Revisiting Dependency Theory in the Age of South–South Cooperation

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Abstract

The emergence of South–South Cooperation (SSC) has been represented as a necessary corrective to hierarchical aid models with numerous conditions of traditional North–South cooperation. This paper draws from dependency theory to ask if emerging powers - most notably, China, India, and Brazil are transforming or reproducing dependency dynamics within the model of cooperation offered through SSC frameworks. The core research question is: Does SSC truly challenge the tenets of dependency, or simply construct a new set of dependency relationships under an emergent metageopolitical context? Using a comparative qualitative methodology, the paper will offer a critical look at practices of development cooperation, through the examination of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Africa, as compared to India’s Lines of Credit and International Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC), and Brazil’s more limited technical assistance in agriculture. Findings report that while SSC often circumvents conditionalities, SSC cannot be stripped of strategic interests or asymmetries present in the dynamics of cooperation. That said, recipient countries seem to be exhibiting negotiated agency and are able to unsettle or reshape dependency from below. The paper concludes with a call to re-theorize dependency in a multipolar world - one that accepts the mobility of dependencies but also accounts for the changing capacities of Global South actors to resist and reconstruct development cooperation on their own terms.

Keywords: Dependency Theory, South–South Cooperation, Power Asymmetries, Aid

South–South Cooperation (SSC) has emerged as critical mechanism in global development, offering an alternative to hierarchical North–South aid frameworks. Traditional aid models often involve stringent conditionalities, policy prescriptions, and embedded asymmetries that reflect historical patterns of dependency between developed and developing nations (Prebisch, 1950; Frank, 1967). In contrast, SSC is frequently framed as

a more horizontal, mutually beneficial partnership, emphasizing solidarity, knowledge sharing, and capacity building among countries of the Global South (UNDP, 2010; Fues et al., 2016). Over the last two decades, major emerging powers such as China, India, and Brazil have significantly expanded SSC initiatives, reshaping development cooperation patterns across Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Bräutigam, 2009; Riggirozzi &

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Tussie, 2012).

Despite its purported egalitarian nature, SSC raises important questions regarding the persistence of dependency. Dependency theory, first developed by Raul Prebisch and further articulated by scholars like Andre Gunder Frank, provides a framework to analyze structural inequalities in global economic and political systems. The theory argues that peripheral nations remain dependent on core countries for capital, technology, and markets, limiting autonomous development and perpetuating underdevelopment (Frank, 1967; Cardoso & Faletto, 1979). While classical dependency theory was primarily applied to North–South relationships, the rise of emerging powers as major development actors necessitates reconsideration of these dynamics. SSC could represent a significant shift in global power structures, or it could merely reproduce similar dependencies under a new guise (Fues et al., 2016).

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), India's Lines of Credit and International Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC), and Brazil's technical assistance in agriculture provide illustrative cases to examine this question. The BRI emphasizes large-scale infrastructure and investment projects across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. While explicit political conditionalities are limited, these projects often serve China's strategic and geopolitical interests, raising concerns about subtle forms of dependency (Bräutigam, 2009; Corkin, 2013). India's SSC programs focus on capacity building and concessional loans for infrastructure, education, healthcare, and renewable energy.

Theoretical synthesis

Dependency Theory emerged in the mid-20th century as a critical framework to understand the persistent underdevelopment of peripheral nations within the global capitalist system. Scholars like Raúl Prebisch (1950) and André Gunder Frank (1967) posited that the economic structures of developing countries were shaped by ex-

ploitative relationships with developed nations, leading to a cycle of dependency and underdevelopment. Prebisch's work emphasized the need for structural changes to break free from this dependency, advocating for import substitution industrialization and regional integration as strategies for economic autonomy.

South–South Cooperation (SSC) refers to the collaborative efforts among developing countries to address common challenges and promote mutual development. The concept gained prominence in the post-World War II era, with initiatives like the Bandung Conference of 1955 serving as a precursor to formalized cooperation among the Global South (UNDP, 2010). SSC was initially viewed as a means for countries in the Global South to assert their agency and reduce reliance on traditional Western-dominated aid structures.

In recent decades, SSC has expanded significantly, driven by the growing economic and political influence of emerging powers such as China, India, and Brazil. These countries have increasingly engaged in development cooperation through mechanisms like China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), India's Lines of Credit, and Brazil's technical assistance programs (Bräutigam, 2009; Kumar, 2017; Carvalho, 2018). These initiatives are often framed as alternatives to North–South aid, emphasizing mutual benefit, respect for sovereignty, and non-interference in domestic affairs.

Despite the rhetoric of equality and mutual benefit, scholars have questioned whether SSC truly transcends the dependency patterns characteristic of North–South relations. Some argue that emerging powers may replicate similar exploitative dynamics under the guise of cooperation. For instance, China's BRI has been critiqued for creating debt dependency in participating countries, raising concerns about neocolonial practices (Corkin, 2013). Similarly, India's Lines of Credit, while less coercive, have been scrutinized for serving strategic interests that may not align with the development priorities of recipient countries (Pant, 2018). The

concept of “neo-dependency” has been introduced to describe these new forms of dependency within SSC frameworks. This perspective suggests that while SSC may reduce overt conditionalities, it does not eliminate power asymmetries and may even introduce new forms of dependency through economic leverage and strategic influence (Fues et al., 2016).

Contrary to the notion of passive recipients, many studies highlight the agency of countries engaged in SSC. Recipient nations often negotiate terms, adapt projects to local contexts, and seek to leverage SSC for their own development goals. This dynamic challenges the deterministic view of dependency, suggesting that countries can exercise autonomy and reshape cooperation to align with their interests (Riggirozzi & Tussie, 2012).

However, the extent of this agency varies. Factors such as political stability, institutional capacity, and alignment of interests with donor countries influence the ability of recipient nations to assert their autonomy. In some cases, strategic partnerships within SSC have enabled countries to diversify their development partners and reduce over-reliance on traditional Western donors (Gray, 2016).

The evolving landscape of global power necessitates a re-examination of Dependency Theory. The rise of emerging powers has introduced new complexities to the traditional North–South dichotomy. Scholars argue for a nuanced understanding of dependency that accounts for the shifting power dynamics and the multiplicity of actors involved in development cooperation (Nilsen, 2025).

This re-theorization involves recognizing the fluidity of dependency relationships and the capacity of countries to navigate and negotiate these dynamics. It also entails acknowledging the diverse forms of cooperation and the varying degrees of influence exerted by emerging powers, thereby challenging the binary categorization of countries as either donors or recipients (Palacios-Cívico, 2023).

Research Hypotheses

This study is guided by three central hypotheses that interrogate the dynamics of South–South Cooperation (SSC) in relation to dependency theory.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): SSC reduces aid conditionalities compared to North–South cooperation. Traditional North–South aid has long been associated with explicit policy conditionalities, often limiting the autonomy of recipient countries and reinforcing dependency (Prebisch, 1950; Frank, 1967). SSC, by contrast, is framed as a horizontal partnership emphasizing mutual benefit and respect for sovereignty (Fues et al., 2016). H1 posits that SSC mechanisms, such as China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), India’s Lines of Credit, and Brazil’s technical assistance programs, are less coercive and allow recipient countries greater discretion in program design and implementation.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Emerging powers’ strategic interests reproduce new forms of dependency. SSC still reflect asymmetrical power relations, where donor countries leverage economic or strategic influence to achieve national objectives (Corkin, 2013; Pant, 2018). H2 suggests that SSC can create “neo-dependency,” where recipients remain influenced by donor priorities even in ostensibly horizontal arrangements.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Recipient countries exercise agency to negotiate and reshape cooperation. Scholarship increasingly emphasizes the role of recipient states as active participants capable of negotiating terms, adapting programs to local contexts (Riggirozzi & Tussie, 2012; Gray, 2016). H3 posits that SSC provides space for recipient countries to exercise agency, thereby partially mitigating dependency and transforming development outcomes.

Methodology

This study employs a comparative qualitative research design to examine the dynamics of South–South Cooperation (SSC) and its relationship with dependency

theory. Qualitative methods are particularly appropriate for exploring complex social and political phenomena, as they allow for a detailed understanding of processes, strategies, and the exercise of agency in development cooperation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By comparing SSC initiatives undertaken by China, India, and Brazil, the study seeks to identify patterns of conditionality, strategic interests, and recipient autonomy, and to assess whether SSC reproduces or mitigates dependency.

The first case, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Africa, exemplifies large-scale infrastructure and investment programs, which are strategically and economically significant for both China and recipient countries (Bräutigam, 2009; Corkin, 2013). The second case, India's Lines of Credit and International Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC), focuses on concessional loans and technical assistance across sectors such as education, healthcare, and renewable energy (Pant, 2018; Kumar, 2017). The third case, Brazil's technical assistance in agriculture, involves smaller-scale programs aimed at knowledge and technology transfer, emphasizing capacity building over strategic leverage (Carvalho, 2018).

Data for this study were collected from multiple sources to ensure triangulation and enhance credibility. Primary sources included official policy documents, government reports, and programmatic statements from both donor and recipient countries. Secondary sources consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and reports by international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2010). Supplementary information was drawn from news articles and case studies to provide contextual understanding of each initiative. This combination of sources enables a comprehensive analysis of both the stated objectives and the practical implementation of SSC programs.

The data were systematically analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns across cases, including the presence or absence of conditionalities,

strategic interests of donor countries, evidence of recipient agency, and socio-economic outcomes for recipient countries (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Cross-case comparisons were conducted to assess similarities and differences, highlighting how SSC mediates dependency and agency in various contexts.

Reliability was enhanced through systematic documentation of data collection procedures and analytical coding. While qualitative research is context-specific and not fully generalizable, the selection of well-documented SSC initiatives provides transferability to similar settings. Several limitations should be acknowledged: the reliance on publicly available documents may overlook informal negotiations or undocumented practices, and the focus on three case studies limits broad generalization. Additionally, SSC initiatives are dynamic, and findings may evolve as programs develop or new partnerships emerge

Key Findings

The analysis of South–South Cooperation (SSC) initiatives across China, India, and Brazil reveals a complex interplay of agency, strategic interests, and dependency. SSC initiatives generally circumvent the overt conditionalities characteristic of North–South aid, providing recipient countries with a higher degree of operational autonomy. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) exemplifies this pattern, as it emphasizes infrastructure development and investment without explicit policy prescriptions (Bräutigam, 2009). Recipient governments are largely free to design project execution strategies and select local partners, which contrasts sharply with the structural adjustment programs historically associated with North–South aid (Corkin, 2013). India's Lines of Credit and International Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programs similarly reduce formal conditionalities, providing concessional loans and technical assistance for sectors such as education, healthcare, and renewable energy (Pant, 2018; Kumar, 2017).

Brazil's technical assistance in agriculture is even less coercive, focusing primarily on knowledge transfer and agricultural innovation (Carvalho, 2018). In each case, SSC initiatives are presented as partnerships grounded in principles of mutual benefit, non-interference, and respect for sovereignty (UNDP, 2010; Fues et al., 2016). Despite the reduction in explicit conditionalities, emerging powers often embed strategic and geopolitical interests in their SSC programs, creating new forms of dependency. The BRI illustrates this dynamic most vividly. While projects are presented as development-oriented, they frequently involve significant debt financing, which increases recipient countries' exposure to financial leverage and influence from China (Corkin, 2013). In several African countries, high levels of debt incurred under BRI projects have led to concerns about long-term economic dependency, raising questions about the asymmetry of power between donor and recipient (Bräutigam, 2009). India's SSC programs, though smaller in scale, similarly serve to enhance its regional influence, particularly in South Asia and Africa. Concessional loans and technical assistance often align with India's strategic goals, such as strengthening political ties, accessing markets, or promoting regional security interests (Pant, 2018). Brazil's technical assistance, while limited in scope, also serves its soft power objectives, enabling Brazil to consolidate its leadership within regional blocs like MERCOSUR and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) (Carvalho, 2018).

Evidence suggests that many recipient nations actively adapt SSC programs to local contexts, negotiate terms, and leverage partnerships for domestic development priorities. For example, in Ethiopia and Kenya, governments have strategically aligned BRI projects with national development plans, selectively engaging with sectors that maximize local employment, infrastructure connectivity, and technological capacity (Corkin, 2013). Similarly, India's Lines of Credit have been used

by countries such as Sri Lanka and Nepal to support critical infrastructure projects while retaining significant discretion over project management and implementation (Kumar, 2017). Brazil's agricultural assistance programs demonstrate recipient-driven adaptation through pilot projects and knowledge transfer, enabling local institutions to integrate Brazilian technical expertise into their own agricultural systems while maintaining control over decision-making (Carvalho, 2018).

A comparative analysis of the three cases highlights nuanced differences in the exercise of agency and the extent of dependency. China's BRI projects, due to their scale and financial complexity, tend to limit recipient autonomy relative to India's and Brazil's programs. However, even within the BRI, some countries have demonstrated remarkable negotiation capacity, using project financing to attract additional investment from other partners or to negotiate favorable local employment and procurement conditions (Bräutigam, 2009). India's programs, being smaller and more flexible, allow for greater recipient negotiation and alignment with domestic development priorities. Brazil's programs, though modest in scale, offer the highest degree of recipient-driven adaptation, emphasizing technical collaboration over strategic influence, suggesting that smaller SSC initiatives may provide more genuine avenues for mitigating dependency.

The findings indicate that SSC contributes to a reconfiguration of dependency relationships rather than their elimination. While traditional conditionalities are less pronounced, the interplay of strategic interests, financial leverage, and technical expertise creates a complex web of interdependence. This reconfiguration is characterized by fluid dependencies, where recipient countries may simultaneously rely on multiple donors, leverage competition among them, and exercise local agency to reshape outcomes (Nilsen, 2025; Palacios-Cívico, 2023). SSC, therefore, cannot be interpreted simply as a departure from dependency; rather, it represents a

transformation in the modalities through which dependency is expressed and managed.

Asymmetrical relation

The findings of this study reveal that South–South Cooperation (SSC) operates within a complex spectrum of autonomy and dependency, challenging traditional assumptions of the Global South’s passivity in development partnerships. SSC initiatives, as exemplified by China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), India’s Lines of Credit and ITEC programs, and Brazil’s technical assistance in agriculture, largely minimize the overt conditionalities characteristic of North–South aid. This reduction of formal conditions provides recipient countries with greater flexibility in designing and implementing projects, aligning external support with domestic development priorities (Fues, et. al., 2016; UNDP, 2010).

A central theme in the discussion is the persistence of asymmetrical influence despite reduced conditionalities. The BRI, for example, while ostensibly a development-oriented infrastructure initiative, enables China to secure market access, strengthen political ties, and consolidate regional influence (Bräutigam, 2009; Corkin, 2013). Financial mechanisms, including debt financing, create long-term obligations that can increase recipient dependence, highlighting a form of “neo-dependency” that operates through leverage rather than explicit policy mandates (Hurley, Morris, & Portelance, 2018). India’s SSC programs, though less resource-intensive, similarly pursue strategic objectives such as regional influence, economic partnerships, and soft power consolidation, while Brazil’s agricultural programs serve its leadership ambitions within Latin America and Lusophone countries (Carvalho, 2018; Pant, 2018).

Recipient agency emerges as a critical factor in moderating dependency. Evidence from Africa, South Asia, and Latin America demonstrates that countries actively negotiate SSC terms, adapt programs to local contexts,

and leverage cooperation for national development priorities (Riggirozzi & Tussie, 2012; Gray, 2016). For instance, African governments engaged with the BRI have selectively integrated projects with national development plans, emphasizing local employment, technology transfer, and infrastructure connectivity (Corkin, 2013). India’s Lines of Credit and ITEC initiatives similarly allow recipient states to prioritize sectors and projects that address domestic needs (Kumar, 2017). Brazil’s technical assistance programs enable recipient countries to integrate knowledge and skills into local agricultural systems while retaining decision-making authority (Carvalho, 2018).

Large infrastructure projects, like those under the BRI, entail financial, technical, and operational dependencies, potentially limiting recipient autonomy. Conversely, smaller-scale, knowledge-based initiatives, such as India’s technical cooperation and Brazil’s agricultural programs, enhance recipient capacity and provide greater space for negotiation (Fues et al., 2016). Multipolarity further modifies the dynamics of dependency. The emergence of multiple influential Global South actors enables recipient countries to diversify partnerships, increasing their negotiating power and reducing reliance on a single donor (Gray, 2016).

Conclusion

A critical contribution of this study is the recognition of recipient agency in shaping SSC outcomes. Evidence from multiple contexts demonstrates that recipient countries are active participants in the design, negotiation, and implementation of SSC initiatives. African nations engaging with the BRI have strategically aligned projects with national development plans, maximizing local employment, infrastructure, and technology transfer (Corkin, 2013). India’s Lines of Credit and ITEC programs provide recipient countries with discretion in prioritizing sectors and projects to meet domestic development goals (Kumar, 2017), while Brazil’s technical

assistance facilitates the integration of knowledge and innovation into local agricultural systems (Carvalho, 2018).

Sectoral focus and project scale further shape the nature of SSC dependency. Large-scale, finance-intensive infrastructure projects create higher potential for reliance on donor expertise and funding, whereas smaller-scale initiatives emphasizing technical assistance and knowledge transfer enhance recipient capacity and institutional development (Fues et al., 2016). Additionally, the multipolarity of SSC, characterized by the involvement of multiple emerging powers, allows recipient countries to diversify partnerships, leverage competition among donors, and strengthen negotiating positions (Gray, 2016; Palacios-Cívico, 2023). These dynamics challenge classical dependency frameworks, which emphasized a rigid North–South dichotomy, and call for re-theorization to account for the fluidity, negotiation, and agency evident in contemporary SSC.

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Negotiating Care and Control: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis of Benevolent Sexism among Politically Active Women Married to Politically Active Men

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Abstract

Benevolent sexism refers to attitudes and practices that appear caring and protective toward women but simultaneously reinforce traditional gender roles and male dominance. While often less visible than hostile sexism, benevolent sexism plays a powerful role in shaping women's autonomy, agency, and participation in public life. This qualitative study explores how benevolent sexism is experienced, interpreted, and negotiated by politically active women married to politically active men. In-depth interviews were conducted with five politically active women from Kottayam District, Kerala. Data were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019) within a constructivist–interpretivist epistemological framework. Four themes were generated: (a) care as a gendered technology of control, (b) internalisation of dependence through gender ideologies, (c) the double burden of political visibility and domestic invisibility, and (d) shaping and silencing of women's political voice within marriage. The findings demonstrate that benevolent sexism operates relationally at the intersection of intimacy and politics, subtly constraining women's political autonomy while being normalised as love, safety, and support. The study highlights the need to critically interrogate gendered power within politically progressive spaces.

Keywords: Benevolent Sexism, Women in Politics, Marriage, Reflexive Thematic Analysis, Gender Power

Women's political participation has expanded considerably across the globe over recent decades, reflecting broader processes of democratisation, institutional reforms, and normative commitments to gender equality. Increased representation of women within legislative bodies, political parties, and governance structures is often interpreted as a marker of democratic deepening and inclusive political development. However, the numerical growth of women's partici-

pation has not necessarily translated into the transformation of entrenched gendered power relations that continue to shape the terms of women's political engagement. Persistent structural inequalities influence women's access to decision-making arenas, their authority within political organisations, and the recognition afforded to their leadership capacities. These dynamics indicate that formal inclusion alone does not dismantle the informal norms and relational practic-

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es through which gender hierarchies are reproduced. A key mechanism through which gender inequality persists is benevolent sexism, conceptualised within Ambivalent Sexism Theory. Benevolent sexism refers to subjectively positive yet paternalistic attitudes toward women that emphasise protection, affection, and moral elevation while simultaneously reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001). Unlike hostile sexism, which manifests through overt antagonism toward women who challenge gender norms, benevolent sexism operates through culturally sanctioned expressions of care that appear socially desirable and therefore evade scrutiny as forms of discrimination. By constructing women as inherently nurturing yet vulnerable, benevolent sexism subtly legitimises asymmetrical power relations and sustains male authority, often under the guise of respect or appreciation. Within marital relationships, benevolent sexism frequently manifests through practices framed as supportive interventions, including guidance in decision-making, protective oversight, or the assumption of responsibility in matters perceived as requiring male judgement. While these practices may be interpreted as expressions of concern, they can simultaneously constrain women's autonomy and reinforce expectations of dependence. When both spouses are politically active, these relational dynamics acquire additional significance, as the boundaries between private and public roles become blurred. Intimate gender relations may therefore shape not only domestic arrangements but also political legitimacy, leadership opportunities, and the distribution of influence within political networks. In the Indian socio-political context, patriarchal norms remain deeply institutionalised despite notable advances in women's representation through electoral participation and affirmative measures. Women who occupy public leadership roles frequently navigate tensions between their identities as political actors and the expectations embedded within familial structures

that privilege male authority. The coexistence of empowerment in the public sphere alongside persistent gender norms within the household creates complex negotiations that shape women's political trajectories, influencing both their capacity to exercise agency and the forms of support or constraint they encounter. Although existing scholarship has examined the psychological and organisational consequences of benevolent sexism, relatively limited qualitative research has explored how such dynamics are experienced within politically active marriages, particularly in contexts where both partners are engaged in political life. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how politically active women married to politically active men interpret and negotiate benevolent sexism across intimate and political domains. By foregrounding lived experiences, the research aims to illuminate the relational processes through which gendered power operates, is normalised, and is reproduced.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Ambivalent Sexism Theory and Feminist Standpoint Theory to conceptualise the operation of gendered power within politically active marriages. Ambivalent Sexism Theory conceptualises sexism as comprising two interrelated dimensions: hostile sexism, characterised by overtly negative attitudes toward women who challenge traditional gender roles, and benevolent sexism, which involves subjectively positive but paternalistic beliefs that idealise women as deserving protection and care (Glick & Fiske, 1996). These dimensions function together to sustain gender hierarchy by simultaneously punishing nonconformity and rewarding adherence to traditional expectations. Benevolent sexism, in particular, operates as a complementary mechanism that stabilises gender inequality by framing hierarchical relations as mutually beneficial and emotionally meaningful (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Within marital contexts, such attitudes may appear supportive while

reinforcing asymmetrical distributions of authority. Feminist Standpoint Theory emphasises that knowledge is socially situated and that marginalised groups possess epistemic privilege in understanding structures of domination because of their lived experiences (Harding, 1991). By foregrounding women's perspectives, this framework enables an analysis of how everyday interactions within marriage reflect broader socio-political arrangements. It also underscores the importance of examining how private experiences provide insight into systemic inequalities that may otherwise remain obscured. Together, these theoretical perspectives facilitate an examination of how benevolent sexism operates relationally, shaping both intimate experiences and public political engagement.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative exploratory research design to capture the complexity of participants' experiences and the meanings they attribute to marital and political interactions. Qualitative inquiry is particularly suited to examining subtle forms of power that operate through everyday practices and interpersonal relationships. Reflexive Thematic Analysis was employed to identify patterns of meaning across participants' narratives, enabling an interpretive analysis grounded in theoretical sensitivity.

Participants and Setting

The research was conducted in Kottayam District, Kerala, a region characterised by high literacy rates, vibrant political participation, and historically rooted social reform movements, yet also marked by enduring gender norms that shape familial and social relations. Participants consisted of five politically active women who were married to politically active men, with both partners occupying roles within contemporary political contexts. This setting provided a relevant context for examining how gendered power operates within house-

holds where political engagement is a shared domain.

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants with direct experience of navigating political engagement within marital relationships. This strategy enabled the selection of information-rich cases capable of providing detailed insights into the operation of gendered power and relational dynamics.

Data Collection

Data were collected through unstructured, in-depth interviews designed to encourage participants to reflect on their political journeys, marital relationships, experiences of support or restriction, and decision-making processes across domestic and political spheres. Interviews were conducted with informed consent, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and preserve participants' voices.

Researcher Reflexivity

Recognising that qualitative research is shaped by the positionality of the researcher, reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process. The researcher engaged in ongoing reflection regarding her location within a gendered socio-political environment, acknowledging how assumptions and interpretive lenses may influence analysis. Memo writing and critical engagement with theoretical frameworks facilitated reflexive awareness and analytical rigour.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved iterative engagement with transcripts through familiarisation, coding, theme development, and refinement. Emphasis was placed on interpreting meanings, contradictions, and power relations rather than merely identifying recurring patterns. Themes were developed through an inductive-deductive process informed by theoretical concepts derived from Ambivalent Sexism Theory and Feminist Standpoint Theory.

Results

Theme 1: Care as a Gendered Technology of Control

Participants consistently described their husbands' involvement in their political lives as supportive, attentive, and motivated by concern for their safety and well-being. Acts such as accompanying them to meetings, advising on travel, or monitoring schedules were frequently narrated as expressions of care. However, closer examination reveals that these practices simultaneously operated as subtle mechanisms of regulation that shaped women's mobility, participation, and decision-making within political spaces.

The language of protection functioned as a legitimising discourse through which male oversight was normalised and rendered benevolent, thereby masking underlying asymmetries of authority. Rather than being perceived as restrictive, these interventions were often framed as necessary in response to perceived risks associated with women's public engagement. This framing illustrates how care can operate as a gendered technology of power, structuring the boundaries of acceptable participation while maintaining the appearance of mutual support. In effect, the discourse of care obscured the ways in which control was exercised, reinforcing patriarchal norms within both domestic and political contexts.

Theme 2: Internalisation of Dependence Through Gender Ideologies

Participants frequently articulated acceptance of various forms of restriction as natural, reasonable, or even beneficial, reflecting the deep internalisation of gender ideologies that position men as primary decision-makers within the household. Expressions of gratitude toward husbands for their guidance or protective behaviour were common, suggesting that dependence was not always experienced as coercive but rather as part of a normative marital arrangement.

At the same time, narratives revealed subtle tensions, as participants occasionally acknowledged limits on their autonomy while simultaneously justifying these limits as

appropriate or culturally expected. This coexistence of appreciation and constraint illustrates the operation of benevolent sexism, whereby practices that appear supportive reinforce structural inequalities by encouraging women to consent to arrangements that restrict their agency. The findings indicate that gender norms are reproduced not only through overt rules but also through internalised beliefs that shape how women interpret and respond to power relations in everyday life.

Theme 3: The Double Burden of Political Visibility and Domestic Responsibility

Although participants were actively involved in political activities, they continued to bear primary responsibility for domestic labour, including household management, caregiving, and emotional work. Political engagement did not substantially alter expectations within the household, and participants reported that their public roles were often accommodated around existing domestic obligations rather than leading to a redistribution of responsibilities.

This resulted in a persistent double burden, where women navigated the demands of political participation alongside extensive domestic duties. Many described time constraints, fatigue, and the need to prioritise family needs over political commitments, highlighting how structural expectations within the private sphere limited the scope of their public engagement. The findings suggest that political visibility does not automatically translate into empowerment within the household and that traditional gender roles continue to shape the conditions under which women participate in public life.

Theme 4: Shaping and Silencing of Women's Political Voice

Participants reported instances in which their political opinions were influenced, guided, or occasionally overridden by their spouses, particularly in matters such as voting decisions, public statements, or organisational strategies. While some framed this influence as collaborative discussion, others indicated that disagreement was discouraged or subtly managed, limiting opportuni-

ties to articulate independent political positions.

These dynamics contributed to varying degrees of self-censorship, as participants sometimes adjusted their views to maintain harmony within the household or avoid conflict. Over time, such patterns affected confidence and reinforced hierarchical relationships that extended beyond domestic interactions into political arenas. The shaping and, at times, silencing of women's political voice underscores how intimate power relations can influence democratic participation, revealing the interconnected nature of private authority and public expression

Discussion

The findings illustrate how benevolent sexism operates relationally within politically active marriages, blending expressions of care with mechanisms of control. Consistent with Ambivalent Sexism Theory, supportive behaviours can mask power asymmetries and render gender hierarchy socially acceptable (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Participants' narratives demonstrate that intimate relationships function as key sites where gender norms are reproduced and legitimised, shaping women's political participation and authority. From a Feminist Standpoint perspective, the study highlights how everyday experiences within marriage reveal broader patterns of political inequality. By centring women's perspectives, the research underscores the interconnectedness of private and public spheres and illustrates how domestic arrangements influence political agency (Harding, 1991). Benevolent sexism emerges as a subtle yet pervasive mechanism through which patriarchal authority is maintained. Within the broader socio-political environment, practices of protection and guidance are interpreted in complex ways involving acceptance, negotiation, and occasional resistance. These relational processes contribute to gendered outcomes such as constrained autonomy, limited political voice, and unequal distribution of labour, reinforcing structural inequalities across domains.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that benevolent sexism functions as a subtle yet influential force shaping the experiences of politically active women within marital relationships. Practices framed as care can simultaneously support and constrain, reinforcing hierarchical power relations while maintaining the appearance of harmony. By examining these dynamics through qualitative inquiry, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how gender inequality is reproduced at the intersection of intimate relationships and political participation. Addressing benevolent sexism within the private sphere is therefore essential for advancing substantive gender equality and enabling women to exercise political agency more fully.

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The Forgotten Voices: Children in the Chengara Land Struggle

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Abstract

In recent years, the Chengara Land Rights Protest has gained widespread attention. The voice of most vulnerable over 200 children living amid the struggle has largely gone unheard. This study brings their lived experiences, shedding light on the violations of their fundamental rights. Through the field report, this research uncovers the harsh realities these children face: substandard housing, unsafe living conditions, lack of access to health care, distracted education, and constant physiological stress. Given the simple joy of playing is stripped away, it confines them indoors. This study indicates how the focus to land right often sidelines urgent concerns of child welfare. By centering children's viewpoints the study advocates for policy measures that align with child welfare and social justice.

Keywords: Chengara Land Struggle, Children's Rights, Child Welfare, Social Justice, Education, Health Inequality, Living Conditions

The Chengara land protest in Pathanamthitta district stands as one of Kerala's most prolonged land rights movements, marked by the continued occupation of a private rubber plantation by landless Dalit and Adivasi families for more than eighteen years as they seek secure housing and sustainable livelihoods (Sreerekha, 2012).

Although there are many discussions related to the Chengara Protest, we rarely hear about the lives of the children in this land replete with struggle, their childhood is not filled with children's laughter or other living facilities, but with constant social neglect and poor living conditions. These children lead lives that question the meaning of justice and equality in this modern age. They are the forgotten voices.

Roots of the Struggle

To understand Chengara, it is necessary to look at the history of land and caste in Kerala. While the state is celebrated for its literacy and development, these achievements have not reached everyone equally. Many Dalit and tribal communities still remain without land even today.

In 2007, under the leadership of Dalit activist Laha Gopalan, Sadhu Jana Vimochana Samyukta Vedi (SJVSV) encroached a part of Harrison's plantation in Chengara and started living with around 600 families demanding five acres of land for each family (Sreerekha, 2012). They named the occupied land *Samarabhoomi* and they built huts and started living there. This protest exposed the face of inequality that exists even today.

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The Children of Chengara

Around two hundred children are living in Chengara without electricity, drinking water or other basic facilities. They study in the dim light of kerosene lamps and the smoke from these lamps often causes breathing problems in children. The nearest school is three km away. During the rainy season, the roads in Chengara are muddy and difficult. Many children stopped going to school due to long distance and lack of transport facilities.

Children in Chengara don't even get the basic right to play outdoors. As this area is close to the Sabarimala forest, wild elephants and wild boars frequently come to the area. Fearing such wild animal attacks, parents are afraid to let their children out of the house. Childhood, which ought to be a period of play and growth, is instead being confined within the boundaries of enclosed spaces.

These conditions violate the basic rights that every child deserves. The Kerala Child Rights Commission has pointed out the violation of children's fundamental rights, malnutrition, lack of safe shelter and lack of access to education. Education, which is one of the achievements of Kerala, is still a dream for the children of Chengara. Most families cannot afford the cost. When education went digital during the covid era, the lack of these facilities in Chengara became very visible. Online learning was impossible for children without electricity and unavailability of smart phones. Arya Rajesh, a girl from Chengara says, "It is very difficult to spend time in my house. The stench of kerosene lamps lingers throughout the day" (Sudhi & Unnikrishnan, 2025). The child is a symbol of the growing generation who are eager to learn but whose rights are being violated. Some children are continuing their studies through scholarships with the help of Non-governmental organisations. However, most of the children are drop-outs.

Poor health status and nutrition are major problems

in Chengara. They depend on shallow wells for water. These become polluted during monsoons. Most of the houses do not have toilet facilities. The nearest health center is far away. People have to take their sick children through the forest paths because of the difficulty of transportation. Smoke from kerosene lamps causes eye and lungs issues in children. Lack of access to nutritious food causes health problems in children, especially in girls. As the families do not have ration cards and other documents, the government's health and nutrition schemes do not reach Chengara (RIGHTS, n.d.).

Children growing up in conditions marked by poverty and persistent insecurity often face significant psychological distress. In Chengara, children remain largely isolated from the outside world, and many recount experiences of stigma, with classmates from nearby villages referring to them as "those from the forest." Everyday life is shaped by uncertainty, as children go to sleep fearing eviction as well as threats from wild animals. Yet, within these harsh conditions, children also learn to navigate adversity through cooperation and mutual support. Shared moments of joy and collective care become crucial sources of resilience, enabling them to endure the hardships of their environment. Mothers in Chengara play a central role in sustaining everyday life. They shoulder the responsibility of caring for their children under extremely precarious conditions, with several women having given birth without access to medical assistance. Such circumstances reflect a broader pattern of neglect that continues to shape their struggle. Despite systemic failures, mothers work tirelessly to ensure the survival and well-being of their children, embodying forms of care that sustain the community in the face of exclusion.

The Role of the Government

The government's approach to Chengara is still unclear. Although the government favors the rights of the landless, those people who are still living there are not get-

ting basic facilities. Article 21 of the Constitution of India guarantees the right to life and dignity to all human beings. However, children and people in Chengara are being denied this fundamental right. Civil society in Kerala has consistently demonstrated a strong sense of responsibility towards the public. When governments falter, people's organisations often step forward to defend principles of justice and accountability. In many instances, the protests and interventions of social organisations have come to embody constitutional values, even when not explicitly framed in those terms.

During the initial and early years of this incident, student communities, Dalit groups, feminist groups, human rights activists, and many others from different parts of the state came together in Chengara. They provided food, medicine, books, and various forms of support to the residents. However, migration came to be viewed as a natural phenomenon, and as a result the support system gradually became vulnerable. Even today, the remnants of the events and the experiences of that period remain audible in the voices of the people of Chengara. Keywords such as rights, dignity, and freedom are used in their everyday conversations, and even children use these terms without fully realizing that they echo the language of the Constitution. "Justice is not to be requested, it should be claimed" stands as one of the enduring contributions of civil society. At the same time, solidarity has its limits. Many voluntary groups operate by following the directions of funding agencies, and when funds are exhausted, interactions and activities often come to a halt. This reveals a deeper structural problem. In India, developmental activities are often measured through indicators such as the number of wells constructed or the number of children enrolled in school. However, factors such as hope, confidence, and mutual understanding cannot be quantified and are therefore frequently overlooked. Such metrics are inadequate in contexts like Chengara, where legal complexities challenge conventional criteria. As a result,

interventions tend to become intermittent assistance rather than sustained engagement. What the people of Chengara seek is not sympathy but a long-term partnership that recognizes them as collaborators. Dalit human rights movements and Dalit feminist collectives frequently conduct workshops on rights and education. Through these programmes, teenagers are trained to file complaints, prepare petitions, and interact with local officials. During one such workshop, a girl asked, "If the land is illegal, then are we illegal too?" This simple yet profound question exposes the moral limitations of bureaucratic language. The role of the state can be understood through the idea of the right to the city. Lasting reform cannot depend solely on activism; it requires institutional rethinking. Moving beyond rigid distinctions of legality and illegality, policymakers must embrace the principle that all residents, regardless of land ownership, should have access to basic amenities. This includes ensuring electricity, water, sanitation, education, and healthcare even in disputed settlements while legal processes continue. Grounded in judicial interpretations and Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, such an approach could enable Kerala to transform Chengara from a symbol of failure into an example of compassionate governance.

Conclusion

The Chengara movement is often described as a Dalit-Adivasi land struggle, yet many children there do not define themselves primarily through caste; instead, a shared experience of marginalisation shapes their consciousness. This shift encourages an understanding of social justice that extends beyond the framework of reservations. If the government invests meaningfully in their education, this young generation has the potential to transform Kerala into a more equal society. More importantly, it is essential to restore to children their lost time, not merely provide facilities, because delaying justice is akin to taking away years that can never be returned.

Chengara functions as a living civic classroom that continually raises political questions. Children who light candles before Ambedkar's statue learn that freedom rests on both moral conviction and material conditions. The Chengara struggle is therefore not only about land but also about the gap between statistical achievements and lived realities of exclusion. The true measure of any society lies in how it treats its children. The voices from Chengara remind us that rights are not granted through generosity but must be upheld through collective responsibility, urging us to choose participation over sympathy and meaningful reform over mere rhetoric.

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In Conversation with Hibi Eden



Member of Parliament for *Ernakulam Lok Sabha Constituency*

Antony Joseph & Gaurav Amar James¹

Antony: We initiated this journal in response to a growing concern that many students today are not engaging with politics at a deeper intellectual level. While there are considerable discussion and participation in campaigns, there appears to be insufficient emphasis on rigorous study, analytical writing, and sustained critical reflection. Drawing on your experience working with youth and student movements, do you also perceive this gap? Furthermore, do you believe that platforms such as a student-led political journal can contribute to nurturing more informed, thoughtful, and responsible political leadership among young people?

Hibi Eden MP: See, we should not look at this as an isolated issue. There was a time when student politics was extremely vibrant. Presidential-style elections were held in colleges, and participation was high. But things changed over time. Some incidents on campuses were challenged in court, and eventually there was a Kerala High Court verdict that restricted student politics. The presidential model shifted to a parliamentary model. Around the same time, a broader perception started growing in society that politics equals violence. That idea began influencing parents and families. Another major shift happened in the family structure itself. Earlier, we had joint families with many children. If one or two children got involved in politics or student ac-

tivities, it was not seen as a big issue. Today, most families are nuclear. For example, I have only one daughter. Naturally, as a parent, I would want her to focus more on academics. I might say extracurricular activities are fine, but student union politics? I would hesitate. That change in family mindset has created a significant shift. Then there is the continuous media narrative that politics is corrupt and politicians are corrupt. That has also shaped how young people see politics. So gradually, a trend developed on campuses where political participation reduced not necessarily because students lack interest, but because there are social, legal, and psychological barriers. However, whenever I interact with young people whether in colleges or schools, I tell them one simple thing: if you want to change the system, you have to be part of the system. I'm not asking anyone to join Congress or any specific party. Whatever your ideology is, democracy needs your participation.

And participation does not only mean contesting elections. It means being involved in organizations, policy discussions, civic platforms and any space where decisions are shaped. We need more young people in Parliament, in legislative assemblies, in panchayats, and across the political system. Greater youth representation is essential if we want meaningful change. That's the message we consistently try to give.

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Antony: In districts like Ernakulam, where large numbers of students are migrating abroad for education, do you think Kerala is facing an intellectual drain? Or could this phase of migration eventually lead to reverse migration and intellectual gain for the state?

Hibi Eden MP: This is something that is bound to happen. We are living in a time where technology has made the world extremely accessible. Earlier, going to study in countries like the US or the UK was rare. It required enormous resources and connections. Today, students have access to information about every university, every course, and every opportunity across the globe. There are diversified programs, flexible options, and even educational loans that make studying abroad far more attainable. Practically nothing is restricting them. Take Ernakulam, for example. There was a day when around 15,000 students migrated to Canada through a single educational agency. Fifteen thousand in one day. That shows the scale of aspiration and mobility among our youth. And it is not just Canada, students are going to the UK, the US, and for MBBS to countries like China, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, the Philippines, and Poland. This is not an isolated trend, it is a global pattern of educational migration.

You really cannot stop this, nor should you try to restrict it. This is the nature of the global era. Young people seek exposure, experience, and global networks. The kind of perspective they gain by studying abroad is different, and that exposure cannot be denied. At the same time, we are expanding opportunities here as well. We now have more MBBS seats, new deemed universities, and diversified courses within the state. Over time, this could create conditions for people to stay back. There may even come a phase of reverse migration, where those who gained global exposure return with experience and contribute locally.

But right now, we are in a phase of outward migration. It is the need of the hour, shaped by global realities. There is nothing inherently wrong with it. The key is to

eventually convert this mobility into long-term intellectual and economic gain for our society.

Gaurav: Do you think political change eventually happens when people, especially the youth, feel fed up with the existing system?

Hibi Eden MP: Whenever there is autocracy or a sense of dictatorship, new leadership will naturally emerge. That has happened across the world. When people begin to feel restricted or dissatisfied, especially the youth, new movements rise over time. Take the example of the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi. It did not emerge because there was no development. Sheila Dikshit served three terms and transformed Delhi with major infrastructure projects like metro connectivity. But after the 2012 Delhi gang rape case, also known as the Nirbhaya case, there was a strong youth-led public movement. That movement shifted public sentiment and created space for new political leadership. So change may not happen immediately, but over time, when people grow frustrated with existing leadership, new forces will rise naturally. It is part of the democratic process.

Antony: Like the Gen-Z protests in Nepal and Bangladesh, and even the “Zohran wave” around Zohran Mamdani, show that new youth leadership is already emerging?

Hibi Eden MP: Absolutely. Those things happen in every era. I do not think you can stop that. And for that matter, he was, I mean, he was a part of a party, again. He was a Democrat with a different view, a lot of socialistic and democratic thoughts. And again, he had his style and way, and people tend to accept that change. That is what we saw in one of the biggest cities like New York.

Gaurav: Social media plays a huge role in shaping young people’s political views today. You spoke in Parliament in 2023 about the need for an ethical framework for AI

governance, but that still seems unclear in India. Since AI can both expand knowledge and spread disinformation, how do you see this balance?

Hibi Eden MP: You cannot stop technology. The Communist Party opposed the tractor when it came, then the mobile phone, then the computer. In the course of time, they have accepted everything. AI, of course, has a different set of rules. But with AI, there are a lot of things, even a negative campaign. Regarding AI propaganda, I saw something at a hackathon I recently attended. A startup company developed a project using an AI tool to identify and remove child predators online. It also automatically removes offensive content. It is a software. So, AI has a lot of positives. However, just as people say we are in a 'post-truth' era, if you look at future American election campaigns, there is a high likelihood of many hate campaigns. Instead of projecting oneself to the public, the strategy will often be to tarnish the opponent. So, when AI and technology advance, we must accept that there is a significant downside. However, I think we will understand and adapt to this over time.

Antony: In India, despite talking about cooperative federalism, our system is structurally asymmetrical, what we call asymmetrical federalism. Do you think this Centre–State imbalance contributes to political apathy among the youth, making them feel their participation does not really lead to change?

Hibi Eden MP: Every generation has its own challenges. I do not necessarily believe this is the problem, nor that it's the solution. When you have political stability, with the same government in the state and the center, it is easier to get things done. However, I have always felt there is discrimination against southern states. They are not given the same importance as other places, despite performing better in literacy, education, healthcare, and infrastructure. They have a system where they have grown with the people. This needs to change, but I do

not think it is the reason people are not voting or getting into politics. That is just an excuse.

Gaurav: What about climate change governance? In Kochi, the air quality index is getting worse, and development is bringing its own set of problems. Could Kochi emerge as a model for this? With the sea level rising, Kochi has a lot of climate issues.

Hibi Eden MP: Kochi is one of the worst-affected cities by global climate issues, especially being one meter below sea level. Look at London's air quality index, their public transportation is great, and most people use it instead of cars. They have shifted to clean energy and use trams, metros, and tubes. There has to be a shift in technology and towards clean energy. When I spoke to an IAS officer, he said it is a design problem. It is surprising that a crowded city like London has a much better AQI than Kochi. Development is not just about roads and buildings; it is a larger vision that includes climate change and accessibility for everyone, including the differently-abled.

Gaurav: Is there any initiative being taken to combat climate change in Kochi? Like using EV-energized systems to limit the impact?

Hibi Eden MP: This is not an individual thing; the government and local self-governments should take the initiative. It is not something one person, parliamentarian, or MLA can decide. It has to come from the state, federal, or at least the city level. And the investment needed is quite huge.

Gaurav: Sometimes people feel that today's leadership does not resemble the leaders of the past, and that the way history is remembered is also changing. As someone who comes from a public legacy, how do you see these comparisons and the way historical figures are discussed today?

Hibi Eden MP: Comparisons are natural, especial-

ly when you come from a family with a public background. I am often compared to my father, and honestly, stepping into those shoes is not easy. But every generation works in a different context. The challenges, expectations, and environment are completely different, so it's not fair to compare leaders from different eras as if everything is the same. At the same time, it is very important that history is understood properly. Over time, narratives can shift, and younger generations might only see fragments of the full story. That is why we need to educate young people with balanced and accurate information about past leaders, their contributions, their decisions, and the context in which they worked. Leadership changes with time, but understanding history responsibly should always remain a priority.



Dialectics

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The inaugural issue of *Dialectics* is grounded in the belief that meaningful engagement with politics requires critical inquiry, reflection, and openness to complexity. In a time of shifting global dynamics and evolving debates on power and identity, the journal provides a space for students and emerging scholars to examine pressing political questions with analytical rigour. By bringing together diverse perspectives on geopolitics, democracy, development, and authority, *Dialectics* seeks to encourage thoughtful dialogue and promote a culture of scholarship that deepens understanding of political realities and the responsibilities of informed citizenship.

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