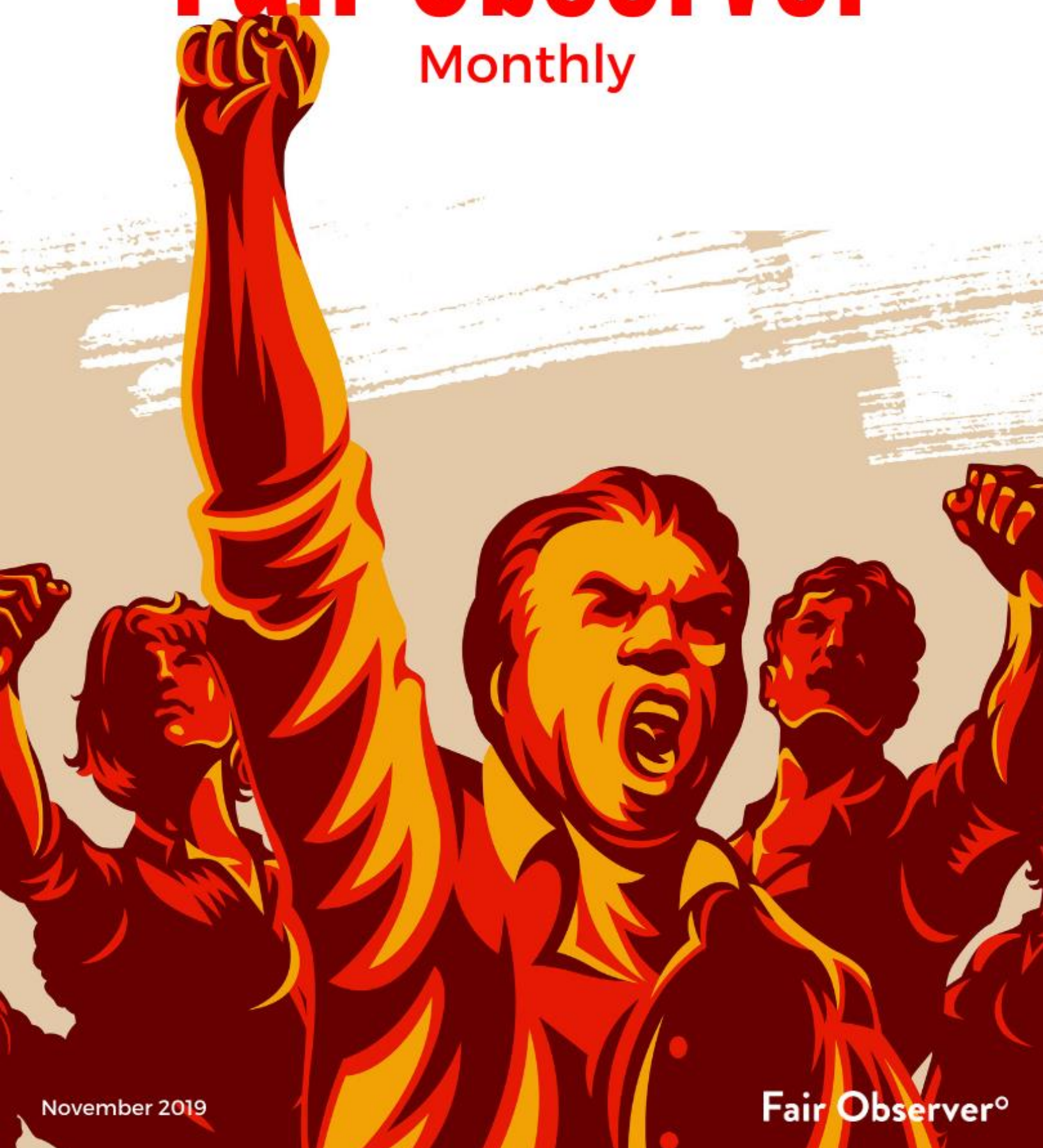


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Our education arm runs training programs on subjects such as digital media, writing and more. In particular, we inspire young people around the world to be more engaged citizens and to participate in a global discourse.

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What Does the Media Have Against Narendra Modi?

Saurabh Jha
November 4, 2019

Narendra Modi is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't.

History's arc is like a boomerang. Winston Churchill didn't believe that Indians were capable of self-rule, once saying that "Indians are not fit to rule, they are fit to be ruled."

As adulation for Churchill is wearing off with the passage of time, *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, the media bastions of anti-imperialism, still recite the spirit of his sentiment: Sure, Indians have the right of self-determination, but they don't seem terribly good at it.

The left-leaning press was disappointed with Indians for voting in Narendra Modi as prime minister. Even *The Economist*, which goes to painful extents to conjure an affectation of objectivity, warned during this year's election, as it had warned in 2014, of the dangers of Modi, the leader of the *Bhartiya Janata Party* (BJP). Yet India's villagers, enthralled by the prospect of not having to defecate in the open — 80 million toilets have been built in Modi's sanitation drive — turned out in droves to vote in the 2019 election. What does *The Economist* see that rural India doesn't?

By all objective indicators, Modi should be the success story the left venerates. Though not *Oliver Twist*, Modi's trajectory was full of twists. He started off as a *chaiwallah*, a tea seller. Statistically speaking, today he should be standing at some railway station shouting "Chai, chai garam" (tea, hot tea), fighting with thousands of other vendors for a few rupees to make a living. Instead, he squared up against India's most famous non-monarchical monarchy.

Modi's political opponent, Rahul Gandhi, comes from a blue-blood lineage of debonair

prime ministers. Rahul's great grandfather, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, was educated at the prestigious Harrow school and then Trinity College Cambridge, savoring Britain's best pedagogy. His grandmother, Indira Gandhi, went to Oxford, and his father, Rajiv, went to Cambridge. Rahul had a brief stint at Harvard. Modi, by contrast, seldom placed a foot on a college campus, obtaining his degrees from lackluster Indian institutes by distant learning.

Whereas Nehru spoke and wrote English so crisp that he was able to charm the wife of Lord Mountbatten, India's last viceroy, Modi exudes the physiognomy of an Indian godman. Before the election, he was meditating in Kedarnath, a sacred place for Hindus. If you had to dress up as an Indian prime minister, you'd choose Nehru over Modi any day.

Modi's problems started in 2001, when he was the chief minister of Gujarat. After a Muslim mob set fire to a train with Hindu pilgrims, the state erupted in Hindu-Muslim riots. Modi was accused of deliberately delaying the deployment of police to enable Hindu mobs to kill Muslims.

This serious charge is difficult to either prove or disprove. If Modi really did hold back the police, he would have made sure he never get caught. A special tribunal cleared Modi of abetting the riots. Modi's detractors didn't believe its conclusions.

Accusations of deliberately not doing enough to stop riots aren't uncommon in India. In 1946, after Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, made an impassioned call to Muslims across India to strike in support of the creation of Pakistan, Kolkata descended into Hindu-Muslim riots, which became known as the Great Calcutta Killings — the riot which sparked riots, the Paul Revere of Hindu-Muslim riots. Huseyn Suhrawardy, a (Muslim) supporter of the two-nation theory, was in charge of Kolkata. He was accused of encouraging Muslims to kill Hindus and of preventing the police from getting to the hotspots of violence. But historians are divided, and many defend Suhrawardy, who later became prime minister of Pakistan, with equal vigor. Was

Suhrawardy really guilty? Your guess is as good as mine.

Whenever you question Suhrawardy's culpability, you have to remind yourself how easy it is to fall for the causal narrative: A Muslim leader who supported Pakistan in charge of the law and order, stops the police from rescuing Hindus in a riot in which Hindus are disproportionately killed. Precisely because the narrative fits the plot so perfectly, it appeals to the reptilian portion of our brains — and this is precisely why, without strong evidence to support or disprove it, it should be dismissed.

After Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984, Hindus went on a frenzy killing Sikhs. Her son, Rajiv Gandhi, who succeeded her premiership, reflected philosophically without affecting contrition on the inevitability of the riots, saying that “When a big tree falls, the earth shakes.” The Indian National Congress party was accused of abetting the riots and Rajiv Gandhi of not doing enough to prevent them. Was Gandhi secretly pleased that Hindus were slaughtering innocent Sikhs to avenge his mother's assassination? We will never know. Thought crimes aren't easy to prove. Because the charge is unfalsifiable, the question is pointless. Such inquiries merely unmask one's own feelings about the accused.

The truth about Modi's involvement in the Gujarat riots will never be known. However, once the doubt is cast, there's no returning to innocence. No Indian institution is free of corruption, least of all the press, which grinds its objective ax selectively. Modi has been roasted by the Indian media in ways Rajiv Gandhi never was, even though both witnessed fierce communal violence under their tutelage.

Though the scrutiny of both Modi and the BJP is mostly healthy, sometimes the criticisms are contradictory or made without knowledge of history. The BJP is accused of jingoism and of escalating tensions with Pakistan, yet India fought three wars against Pakistan, including the one started by New Delhi, when the Congress was in power.

Under the BJP, India fought only one war with Pakistan, the 1999 Kargil War, which wasn't really a war with Pakistan: It was fought by the Indian Army against intruders on Indian soil, Indian soldiers never crossing the line-of-control (LOC) into Pakistan.

Recently, the Indian Air Force crossed the LOC to retaliate against an attack by a Pakistan-based militant group, Jaish-e-Mohammed, on Indian soldiers in the disputed Jammu and Kashmir region. It was a bold act, and Modi was rightly criticized for escalating tensions with Pakistan. But, comically, he was also mocked for not harming anything but a few trees in Pakistan.

Narendra Modi is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. It is fashionable in educated Indian circles to be against Modi, in part to avoid the label of a Hindu fundamentalist. Labeling can be powerful, and this writer too has demonized BJP supporters. But one is reminded of the wisdom of F.A. Hayek, who placed much importance on local knowledge. Between India's illiterate villagers living the consequences of their political choices and the lettered editors of *The Economist* haw-hawing from their armchairs in Westminster, I trust the former.

***Saurabh Jha** is a physician and writer.

Germany, 30 Years After Reunification

Hans-Georg Betz
November 9, 2019

Three decades after reunification, a large number of east Germans still consider themselves second-class citizens.

Thirty years ago, on November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall came down, and with it the communist regime that had held the East German “workers’ and farmers’ state” in its iron grip since the beginning of the Cold War.

A year later, the two German states were reunited. The mood was exuberant, with Germany's Chancellor Helmut Kohl famously promising that the East German regions would turn into "blühende Landschaften" — flourishing landscapes.

Three decades later, the mood in Germany is far less joyful and hardly excited. Reality has sunk in, and that reality is sobering. Things have not gone all that well in the east of the country. With the dramatic gains of the far right in virtually all east German regions — most recently in Thuringia — there is little to celebrate. Rather, even a cursory glance at the coverage of this year's 30th anniversary of the fall of the wall reveals a fundamental shift in perspective, somber and disillusioned, paving the way for a new narrative with regard to reunification.

Brothers and Sisters

In the old narrative, the fall of the Berlin Wall marked the liberation of the East German population from a criminal "communist" regime which had held its population captive behind walls, fences and hundreds of kilometers of no-man's land, heavily guarded and virtually impenetrable. Reunification was the result of a voluntary "accession" of the territory of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), which welcomed its "brothers and sisters" with open arms and a great deal of generosity.

Today, this idyllic account is no longer tenable. On the contrary. Earlier this year, a cultural institute in Dresden organized a conference with the provocative title, *Kolonie Ost?* (Colony East). The conference was intended to explore the various economic, cultural and sociological "aspects" of colonization in the eastern part of Germany after reunification. For those familiar with American 19th-century history, a different association suggests itself, that of the Reconstruction era following the end of the Civil War, which lasted until 1877.

As the eminent Columbia University historian Eric Foner has reiterated on numerous occasions, Reconstruction was an honest attempt on the part of the victorious North to integrate the South into the folds of the union while, at the same time, seeking to bring about a "second foundation" of the republic by transforming government from one "for white men" to one for all humankind.

The experiment largely failed. What was left was considerable resentment on the part of the Southern whites — a resentment that found its negative poster child in the figure of the "carpetbagger" — a Northerner coming to the South to teach white Southerners the principles of enlightened political culture while, in reality, or so the Southern narrative went, seeking material gains.

The point I am trying to make here is not to compare the horrific "peculiar institution" of Southern slavery to the petty, coercive surveillance state on the other side of the "intra-German border," the survival of which crucially depended on Soviet support and West German credits. Rather, it is that haughtiness provokes resentment, particularly if haughtiness is combined with unabashed greed. A slew of recent articles in prominent German newspapers acknowledge that this is what happened in the aftermath of reunification, with a large number of West German "carpetbaggers" effectively taking over virtually all important positions in the former GDR. The result has been less than optimal, to put it mildly.

The GDR was a country of "ordinary people" — ein Land der kleinen Leute — with an ordinary-people mentality. This was, to a large degree, the result of the brain drain that afflicted the eastern part of Germany and which, to a large extent, led East German authorities, headed by Walter Ulbricht, to order the construction of the wall. Erich Honecker, East Germany's long-time helmsman, was the perfect epitome of this habitus and mentality: a petty bourgeois with a ridiculously high-pitch voice, lacking even the most basic level of charisma, wearing badly-fitting suits. Once his regime collapsed, his

subjects — and this is what the “citizens” of the GDR were — were on their own. And, as such, they were relatively helpless in the face of the onslaught coming from the west.

Within a short period of time, westerners had taken over most important positions in economics, politics and academia, leaving easterners out in the cold. The eastern response bordered on stupor, reflected in the helpless *cri de cœur*: “So haben wird uns das nicht vorgestellt” — this is not how we imagined it. The result has been simmering resentment which continues to inform the emotional state of a considerable part of the East German population, including the younger generation.

End of Division?

The end of the division of Germany was supposed to mark the beginning of a new era, particularly for East Germans who, for geopolitical reasons, had been forced to bear the full brunt of Germany’s crimes against humanity. Yet once again, history has not been particularly kind to them.

Even after 30 years, the eastern part of the county continues to lag behind the west. In recent years, GNP per capita in the east was stagnating, at roughly 75% percent of the west. Reasons for the east’s sluggish performance are, among other things, a decline in innovative capacities as well as the absence of large companies.

Arguably most important, however, has been a third factor: eastern Germany’s idiosyncratic demographics. Over the past three decades, eastern Germany has witnessed a continuous exodus of younger, better educated individuals, particularly young women. In fact, eastern Germany is a paradigmatic case of what MIT economist David Autor and his collaborators have, tongue in cheek, characterized as the “falling marriage market value of young men.” The result has been a shrinking and aging population, together with a relative shortage of skilled workers — hardly a fertile ground for new investments.

In the cruel world of neoliberal capitalism, a growing number of countries and populations are becoming what Manuel Castells once called “structurally irrelevant.” The reality is that established parties on both the center right and center left have followed suit and “written off” a sizeable portion of the electorate. Under the circumstances, the dramatic gains of the radical right-wing populist Alternative for Germany have caused a rude awakening to the fact that financial transfers, even relatively massive ones, are not enough to win people’s hearts. On the contrary: In eastern Germany, they seem to have added to resentment, perhaps because they are perceived as handouts.

Representative surveys indicate that a large number of east German citizens still consider themselves second-class citizens. There is a strong sense that westerners look down upon them, have little regard for their achievements and failed to recognize the impact the fallout from unification had on their lives and wellbeing. Instead, westerners dismissed them as *Jammerossis* (yammering easterners), asking them “to get over it” and stop complaining.

After all, the west had invested billions of euros to rebuild east Germany’s ailing infrastructure and decaying cities. West German citizens had been forced to pay a “solidarity tax” (aka “Soli”) of 5.5% since 1998, designed to partly cover the costs of reunification.

Ostalgie

Yet easterners failed to show the appreciation and gratitude westerners expected. Instead, they appeared to nourish nostalgic sentiments, known as “Ostalgie” — a distorted, romanticized longing for an idealized past (the GDR), when life was simpler, when most important things in life, such as getting a job and daycare for the children, were being taken care of by the state (as long as one towed the line), and there was a strong sense of community and solidarity. Ostalgie is reflected, among other things, in the return of GDR products, from Spreewaldgurken (gherkins, which play a significant role in the

movie “Good Bye, Lenin”) to the famous Rotkäppchen Sekt, a popular GDR sparkling wine.

For West Germans of my generation, Ostalgie is particularly galling. Those of us who had the opportunity to visit West Berlin and the other side of the wall in the decades when the GDR was in full swing, still remember the guard towers with East German soldiers observing every move; the humiliating treatment dished out by East German border guards on the trains traversing the territory of the GDR on the way to West Berlin; and, above all, the dilapidated buildings, even in the center of East Berlin, depressingly grey, which left the visitor with the impression that the war had just ended.

As far as we were concerned, there was nothing redeeming about a country where it was common to have to stand in line for some of the most basic consumer goods.

For me, one of the memories of the days following the fall of the Berlin Wall that have stayed with me is the image of that East German citizen who came out of a West Berlin supermarket. Vigorously shaking his head in front of West German TV cameras, he repeated over and over, “Fifteen kinds of salami. Fifteen kinds of salami.” Thirty years after reunification, 15 kinds of salami are being taken for granted.

Yesterday’s wonder, however, has turned into resentment, against western arrogance and know-it-all-ism, reflected in the image of the Besserwisser (wise-ass). Many of these notions are nothing but prejudices and stereotypes. Sometimes, however, they do reflect genuine and justified grievances.

Take for instance the open hostility RB Leipzig, a soccer club that plays in Germany’s top league, has provoked in the west. RB Leipzig is a creation of Red Bull, which invested a great deal of money to catapult the club into the Bundesliga.

Since then, RB Leipzig has routinely been denigrated as an artificial creation, a Retortenverein (petri-dish club), which does not belong in the Bundesliga — particularly given

the fact that a growing number of illustrious “clubs with a long tradition” (such as TSV 1860 Munich and Kaiserslautern, which both won the championship in the past) from the west are trying to keep their head above water in Germany’s third league.

In the east, these attacks against what until recently was the only eastern club in the Bundesliga (with the new season, Leipzig was joined by Union Berlin, a club from the eastern part of Berlin with a long tradition) could only but confirm eastern perceptions of the arrogant west.

Thirty years ago, on the eve of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Germany’s former chancellor and mayor of West Berlin was purported to have coined a phrase, often repeated in the weeks that followed, which would mark the spirit of the time: “Now grows together what belongs together.” Whether or not Willy Brandt ever uttered that phrase is disputed. What is not disputed, however, is the fact that it was far too optimistic. Thirty years after the fall of the wall, eastern Germans have still not completely arrived in the FRG.

A few years ago, Germany opened its borders to over a million refugees. Initially the reception was generally warm and welcoming, only to turn negative. Particularly in the east, there was growing resentment against the government’s efforts to integrate the refugees into German society.

As far as eastern Germans were concerned, refugees received preferential treatment, while they were still waiting to be fully integrated. As eastern demonstrators famously put it, “Integriert erst mal uns!” (First, integrate us!).

These sentiments suggest that it might take a few more decades for reunification to be completed.

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Chile Protests and the Rise of Political Risk in Latin America

German Peinado Delgado & Glenn Ojeda Vega
November 11, 2019

The working and middle classes of Chile were ripe for a social uprising, unbeknownst to the country's economic elite, political class and foreign creditors.

Just as it seemed that the leftist “pink tide” had finally receded across Latin America, a wave of social movements are shaking market-friendly governments in the region.

While certainly a reflection of the polarized political climate on a global scale, the recent convulsions across the continent deal a strong blow against the region's maturing democratic institutions and serve as a reminder to foreign investors of the political risk that hangs over this attractive emerging market.

In recent weeks, the Chilean government has suffered the raucous consequences of announcing unpopular economic measures intended to rein in government debt and spending by increasing the cost of public services. In what has become a regional trend, protests in the capital Santiago began with a relatively small metro fare hike in early October. But the movement has since morphed into a widespread upheaval against neoliberal economic policies and social inequality in South America's most prosperous nation.

Festering Grievances

Protests are nothing new for the Chilean people, and the grievances being revendedicated — such as the lack of accessible basic social services, the discrimination against indigenous peoples and growing inequality — are legitimate. However, the level of coordination amongst some of the fringe elements and the main instigators of the last few weeks has left many wondering how truly spontaneous this movement is.

Whether orchestrated, organic or both, the socioeconomic frustration felt by many Chileans has been accumulating for years as two presidents, Sebastian Pinera and Michelle Bachelet, alternated over four terms while dismantling much of the welfare state in order to attract foreign investment and positive credit ratings.

The seemingly excessive liberalization of the Chilean state economy has not been an issue as long as all social classes have shared, for the most part, in the country's prosperity and growth. However, feeling increasingly burdened and unfairly taxed, the working and middle classes of Chile were ripe for a social uprising, unbeknownst to the country's economic elite, political class and foreign creditors.

Amid mass protests, the government of Sebastian Pinera was forced to decree a state of emergency, which translated to curfews and martial law in several regions of the country. Perhaps a political miscalculation, for many Chileans who lived through the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet the state of emergency only fired up their desire to protest.

Santiago has been the epicenter of demonstrations, including one that attracted more than a million people on October 25. Moreover, the protests have not been limited to the capital but have spread across other major cities such as Concepcion, Temuco, La Serena and Valparaiso. According to the United Nations, at least 20 have been killed and around 1,600 injured in the violence so far.

Like a Wildfire

Due to the sustained nature of the demonstrations, the national economy has begun to feel their effects. In that sense, international gatherings, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit and the UN climate meeting, as well as cultural and sporting events, have either been canceled or relocated away from Chile. Similarly, domestic consumption, private business and public government infrastructure

have all been dealt a severe blow by the unrelenting nature of this social wave.

Chile has not seen protests or public order mobilizations of this magnitude since the end of the Pinochet dictatorship in 1990. Moreover, given the country's high level of institutional and socioeconomic development, the events of the last several weeks are even more shocking, having prompted calls for a UN human rights verification mission to be sent to Chile. Ironically, the UN's current high commissioner for human rights is the former Chilean president, Michelle Bachelet.

While it would be unwise of global investors to flee from one of the world's most attractive emerging markets, it would also be foolish of international capital not to protect itself against this regional tide of political risk. Instead of skyrocketing premiums, international brokers should seek to expand the pool by making political risk insurance more accessible and commonplace.

Political risk underwriters should be smarter as to the inputs that they consider when quantifying risk. For instance, a key consideration throughout Latin America should be the GINI coefficient, which indicates wealth inequality in a country, and the average increase in the standard of living of the middle and working classes over the last five years, particularly as these correlate to the impact on the middle and working classes of new economic policies and reforms.

With the possibility of a global economic slowdown on the horizon and the need to reduce high levels of public debt, right-wing governments throughout Latin America are implementing economic policies that hit the working and middle classes hardest, such as cutting subsidies, increasing the costs of public services and rolling back social welfare.

For a region where the bulk of the population has seen an increase in its standard of living over the last two decades due to a commodities boom and the excessive spending by left-wing governments, any policy that threatens to worsen

the average lifestyle of the population will meet fierce resistance.

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Mumbai Needs To Come Together to Prevent Annual Flooding

Karan Kapoor
November 11, 2019

Every year, monsoon rains bring Mumbai to a halt and expose the crumbling urban infrastructure.

This year was an unusually wet one for Mumbai, the commercial capital of India. Until mid-September, the city received rainfall of 2,366 mm, which is 26% more than the usual average of 1,800 mm. This is an ominous trend of extreme weather events, a phenomenon the frequency of which is rising because of climate change, according to scientists. Global warming triggers intense bursts of rainfall because higher temperature increases the moisture-holding capacity of the atmosphere. In urban areas, where impervious materials cover much of the land surface and hence lower natural infiltration of rainwater into the ground, such a heavy and short-term rainfall leads to flooding.

This year, the southwestern monsoon that typically arrives in Mumbai in early June came in late, leaving the city relatively dry for a month. But then the city received, within the span of two days, the same amount of rainfall it normally gets in the entire month of June. What's more, in early July, Mumbai was hit with the worst rains in 14 years, leaving thousands of people stranded across the city.

Indian news outlets were full of images of people wading through knee-deep water. Cars were marooned across the city, roads were jammed, flights were canceled, and schools and colleges were closed. Excess rains have added to the woes of the city that has the dubious distinction of having the worst traffic in the world, as reported in a study by the location technology firm TomTom earlier in the year.

Down the Drain

Mumbai's rains are a perennial torture. The city saw massive floods in 2005, in which around 5,000 people died, and the situation has only gotten worse since. Not surprisingly, people are embittered, and in the crosshairs of their anger is the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the richest civic body in India with an annual revenue of 300 billion rupees (over \$4 billion) and over 750 billion rupees in accumulated reserves. The city's residents blame the corporation for failing to fulfil its promises.

The BMC has spent considerable time highlighting its efforts to improve the archaic drainage system in Mumbai. It spent 5 billion rupees this year alone on laying new drainage lines, augmenting the older lines, desilting sewers and cleaning gutters. So why have all these efforts literally gone down the drains during the monsoons? It would be interesting to flip the mirror and look at the other side.

During a routine clearing of the drains in Kurla, a suburb of Mumbai, in August, workers fished out a cupboard, a table, a bed and mattresses, among other objects, which were choking the drainage system. Kurla adjoins Dharavi, considered to be one of the world's largest slums, and has a population density of over 50,000 people per square kilometer. The area has several open drains besides the ironically named Mithi (sweet) river — one of the four suburban rivers in Mumbai passing through it. Mithi originates in the Vihar and Powai lakes in north Mumbai and runs a distance of 17.8 kilometers before draining into the Arabian Sea at the Mahim Bay. In ideal conditions, it should

serve as a crucial storm-water drain for Mumbai during excess rainfall, when the two lakes overflow. But in reality, the river is a putrid drain regularly used by residents as a dumping ground for waste.

Workers claim broken water pipes and bamboo pieces — besides the occasional large items of furniture — are regularly dumped by the residents. Not surprisingly, the river pushes out years' worth of garbage every time it rains. On August 4, the river flowed 4 meters high — almost half a meter above its danger mark — and the BMC had to evacuate over 400 people from the slum along the riverbank in Kurla among fears that homes would get submerged.

It Takes Two

Apathy to civic infrastructure is not restricted to slum-dwellers alone. In fact, littering and dumping garbage on the roads and footpaths is quite commonplace. Every day Mumbai dumps between 80 and 110 metric tons of plastic waste into drains and water channels, according to Vanashakti, an environment group. The BMC attempted to prevent people from tossing garbage into the open drains by covering some of them using polycarbonate sheets. But such methods restrict regular cleaning, and a similar covering of the suburban rivers such as the Mithi is neither practical nor allowed by the environmental regulations as that would affect marine life.

The attempt to control waste generation itself by banning single-use plastic and introducing steep fines for its use has also proved to be a futile exercise so far. One reason is that people prefer to buy fruits and vegetables from hawkers and roadside vendors who still use plastic bags. A change in habits — such as carrying a cloth bag — is proving difficult to achieve, despite multiple attempts to increase awareness of how plastic waste clogs the city's drainage system besides causing long-term environmental damage.

Instead of playing the blame game, what Mumbai needs is for municipal corporations and citizens to take collective responsibility in keeping the city's drainage infrastructure clean

and efficient. It is important for the BMC to educate and engage with residents, especially those living in slums along the major drains, many of whom may have never given a thought as to how their own actions create the very problem that plagues them. The BMC also needs to put in place efficient programs for debris management. Citizen groups, on their part, should come together to increase awareness of the ills of plastic bag usage and public littering.

Mumbai doesn't need to look far for inspiration. When Surat, a city 300 kilometers north of Mumbai in the state of Gujarat, was ranked as the fourth cleanest city in India in 2017, not many recalled it was once among the dirtiest and was even affected by the pneumonic plague in 1994. One should hope that Mumbai won't wait for the plague to turn things around.

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Why Does Transphobia Still Exist?

Ellis Cashmore
November 13, 2019

At a time in history when delicacy toward others is practically enforced, hatred of transgender people is as old fashioned as the 1980s.

Nobody is born a bigot So why does bigotry exist? Because it creates the illusion of order and normality in a chaotic world.

Possessing or expressing strong, unreasonable beliefs and disliking others who have different, often contrasting, beliefs or puzzling ways of life explains disquieting problems to the bigot and provides a comfort of sorts.

I have spent the combative years of my life as a scholar, fighting different forms of bigotry. The foundation of my own philosophy is, first of all,

that nothing is natural — we learn everything and, complex as it is to fathom, we can, given enough time and intellectual diligence, discover that we learn everything; second, that everything is relative — there are no universal truths but a bewildering number of versions, some more helpful than others; and, finally, that all forms of bigotry are based on rivalry or competition over resources considered by people to be valuable — jobs, land, status and so on.

Appearance, language, faith and other characteristics typically picked out as denoting Otherness are merely convenient markers used to identify groups thought to be different and threatening.

In the 20th century, racism and sexism were great fault lines in Western society. Groups spuriously labeled “races” had been exploited and abused for centuries. But in the 20th century, people realized the wrongness of treating groups differently because of their putative natural differences. Sexism did not become a word until the late 1970s. I still have the 1975 edition of the Oxford English Dictionary I used as an undergraduate: Sexism isn't in it.

I don't know when homophobia was added to our lexicon. I suspect it filtered in through cultural use, at first by gays. By the 1990s, the AIDS pandemic ensured gay men and, to lesser extent women, suddenly fell into frightening disfavor. Everyone knew the meaning of homophobia. Gay men didn't pose a threat in the same way as ethnic minorities or women, and while they remained the sole victims of AIDS, it appeared to some to be divine, cataclysmic retribution. It was when the disease spread beyond the gay world that hatred, and perhaps fear, of gay men grew spectacularly.

Tolerating Intolerance

No one is naïve enough to suppose racism has disappeared, or that sexism vanished the second Margaret Thatcher moved into 10 Downing Street. And it would be ludicrous to argue that Elton John singlehandedly banished revulsion at homosexuality. But, at the risk of ridicule, let me

suggest that all these forms of bigotry have been dealt damaging blows by developments of the past 30 or so years.

Only a fool would hold that racism is as virulent as it was in the 1960s, or that sexist resistance to women's claims for equality is at the same level it was in the 1970s. Or that the openness of gay men, their occupancy of prestigious positions in all industries and their conspicuous presence everywhere in society has not forced society to modify what was once endemic homophobia.

Today, no one would openly admit to holding bigoted beliefs. I know this is disputable, but my view is that intolerance is no longer tolerated. Generation X put paid to old prejudices. It might not have shown much enthusiasm for changing the world, but it changed attitudes effectively, pathologizing "isms" and "phobias," or at least most of the big ones. One remains.

In the 1990s, there were transsexuals. They were people who had the physical characteristics of one sex even though they were assigned a different sex at birth. There were also transvestites, who dressed in a way that was not appropriate to their sex. This century, both terms were replaced by the less stable or precise transgender. This refers to people who, for any number of reasons, reject the traditional sexual binary of male/female and opt to live their lives in a way that defies conventional expectations or established categories. Their appearance has coincided with, or perhaps prompted, the emergence of gender fluidity. Gender is not as simple or changeless as most people in the late 20th century imagined it to be.

A Fight for Resources

Transphobia is a misleading appellation: Phobia suggests a fear of, anxiety over or allergy, whereas it describes hostility. At a time in history when delicacy toward others is practically enforced, hatred of transgender people is as old fashioned as the 1980s.

What's more, no one is hiding this animosity. Figures from the feminist pantheon, such as

Germaine Greer, have sneered at transgender women's liminal status. Athletes like Sharron Davies have openly opposed trans athletes' entry into sport, and tennis great and stalwart LGBTQ+ champion Martina Navratilova has made inflammatory remarks designed, it seems, to distance gay athletes from a group who should, logically, be allies.

Many would insist this is not a phobia of any sort, or even a form of bigotry: It is just a rational appraisal. But it is unlikely to persuade the rising number of trans people, who are victims of hate crime, or who feel marginalized and forced continually to justify themselves. I wrote earlier that bigotry has its roots in competition over scarce resources, and readers will wonder what is being contested. Womanhood is the plain answer.

Being a woman means belonging to a struggle that has been incubating for centuries and forms an indelible part of human history. I conjecture this is what's on many people's minds when they object to transgender people's self-description as women.

Something similar might have been on Greer's mind when she made her remark that "Just because you lop off your dick and then wear a dress doesn't make you a fucking woman." She was alluding to women's history of being denied the right to own property, vote, keep their own income, be educated, serve in the military or in politics, or participate in dozens of other pursuits that men have controlled. "Anyone born a man retains male privilege in society; even if he chooses to live as a woman." This is how Michelle Goldberg, of *The New Yorker*, sums up her position, presumably the one Greer would adopt. Women haven't been gifted their rights — they've fought for them. In other words, transgender women haven't paid their dues.

Education, the military, criminal justice system and other mainstream institutions are striving to make satisfactory accommodations to gender fluidity. In 2017, Danica Roem became the first US transgender official when she won election to the Virginia House of Delegates and, more recently, she won reelection, beating her

anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-abortion rival. It is also apparent that transgender males do not experience the same degree of resentment as transgender women — a perverse form of sexism, perhaps. So there are signs of change.

But there is resistance and, in some areas, for example, sport, opposition to trans athletes is bound to be fortified by women who feel they are being squeezed out of their own competitions.

Antipathy against trans people is unlikely to subside. The fear is imagined rather than real and, while the antipathy appears reasonable, it is not — it's irrational. Followers of women's liberation inverted Freud's apothegm that "biology is destiny" to remind the world that personalities, behavior, interests and tastes are not determined by birth, but shaped by culture. The social world is not divisible into two types of people. Rather, sex is a spectrum of possibilities.

It is a calamity of fate that, after decades of battling repression of one sort or another, feminists are asking almost the same questions of transgender people that chauvinists asked of them, the main one being, "What's wrong with the way things are?"

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What Is Driving the Protests in Latin America?

Leonardo Vivas
November 13, 2019

When addressing the recent protests in Latin America, it is important to resist the spell of common myths about the region.

The first thing to bear in mind when looking at the recent violent demonstrations that have occurred in Latin American countries like Chile, Ecuador, Haiti and Bolivia is to resist

the spell of common myths about the region. Latin America is a vast territory composed of 20 countries, from Mexico on the US border to Argentina and Chile in the confines of Antarctica. So when upheaval occurs in a number of small-to-middle-size countries, why should one immediately attribute such events to an alleged sub-continental momentum?

After all, there are powerful reasons for social disturbance in larger countries like Brazil, Argentina or Peru, not to speak of Venezuela, but so far none of them show signs of deep social unrest.

This is not to say that the protests are unimportant or that one should ignore regional waves, such as the turn to the left in Latin American politics at the beginning of the century. After all, Latin America has been historically prone to cyclical trends that have spread throughout the entire region in the past. This doesn't seem to be the case today. Rather, the protests should be assessed for their individual value, one case at a time.

A second temptation is to identify protests with a common motive. A cherished topic in Latin America is the resistance to cold-hearted neoliberalism, where the continent's version of the wretched of the earth regain their spirit in the face of powerful — and often foreign — economic interests, or falling prey to conspiracy theories like arguing that behind the protests in most right-leaning countries is the dark hand of the Maduro regime, or even Russia.

A grain of truth can exist in some of these speculations, and they may certainly capture the interest of the mainstream international media, but we should know better. So, what's been happening?

Ecuador

The initial protests took place in Ecuador in early October after the administration of President Lenin Moreno decreed a hike in fuel prices. The response was angry, violent and widespread — including a strike from transportation organizations nationwide and mobs carrying out

destruction, mainly in the capital, Quito. The government responded with a twofold strategy. On the one hand, it sought to negotiate with transport organizations to stop the strike; on the other, it brought the army to the streets.

Despite the stick-and-carrot approach, violence spread, especially in Quito, where government buildings were set on fire. The protests reached a peak when the powerful Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities put its weight behind the protests. Bear in mind that this organization, known as CONAIE, was instrumental in bringing down several governments at the turn of the 21st century.

The protests rapidly gained a political angle in the highly politicized climate of Ecuador. In the last few years, President Moreno applied himself to dismantling the tight political network built in the last decade by his predecessor, Rafael Correa, through control over most state institutions.

The former president was investigated on corruption charges amounting to between \$30 and \$70 billion during the time he was head of state. In the past few days, a local court ratified an indictment against him for “alleged bribery, racketeering, and peddling of political favors.”

Correa rapidly became the main culprit of the country’s many woes. There is a high probability that he seized the opportunity to mobilize his weakened forces, perhaps with international help — allegedly from Venezuelan pro-Maduro organizations — to bring down the government and promote a restoration that would allow him a political comeback. But to what extent this is true has not been substantiated so far.

Despite the transport strike coming to a halt and President Moreno reconsidering the fuel prices measures, leading the CONAIE to call for a truce and accept conversations with the government, the protests continued with increased violence. The seat of government had to be moved to Guayaquil, the largest commercial city on the coast. But after a spell of violence that lasted several weeks and claimed eight lives, the country returned to normal.

Chile

As protests were waning in Ecuador, violence erupted in Chile, spreading from the capital Santiago to other cities like Valparaiso and Concepcion. Similar to Ecuador, protests began when the authorities augmented the rates of the Santiago subway system by a few percentage points. Also similar to Ecuador, the protests that ensued were highly violent, with buses set on fire, metro stations, banks, supermarkets and even the offices of an electrical utility company destroyed. But, different to earlier protests taking place a decade ago throughout the country, these were not exclusively student-led and involve a wider social spectrum, including workers, part of the middle class and urban mobs.

Protests in Chile caught everyone in the country and elsewhere by surprise. After all, Chile has seen a steady growth record and the most impressive social and economic gains, except for inequality, in the region. In 2010, the country was admitted to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development club of rich nations and was getting ready to host a meeting of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in November and the United Nations’ COP25 climate summit in December. Understandably, the government declined to host both events. But it is probably the timing and violence of the protests that still has most analysts on their toes.

Initially, Sebastian Pinera, a businessman-turned-politician now in his second term as president, responded aggressively, declaring a state of emergency and calling on the army to contain the protests, which brought back dark memories of the Pinochet dictatorship. But instead of curbing what had now become a mass movement, it only heightened the clashes, bringing a string of 23 deaths and losses near to \$1.4 billion. The violence has been particularly ferocious, including the most recent setting on fire of a private university and even the looting of churches.

Facing what could evolve into an insoluble crisis, Pinera rapidly moderated his tone,

recognizing the government's fault and promising wide policy changes. Currently, the country is in the process of digesting the impact of the protests. President Pinera has offered a change in the constitution that could perhaps contribute to the ruling elite — including both the conservatives and the moderate left parties — regaining its footing over the future of the political system.

Haiti

“We are in misery and we are starving,” protester Claude Jean told Reuters. “We cannot stand it anymore.” These two phrases summarize the ultimate rationale behind the most recent protests that exploded in Haiti and have continued to this day. Starting in September, day after day and week after week, people from all walks of life have taken to the streets en masse to protest against a deadly combination of an enduring social drama — including fuel shortages, spiraling inflation, a lack of safe drinking water and food scarcities — and rampant corruption. So far, severe clashes have wrought havoc, with at least 18 dead, but compared to the protests in Chile, Ecuador and Bolivia, sheer violence and destruction have not been the predominant note.

Unrest in Haiti is as chronic as the accumulation of social distress. But over the past year, it acquired a new tone when allegations of corruption within the government of President Jovenel Moïse regarding the misuse of resources from Petrocaribe, Venezuela's flagship international economic aid program, came into the open. The protests rapidly took a stronger political bent, pointing directly to Moïse and demanding his resignation.

In the background is also the deep dissatisfaction among a majority of Haitians with the meager impact of the massive amount of economic aid that entered Haiti after the devastating 2010 earthquake, which failed to translate into infrastructure, schools or even sanitation improvement. Also, different to the chronic social malaise, on this occasion the middle class, especially intellectuals and

professionals, has also taken to the streets, providing a stronger voice to the demands of the population.

Bolivia

The image couldn't be more gruesome: Patricia Arce, the mayor of Vinto, with her hair cut and her body covered in red paint, was dragged through the streets after violence erupted in the city. She is a member of Evo Morales' Movement for Socialism (MAS) party and, after the city hall of her town was set in fire, she was captured by a mob. The scene reflects the level of violence achieved by the political confrontation taking place in Bolivia in the aftermath of the recent presidential election where the opposition and independent observers alleged fraud on the part of the Morales-dominated electoral authorities.

In 2016, Evo Morales was defeated in a referendum that put to a national vote his decision to run for reelection for a fourth time, in an attempt to redraw the constitution that set a limit of two presidential terms. After his defeat, Morales brought the issue to the constitutional court, which in 2017 decided that his “human rights” had been demoted, even if he had called for the referendum himself. Another presidential election was scheduled for October 20, 2019. After the official results contradicted the initial count, the opposition refused to recognize his triumph and took to the streets, first rejecting the result and later calling for his resignation.

Different to Ecuador, Chile and Haiti, where social dissatisfaction is the prime mover, in Bolivia the protests were 100% political. So far, the balance of Evo Morales' decade-long social and economic policies has been favorable, including stable growth with low inflation, a drastic reduction of poverty and a historic recognition of indigenous communities as part of a plurinational state. But his attempts to remain in power at any cost seemed, to a growing portion of Bolivians, increasingly akin to the likes of Nicolas Maduro, the standard bearer of the new dictatorial trend in the region.

When the crisis erupted, the signs of a drastic evolution toward stark authoritarian rule were still in the making and nowhere near the current levels of the Venezuelan tragedy. But, if one were to judge by precedents like Nicaragua, the future looked gloomy. On this occasion, however, and different to earlier electoral confrontations, the opposition forces were more disciplined and after the first electoral round presented a united front, disputing the electoral results legally and openly in the streets.

The demise of Evo Morales, who resigned on November 10 after a string of violent protests nationwide, echoes Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel, "A Chronicle of a Death Foretold." Morales could have retained his stature had he not run for president again or accepted defeat in the October 20 election. But he bet on his popularity to push for a fourth term in office.

Before election day, all opinion polls showed Morales leading, but with less than the necessary 10-point difference to avoid a runoff. After the election took place, the trends very closely replicated the predictions. Even the first bulletins released by the supreme electoral tribunal pointed in that direction.

Then, the count was suspended for a day, after which the next bulletin claimed Morales had passed the finish line with slightly more votes than he needed to avoid a second round. Then, all hell broke loose. His close contender and former president, Carlos Mesa, accused Morales and the vice president of fraud. Soon after, the company contracted by the electoral authority to make an audit of the election results stated it was full of inconsistencies and refused to grant a legitimate result.

The president's tone was defiant. He declared himself the winner and challenged his opponents to a rebuttal. As a result, protests in several provinces became more violent, with the burning of MAS officials' houses, while the president's supporters burned down buildings in other provinces. Overall, however, the protests were peaceful. But by Saturday, November 9, discontent had reached the police forces, with

rank and file in some cases defending the protesters and joining the demonstrations.

By Sunday, once the Organization of American States observation group also declared foul play and called for new elections, Morales went public, agreeing to a new vote. But it was too late. He had lost control. Shortly after, the head of the armed forces asked the president for his resignation. The situation remains unclear, with the succession line in the absence of the president interrupted by a string of resignations. To date, Bolivia's constitutional court has approved a senator from the opposition, Jeanine Anez, for the post of interim president.

In the end, the demotion of Morales and the violence spearheaded by his manipulation of the electoral process were a reflection of a significant portion of the nation feeling cornered into a growingly personal and authoritarian rule. On Monday, November 11, Morales was granted asylum and escorted to Mexico City.

Making Sense of the Protests

The current wave of protests is not the first in a region which, for a couple of decades since the mid-1990s until a few years ago, seemed to have overcome a century-long string of economic failures and social upheaval. During those years, a combination of significant, though by no means flamboyant, economic growth combined with a vast process of democratization took place in most countries in the region. When a wave of protests erupted in Chile in 2009-10 and Brazil in 2012-13, observers were rattled. The two countries symbolized by far the best of two worlds: robust democracy and prosperity.

Chile had experienced the stronger and more prolonged economic performance of the region, while Brazil's path out of the doldrums of high debt and inflation, together with an assertive social policy, brought some 60 million Brazilians out of poverty. Moreover, public opinion surveys held since late 20th century showed high support for democracy.

Then, again, just before the 2016 Olympic Games held in Brazil, a massive wave of peaceful

protests erupted, bringing millions of people to the streets, complaining against vastly inefficient public services and other public investment, combined with massive corruption scandals that incriminated the top of the political hierarchy, both in congress and in the executive. Why host the Olympics if hospitals didn't work or infrastructure was collapsing?

In Chile, the protests were far more limited, essentially an awakening of the student movement demanding better education and protesting against a skewed system where the most affluent always obtained the best places in the best public schools. The protest movement lasted for a long time — until the wind of reform proved strong enough, forcing an initial transformation of the system.

Expectations Revolution

What was apparently taking place in both Brazil and Chile was an expectations revolution. As more people were leaving the ranks of poverty behind and joining the middle class, they no longer conformed to the status quo of bad services and poor education. Thus, the peaceful protests pushed against a lack of progress and corruption, especially in Brazil, where the Carwash and the Odebrecht corruption scandals were undermining the credibility of the political class. Corruption charges reached the top of government and led to the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in April 2016.

The expectations revolution may have been taking place in Bolivia as well. Paradoxically, Evo Morales' success might have worked as a backlash. Bolivia, as well as Chile, had high growth rates for more than a decade, and millions of Bolivians have been brought out of poverty. Having achieved better living standards, a part of those entering the middle class may have joined those demanding more from the political system and from the president himself. And, most probably, this change of mind was not in President Morales' calculations.

Overall, the situation in the region today is different to those golden times in several

respects. There has been a clear backlash against democratic rule while economic performance has been meager, even if it has not faltered altogether as it has elsewhere. A combination of factors seems to have propelled the more violent protests.

First, the overall perceptions about democracy vs. authoritarian rule have shifted. According to Latinobarometro, the overall preference for democracy as a political system has dropped from 79% in 2013 to 65% in 2018 in the region as a whole, while it dropped to 68% in Ecuador, 66% in Bolivia and 65% in Chile. In turn, the number of people calling the regimes in their countries undemocratic went up from 9% in 2013 to 14% in 2018. At the same time, the younger segments of the population have a lower preference for democracy (44% between the ages of 16 and 25) as compared to the older (52% for those over 61), while the preference for authoritarian rule is higher for the young (16%) compared to the old (13%).

Second, the perception that the political system works in favor of a few powerful groups has increased consistently from a minimum of 61% in 2009 to the current 79% — a massive 18 percentage points — with numbers as high as 60% in Bolivia, 74% in Chile and 81% in Ecuador. What these numbers are saying is that no matter the advances in economic terms, the overall perception is that the system is skewed against you.

Third, except for Bolivia, where political parties seemingly continue to be the main vehicle for representation, in most other countries this essential feature of political stability has weakened over the years. Even in Chile, a country with strong political party traditions and a clear distinction between the left and the right, the overall representation of political parties has become lackluster. This may explain why protests gave way to sheer violence.

Clearly, the worst case is Haiti, where traditionally political parties have been either weak or non-existent. In Ecuador, weak parties are a typical feature of the political system. It was

only during the Correa era when his newly created party, despite accommodating to the needs of the populist leader, was able to overcome the traditional solitude of Ecuadorian rulers. But the recent friction between Lenin Moreno and Rafael Correa has brought weakness back as a defining part of Ecuador's political life.

What Now?

Christopher Sabatini and Anar Bata, writing in Foreign Affairs, argue forcefully that protests don't seem to be leading anywhere and that it is highly likely they won't deliver the type of change they were intended for. This is clearly not the case in Bolivia. Evo Morales was forced to resign, and, in the aftermath, members of the electoral tribunal were imprisoned for orchestrating an electoral sham. Having inherited a highly polarized country — mostly of his own making — it would seem that the times of prosperity and overall peace that Morales granted Bolivia are over. What will come now is unclear — a full return to democracy or continued unrest and unstable governments.

In the rest of cases discussed here, things may not turn out as desired by those staging the revolt. Haiti will continue to suffer its chronic disease of political instability and the utter impossibility of finding even a modest path to overcoming its tragic drama of poverty and destitution.

In Chile, there might be some reshuffling of how policies are designed and put in practice, but given the representation crisis the country has been suffering for quite some time, it is unlikely that the channels for smooth democratic politics will be restored and people's feedback will be given greater credence. Despite President Pinera's call for a new constitution, if Martians were to descend in Chile today, they would be astonished to see how the current political landscape has changed so little from the times of Salvador Allende.

Finally, after the era of strong leadership and concentration of power under Rafael Correa, Ecuador is in a difficult transition to greater political openness and transparency, which may

succeed if Ecuadorians give Lenin Moreno a new opportunity. Judging by the recent upheaval, it would seem that microeconomics beats attempts at re-democratization. In addition, his efforts to dismantle the populist edifice Correa built with such care might inevitably open the door to the ghosts of instability and uncertainty.

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As Iraq Burns, World Leaders Stay Silent

Amin Farhad
November 20, 2019

By not responding to the brutal quelling of protests, the US and its allies are giving a green light to Iran and silently sealing Iraq's fate.

The wave of unrest that has swept through Iraq has gone from protest to violence, creating tension in the region. The demonstrations, which were initially motivated by discontent over the country's economic stagnation and rampant government corruption, quickly devolved into chaos. Since their start in October, hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets, burning down several political party buildings.

The security forces and the militias backing the government, some linked to Iran, responded with sniper fire, tear gas and firing live ammunition at the protesters. To date, over 300 people have been killed and thousands more injured — a sign of the repressive turn the current regime has taken.

Though the smaller issues at the heart of the protests are local, the presence of the anti-government wave itself is important on the global stage due to Iraq's regional positioning.

Following the US invasion and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the government remains largely ineffective and rife with corruption. However, it is still an important strategic point for the US, which has an ongoing military presence in the country, and has become a key part of Iran's regional aspirations.

This divide also highlights the gamut of responses ranging from condemnation to quiet support, but it ignores the fact that while politicizing seems to be par for the course, there is more that should be said. Indeed, the world should turn its eye on Iraq and truly question, a decade and a half after Hussein's overthrow, if the current political elite is equipped to lead the country back to stability.

Protecting Government Interests

The protesters are, first of all, fighting against endless corruption: Transparency International ranks Iraq 168 out of 180 countries. The people of Iraq are also frustrated with a lack of public services and inability to find jobs. According to the World Bank, the current unemployment rate is 9.9%, while youth unemployment is at 25%. A large portion of the population lives below the poverty line, spending less than \$2.2 a day.

To add fuel to the fire, Iran's influence in the country continues to provoke public anger. Iran's aim is to keep Iraq aligned with Iranian interests and, by essentially having unrestricted access to key state institutions as well as playing a significant role in decision-making, Tehran has been successful so far. However, many believe that Iran's presence is suffocating Iraq, and protesters are demanding that Iran leave Iraq alone and stop using violence to suppress the demonstrations.

The government struggled for days to quell the unrest, even going as far as suggesting sweeping changes, such as a reshuffling of Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi's cabinet, land distribution and expanding welfare programs. However, these were shot down by protesters due to the government's inability to tackle the root cause of the problem — corruption — that

distorts the development and economic prosperity of the country.

Although Abdul Mahdi did not directly order the militias to suppress protests — indeed, the militias are not technically affiliated with the government — they were acting to protect his position and that of the current Shia bloc in power, which is made up of two coalitions, Al-Islah, led by Muqtada al-Sadr's Sairoon, and Binaa, led by Hadi al-Amiri's Fatah. This coalition is problematic because while Sadr's bloc is against Iran's involvement in the country, the Fatah bloc is pro-Iran, making parliamentary decision-making difficult and often leading to deadlocks.

Because the Iraqi government has been heavily influenced by Iran and riddled with corruption for as long as memory can reach, the demands put forward by the protesters are difficult to implement. The ensuing bloodshed was described by Abdul Mahdi as a "bitter medicine" necessary to stop ongoing unrest, although he did not condemn the violence outright.

The World Reacts

The protests — and especially the violence that followed — have brought condemnation from some familiar actors. The UN was swift in its rebuke of the Iraqi government's response, with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq casting serious accusations. The mission claimed that Iraqi authorities committed severe human rights violations in their efforts to quell protests, including mass arrests and multiple reports of the use of excessive force. Amnesty International followed up with several calls for authorities to stop mass arrests and censorship, which included cutting off the nation's access to the internet.

However, as the country's government slides back into repressive tactics reminiscent of Saddam Hussein's regime, the governments of the world must be more forceful in their response, albeit careful in their actions. Iraqis have reacted strongly against what they perceive to be political meddling from Iran.

The current Shia majority government, which has strong backing from Iran, must not be left blameless for the administration's unnecessary and lethal reaction. Even Shia figures in Iraq have spoken out against the government, with Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani urging authorities to give in to protesters' demands or face escalating tensions. Shia opposition parties have called for the government to be dissolved and for elections to be called.

So far, the US expressed concern over the situation, urging restraint from the Iraqi government. However, if Washington wants to maintain presence in the region, it is important that it takes appropriate actions to preserve its interests.

Lack of a broader response from world powers shows an unwillingness to enter the quagmire created by constant interventions by foreign powers in Iraq over the past decade. The European Union released a statement in early October that called for restraint while at the same time praising Abdul Mahdi's actions at that point, which included proclaiming his support for freedom of expression, but remained noncommittal.

If the US and its allies wish to see Iraq remain a point of strategic relevance, their responses must be more forceful while being respectful of Iraq's sovereignty. The current regime inherited a complex combination of politics and instability, but has done little to improve it, pushing protesters to call for the formation of a new government. The violent and repressive response hints at the potential future for Iraq should attacks on democracy continue in the face of silence from world leaders. The governing coalition has proved that it is either unwilling or unable to fix the situation — either case raises serious questions about the future. By not responding to the brutal quelling of protests, the US and its allies are giving a green light to Iran and silently sealing Iraq's fate.

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US Position on Legality of Israeli Settlements Not Good for Peace

Gary Grappo
November 25, 2019

Regardless of how one may argue the case of Israeli settlement legality, America's decision not to consider West Bank settlements illegal drives down the possibility of resolving this decades-long dispute.

On November 18, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the US would no longer view Israeli settlements in the West Bank as illegal. The decision breaks with a 1978 State Department finding that settlements were "inconsistent with international law." The new policy is also at odds with the view of nearly every other nation in the world.

Alan Baker, who currently directs the international law program at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and served as the legal counsel of Israel's foreign ministry and the Israeli ambassador to Canada, offers an excellent legal analysis of the history and substance of the legal issues surrounding the matter of Israel's West Bank settlements. Reading his assessment, one comes away with an appreciation of the complexity and unusual nature of this specific issue. While one may disagree with his arguments, they are succinct and largely objective.

Is Legality the Real Question?

Legality is really not the question, though many may wish to argue otherwise. One question left unanswered, for example, in this decision is whether Palestinians have a right to their own state with designated borders — many today still would argue vociferously that they do. There is also the question of what the two parties (and the rest of the international community) are prepared to do about the dispute, among the Middle East's longest and seemingly most enduring. Israelis

seem willing to wait it out for the time being, while Palestinians wallow in hopelessness as fewer nations take an interest in their plight.

The cases for the “one-state” versus “two-state” solution to this dispute — in her recent book, “The Levant Express,” Professor Micheline Ishay of the University of Denver also makes the case for a confederation solution — are still in play. However, Israelis and Palestinians alike are more uncertain than ever about which is preferred.

Fewer than half of both populations now support two states. These historically low levels of support reflect in part the belief among many Palestinians that the rising number of Israeli settlements in the West Bank makes a contiguous Palestinian nation unlikely if not impossible.

In addition, these declining polling figures for the two-state approach is also a reflection of the lack of substantive negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. The two sides haven’t spoken since former US Secretary of State John Kerry’s efforts came to naught in the spring of 2014. Not only are the two sides not talking, but the international community isn’t doing much either. The Trump administration’s “deal of the century” has yet to see the light of day. And the uncertainty around Israel’s next government makes it highly unlikely that it will be presented before the US presidential election in 2020. After considerable hoopla, it may be destined to join the many other deals now sitting on the shelves of the State Department that never saw grand signing ceremonies.

Beyond Legality

The legality question masks some fundamental issues. For example, are Palestinians (and Arabs more generally) prepared to accept Israel as the national homeland for Jews — i.e., a Jewish state? Are Israelis prepared to accept a Palestinian state with defined borders? And if so, what degree of genuine autonomy would that state have? Are Palestinians prepared to commit to genuine, democratic institution-building so as to increase Israeli confidence in a stable, non-

threatening Arab neighbor? Would the Palestinian state be willing to make the necessary concessions to satisfy Israel’s security concerns?

But the overriding question may actually be whether the two sides are willing to acknowledge the other side’s narrative. Their competing narratives have been repeated throughout the dispute dating back at least as far as Israel’s statehood declaration in 1948, if not before. The respective competing histories, legal arguments and statistical data are known and documented. Yet they are still debated and the US decision on the legality of settlements is but the latest iteration.

Only after acknowledging — as opposed to accepting — the other side’s narrative can each party begin to fully appreciate the passions and emotions that fuel their respective motivations. Those dual acknowledgments have not occurred. Acknowledgment and the attendant understanding then allow for empathy, more honest — though not necessarily less heated — and frank discussion, a full assessment of critical needs and wants from a negotiation, and ultimately for the hard compromises vital to reaching a solution.

Washington Isn’t Helping

That is why the latest announcement from Washington isn’t helpful. It’s not that massive settlement expansions will now be the order of the day. They won’t. Nor does it necessarily mean Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will follow through with prior threats to annex some or all of the settlements in the West Bank. Chances are that he may have other issues on his plate after the recent news of an indictment against him for bribery and other violations.

The US announcement instead further entrenches the two sides in their respective narratives. It makes discussion and negotiation all the more difficult. It is not conducive to solving the problem — it inflames it. However legally sound the American argument may be, it effectively has thrown gasoline on the fire.

This is especially important because, outside the two parties, the US will be the most critical player in reaching a solution. Its recent decision further cements the belief among Palestinians and most other countries that the US cannot play any moderating role. In fact, however, only the US can play that role. Now, it has severely compromised its chances of doing so again. This was already practically the case after its recognition in 2017 of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and subsequent relocation of its embassy to Jerusalem. If the United States cannot play that role, it will make solving this dispute ever more difficult. Its participation is virtually a *sine qua non*.

Israel may be delighted with Washington's decision. But if it is interested in truly untying the Gordian knot of peace in the Middle East, it shouldn't celebrate the announcement. Israel, too, needs the Americans.

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Is Europe Really Ready for Its Own Military Force?

Martin Reguli
November 25, 2019

While the perception of the need for stronger EU defense capabilities seems to go unchallenged, member states can't agree on the scope, goals or structure this cooperation should have.

The European Union has been facing turbulent geopolitical moments outside as well as inside its own borders. These factors have prompted the EU's key personalities to become more outspoken about what they see as a key step in making the EU a truly global player: developing its own defense capabilities so

that the EU can project military power and act collectively as a military force.

These goals have been recently voiced by French President Emanuel Macron. The question remains as to how many allies among the European countries he has.

While the perception of the need for stronger defense capabilities of the European Union seems to go unchallenged, member states can't agree on the scope, goals or structure this cooperation should have. The internal divergence of the different blocs within the EU remains and has manifested itself in the approach to Russia, Turkey and the migration crisis, all of which have ignited fierce debates on the extent and direction of the involvement that the EU should provide.

The political guidelines for the next European Commission speak of the attempt for a genuine European Defence Union within the next five years. However, given different defense priorities and eagerness for integration among member states, the path forward is not yet really clear.

European defense integration divides member states even within the usually cohesive blocs. Take, for example, central and Eastern Europe, which can be split among the Baltic states, Poland and Romania on one hand, and the remaining V4 countries — Slovenia, Croatia and Bulgaria — on the other. They not only have different perceptions toward Russia as their main threat, but also attitudes toward NATO. For instance, while central Europe is strongly influenced by the proximity of the Russian threat and looks to NATO for its security, Eastern Europe has lukewarm views on Russia due to its critical positions toward the EU.

At the same time, all of these groups are cautious about transferring more power to Brussels, as they do not hold high levels of trust toward France or Germany, albeit for different reasons. They are still at odds with the ambitions of the bigger EU countries, such as France and Germany, which believe that they should focus on developing common European defense structures.

The security and the defense threats arose after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its activities in the Eastern Ukraine, the migration crisis from the Middle East and Northern Africa, and have peaked at the worsening of relations with the traditional guarantor of European security — the United States.

With the establishment of the office of the high representative of the union for foreign affairs and security policy and the increasing voices calling for greater European responsibility, the EU has met the obvious problem: the implementation of these ambitions in practice. To elaborate on the immortal line that with great power comes great responsibility, it should be added that with the assumption of such responsibility, one needs to have actual power. For Europe this means creating military and defense capabilities and interoperability between the European military equipment. In addition, there needs to be an establishment of the organizational structure that would also define the priorities that European defense should fulfil.

The main blocs have different ideas regarding not just the specific projects of defense cooperation, framework of the new defense strategy, response to the recent rifts with the US or the level of the strategic autonomy that the EU should be striving for. This provides numerous options for the European Union to go forward. The EU can either become united behind a centralized approach of the leading countries or have the form of a “coalition of the willing.” It can focus on complementing NATO in specific areas on the ground or become a replacement for it.

There have been discussions, even among experienced military personnel across Europe, disagreeing about the key steps needed to motivate the EU countries to put their money where their mouths are. Furthermore, there is a level of disagreement — and resulting distrust — between the eastern/northern tier of the EU/NATO countries focusing more on the NATO platform and setting their eyes on Russia, and the southern/western tier preferring a more

supranational approach with greater stress on migration aspects and the Mediterranean region. The two groups of countries have different historical narratives, so overcoming the split may prove to be a difficult task.

The EU-NATO nexus has been undergoing several problems since Brexit and Donald Trump's presidency entered the picture. What is more, the structure of EU-NATO cooperation has to be established in light of the non-EU European members, like Norway or, soon perhaps, the United Kingdom. There will have to be a clear division of responsibility, even as President Macron makes a statement about the clinical death of NATO.

The irony of this situation is that a push by President Trump to make the NATO countries fulfil their obligations may be beneficial to motivating the countries to be more active in finding prospective projects of cooperation with other EU members as they are operating with a higher budget. But without a strategy, there is a considerable agreement that this approach will fail to achieve its objectives.

The current activities of the EU focus on soft security missions, from the Balkans to Africa, while the key flagship initiative is the Permanent Structured Cooperation, or PESCO — a multi-layered and multi-purpose initiative that has the potential of forming the foundation of a credible EU defense force. Further steps will also have to include the creation of a directorate general for defense and more financial commitments in terms of defense cooperation.

The last of the structural developments that will have a definite impact is the formation of the European Defence Fund (EDF), which aims to increase member states' investment in defense research to improve interoperability of the different national defense forces. It is expected that the budget allocated to the EDF under the EU's next Multiannual Financial Framework will reach €13 billion (\$14.3 billion). The use of this fund will be contested by different groups of European countries. Other points of contention

would be active initiatives such as the European Intervention Initiative (EI2), led by France.

Despite these internal disagreements on shape and size, it will probably be engagement outside of EU borders that proves critical in deciding whether the EU can ever truly act externally as a single force.

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Is South Africa Heading for a Storm?

Stephen Chan
November 26, 2019

There is only so much a technocratic president can do to steer South Africa toward the dream of an equal rainbow nation in which all had a share.

Despite having a technocratic president in Cyril Ramaphosa, are the structural underpinnings of the economy so weak that South Africa's future is endangered? Allied to weak economic foundations are the questions of corruption and extremely poor public administration. The mismanagement at both the Electricity Supply Commission and South African Airways have raised eyebrows around the world. The constant lack of electricity not only means huge power outages for homes, but also constitutes a disincentive for industrial investors.

There is a huge concentration of population in the country's urban areas, but 29.1% of the working age population are unemployed, although some calculations put the number at 38.5%. Many of these join the resistance against immigrants who are seen as taking what jobs there are. They basically form an urban underclass of growing volatility and, of course, are drawn toward the deliberately inflammatory

and mobilizing rhetoric of the likes of Julius Malema.

And, in fact, now that the Democratic Alliance (DA) has imploded, with its key black leaders like Mmusi Maimane having resigned from the party, Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) form the only real parliamentary and populist opposition to Ramaphosa's African National Congress (ANC) government.

There is a tiny but extremely wealthy elite who are seen by ANC members and non-ANC members alike as commandeering all levers of wealth. Ramaphosa is himself among these. But he presides over a system of elite accumulation that is viewed widely as corrupt or, at best, non-transparent. Transparency International listed South Africa 43 out of 100 in its 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index.

But if Ramaphosa is no longer able to be seen as a man of the people, can he at least lay down plans for economic change? The answer is probably no. Not only is far too large a segment of the population both non-productive and dependent, but the issue of national debt is beginning to loom large over the country. Official figures from 2018 suggest that debt accounts for some 55.8% of GNP, but even South Africa's own projections suggest it will reach 70% by 2022 and 80% within 10 years.

All this is amidst an economy that grew by 3.1% in the quarter ending June 2019, but in the face of inflation at 4.5% the overall prognosis is of an economy without sufficient capacity to service growing debt, deliver increasing benefits, reestablish working infrastructure, like electricity, and offer a results-led alternative to Malema's populist demands and simplistic remedies for the future.

The rise of crime requires now only the addition of quality armaments to criminal gangs before a form of urban warfare is foreseeable. Corrupt entry into military arsenals could facilitate that. Only it won't be gang-on-gang warfare as in the past. The era of insurrection may be looming in South Africa as national unrest contemplates militarization.

What this means is that government fears of an Arab Spring scenario, involving protesting students, as in the “Fees Must Fall” campaign, is misplaced. The students have not joined the EFF in any great numbers and have failed to form alliances outside the universities. What the government is perhaps underestimating is militancy that becomes militarized.

Is this a doomsday scenario? Hopefully it really will be just a scenario that never becomes reality. But the economic conditions of South Africa allow for such doomsday scenarios. At this time, there are no plausible scenarios that are positive and which betoken a planned and financed brighter future. There is only so much a technocratic president can do to steer South Africa toward the dream of an equal rainbow nation in which all had a share. It is a nation facing a looming storm cloud.

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