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Governance, Health Financing and Health Outcomes in Nigeria: A Quantitative Assessment

Abstract

Good health is essential to achieve sustainable development in any economy. Nigeria is no exception. No wonder it is the third goal in the sustainable development goals of the United Nations. Achieving good health also needs

to be well funded with institutional quality, hence this study. This paper examined the effect of health financing and governance quality on health outcomes in Nigeria from 1980 to 2018 using secondary data sourced from World Development Indicators (WDI). A co-integration test and a vector error correction model (VECM) were employed to analyse the data. Short- and long-term results of an analysis based on life expectancy and infant mortality as a measure of health outcomes and dependent variables demonstrate that institutions empowered with good governance could produce positive health outcomes in the country.

Keywords: health financing, governance, life expectancy, infant mortality, co-integration, VECM

JEL Classification: H110, I100, I120

Praktyki zarządzania, finansowanie ochrony zdrowia i wyniki zdrowotne w Nigerii: ocena ilościowa

Abstrakt

Dobra kondycja zdrowotna jest kluczowa dla osiągnięcia zrównoważonego rozwoju w dowolnej gospodarce, w tym w Nigerii. Nie dziwi fakt, że ONZ wskazało dobry stan zdrowia jako trzeci cel zrównoważonego rozwoju. Utrzymanie dobrej kondycji zdrowotnej wymaga nakładów finansowych oraz sprawnie funkcjonujących instytucji. Te właśnie zależności przeanalizowano w niniejszym artykule. W artykule zbadano wpływ finansowania opieki zdrowotnej i jakości zarządzania na wyniki zdrowotne w Nigerii w latach 1980–2018, wykorzystując dane wtórne oparte na Światowych Wskaźnikach Rozwoju (WDI). Na potrzeby analizy danych zastosowano test kointegracji i model wektorowej korekty błędów (VECM). Wykorzystując zarówno oczekiwaną długość życia, jak i śmiertelność niemowląt jako miarę wyników zdrowotnych i zmiennych zależnych, wykazano na podstawie

wyników krótko- i długoterminowych, że instytucje usprawnione za pomocą dobrych praktyk zarządzania mogą przynieść pozytywne wyniki zdrowotne w kraju.

Słowa kluczowe: Finansowanie ochrony zdrowia, praktyki zarządzania, oczekiwana długość życia, śmiertelność niemowląt, kointegracja, VECM

Introduction

Investing in health is inevitable because protecting communities from infectious diseases brings greater security and stability. Health is not necessarily the absence of illness and diseases but the presence of the populace's adequate (psychological, social and physical) well-being. However, most of the West African Countries are faced with different levels of crises in health financing even though the region has witnessed the outbreak of global infectious diseases in recent times, such as Ebola. Public sector spending on health is low in most West African countries, Nigeria inclusive. Most of the time, making health a priority has been a daunting task. Healthcare financing implies mobilising funds for healthcare services (Oyefabi *et al.*, 2014). It could also mean providing medical and related services to maintain good health. So, the essence of financing health is to ensure that funds and proper financial incentives are available and channelled so that public and personal health care is accessible to all individuals.

Health financing covers three essential functions. These are revenue collection, risk pooling, and purchase of health services. Revenue collection is how funds are raised from different sources to finance the health system. Risk pooling is how revenue collected is managed while purchasing implies transferring the pooled funds to the providers of health services to enable them to provide health services to the population (Asante, Wasike, and Ataguba, 2020). Per capita health spending in low-income countries was \$110 in 2015, which is behind target according to the World Health Organization (WHO). On average, the total health expenditure that comes from the government is less than 30%. This is low when compared to high-income and middle-income countries. This compels the populace to depend heavily on out-of-pocket expenditures (Asante, Wasike, and Ataguba, 2020; Aregbeshola, 2021). With this, millions of people do not have access to health services due to poverty. Out-of-pocket expenditure (OOP) constitutes almost 70% of total national healthcare expenditure (Alfred *et al.*, 2016; Micheal, Aliyu, and Grema, 2020). This high OOP has pushed poor households to self-medication, quack practitioners, and postponing medical treatment. All these harm individuals' and households' health and impoverish people with low incomes even more. Despite the importance of health financing, some studies found health financing

to improve health outcomes (Kulkarni, 2016; Edeme, Emecheta, and Omeje, 2017), while in some countries, health financing does not promote health outcomes (Nathaniel and Khan, 2019).

One of the following three models describes the health system of most countries – national health, social, and private insurance models (Kulesher and Forrestal, 2014). The national health model is seen as the universal health coverage of all citizens by the federal government financed through tax revenue; the social insurance model is funded by any employer, individual or private insurance funds; the private insurance model is employment-based or when individuals purchase health insurance (private) which is financed by employers or individuals. The governments of developing countries adopt different health financing models to achieve universal health coverage. Standard models in developing countries are private, community-based, and social health insurance (Domapielle, 2020). In low-income countries, the informal sector population is found to be excluded from the social health insurance scheme. It majorly captures the formal sector. In Nigeria, the Federal Government introduced the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) to guarantee better access to efficient healthcare services and reduce household out-of-pocket expenditure. However, statistics revealed that as of 2016, approximately 4.2% of the population were covered. These are mainly the federal government's civil servants (including their dependents) (Health and Managed Care Association of Nigeria, 2017). As a result, 75.2% of total health expenditure was accounted for by Out-Of-Pocket spending, which implies that 25% of the households spend over 10% on health, which exposed those households to catastrophic health expenditure.

Likewise, in 2016, total government health expenditure was 0.6 per cent of GDP (World Bank, 2017). This low level of government health expenditure was due to the economic downturn. However, it was further argued that even when the country had good economic terms, there has been a lower investment in health over two decades compared to countries with similar economic status to Nigeria (World Bank, 2017). There are also disparities in health system financing, such as uneven distribution of resources and budget constraints in different areas across countries. The health outcomes in Nigeria are not so encouraging. Life expectancy for males is 54.7, female is 55.7, while total life expectancy is 55.2 in Nigeria (WHO, 2018), infant mortality rate for Nigeria in 2019, 2018, 2017 were 60.662, 62.142, 64.708 deaths per 1000 live births respectively (United Nation-World Population prospect, 2019), maternal mortality rate for Nigeria in 2015, 2014, 2013 were 814.00, 820.00, 821.00 per 100,000 live births respectively (World Bank, 2012).

The government cannot be left out in making concrete decisions related to the well-being of its populace. Some empirical studies opined that good governance is needed to improve health outcomes through health financing (Holmberg and Rothstein, 2011; Osakede, 2020). Therefore, good governance has a role to play in promoting health outcomes. Nigeria has been described

as experiencing political instability, corruption, an ineffective government, and a lack of rule of law (Fayissa and Nsiah, 2010).

Good governance provides checks and balances in health financing for the system's proper functioning (Phua *et al.*, 2015). Corruption is experienced by 80% of the population in the health sector in developing countries (Holmberg and Rothstein, 2011). Corruption could involve bribing health professionals and diverting medical supplies meant for public use into personal use (Vian, 2008; Mackey and Liang, 2012). According to (Easterly, 2006), it is possible for donors also to influence bad governance when they support corrupt governments or programs that are not successful, and these all have effects on global health outcomes. More so, fungibility exists if external aid for health care reduces government health spending from domestic sources (WHO, 2011). Several studies have studied government spending and health outcomes, but few have investigated health financing and governance. It is, therefore, against this background and given the importance of health financing that this study aims to assess the effect of health financing and good governance on health outcomes in Nigeria. Section two presents the relevant literature review, while data and methodology are specified in section three. In section four, the variables are analysed, results are discussed, and conclusions are drawn in section five.

Empirical review

Governance and health outcomes in Nigeria

Faraq (Faraq *et al.*, 2013) examined the relationship between health expenditure and health outcomes and the role of good governance in 133 low-income and middle-income countries. The study proxied health outcomes with child and infant mortality, while the health expenditure proxy was total and public health spending and GDP per capita. Also, government effectiveness was used to measure good governance. The fixed effect model result shows that health spending significantly reduced child and infant mortality and government health spending. The study concluded that health spending is adequate with good governance. Likewise (Hu and Mendoza, 2013) examined the determinants of child health in developing countries in 136 countries between 1960 and 2005. Their empirical analysis suggests that quality of governance (control of corruption and bureaucracy quality) and public spending on health services reduce child mortality. Sirag *et al.* (2017) examined the determinants of health financing in 177 developed and developing countries. They formulated three public health financing models in their study for the countries. The first model does not include the institutional variables;

the second model includes one of the two institutional variables, government effectiveness, while the third model includes the other institutional variable, control of corruption. Using GMM estimators, the empirical findings showed that income improves health financing with an elasticity of less than one. Public expenditures as a share of GDP improve total and public health financing while lowering private health financing. Also, developed countries are characterised by a high quality of governance, while low quality of governance is peculiar to developing countries. Their study concluded that GDP per capita and government expenditure are important factors that influence health financing. Governance quality is also an essential factor that helps achieve sustainable health financing, which will drastically reduce catastrophic health expenditures and out-of-pocket expenses, which could further impoverish people experiencing poverty.

Bashir (2016) evaluated the role of government expenditure in Nigeria's health sector. They measured life expectancy and infant mortality rates against government expenditure between 2000 and 2013. Pearson's moment correlation indicates that when government spending on health increases, the infant mortality rate reduces, significantly improving the government's life expectancy and expenditure. In selected middle-income countries, Salatin and Noorpoor (2015) examined the theoretical relationship between quality of governance effectiveness and health economics between 2002 and 2011. The methods of estimation used were Generalised least squares (GLS) and Generalised method of moments (GMM), and their findings showed that governance quality has a positive and significant effect on life expectancy. Some studies (Thornton, 2002; Baltigi and Moscone, 2010; Santias *et al.*, 2011; Moscone *et al.*, 2012; Fayissa and Train, 2013; Ravangard, 2014) have used the production function approach to examine the performance of health care system, and this is mainly estimated using the ordinary least square (OLS) techniques. This approach consists of input and output variables, where the input variables contribute to output production. The output variables could be life expectancy at birth and infant mortality rate. In contrast, the input variables could be health care resources both in monetary and non-monetary terms.

Grossman (1972) developed a demand for a good health model. This model assumes that health is a durable capital stock which produces healthy output time. It is also assumed that there is a first stock of health inherited by individuals that reduces with age at an increasing rate, which could be increased by investment. The rate of depreciation increases when humans grow older, and thus, expenditure on health and medical care increases for elderly people. The model stated that a person's accumulated knowledge affects productivity (market or non-market). At the same time, the time he spends on earning and commodities depends on his health stock. When the stock falls below a certain level, death occurs. Consumers demand health as a commodity (investment and consumption commodity).

Similarly, a demand for a health model was developed by Galama (2011). The model predicted a negative relationship between health status and showed that a healthier population demands fewer medical services than a less healthy population. Keynesian fiscal policy has a direct influence on consumption and investment. It depends on tax policy and how public expenditures are administered. In the healthcare system, fiscal policy is essential to ensure adequate health sector financing, equity in health services distribution, and easy access to the populace to reduce out-of-pocket expenditures. Tax policy is the primary source of public revenue used to finance public expenditure, which increases the income level, expands effective demand and enhances the equal distribution of income. The policy also has a macroeconomic role in determining economic growth and income distribution. This should be implemented over time to prevent the occurrence of peaks and slumps in investment (Galama, 2011).

Health financing and health outcomes in Nigeria

Anton and Onofrei (2012) investigated the relationship between health system performance and total health spending in some selected countries from Central and Eastern Europe. The regression analysis performed with cross-sectional data explained the differences in health expenditure and the implications this has on the system efficiency. Their findings show that the total health spending and GDP per capita are essential factors explaining the differences in the health sector, apart from other lifestyle factors that could also play essential roles. Using the fixed effect model, Kim and Lane (2013) used two health outcome indicators to analyse the relationship between national outcomes and public health expenditure among seventeen OECD countries between 1973 and 2000. The results showed that government health expenditure reduces infant mortality and life expectancy. Their findings also discovered that men consume health services more regularly than women. Likewise, there is an essential improvement in health outcomes for women when spending on health expenditure increases. This effect is more pronounced than in men. The study (Oladosu, Chanimbe, and Anaduaka, 2020) examined the impact of public health expenditure on health outcomes in Ghana and Nigeria. Health outcomes were captured with HIV/AIDS, maternal, malaria and infant mortality. The study finds that public health expenditure needs to be augmented in Ghana and Nigeria to improve health outcomes. Using pooled regression and pairwise correlation, Sango-Coker and Bein (2018) investigated West Africa's private, public, and public-private healthcare sectors from 1999 to 2014. They found out that the women in the population lived longer than men. Also, in the public health sector, healthcare spending improves life expectancy, while healthcare spending does not significantly improve life expectancy in the private health sector. The findings of Bein *et al.* (2017) on the relationship between healthcare

expenditures and health outcomes in eight East African countries with the use of regression techniques show that healthcare expenditures contribute positively to life expectancy (both male and female) while healthcare expenditures reduce the number of neonatal, infant and under-five deaths.

In addition, Kulkarni (2016), in his study on examining the differences in the healthcare systems of emerging economies of BRICS, found that health outcome improves the Adult Literacy rate, GDP per capita, and out-of-pocket expenditure while the public health expenditure is positively related to Infant Mortality Rate. Boachie *et al.* (2018) re-examines the connection between government health outcomes and health expenditures with the use of annual data for the period of 1980–2014 on Ghana and Ordinary Least Square estimates (OLS) and two-stage Least Squares (2SLS) estimators. Their findings show that income and public health expenditure contribute to improving health outcomes within the study period. The health sector can be measured using four measures: equity, sustainability, accountability and performance (Health Finance and Governance Briefing Kit, 2015). Equity as a measure of the health sector aids better health outcomes, and it is simply the gap between health quality and peoples' access to health care services in a country. When the population have access to quality healthcare services, these services should be sustainable in the sense that the present and future amount of resources must be sufficient to meet the health needs of the present and future population. The sustainability of these resources also depends on the accountability and performance of the health sector. This will ensure checks and balances in the health sector and enable the government to implement effective health policies and deliver quality health services to the public in rural and urban areas (Sango-Coker and Bein, 2018).

Data and methodology

Secondary data were employed for the study. The data were sourced from the National Health Account (NHA) from the WHO database for public, private and total health financing, the World Development Indicator (WDI) of the World Bank, the World Governance Indicator (WGI) and ICRG for Governance variables. The dependent variables are life expectancy and infant mortality. In contrast, the explanatory variables are government effectiveness, bureaucracy quality, democracy index, GDP per capita, government spending on health, gross capital formation, and carbon emissions. The study made use of the health production function, which was postulated by Grossman (1972) and was also used in studies by Galama (2011), Riman and Akpan (2012), and Boachie *et al.* (2018). The health production function model is specified below:

$$Y_t = (Z_t, X_t) \quad (1)$$

Where $t = 1, 2, 3, \dots, T$; Y_t is a vector for the two dependent variables, that is, life expectancy at birth (LEAB) and infant mortality rate (IMR); Z_t is a vector for GDP per capita (GDPC), domestic government health expenditure (DGHEXP), gross capital formation (GCF) and Carbon emission (CAEM); X_t is a vector for governance variables that is, government effectiveness (GVEF), Bureaucracy quality (BUQU) and democracy index (DMIN).

$$Y_t = \alpha Z_t + \beta X_t + \varepsilon_t \quad (2)$$

α and β and are the coefficients of health financing and governance variables, while ε_t is the error term. By disaggregating the components of Z_t and X_t , Equation 2 becomes

$$\begin{aligned} LEAB_t = & \alpha_1 GDPC_t + \alpha_2 DGHEXP_t + \alpha_3 GCF_t + \alpha_4 CAEM_t \\ & + \beta_1 GVEF_t + \beta_2 BUQU_t + \beta_3 DMIN_t + \varepsilon_t \end{aligned} \quad (3a)$$

$$\begin{aligned} IMR_t = & \alpha_1 GDPC_t + \alpha_2 DGHEXP_t + \alpha_3 GCF_t + \alpha_4 CAEM_t \\ & + \beta_1 GVEF_t + \beta_2 BUQU_t + \beta_3 DMIN_t + \varepsilon_t \end{aligned} \quad (3b)$$

To specify the long-run model for the VECM, we have the following:

$$\begin{aligned} ECT_{t-1} = & Y_{t-1} - \alpha j X_{t-1} + \beta i R_{t-1} - \phi m U_{t-1} - \infty n V_{t-1} - \mu b W_{t-1} \\ & - \pi c Z_{t-1} - \varphi d S_{t-1} \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

To specify the short-run model, we have:

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta Y_t = & \sigma + \sum_{j=1}^{k-1} \alpha j \Delta X_{t-j} + \sum_{i=1}^{k-1} \beta i \Delta R_{t-i} + \sum_{m=1}^{k-1} \phi m \Delta U_{t-m} \\ & + \sum_{n=1}^{k-1} \infty n \Delta V_{t-n} + \sum_{b=1}^{k-1} \mu b \Delta W_{t-b} + \sum_{c=1}^{k-1} \pi c \Delta Z_{t-c} + \sum_{d=1}^{k-1} \varphi d \Delta S_{t-d} \end{aligned} \quad (5)$$

Results and discussion

Note that LLEAB means log of life expectancy at birth, LIMR is a log of infant mortality rate, GVEF is government efficiency, BUQU is bureaucracy quality, LGDPC is a log of GDP per capita, DGHEXP is the domestic government health expenditure, LGCF is the log of gross capital formation, LCAEM is a log of carbon emission, DMIN is democracy index. We used the three-year moving average method to fill up the missing data in the Excel spreadsheet for this analysis so that we would not have any missing data.

Summary statistics

Table 1 below presents the summary statistics of both the dependent and explanatory variables. Descriptive statistics lets us determine whether the data are consistent and normally distributed. LIMR, LCAEM, GVEF, and DMIN are negatively skewed, while LLEAB, LGDPC, LGCF, and DGHEXP are positively skewed. The kurtosis tells us that GVEF, DMIN, and DGHEXP are peaked relative to the normal distribution while LLEAB, LIMR, LGDPC, LGCF, and LCAEM are flat relative to the normal distribution. Also, all the variables have a positive mean value except GVEF, which has a negative mean value. The positive mean value implies an upward trend in the time series where LGDPC has the highest mean value while DGHEXP has the lowest.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the data

	LLEAB	LIME	LGDPC	LGCF	LCAEM	GVEF	DMIN	DGHEXP
Mean	3.8699	5.1528	12.4611	29.0470	11.1378	-1.0097	2.9929	0.5363
Median	3.8314	5.2476	12.3788	28.7284	11.2051	0.9889	3.0741	0.4956
Maximum	3.9881	5.3627	12.8619	30.0478	11.5718	-0.8928	4.5000	0.8535
Minimum	3.8140	4.7867	12.2013	27.9950	10.4688	-1.2146	0.5000	0.3315
Std. Dev.	0.0574	0.2101	0.2371	0.6419	0.3731	0.0667	0.9175	0.1082
Skewness	0.8966	-0.5088	0.4630	0.3316	-0.5255	-1.5252	-0.9094	1.6609
Kurtosis	2.2156	1.6044	1.6169	1.6176	1.7605	5.2235	3.8692	5.4966
Jarque-Bera	6.2254	4.8476	4.5018	3.8202	4.2917	23.1155	6.6037	28.0604
Probability	0.0444	0.0886	0.1053	0.1481	0.1170	0.0000	0.0368	0.0000
Observations	39	39	39	39	39	39	39	39

Source: authors' computation

Unit root test

The results from the unit root test are presented in Tables 2a and 2b below. Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) and Philip Perron (PP) are used to test for the Unit root. The result in Table 2a shows the unit root test with intercept, while Table 2b shows the unit root test with intercept and trend. In Table 2a, BUQU, LCAEM, DGHEXP, DMIN, and LGDPC are significant at 1% for both the ADF and PP. The LGCF is significant at levels for ADF and PP at 10% and 1%, respectively; LLEAB was significant at levels at 10% for ADF, while LIMR was significant at the first difference for ADF at a 5% significance level. In Table 2b, BUQU, LCAEM, DGHEXP, DMIN, and GVEF are significant at a 1% level for both the ADF

and the PP test. LGDPC was significant at 5% level both for the ADF and PP test, LGCF was significant at levels for ADF at 5% level and significant at first difference for PP at 1%.

Table 2a. Unit root test (Augmented Dickey-Fuller [ADF] and Phillip Perron [PP] test with intercept)

Variable	ADF test			PP test		
	Level	Ist Diff.	Remarks	Level	Ist Diff.	Remarks
BUQU	-2.5081	-5.0198***	I(1)	-2.2762	-5.9261***	I(1)
LCAEM	-1.1854	-6.0036***	I(1)	-1.2095	-6.0036***	I(1)
DGHEXP	-2.8382	-7.0166***	I(1)	-2.7709*	-6.4240***	1(1)
DMIN	-1.8901	-5.8869***	I(1)	-1.7341	-8.2459***	1(1)
LLEAB	-2.8497*	-1.0765	I(0)	1.3050	-1.0777	
LIMR	1.7859	-3.4762**	I(1)	1.0274	-1.2381	
GVEF	-4.7175***	-3.6563**	I(0)	-4.7361***	-23.4717	I(0)
LGDPC	-1.2215	-4.2121***	I(1)	-0.8291	-4.2659***	I(1)
LGCF	-0.9077	-2.6577*	I(1)	-0.7803	-5.0564***	I(1)

Note: *, **, *** denote 1%, 5% and 10% level of significance, respectively

Source: authors' computation

Table 2b. Unit root test (Augmented Dickey-Fuller [ADF] and Phillip Perron [PP] test with intercept and trend)

Variable	ADF test			PP test		
	Level	Ist Diff.	Remarks	Level	Ist Diff.	Remarks
BUQU	-2.5286	-5.0259***	I(1)	-2.3270	-5.9622***	I(1)
LCAEM	-1.9128	-5.9655***	I(1)	-1.9380	-5.9655***	I(1)
DGHEXP	-2.8823	-6.9364***	I(1)	-2.8305	-6.3249***	1(1)
DMIN	-2.8709	-5.9840***	I(1)	-2.3455	-12.6838***	1(1)
LLEAB	-3.5913**	1.6657	I(0)	-0.9228	-0.8153	
LIMR	-1.0717	-4.0421**	I(1)	-1.7322	-1.6351	
GVEF	-5.1814***	-3.8401**	I(0)	-5.1814***	-22.6869***	I(0)
LGDPC	-2.2744	-3.5648**	I(1)	-4.0260**	-3.9568**	I(1)
LGCF	-3.6665**	-2.9279	I(0)	-2.3613	-5.6603***	I(1)

Note: **, *** denote 1% and 5% level of significance, respectively

Source: authors' computation

Co-integration test

The co-integration test was introduced by Granger (1981) and Engle and Granger (1987). It implies stationarity due to a linear combination of two integrated variables with a common stochastic trend. In Tables 3a and 3b below, the test statistic's result shows that at least eight equations are co-integrated among the variables at the significance level of 5%. It could be deduced from this that a long-term relationship exists between the model's short-term and long-term equilibrium dynamics.

Table 3a. Co-integrating results with LLEAB as the dependent variable

Hypothesised	Trace			
No. of CE(s)	Eigenvalue	Statistic	Critical Value	Prob.**
None *	0.970991	421.1278	159.5297	0.0000
At most 1 *	0.898529	293.6824	125.6154	0.0000
At most 2 *	0.853295	211.3149	95.75366	0.0000
At most 3 *	0.767976	142.2190	69.81889	0.0000
At most 4 *	0.707508	89.62606	47.85613	0.0000
At most 5 *	0.501986	45.37060	29.79707	0.0004
At most 6 *	0.326295	20.27399	15.49471	0.0088
At most 7 *	0.154818	6.055312	3.841466	0.0139

The trace test indicates eight co-integrating equations at the 0.05 level.

Source: authors' computation

Table 3b. Co-integrating results with LIMR as the dependent variable

Hypothesised	Trace			
No. of CE(s)	Eigenvalue	Statistic	Critical Value	Prob.**
None *	0.944977	384.3059	159.5297	0.0000
At most 1 *	0.890390	279.9055	125.6154	0.0000
At most 2 *	0.849726	200.3157	95.75366	0.0000
At most 3 *	0.772142	132.0851	69.81889	0.0000
At most 4 *	0.760768	78.83986	47.85613	0.0000
At most 5	0.373435	27.34825	29.79707	0.0934
At most 6	0.240260	10.51818	15.49471	0.2430
At most 7	0.017242	0.626109	3.841466	0.4288

The trace test indicates eight co-integrating equations at the 0.05 level.

Source: authors' computation

Vector Error Correction Model (VECM)

VECM is appropriate for variables that have a co-integrating relationship. In the VECM model, the equation is different, and it also includes an error correction term (ECT), which implies the deviation from long-term equilibrium in the previous period. In a VECM model, we have both the long run (ECT) and the short run relationship. Tables 4a and 5a explain the long run relationship with LLEAB and LIMR as dependent variables, respectively, while Tables 4b and 5b explain the short run relationship with LLEAB and LIMR as the dependent variables respectively. In Table 4a, GCF, CAEM, GVEF, DGHEXP, and BUQU have a positive relationship with LLEAB, while GDPC and DMIN have a negative relationship with LLEAB, on average, *ceteris paribus*. Our result supports the findings of Kim and Lane (2013) that a positive relationship exists between government health expenditure and LLEAB. It is also partially in support of the findings of Anton and Onfrei (2012), who found that total health spending (DGHEXP) and GDP per capita (GDPC) are the most critical factors that explain the differences in health status. Also, two of our measures of governance quality (GVEF and BUQU) have a positive effect on LLEAB, which supports the findings of (Salatin and Noorpoor, 2015) that governance quality has a positive and significant effect on LLEAB.

In Table 4b, the co-integrating equation value implies that the deviation from the long-run equilibrium in the previous year is corrected for the current period as an adjustment speed of 0.37%. Also, a change in percentage in LGDPC, LGCF, LCAEM, DMIN, and DGHEXP is associated with 1.1, 0.08, 0.11, 0.07, and 0.26 percentage increase in LLEAB on average, respectively. In contrast, a percentage change in GVEF and BUQU is associated with an average 0.50 and 0.02 percentage decrease in LLEAB, respectively, in the short run. This supports the study of (Kim and Lane, 2013; Bashir, 2016; Bein *et al.*, 2017), that a government expenditure improves health (DGHEXP) and LLEAB. More so, the result also supports the findings of (Boachie *et al.*, 2018) that public health expenditure improves health outcomes.

In Table 5a, GCF, CAEM, GVEF, DGHEXP, and BUQU negatively affect LIMR, while GDPC and DMIN positively affect LIMR. This supports the findings of Kulkarni (2016) that GDPC has a positive effect on LIMR while CAEM has a negative effect on LIMR. It also supports the study of Bashir (2016) that an increase in the government budget for the health sector (DGHEXP) can reduce the mortality rate (infant).

In Table 5b, the co-integrating equations imply an adjustment speed of 102% from the previous year to the current period. Also, a one per cent change in LGDPC, LGCF, LCAEM, and DGHEXP is associated with 4.2, 925, 0.27 and 0.59 percentage decreases, respectively, in LIMR, while a percentage change in GVEF,

DMIN, and BUQU is associated with 1.09, 0.15, 0.21 increase in LIMR in the short run. An increase in LGDPC and LGCF percentages will have a very significant influence on reducing IMR. This supports the findings of (Anton and Onfrei, 2012) that the most critical factors that significantly explain the differences in health status are LGDPC and DGHEXP.

Tables 4c and 5c explain the response of LLEAB and LIMR to shocks, respectively. In Table 4c, the response of LLEAB to GVEF and GCF is adverse to a positive shock of one standard deviation. This implies that LLEAB responds negatively to shocks in GVEF and GCF. Also, if one standard deviation positive shock is given to BUQU, GDPC, DGHEXP and CAEM, life expectancy will react to these shocks in all ten periods. This means life expectancy reacts to positive shocks in BUQU, GDPC, DGHEXP, and CAEM.

In Table 5c, the infant mortality rate (IMR) responds negatively to a shock in GVEF, GDPC, DGHEXP, GCF and DMIN through the ten periods, while IMR responds positively to a shock in BUQU and CAEM through the ten periods.

Tables 4d and 5d give the variance decomposition for LLEAB and LIMR, respectively. The variance decomposition scale is the variation (in percentage) in the endogenous variables induced by the shocks (innovations) that result from any variables in the system (Akintunde and Satope, 2013). The variance decomposition also tells the level of information that each variable adds to the other in the auto-regression and predicts the error variance of each variable that other variables' exogenous shocks can explain.

In Table 4d, GVEF, BUQU, LGDPC, DGHEXP, LGCF, LCAEM, and DMIN do not explain variations in LLEAB in period one. The shock from each variable increased from zero in the first period to 2.00, 0.13, 4.76, 0.08, 0.61, 1.59 and 0.01 per cent, respectively, in the tenth period. GDPC and GVEF offer significant explanations for LLEAB, while DMIN has the lowest power to explain the variations in LLEAB. This supports the findings of Sirag, Nor and Abdullah (2017) that GDPC is a crucial factor to be considered in health financing and that a high level of government effectiveness (GVEF) stimulates public health financing and reduces private health financing.

In Table 5d, GVEF, BUQU, LGDPC, DGHEXP, LGCF, LCAEM, and DMIN did not explain variations in LIMR in the first period. The shock from each variable increased from zero in the first period to 0.48, 0.72, 0.24, 0.33, 1.79, 3.42 and 1.82 per cent, respectively, in per cent, nth period. C, AEM and DMIN offer significant explanations for LIMR, while LGDPC has the lowest power to explain the variations in LIMR. This supports Kulkarni's (2016) study that CAEM is significant in explaining the variations in LIMR.

The co-integrating equation and the long-run model can be expressed as

$$ECT_{t-1} = Y_{t-1} - \alpha jX_{t-1} - \beta iR_{t-1} - \delta mU_{t-1} - \infty nV_{t-1} - \mu bW_{t-1} - \pi cZ_{t-1} - \phi dS_{t-1}$$

therefore, the long-term result for Table 4a can be expressed as

$$ECT_{t-1} = 1.0000LLEAB_{t-1} - 9.59E-05GDPC_{t-1} + 1.43E-1GCF_{t-1} + 5.63E-05CAEM_{t-1} + 20.8839GVEF_{t-1} - 2.0619DMIN_{t-1} + 7.5530DGHEXP_{t-1} + 0.6757BUQU_{t-1} - 11.4384$$

Table 4a. Long run relationship with LLEAB as the dependent variable

Co-integrating Eq.	coinEq1
LLEAB (-1)	1.0000
GDPC (-1)	-9.59E-05 (4.2E-06) [-22.6115]
GCF (-1)	1.43E-1 (9.3E-12) [15.3098]
CAEM(-1)	5.63E-05 (8.1E-06) [6.9188]
GVEF (-1)	20.8839 (1.2515) [16.6877]
DMIN(-1)	-2.0619 (0.1096) [-18.8067]
DGHEXP (-1)	7.5530 (0.9627) [7.8459]
BUQU (-1)	0.6757 (0.0896) [7.5401]
C	-11.4384

Source: authors' computation

Table 4b. Short run relationship with LLEAB as the dependent variable

Error Correction Term	LLEAB
Co-integrating equation	0.0037
LGDPC	0.0108
LGCF	0.0008
LCAEM	0.0011
GVEF	-0.0050
DMIN	0.0007
DGHEXP	0.0026
BUQU	-0.0002

Source: authors' computation

Table 4c. Response of LLEAB to shocks

Period	LLEAB	GVEF	BUQU	LGDPC	DGHEXP	LGCF	LCAEM	DMIN
1	0.002867	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000
2	0.005468	-0.000403	4.37E-05	0.000433	0.000155	-3.57E-05	0.000427	0.000131
3	0.007873	-0.000757	6.47E-05	0.000958	0.000175	-0.000157	0.000819	0.000187
4	0.010119	-0.001251	0.000116	0.001593	0.000236	-0.000417	0.001166	0.000125
5	0.012128	-0.001639	0.000254	0.002315	0.000303	-0.000679	0.001484	6.40E-05
6	0.013951	-0.002006	0.000412	0.002946	0.000383	-0.000966	0.001786	-3.13E-06
7	0.015586	-0.002338	0.000547	0.003560	0.000461	-0.001242	0.002071	-6.77E-05
8	0.017051	-0.002632	0.000680	0.004111	0.000533	-0.001498	0.002327	-0.000131
9	0.018361	-0.002900	0.000801	0.004614	0.000599	-0.001732	0.002561	-0.000187
10	0.019531	-0.003137	0.000910	0.005065	0.000658	-0.001944	0.002770	-0.000239

Table 4d. Variance decomposition result for LLEAB

Period	SE.	LLEAB	GVEF	BUQU	LGDP	DGHEXP	LGCF	LCAEM	DMIN
1	0.002867	100.0000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000
2	0.006220	98.51087	0.418803	0.004933	0.484118	0.061696	0.003289	0.471948	0.044347
3	0.010146	97.24794	0.714240	0.005922	1.073470	0.053016	0.025325	0.829421	0.050669
4	0.014528	95.94780	1.089401	0.009257	1.725307	0.052327	0.094685	1.049068	0.032156
5	0.019210	94.73647	1.351241	0.022753	2.438840	0.054816	0.179234	1.197150	0.019501
6	0.024100	93.70365	1.551614	0.043627	3.044246	0.060148	0.274664	1.309658	0.012392
7	0.029124	92.80144	1.706913	0.065190	3.579019	0.066205	0.369997	1.402213	0.009025
8	0.034223	92.03308	1.827856	0.086643	4.034778	0.072229	0.459440	1.477978	0.007997
9	0.039353	91.37288	1.925366	0.106911	4.426338	0.077759	0.541127	1.541302	0.008314
10	0.044479	90.80717	2.004525	0.125551	4.761626	0.082760	0.614649	1.594314	0.009405

The co-integrating equation and the long-run model for Table 5a can be expressed as

$$ECT_{t-1} = Y_{t-1} - \alpha_j X_{t-1} - \beta_i R_{t-1} - \phi m U_{t-1} - \infty n V_{t-1} - \mu b W_{t-1} - \pi c Z_{t-1} - \varphi d S_{t-1}$$

therefore, the long-term result below can be expressed as

$$ECT_{t-1} = 1.0000LIMR_{t-1} + 0.0013GDPC_{t-1} - 2.14E-11GCF_{t-1} - 0.0007CAEM_{t-1} - 334.0696GVEF_{t-1} + 1.0228DMIN_{t-1} - 87.9806DGHEXP_{t-1} - 7.7408BUQU_{t-1} - 727.2442$$

Table 5a. Long run relationship with LIMR as the dependent variable

Co-integrating Eq	coinEq1
LIMR (-1)	1.0000
GDPC (-1)	0.0013 (6.8E-05) [18.8822]
GCF (-1)	-2.14E-11 (1.3E-12) [-16.7152]
CAEM(-1)	-0.0007 (0.0001) [-4.8214]
GVEF (-1)	-334.0696 (21.7041) [-15.3920]
DMIN(-1)	1.0228 (0.0683) [14.9820]
DGHEXP (-1)	-87.9806 (8.6140) [-10.2136]
BUQU (-1)	-7.7408 (1.4653) [-5.2827]
C	-727.2442

Source: authors' computation

Table 5b. Short-term relationship with LIMR as the dependent variable

Error Correction Term	LIME
Co-integrating equation	-0.0035
LGDP	-0.0420
LGCF	-9.25E
LCAEM	-0.0027
GVEF	0.0110
DMIN	0.0015
DGHEXP	-0.0059
BUQU	0.0021

Source: authors' computation

Table 5c. Response of LIMR to shocks

Period	LIME	GVEF	BUQU	LGDPC	DGHEXP	LGCF	LCAEM	DMIN
1	0.002442	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000
2	0.006421	-0.000136	0.000182	-0.000678	-0.000177	-0.000517	0.000524	-0.000473
3	0.010693	-0.000428	0.000349	-0.001081	-0.000406	-0.001120	0.001509	-0.001129
4	0.014785	-0.000765	0.000805	-0.001287	-0.000772	-0.001688	0.002455	-0.001765
5	0.018719	-0.001159	0.001279	-0.001372	-0.001084	-0.002345	0.003349	-0.002400
6	0.022523	-0.001526	0.001735	-0.001376	-0.001338	-0.003005	0.004215	-0.003051
7	0.026128	-0.001876	0.002229	-0.001343	-0.001584	-0.003621	0.005045	-0.003668
8	0.029528	-0.002212	0.002711	-0.001298	-0.001818	-0.004218	0.005831	-0.004246
9	0.032757	-0.002535	0.003159	-0.001245	-0.002029	-0.004794	0.006576	-0.004801
10	0.035816	-0.002839	0.003590	-0.001187	-0.002228	-0.005337	0.007283	-0.005329

Source: authors computation

Table 5d. Variance decomposition result for LIMR

Period	SE.	LIMR	GVEF	BUQU	LGDPC	DGHEXP	LGCF	LCAEM	DMIN
1	0.002442	100.0000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000
2	0.006965	97.30145	0.038134	0.068007	0.948745	0.064774	0.551660	0.566804	0.460424
3	0.013011	95.42009	0.119159	0.091312	0.961554	0.116103	0.899493	1.507184	0.885107
4	0.020084	94.24114	0.194962	0.198919	0.813909	0.196418	1.083654	2.127393	1.143601
5	0.027969	93.38636	0.272127	0.311815	0.660301	0.251451	1.261591	2.530383	1.325969
6	0.036533	92.74255	0.333993	0.408382	0.528952	0.281611	1.415831	2.813985	1.474694
7	0.045631	92.23486	0.383038	0.500298	0.425678	0.301077	1.537382	3.026283	1.591383
8	0.055146	91.82124	0.423138	0.584270	0.346815	0.314766	1.637601	3.189877	1.682290
9	0.065004	91.47860	0.456628	0.656709	0.286265	0.323924	1.722565	3.319123	1.756189
10	0.075137	91.19104	0.484530	0.719775	0.239229	0.330355	1.793835	3.423752	1.817479

Source: authors computation

Conclusion

Quality health is vital for everyone because of its effect on economic and human welfare. Adequate financing of the health sector and good governance quality could improve the delivery of health services and health outcomes in less developed countries. Therefore, we have examined how health financing and quality of governance impacted health outcomes in Nigeria over 39 years (1980–2018).

The findings show that in the long run, gross capital formation (GCF), carbon emission (CAEM), government effectiveness (GVEF), domestic government expenditure (DGHEXP) and bureaucracy quality (BUQU) have a positive effect on life expectancy at birth (LEAB). In contrast, GDP per capita (GDPC) and democracy index (DMIN) adversely affect LEAB. This implies that an increase in GCF, CAEM, GVEF, DGHEXP and BUQU will increase LEAB and vice versa, while an increase in GDPC and DMIN will reduce LEAB and vice versa in the long run. Also, gross capital formation, carbon emission, government effectiveness, domestic government expenditure and bureaucracy quality have reduced the infant mortality rate (IMR). At the same time, GDP per capita and the democracy index have a positive relationship with IMR in the long run. This suggests that an increase in GCF, CAEM, GVEF, DGHEXP, and BUQU will reduce the infant mortality rate in the long run, while the increase in GDPC and DMIN will increase IMR. The short-term effect shows that GDPC, GCF, CAEM, DMIN, and DGHEXP increase LEAB while GVEF and BUQU decrease LEAB. Also, GDPC, GCF, CAEM, and DGHEXP decrease IMR while all the governance measures (DMIN, GVEF, and BUQU) increase IMR in the short run. The impulse response result shows that LLEAB responds negatively to a shock in GVEF and GCF, while LLEAB responds positively to a shock in BUQU, GDPC, DGHEXP, and CAEM. IMR respond positively to a shock in BUQU and CAEM, while IMR responds negatively to a shock in GVEF, GDPC, DGHEXP, GCF, and DMIN. More so, the variance decomposition result tells us that GDPC and GVEF offer significant explanations to LEAB, while CAEM and DMIN offer significant explanations to IMR.

From the study, it can be gathered that good governance promotes health outcomes. Hence, the government should strengthen institutions and ensure political stability, especially in Nigeria, since we now practise democracy. Also, the government should increase its spending on the health sector in the country to improve people's longevity and reduce death so that when people are healthy, they can contribute to the country's productivity level positively.

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No Overactivism: Robert Lewandowski's Use of Gentle Protest to Avoid National Political Backlash

Abstract

The last few years have seen the return of athlete activism into major international sports events held worldwide as a mindset based on social responsibility and political freedom of speech has spread into the self-perception of many current top athletes. However, while these athletes may have experienced a recent personal transformation, the national political backlash accompanying activism remains set in a long tradition condemning political interference in sports. This article provides a background on the tradition of castigating political athlete activists, a theory on why and

how national political backlash occurs, and evidence on the successful use of gentle activism to avoid such scenarios. The research examines a case study of Polish international footballer Robert Lewandowski's 'pointing the finger' during a World Cup qualifier in 2022 to illustrate how alternative moderate forms of activism can be adopted. This study aims to introduce the term 'overactivism' into the politics of sport as a concept where the athlete prioritises retaining long-term political relevancy over maximising the political impact of a single event.

Keywords: politics of sport, Robert Lewandowski, athlete activism, gentle protest, overactivism, political backlash, taking the knee, UEFA RESPECT

Aktywizm bez przerostu formy nad treścią: łagodna forma protestu Roberta Lewandowskiego jako środek zaradczy przeciwko atakom politycznym na szczeblu krajowym

Abstrakt

W ciągu ostatnich kilku lat odnowił się trend aktywistyczny na niwie sportowej manifestowany na najważniejszych międzynarodowych imprezach sportowych na całym świecie, a postawa oparta na odpowiedzialności społecznej i politycznej wolności słowa stała się elementem tożsamości własnej wśród wielu czołowych sportowców. Jakkolwiek sportowcy mogli niedawno doświadczyć osobistej transformacji, towarzyszącej aktywizmowi, ataki polityczne w kręgach krajowych pozostają osadzone w długiej tradycji braku przyzwolenia dla ingerencji sportowców w świat polityki. W niniejszym artykule omówiono korzenie, z których wyrasta tradycja piętnowania sportowców angażujących się w aktywizm polityczny, przedstawiono teorię, dlaczego i w jakiej formie sportowców tych spotykają ostre ataki polityczne w reprezentowanym przez nich kraju, jak również pokazano, że wybór

łagodnych form wyrazu aktywizmu pozwala skutecznie uniknąć powyższych scenariuszy. W badaniu przeanalizowano studium przypadku polskiego piłkarza Roberta Lewandowskiego „wskazującego palcem” podczas eliminacji do Mistrzostw Świata w 2022 roku. Przykład Lewandowskiego posłużył jako ilustracja alternatywnych, umiarkowanych środków uprawiania aktywizmu. Celem niniejszego badania jest wprowadzenie terminu „przesadnego aktywizmu/przerostu formy nad treścią w aktywizmie” do dziedziny polityki sportu w kontekście decyzji sportowców, by przedłożyć utrzymanie długofalowej pozycji politycznej nad uzyskanie maksymalnego efektu politycznego w następstwie pojedynczego wydarzenia.

Słowa kluczowe: polityka sportu, Robert Lewandowski, aktywizm sportowców, łagodny protest, przesadny aktywizm/przerost formy nad treścią w aktywizmie, negatywna reakcja polityczna/kontratak, gest przyklękania, UEFA RESPECT (Szacunek)

Introduction

Since the turn of the millennium, the world has become increasingly divided for many. After the Brexit referendum and Trump's U.S. general election victory, both in 2016, a destabilisation of Western politics and the global community occurred, with divisions deepening and the return of mass political protests. Suddenly, after years of what now seems like relative stability, people are again being asked to take sides and get political. Our decision on whether to become involved in political activism is essential.

In its broadest form, activism can be defined as “action taken to create social change” (What Is Activism) by either individuals or groups that are prepared to go “beyond what is conventional or routine” (Martin 19). This means that political activism inherently and unavoidably contains both criticism and resistance towards current political policy, which it seeks to reform. Activism, therefore, exerts pressure for change, which sometimes is welcomed but most often is not. At times and places where specific forms and agendas of political activism are unwanted, regulations function as deterrents and disciplinary action can occur. An essential part of being an activist is understanding the consequences of one's actions and how this will most likely result in losing various forms of personal, professional, and civil liberties. However, there are also arguments to defend harsh responses taken against activists from politicians and regulators. Activism frames a political policy as unfavourable and rarely offers a replacement governance system to take over and stabilise once change has been enacted (Ellis 17). In other words, activists are good at burning down the house but not at rebuilding it, as activism

tends to favour revolutionary, not evolutionary, development. This means political activism can also unwittingly undo the many valuable advancements achieved in the past in the area for which it campaigns, causing even more issues than before (Haidt, Pluckrose, and Lindsay). The regulations and disciplinary actions, alongside the discouragement and even open hostility expressed against activists, are known as backlash and offer a powerful deterrent.

Responsible political activists are aware of the above issues, that backlash should be expected, and they could end up seriously out of their depth. For the professional athlete who needs to remain at the top of their sport to retain access to a public platform required for activism, the complexities of politics can become overwhelmingly loaded with just too many potential pitfalls. However rational this sounds, circumstances can conspire otherwise, and when an event such as the hostile invasion of one's nation occurs, an athlete may become forced to cross the line that separates sport and politics to become an athlete activist.

In 2017, Munshi declared, "The political athlete is back, energised [sic] by the resurgent national furore over race and the direct power of social media" (qtd. in Smith 2388), but "when activist athletes act with integrity and sincerity by promoting social and political justice" they rarely comprehend the extent to which they may also "face a hate-filled backlash of scorn and contempt" (Kaufman 215). This is because while athletes may be inspired by a "long tradition of activism in sport, there is also an equally long tradition of opposition and backlash against any form of protest in the athletic realm" (Hawkins et al. 3), which means the athlete should be "prepared to incur high costs" (Oliver and Marwell 251). So, what does this all now mean for the current wave of athletes becoming political who are more aware than previous generations that they should keep "their social and political views separate from their athletic lives because sports and politics do not mix" (Kaufman 234)? Furthermore, if, as claimed, activism is back on the rise and we now know much more about the process of backlash, are there techniques that athlete activists can use to avoid the most harmful repercussions?

This paper is an examination of keeping athlete activism safely within the boundaries where the athlete will not become cancelled, blacklisted, or banned following becoming involved in issues of national politics. From this perspective, the goal now is for the athlete to make the most compelling statement possible within that individual situation, enabling them to continue at the top of their career and make further, more significant, political statements. The key to this is to understand the difference between activism and advocacy. For example, when writing in 2023, if a Russian athlete were to appear at a closed domestic competition displaying a 'Z' on their clothing, this would not represent activism but advocacy. However, if that same gesture occurred at a major international meeting it can be called activism, even though it may be politically incorrect and overpoliticising, as it represents a protest in opposition to power for which the athlete can expect to incur

consequences. These are two extremes, but within them exists a straightforward means of balancing advocacy and activism to exercise control over backlash and avoid overactivism.

This paper pursues the logic that athlete activists should seek to avoid overactivism, not to disadvantage the athlete's ability to make further political comments. It begins by providing a literature review of published academic materials about backlash to political activism in professional sports. The materials on backlash have been examined for occurrences from ruling politicians of the American and British nation-states. The personal consequences of backlash on the athletes' lives, such as deterioration in mental well-being that then affects sporting performance, while relevant to this subject, fall outside the scope of this study. Here, the concern is directly focused on backlash originating from national governments and supported by international sports organisations, global media networks, and even supporters, all resulting in the athlete losing their position of political influence.

The literature review is followed by the theory of gentle protest and a case study of Polish footballer Robert Lewandowski based on the content analysis of videos and texts taken from reputable online news media sources and official statements. The politics of sport, which includes athlete activism, is still relatively new to academic research, with many past publications taking the form of mainstream biographies or investigative journalism. This study aims to establish greater credibility for the existing academic research on backlash to athlete activism and provide an example of gentle protest in sports to avoid the many pitfalls involved.

The 1960s Civil Rights Movement and Black Lives matter in U.S. sport

In 1968, Tommie Smith and John Carlos demonstrated to the world that no podium is too high for a top athlete to fall from as both were cancelled out of all areas of public influence and life following their gesture in support of U.S. Black Civil Rights at the Mexico City Olympic games until the global sports community reappraised their actions (Bass; Witherspoon; Edwards). Such examples now serve as a further reminder that "during their heyday, athletes such as Muhammad Ali, Tommie Smith, and John Carlos were loathed by the American mainstream" (Brown and Foxx 55) as U.S. media networks encouraged backlash against athlete activists standing up for U.S. black civil rights.

In 2003, long before the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement emerged in 2013, sensationalist U.S. media outlets had continued to refine their skills for manufacturing national controversies out of political athlete activism. An example is backlash generated against female college basketball player Toni Smith,

encouraged by ESPN broadcaster Dan Patrick, who declared, “Boundaries have been crossed. It is one thing to voice an opinion, but it is completely different to turn your back – literally, not figuratively. In turning her back on the American flag, Smith is doing more than making her point – she is rejecting everything the flag and this country represent” (qtd. in Kaufman 223). Following such incidents, Kaufman identified an interesting intensifier to backlash against athlete activists involved in anti-war activism: “In addition to confronting the patriotic fervour that often accompanies war, they must also contend with the near patriotic devotion that often accompanies sport” (225).

Sports journalists have always held political power. In 2016, energised by BLM, a wave of NFL national anthem protests began (Intravia et al.; Frisby; Trimbur; Houghteling and Dantzer) that sports media hosts, such as the controversial ESPN host Skip Bayless would label critically as athletes overstepping their “boundaries of expertise” (Darnell 16). However, what then happened surprised many as the President of the United States, Donald Trump, became directly involved. Trump targeted the primarily African American football players involved in protests and “used politically motivated, racially coded speech to mobilise a nativist, reactionary response” (Athlete activism is on the rise, but so is the backlash). Trump’s message was to the point and unforgiving, stating that “NFL owners should fire players (“Get that son of a bitch off the field. He’s fired!”) who kneel during the anthem” (Jenkins qtd. in Smith 2382). This sent a clear message to all athletes considering political activism not to criticise the Trump administration, or they could expect “to receive a tweet or backlash of any form from then-President Donald Trump” (Schmidt 47).

Athlete activism backlash and personal values were the focus of a 2019 study by Lauren Smith entitled “Stand Up, Show Respect: Athlete Activism, Nationalistic Attitudes, and Emotional Response”. The basic premise of this article addresses how “nationalistic attitudes affect participants’ perceptions of athletes who engage in a form of activism” (2376). It extends upon the work by Frederick *et al.*, who examined fan perceptions of athlete activism on Facebook that were “chastising and condemning the protesting athletes for challenging the status quo” (qtd. in Smith 2380). Surprisingly, despite the widespread belief that racist ideologies were most likely to be found as the primary triggers to backlash against U.S. Black athletes involved in human rights activism, Smith’s research found no such issue occurred. Instead, Smith concluded that data supported “the notion that individuals who displayed higher levels of nationalism would respond with more negative emotions to the athlete activism”, explaining this using evidence that “when an act occurs that threatens an individual’s feelings of nationalism, or a group’s collective ideals of what nationalism is – for example, kneeling during the national anthem – it is expected that members of the ingroup will respond

in such a way that will mitigate this threat to their collective identity and reinforce their own self-esteem” (Smith 2376–2378).

By 2020, and with the Trump administration established in the White House, the general patriotic devotion was resulting in many situations where athlete activists experienced backlash now increasingly from an anti-establishment and nativist fringe (Athlete activism is on the rise, but so is the backlash) further provoked by the pro-Trump media outlets. Fox News host Laura Ingraham is one example of many who said after LeBron James and Kevin Durant spoke out against Trump, “You’re great players, but no one voted for you. Millions elected Trump to be their coach. So keep the political commentary to yourself, or as someone once said, shut up and dribble” (Smith 2382). What had started with these media networks broadcasting protest footage of “former ‘fans’ setting Kaepernick merchandise on fire” for his role in initiating the NFL protests by use of the taking the knee gesture in 2016 (Brown and Foxx 63) has now spread up to the very top of U.S. politics and into all U.S. sports.

Taking the knee in British football

In 2021, a similar scenario began to unfold in Britain, but this time within Boris Johnson’s anti-European hard Brexit conservative government. In 2019, in support of U.S. athletes taking the knee across the Atlantic, the gesture entered European sport as players within the English Premier League started to take the knee before kick-off. The gesture would eventually be adopted by both the England and Wales national teams for the Euro 2020+1 (Back and Mills; Strange; Dixon et al.) resulting in a flashpoint between British politics and sport unlike ever seen before.

Disapproval of the English team taking the knee first surfaced lower down in the ranks of Conservative MPs in the Facebook posts of Lee Anderson, who began accusing the national team of inappropriately supporting a political movement. Anderson’s post read, “For the first time in my life, I will not be watching my beloved England team whilst they are supporting a political movement whose core principles aim to undermine our very way of life” (Tory MP ‘to boycott England’s Euro 2020 matches’ over players taking the knee). This opened the door for other Tory MPs to add their condemnation.

Conservative MP Brendan Clarke-Smith accused the England manager of insulting the intelligence of England fans as “they are just sick and tired of being preached and spoken down to. They are there to watch a football match, not to be lectured on morality.” Clark-Smith argued that the England team “were misguided and should have devised their own campaign at the time.” He continued to explain: “Black Lives Matter is a political movement and also promotes some quite eccentric and extreme policies, such as abolishing the nuclear family and defunding

the police, as well as many others” before urging the England team to “learn some lessons” from their errors (Tory MP ‘to boycott England’s Euro 2020 matches’ over players taking the knee).

The finale to the issue came after England’s 2nd place finish in the UEFA EURO 2020 final in London at Wembley Stadium in July 2021. Now, Priti Patel, the UK Home Secretary, had entered into the argument and “boldly stated that fans had the right to boo the England team, who were indulging in ‘gesture politics’” (Back and Mills 111). When confronted during Prime Minister’s Questions in Parliament, Boris Johnson refused to support nor condemn his MP. An environment of acceptable hostility had now been established where the English football team could be “criticised by Conservative MPs and B-list celebrities alike, [as] these sportsmen drew political ire for using their position to strike the pose in protest” (Back and Mills 111).

The use of gentle protest to avoid backlash

It is critical to understand the connections between the above examples of activism and national backlash to acknowledge the widespread belief that protest is in opposition to power. *The Activist Handbook explains*: “People who do activism reclaim their agency in deciding what kind of world they want to live in. Activism helps us bridge the gap between what needs to be done and what our governments are willing to do” (What Is Activism). This makes activism changeable as governments come and go with contradictory policies.

Athlete activism, however, varies significantly from many other forms of political activism due to its celebrity nature and the sheer size of its global platform. Athlete activists directly connect politics to sport and media when “athletes use their platform (visibility, inherent social power, and wealth) to speak out or build awareness about a cause or issue” (Supporting the Athlete in Society). Both the athlete’s fame and the global platform also greatly intensify the intended backlash due to overactivism that can escalate to national or even international political controversies. For this reason, athlete activists must act exceptionally carefully, knowing that their actions could find powerful opponents.

Gentle protest is a possible cure to overactivism based on identifying a way to make activism work by avoiding the extremes of oppositional confrontation. Fundamental to this is that activists should think carefully about their actions and the outcomes they may bring, as this can determine whether their actions may be considered advocacy or activism. To retain integrity while avoiding backlash, it is recommended that activists conduct their activism in a “way that models the world we want to live in” (Corbett 39). So, if an activist desires for the world to be peaceful, they should plan this into their strategy.

No academic literature on gentle protest in professional sports was available at the time of writing. However, recent studies on gentle forms of activism have occurred within the art and craft world (which sport, at a stretch, could also be argued to be). In Sarah Corbett's *How to be a Craftivist: The Art of Gentle Protest*, the author succinctly explains the logic behind non-confrontational activism. Corbett suggests: "Sometimes it is more effective to find a gentle way to help other people deliver the change we need in the world", believing the key to this is ending preconceptions of protest "as only being about shouting in a crowd" which causes a "negative connotation of the word 'protest'" and where "doing good is framed as anti-bad". Instead, Corbett encourages activists to become gentle where "to engage with people gently is to be thoughtful about your actions, consider carefully the most effective approach to each situation and keep an eye on the detail so nothing is neglected or rushed" (37–38). This represents the opposite of the hard-hitting sensationalist news channel rhetoric with strong political agendas.

Jonathan Cinnamon's article "*Power in Numbers/Power and Numbers: Gentle Data Activism as Strategic Collaboration*" also supports this position. Like Corbett, Cinnamon claims the most effective data activism is "strategically non-oppositional or 'militant'" instead choosing to pursue a "careful, consciously moderated strategic mode of action". Cinnamon then further expands his arguments by providing possible reasons why this may be the case, including the element of human connection, "acting gently modifies action so that it is experienced as recognising, and adequately responding to, the intersubjective and more-than-human capacities to affect, and be affected by others" (2). It is this ability to involve rather than divide that makes gentle protest such a powerful tool in the activist's kit while at the same time making backlash less plausible.

As Kaufman's 2008 landmark article on backlash entitled 'Boos, Bans, and Other Backlash: The Consequences of Being an Activist Athlete' concludes that athlete activists benefit most when they learn how to "distinguish between harmless altruism and backlash-producing activism" (226) as this was the most important lesson learnt from the past experiences of many athlete activists who jumped into national politics only to receive an "education from their activism [where they] did not expect their actions to result in such intense reactions" (232).

Case study: Robert Lewandowski's 'pointing the finger'

This paper will now examine the activism and advocacy in an event involving Robert Lewandowski to show how it is possible for an athlete to navigate the minefield of domestic national politics. Lewandowski is Poland's most successful footballer and the captain of the Polish national team. He has scored over six hundred senior career goals for club and country and was named Polish

Footballer of the Year nine times and Polish Sports Personality of the Year three times. In 2014, he began the most successful period of his career to date at Bayern Munich, where he remained until joining FC Barcelona in 2022 for a total fee of over \$50m. Lewandowski won the Best FIFA Men's Player Award in 2020 and 2021.

In addition to Lewandowski's football background, it is also essential to include information on the volatile political situation in his home country of Poland, which has significantly grown since October 2015 when the Law and Justice Party (PiS) came to power. Upon gaining a political majority, the new government began a range of reforms, often reversing previous pro-European reforms, which NGO-published academic literature on human rights now claimed to be "problematic cases during the previous government period that could be seen as imposing disproportionate restrictions on freedom of speech" (Zych). However, the previous government and their supporters saw this very differently, with rival progressive human rights NGO literature perilously labelling Poland's changes as a "slide toward what can appropriately be termed illiberalism" (Kostrzewski 1). Just one year after Lewandowski's departure to Germany, an endless series of public protests began that met with severe governmental backlash. During the protests against further change to the Polish Constitutional Tribunal in 2017, "party leader Kaczyński and his officials called the concerned citizens protesting in Poland's streets 'scumbags' and 'traitors'; his justice minister argued that a European conspiracy organised protestors. The government's media mouthpiece argued that the protests were pre-planned by foreign PR firms and George Soros" (Kostrzewski 2).

From 2015 onward, Robert Lewandowski continued playing professional football in Germany and avoided any controversy and backlash accompanying political activism. This resulted in accusations being levelled at Lewandowski of wanting to protect his numerous personal sponsorship deals. However, this pressure was then partly relieved by the actions of his wife, Anna Lewandowska (a multiple medalist at the World and European Karate Championships), who had been more vocal (Anna Lewandowska zabrała głos w sprawie aborcji. "Prowadzę tę walkę od lat"). Until 24 February 2022, and the escalation in the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Lewandowski avoided direct association with political activism and instead maintained a cultured and dignified personal profile more in line with a national diplomat. While writing this article, the author attempted to contact Lewandowski through his agent to clarify his motivations behind 'pointing the finger' in the match against England and if this action was pre-planned but did not receive a reply.

The idea of a star professional footballer pointing at the UEFA RESPECT badge on their sleeve as a form of protest was never UEFA's plan or intention. Nevertheless, nearly 15 years after UEFA launched their first major social responsibility program, this simple act has become one of the most prominent gestures available to athletes wishing to stand up for the values UEFA's social awareness scheme represents.

The 'RESPECT' program, originally named 'Unite Against Racism', was started by UEFA for EURO 2008 in Switzerland/Austria as just one of five partner social responsibility campaigns. It was the first time that UEFA had committed to such a large-scale social project, and, unfortunately, during EURO 2008, many efforts fell flat as double standards and paradoxes surfaced within UEFA itself. However, by the end of the tournament, the organisation had learnt an important lesson. They had issued a simple badge with the word RESPECT to be placed on the free area of the left shirt/jersey sleeve of all participating players, which had become an indisputable success. Based on a single non-confrontational and apolitical term, it showed how it was possible to unite everyone under the goals of a social responsibility program.

Unlike other campaigns, there was close to no media backlash to the promotion of UEFA RESPECT and the idea caught on so well that by the end of UEFA EURO 2008, it was agreed to extend the scheme into all future UEFA competitions and to make it an opt-in scheme for top European clubs to wear the badge during domestic matches. After EURO 2008, the next major event for UEFA was EURO 2012, held in Poland/Ukraine, which presented more significant social problems as both countries had long-established reputations for racism both within their domestic societies and national football leagues. In preparation for the tournament, UEFA launched the improved and now renamed 'RESPECT' social responsibility program, including the 'RESPECT Diversity' campaign. The host Poland, then under a strongly pro-European government, took its role very seriously, with the Warsaw-based Polish NGO 'NEVER AGAIN' coordinating an extensive range of educational and promotional events to remove racism from Polish football permanently. The tournament and social responsibility campaign were later claimed to be a great success (Jurczyszyn 251).

The gesture of pointing at the RESPECT badge originated as a response to the Welsh national squad taking the knee before kick-off at the FIFA World Cup Qualifier between Wales and the Czech Republic on 30 March 2021. Wales had announced in advance that they would be taking the knee, and the Czech team, not wishing to join them, opted to point at their UEFA RESPECT badge instead. An official statement from the Czech Football Association read: "To express their support for the fight against racism and other displays of discrimination, xenophobia and antisemitism, the Czech national team will point to the UEFA Respect inscription on the left sleeve of their jerseys, referring to the UEFA campaign of the same name, before the match in Wales [on 30 March 2021]" (Europe Divided on Taking the Knee during EURO 2020 Football Tournament).

This same sequence of events was repeated the following day at Wembley Stadium when England faced Poland in their FIFA World Cup 2022 Qualifier on 31 March 2021. As Benson describes, "To express their objection, the Polish representatives, before the first whistle of the match with England, pointed

to the 'UEFA RESPECT' inscription on the left sleeve of the jersey, which refers to the campaign conducted by the European federation against racism, xenophobia and intolerance" (Robert Lewandowski leads Poland players' gesture while their fans boo England for taking the knee). To explain their decision on why not to join England in taking the knee, the Polish Football issued a statement explaining that they were taking a "neutral and apolitical stance towards the 'Black Lives Matter' initiative before the game against England at Wembley" (PZPN) – a position further clarified by Polish FA President Zbigniew Boniek who said, "I am absolutely against such actions" (Which Euro 2020 Teams Have Taken the Knee and Will Italy Kneel against England in the Final?). Both the Wales/Czech Republic and England/Poland matches were played in empty stadiums during the pandemic, so the acts of taking the knee and pointing the finger occurred without a reaction from a live audience. Robert Lewandowski did not play in the match against England due to injury.

For EURO 2020, played in June 2021, just three months after the above mentioned world cup qualifiers, the Polish international team declared in advance that they would not be taking the knee, then managed to avoid all further issues on the subject as all their EURO 2020+1 matches were against sides who had also chosen not to take the knee: Sweden, Spain and Slovakia. Pointing the finger did not feature in EURO 2020 until England met the Czech Republic on 22 June 2021, when the "Czech Republic did not take the knee in any of their Euro 2020 matches. When they played England, they decided to point to the UEFA Respect logo in their sleeves on that occasion as a 'neutral, apolitical gesture'" (Which Euro 2020 Teams Have Taken the Knee and Will Italy Kneel against England in the Final?).

This now brings us to the main incident in our discussion. On 8 September 2021, Poland played England in the FIFA World Cup 2022 Qualifier at the PGE Narodowy Stadium in Warsaw, Poland, in front of 56000 passionate Polish supporters. As expected, England took the knee before kick-off while Poland remained standing and, as they did, booing and whistling were heard throughout the stadium. On live talkSPORT internet radio commentator Jim Proudfoot described the moment: "England players taking the knee. Boos from some of the Polish supporters. Moreover, as they do, Robert Lewandowski just pointed to the RESPECT badge that was on the side of the sleeve of his shirt. A nice touch, making his point to the Polish supporters" (Robert Lewandowski leads Poland players' gesture while their fans boo England for taking the knee).



Fig. 1. Poland vs England, FIFA World Cup 2022 Qualifier, 8 September 2021, PGE Narodowy, Warsaw, Poland (Image from the webpage: Football world seethes over 'appalling' crowd scenes).

Robert Lewandowski's action was the gentlest of gestures. However, at that exact moment, the nation's cameras were all pointing at him, and his expression of great disappointment in his fellow Polish nationals said it all. Lewandowski had politely and discreetly pointed out to a stadium and nation of Polish fans, in footage broadcast live around the world, that racial intolerance continued to exist and was now making a return to acceptability in Poland. Despite the intense political complexities behind the situation, Lewandowski's criticism did not incur significant backlash from the public, media, or government.

One explanation for the success of Lewandowski's gentle protest in avoiding overactivism and backlash could be its use of advocacy for UEFA's RESPECT at the same time as its activism. From this perspective, Lewandowski's gesture was an expression of support for the global social and political values of international sport as supported by UEFA and FIFA. Lewandowski's actions had been conducted behind an international sports organisation's protective screen that potential sources of backlash would choose not to challenge. Furthermore, this screen was a scheme that Poland was fundamental in constructing, grounding Lewandowski's response in a long history between Poland and UEFA stretching back to the work conducted by 'NEVER AGAIN' in preparation for the EURO 2012. It was consistent with the long-term goals established at the top level of Polish football that sat above the new wave of nationalism and protest that had swept over the country since 2015. Lewandowski was simply confirming his conviction in his beliefs and commitment to higher values in the same way as a Christian may mark a cross on their chest.

While the England team's activism continued to remain embroiled in all the ongoing controversies surrounding taking the knee, Lewandowski's gentle protest achieved a visible effect without experiencing significant adversary backlash. Immediately after the match, liberal Polish online media sources celebrated Lewandowski's beautiful gesture that showed his great class (*Piękny gest Roberta Lewandowskiego przed meczem z Anglią*), describing it as eloquent behaviour (Robert Lewandowski był zdegustowany gwiazdami kibiców). The state-owned TVP Sport, which had transmitted the event live on national television and online, withheld from reporting the incident on their website in any shape or form.

In Robin's 2014 academic paper on activism in South Africa, the author sums up what seems most likely to have happened by explaining: "These strikingly different activist strategies also seem to manifest themselves as contrasts between the politics of the instant media spectacle and the patient, long-term organisational work of 'slow activism'". Robin's 'slow activism' concept shows that "the activist's problem becomes how to translate the realities of 'ordinary', ongoing suffering into media-friendly images and texts that can evoke empathy and action" rather than the anger and emotion of sensationalism that "eventually leads to apathy, indifference and moral fatigue" (Robins 91-95).

Conclusion

The lack of backlash to Robert Lewandowski's gentle yet bold athlete activism serves as a notable example of how much can be achieved through purposely not going head-to-head with those in power whom you are now asking to change. Against the context of current Polish politics, his action of pointing the finger was activism, yet held in the context of FIFA's RESPECT campaign, established in Poland, was an act of advocacy and Polish pride. The gesture sat balanced on a fine line between both, where a more confrontational gesture would have encountered backlash and a less confrontation gesture gone unnoticed.

Mass media publications on Lewandowski since his action, including his transfer to FC Barcelona, confirm that the event did not damage his position as Poland's favourite footballer and primary sports diplomat. The act was neither a detriment to his career nor his reputation and allowed Lewandowski to go on to make even more significant political statements. In February 2022, upon Russia's expanded military invasion of Ukraine, the Polish captain led a protest of the national team to boycott their upcoming world cup qualifying match against Russia. This time, the action challenged FIFA regulation and was supported by the Polish government. The event contributed to FIFA's banning Russia from all international competition in alignment with the UN policy of imposing sanctions upon the Russian economy (Poland Refused to Play Russia Once. It May Have to Do So Again).

Robert Lewandowski has been a significant figure in international football for over ten years, over which time he has occasionally become involved in politics without incurring detrimental consequences. He is now silent again but, if needed, is ready to speak out. In Smith's important article establishing the connection between athlete activism and the nationalist backlash, he summarised his proposed solution: "By re-framing the intent of the protest to align with the views of the reader/viewership more closely... editors and writers can narrate the story in a way that does not threaten the identity of their core audience" (2390). The political activism of Robert Lewandowski provides credible support for this.

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Critical Review: The Impact of Political Prisons on Political Participation (The Case of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood)

Abstract

Many revolutionary figures throughout history proved their corrupted intention whenever they reached authority (e.g., the Iranian revolution, Burma’s Aung Suu Kyi). Some political leaders in Egypt claim they own it all depending on whom they represented in the latest major social uprising, and they define what is moral or who shall be the target for future political manoeuvres of the ruling military regime. With no one taking the lead for democratising the system, and the ex-minister of defence, incumbent President Abdelfattah Al-Sisi allegedly caught up in an internal fight with a corrupt government, the country’s better future seems to be a long and arduous struggle away. This paper addresses the overlapping and misleading

media and political utterances of Egyptian opposition, who either takes a popular stand or loses followers through democratisation itself.

Keywords: political prisoners, revolutionary change, conceptual analysis, political integration

Przegląd krytyczny: wpływ więzień politycznych na uczestnictwo w życiu politycznym (przypadek egipskiego Bractwa Muzułmańskiego)

Abstrakt

Historia dostarcza świadectw skorumpowanych intencji wielu rewolucjonistów, którzy objęli władzę (np. rewolucja irańska, Aung Suu Kyi w Birmie). Niektórzy aktorzy sceny politycznej roszczą sobie pretensje do legitymizacji dowolnych działań z ich strony. Za przykład mogą posłużyć przywódcy niedawnych społecznych ruchów wolnościowych w Egipcie, którzy przypisują sobie prawo decydowania o tym, co jest moralne, i kto zostanie przyszłym celem podejmowanych manewrów politycznych. Tymczasem, panuje reżim wojskowy. Wydaje się, że nikomu nie zależy na staraniach na rzecz demokratyzacji systemu. Jakkolwiek były minister obrony Abdelfattah Al-Sisi twierdzi, że toczy walkę z korupcją w tonie własnego reżimu, kraj czeka jeszcze długa droga, by unormować sytuację. W niniejszym artykule poruszono kwestię wzajemnie sprzecznych i rodzących dezorientację wystąpień medialnych i politycznych egipskiej opozycji, w których wybrzmiewają tendencje populistyczne i które sprawiają, że opozycja przegrywa na zasadach, zgodnych z procesem demokratyzacji, zmuszają ją do zajęcia popularnego stanowiska lub przegrania samego procesu demokratyzacji.

Słowa kluczowe: więźniowie polityczni, zmiana rewolucyjna, analiza pojęciowa, integracja polityczna

Theoretical approach

- This paper relies on the analysis of conceptual media and political speech (Guzzini 1–24) of the Muslim Brotherhood and their affiliated media organisations in Turkey. The conceptual analysis covers (the MB's opposition to the ruling military regime in Egypt) discourse from 2013 to the present to focus on what lies behind the mega media projects, which are mainly supported by the Turkish political regime, and to reflect on the Egyptian reality that the MBs themselves are not handling reasonably. Also, their fallacies have made them a target for public disgrace and are a reason for the lack of support for their appeals. No sides are taken in this paper. The only concession made is that the MB seems to be undergoing an existential and identity crisis, which affects its ongoing political and media performance.
- The conceptual analysis focuses on keywords or approaches targeting Egypt's politics and the ruling regime of Abdelfattah Al-Sisi. This analysis addresses the strengths and weaknesses among significant media and political figures representing the MBs or the opposition in Turkey.
- This paper tries to determine how political prisons have been the main factor in the MBs' struggle for power and how they are affected by or affecting the political change process through victimhood, imprisonment, or proclaimed superiority. In other words, the issue under study is how political prisons have been used in Egypt to stymie Muslim Brothers' and other minor groups' political aspirations. It is to be borne in mind that the members of these political formations have visited a political prison at least once in their lives. My objective in the article is to track potentially imprisonment-related alterations in MB speech, which seems sometimes problematic and sometimes – pragmatic.
- This paper also addresses the political imprisonment experience among MBs before the 2011 elections and how political prisons have not only become home to heroic politicians and fighters for democratic values, but also a mandate for one's truthful intention behind Islamic Jihadism or Political Islam struggle.

Limitations of the study

The MBs and other political groups have relied mainly on secrecy and private top management among the most influential members, whether inside the MB, the Liberalist groups, or others. Other influential civil society organisations have been led in recent years primarily by pro-regime or pro-MBs who rely on top secret management files. Therefore, this paper relies on public initiatives and announced plans of the opposition or the leading military regime, which reflects positive,

meaningful public changes in the country as advertised by the leading politicians. Finally, this paper addresses the MB experience in Turkey, not the entirety of the Middle Eastern countries the MB has ever been influenced by, such as Qatar or the Saudi regime.

Introduction

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) of Egypt seems to struggle with the pressure that has led to its members' division and internal conflict. While some of its low-profile members are going through an ordeal of long-term imprisonment, others, who are in the diaspora, are struggling with one another for control over the Political Islam ideology.

Hence, there does not seem to be any other political group taking the lead in the political change process or trying to pressure the regime to work on a democratic, peaceful transition of authority. Besides, it seems that without the Turkish government's support Muslim Brothers would not go that far with their political interests and call for a revolutionary change in Egypt. Therefore, many of the MB political and media figures claim that overthrowing the military regime in Egypt by the diaspora, by analogy to the Iranian revolutionary model, could happen at any time. However, these plans for change seem stalled until further notice due to the ongoing regional political changes.

Moreover, the opposition media does not seem to be influencing the public to revolt. They are only after making their voices heard. Other than that, there seems to be an overlapping Liberalist-Islamist media speech trying to bring together as much support as possible for the MB cause, which has been freeing their political prisoners. However, such confusion among the public as well as the closest allies to the Muslim Brotherhood operating on the home ground made it easier for many supporters to move forward by forming their own Political Islam mini-support groups.

Then, conflict loomed into view, with yet another wing of the Muslim Brotherhood trying to take it to another level by reconsidering the political negotiations with the military institutions in Egypt or outside allies (e.g. imprisoned members of the MBs).

Additionally, some critically-oriented politicians reject democratisation in favour of establishing another Islamic state in Egypt that would rely mainly on Islamic laws. Such demands has been showing up among some of the Islamist opposition in Turkey. They believe their significant losses in 2013 were mere results of relying on secularists' political alliances and state-building, which included participating in elections and allying with political groups other than Islamists who do not consider Islamic Shariah the only valid set of laws.

Besides, the Liberalist media and political figures do not seem to cooperate on any political opposition alliance or public mobilisation through media. Furthermore, many of the Liberalist or Islamist-Liberalist politicians decided to take steps towards their own independence, disapproving of other forms of opposition and sometimes praising Al-Sisi's regime itself (E.g. Poet-activist Yasser Elomda or Liberalist Hossam El-Ghamry in Turkey).

As far as the Muslim Brotherhood represents the far extreme right in the Egyptian-Arab political spectrum, they have not managed to become a powerful mainstream on a leading or ruling level. Although they did manage to work on a bottom-up social and political change a bit over the last couple of decades, the far extremist religious practices and their so-called religious awakening made them a target for long-lasting imprisonment by the ruling Arab-military regimes.

Occasionally, the public hate speech of the MBs towards Egyptian non-extremist Muslims or non-Muslims brings up accusations of terrorism crimes or disturbing the social peace. They are often sent to prison on these charges and miss out on the many ongoing political, economic and societal developments. As a result, their ability to communicate their political goals and understand social change is compromised. This is especially true given the rising education rate of men and women in many Muslim countries. These challenges usually lead MBs to contest the status quo, which seems exclusivist and missing on a co-existence concept or raises doubts on what extent the MBs may even abide by the changes needed for the country. For example, the oppressive utterances of many MB supporters made them believe they hold control over the public's religious choices and practices under Morsi's presidency.

Since the military coup in Egypt in 2013, the Muslim Brothers have made it clear that they are on a revolutionary quest to change the country socially and politically according to what they believe is the ultimate goal of Islamic ideology. While some internal or external Egyptian activists claim their participation in the same revolutionary movement, the movement seems to be taking its toll on many.

These pressures give the MBs the upper hand in claiming what works for the people and what does not based on their popular Islamic relationship with the impoverished in Egypt, who accounted for most of their constituency in 2012. Additionally, the MBs seem to be gaining more regional acceptance from many Muslims who see the MBs as leaders of the crusade against the West or globalisation.

However, the Liberalist and Socialist activists seem to favour more of a modern state, but led by the military, should the Islamist opposition be unwilling to cooperate with Egyptian opposition groups. Consequently, this leads to uncertainty over who may call for a revolution and who shall assume the leadership in changing the country's politics. However, the pros and cons of

each side of the political spectrum in Egypt have been evident over time. Multiple political figures in the diaspora seem to be leaning toward MBs with a view to popularity, forsaking the ultimate goals of their so-called liberal or socialist ideologies, which contradict the core values of Islam, such as transparency and honesty.

Meanwhile, many MB members have not managed to draw the line between what works for religious practices and what – for building a democratic state. In other words, any Islamic preacher may call for violence any day. Although many have claimed to be the voice of a political revolution, the MBs have ignored the other revolutionary phases toward a better future for the country by allowing for a more open study of the validity of the Political Islam movement or what it may offer. While many revolutionary activists before had considered the MBs to be their political representatives when in power in 2012 since they got the ballot box power, it seems that MB presidency was a disastrous choice. To make matters worse, many MBs lacked public experience as they spent multiple years as political prisoners.

Political imprisonment pre- and post-2011 revolution

Until recently, Egypt's political prisons seemed to be a favoured place for everybody who hated the ruling regime and could not keep their mouth shut (Aboubakr 261–262). Many activists, post the Arab Spring, visited political prisons once or twice for their anti-regime political activities that ranged from investigative journalism to protesting any new laws that control the press or freedom of expression.

President Abdelfattah Al-Sisi is not backing down from building new prison establishments (Chaabane). Also, the acting government is trying to bring up new accusations against many Egyptian activists, whether for disturbing the public order, spreading false news, or calling for the ruling regime to step down (Shaker 1–8). Thus, the ruling regime does not fear sending more politicians to prisons, which would guarantee that the only voice heard is the president's voice.

Meanwhile, members of the MB or denounced figures have been a target, and as they claim, thousands have been imprisoned for political reasons. Some have lost their lives due to the deteriorating imprisonment conditions.

Political prisons in Egypt once seemed to be the norm for many of the MBs, making them public heroes and courageous political leaders in the eyes of the major public, regardless of how many of them lost their focus after late or early release (Aboubakr 262–263) due to the torture policy in Egyptian prisons (DeGregorio 343–361).

In addition, the political imprisonment after the 2011 revolution (Seif Al-Dawla & Atallah 8–11) looks like it has taken another form of MB political propaganda, as they started to use it to advocate against the mere autocracy of the ex-military

general Abdelfattah Al-Sisi. Later, the MBs gained experience through direct access to multiple human rights or journalism groups to advocate for their political prisoners as faithful future leaders of change in Egypt or to bring about more pressure on the so-called oppressive regime in Egypt.

Similarly, MB's top leadership struggled to reach out to the supporters of political prisoners as the toll of imprisonment or enforced disappearances reached another level of fear and backlash in the aftermath of the absolutist management of MB President Morsi. Moreover, the military in Egypt had fears of the MBs turning over the political order.

This resulted in the military coup eliminating the top MB influences and members of the cabinet by sending them to prison under diverse political accusations, which led to the reshuffle of the whole MB ideology and political goals (e.g., MB discourse, which once revolved around their struggle for power in a revolutionary collective act, transitioned to fight against the war on Islam itself represented in ex-president Mohamed Morsi's overthrow).

The old-*neo* imprisonment struggle of the MBs as a form of political domination and revenge by the military has led some of the top MB leaders, like Mohamed Elbeltagy, to call out for a civil war or bloodshed in the Sinai peninsula to protect the newly formed MBs regime (Elbeltagy). This resulted in the civil war formula of 'your military tanks versus our militant Islamist groups in Sinani', which turned the focus of many political allies as well the MBs themselves from major political goals.

The performance of the MBs before the 2011 social uprising among other politicians was never meant to be absolutist or exclusivist since the MBs themselves had been banished for years to Egyptian prisons. However, the so-called first transparent and democratic elections in Egypt made them believe that once they had the ballot box, they could gain control of the political system in the country. Afterwards, many of their vocal figures blamed the military and the inexperienced young activists for the turnover of Morsi's presidency so soon after a year in power.

Although early on after ousting Mubarak MBs denied seeking full power or ever radicalising the society into becoming a more Islamic, similarly to the Iranian or Taliban models, as it would be in the military's favour to call out for another massive wave of public protest, the MBs claimed this strategy of protesting and ousting the president to be their magic act of changing one regime after another in the whole Arab region. Adversely, this led to another wave against the MB themselves, which proved their lack of commitment and failed promise towards their peer politicians, besides the shortcomings of their political vision.

The MB's political leaders and media figures have missed out on what it means to promote a revolution that includes a radical change of the political system or a transformation of the obsolete societal values towards a more progressive and

empowering system. These misled and mixed conceptions about sociopolitical change have led to the top-elite clashes between the Islamist wing (Abdelrahman) and other Liberalist-Socialist figures (Ismael).

Accordingly, many of the politically imprisoned MB supporters have considered giving up on political activism for the sake of an early prison release and getting reunited with their families over the long-lasting promotion of an Islamist state (Rights and Freedoms 2021). Additionally, the current president, Abdelfattah Al-Sisi, seems to be aware of the MB's present struggle inside prisons, advocating for pardon as was the case with Mubarak or Al-Sadat, who let multiple of the MB prisoners out in order to maintain the political stability of the regime. Besides, Al-Sisi has called recently for a possible reconciliation (Al-Sisi) with various opposition figures under one condition that they will not seek power change like with Mubarak's regime whenever he released any of the MB leaders. Nonetheless, this reconciliation seems flawed, and the MB does not have any other choice but to rely on propaganda to eliminate other rivalries.

This call for reconciliation has shaken the pre-established visions for the future of the Egyptian opposition from the far right to the left wings, from those who wish to avenge the lost opportunity to rule the country to others who see no harm in negotiating power with the military (Nada). Reconciliation with the ruling regime seems to be winning over the MBs and their supporters, failing to keep the same level of enthusiastic criticism of the Egyptian president on air and broadcasting from Turkey. Additionally, the Turkish and Sudanese exert regional pressure on the MBs to limit their share of media or political campaigns. MBs could lose a lot in the forthcoming deals.

Correspondingly, multiple MBs have not avenged the multiple phases of unfair imprisonment under Al-Sadat or Mubarak's regimes, and politicians do not see a trustworthy complete reconciliation with the ruling regime as possible. In addition, many families and political activists who have suffered harsh imprisonment conditions and unfair military trials anticipate further social unrest among the different socio-political factions. This means reconciliation is unlikely without breaking down the previously established expectations of Islamic ex-political prisoners like Sayed Kotb, whose writings were exclusivist. Many MBs see their political group as a leader among the opposition since they were backed by the Islamist wing in Turkey and other countries. At the same time, the Liberalist-Socialist activists struggle to gain any public support. Whether Al-Sisi acknowledges the MB's validity to exist or not in the future, the pro-Al-Sisi media have greatly contributed to turning society Islamophobic and advocating against the MB's return to power.

Unfavourably, if the MBs try to reintegrate themselves with the Liberalist-Islamist type of political groups, this will make the political divisions even more complex, adding to the significant disparities among the pro-regime and opposition

Liberalists, which may eventually fail. Liberalist Islamists assume promoting extremism as part of their freedom of speech or press when compared to minor influences of the Liberalist or Socialist speeches.

Political participation and media influence

This paper tries to elaborate on what went wrong, why it persists in the MB's political leadership and how it continues to shape their media and political speeches (Shehata 53–61) through analysing the media content broadcasted outside Egypt and the dichotomies of a blurred Islamic vision.

Victimhood vs. supremacy

The MB calls for the public to change their government have always relied on how victimised or superior they are as a result of a better understanding of Islam. Their target have been the less educated Muslims across the region. MBs presented their prison episodes as a fight for the bread and basic needs of the people. MBs called on the public in 2012 to vote for the most religious political leadership led by an MB candidate. Nevertheless, MBs knew they only got to power thanks to non-MB constituencies who wished to vote for change and assure revolution would be duly followed up during the presidency.

MB public supporters went on to claim supremacy over the public in political leadership and spirituality. Their eternal victimisation (Devasia 219–239) served as the only proof, at which point their political imprisonment turned into a form of revenge at the hands of non-MB supporters. MBs claim superiority and authority to make righteous claims of what is accepted or forbidden in a sacred Muslim society. Nevertheless, once Mohamed Morsi got to power, he acted as the favoured candidate for all the Egyptians, not only the revolutionary figures and their street supporters (Özdemir 76–123). MB's bottom supporters went on to push away all non-Islamist figures from having access to the highest decision-making positions, which later led to their engagement with the military in toppling the MB's president himself, whom they once voted for.

This is obvious in multiple media figures' approach in Turkey, as they claim not to be members of the MB. However, every now and then they show their distress and discontent with the non-Islamist political figures. The present approach of many MB youths is to denounce the MB leadership to gain public support. But they do not let go their claim for power. Furthermore, some of the ex-MBs tried to move forward by showing their support for some Liberal-Islamist figures who tried to form a so-called Liberalist alliance of politicians opposing the Egyptian military regime (Nour, 2021).

On the other hand, this political mess has not helped the Egyptian opposition to move forward or make any difference over the years of the diaspora efforts. The primary public has lost interest in any social uprising since all the people have seen was struggle for power and not a real change in the policymaking process.

Social uprisings vs opposition work

The media have discussed what mobilised the public in Egypt to revolt (Hessler) in the speeches given by the likes of Mohamed Nasser or Zawba. These media ignored that military insiders may have wanted to get rid of Mubarak and his family in 2011. Mubarak wished to transfer power to his son Gamal, relying on a corrupt presidential election. Thus, mobilising the public for another massive social uprising may have not been the effect of the MBs' revolutionary speech, as they never genuinely controlled the public.

Furthermore, the Arab Spring arose from common distress and public dissatisfaction with their politicians everywhere in the world (e.g. Greece and France) and not only in the Arab region (Syed 56–77). However, multiple media figures tried to argue the goal of the 2011 uprising was MB presidency and their majority of votes in the parliament. Also, MBs fail to come to terms with the fact that the massive demonstrations in June 2013 were a public demand to topple the first elected civilian president who laid bare the falsity of MBs claims who were not democratising the system.

Moreover, when the MBs realised they were getting trapped by the military who persuaded the public to forego the idea of democratisation and fighting corruption, they decided to start from scratch, trying to cooperate with other Egyptian factions, like the Liberals or Socialists. However, the MB media figures did not acknowledge other political forms of change, and they wished to get back to historical claims of eliminating all versions of political transformations other than the Islamist one. MBs in exile seemed to lose interest in leading the outraged public, but they were keen on benefiting from any attack on the regime.

In effect, MBs have come to believe Liberalism, Socialism, or Secularism are outside or extended influences of past colonisation, regardless of how valuable those paradigms are in mobilising the public towards change (Nasser, 2017b). Hence, the MBs believe only Islam motivates the public to take up the sacred war of social transformations (Monir). It is worthwhile to assess the content of most TV shows aired from outside Egypt and supported by MB media figures. They present a dire wish to turn over the military regime instead of working on trust-building (Nasser, 2019b) with other factions. What is more, twenty years ago, none of the Islamists or Wahabi figures claimed the lead in representing a better human rights status or fighting for social justice in any Arab country. Currently, many Islamists claim their

interest in fighting for equality as a secondary goal for democratising the system. Even so, the articulation and formation of their media speech ignores equality between men and women, between Muslim and non-Muslim or even the poor and the rich.

As a result, the MB media always try to hide their discontent with other political ideologies and claim their approval of Liberalism or Socialism as long as they do not contradict the intentional Islamization of the society. Despite contradicting the accumulative work of the diverse and adaptive opposition, MBs forget the need to work on mutual trust, which comes through hardships and a shared understanding of the struggle for power under a dictatorship (Sallam 4–5).

Generally, MBs – with no shame – denounce secularism by emphasising its limitations and adverse effects to filter outsiders' influence on their fellow supporters (Nasser, 2021). Conversely, MBs overwrite secularism with Islamic values to show the Muslim world how scientific (Nasser, 2020) or humanist Islam is as a religion (Alsagheer). Nevertheless, this secularist-Islamic merger sometimes wins other factions' support in times of elections or whenever they call for a major upheaval.

Religion vs politics

The struggle between politics and religious figures has shaped Egyptian politics over the last twenty years and have determined the political fate of Islamic politicians. This has been caused by MB work on public dissatisfaction with the government. The public has never understood why or how Islamists failed over a year in power. Then again, no one seemed to wait for an Islamic solution to end poverty and heal the malfunctioning health care system, for instance.

On the other hand, the current government led by Al-Sisi has never shied away from propagating Islamic solutions to appease public discontent by reminding the public to do more prayers and have faith in their God's will and live by austerity measures. Regardless of how Al-Sisi became the president of Egypt, he does not seem to be giving up on Political Islam itself. He uses Islamists (e.g. Salafist pro-military Alnour *Enlightened* party) to cover up for his failure or corruption, following in the footsteps of the ex-president of Egypt Al-Sadat who vanquished Socialists by appealing to Islamic groups to act accordingly.

This dilemma never ends, and MBs get lost in the so-called fit-all solution to the problems of Egypt. Looking at the kind of solutions offered by Islamic figures in Turkey, they do not seem to work even for President Recep Erdogan himself. MBs have been keen on reinventing the wheel by claiming Islam is one big solution to all of Egypt's economic and sociopolitical problems, regardless of how it was proved wrong on many occasions. Therefore, it would be hard to establish a public stand

against violations of human rights in Egypt, the fight for which has been mainly appropriated by MBs and their fellow regional allies, or to reconsider what went wrong, at what time, and because of whom the democratisation process has stalled.

Co-existence vs exclusion

The newly established government in 2012 was supposed to act for common good and not MB's hierarchy among different public institutions (Fahmy). Also, MBs did not have enough access to the military or security institutions, which were considered a priority for protecting the newly governing regime. They quickly failed in controlling the different leading government offices, from public finance to foreign affairs. Hence, this was a chance to democratise the system, which went to waste. Furthermore, the majority of political Liberalists or Socialists (Abdelfattah, 2012) Egyptian figures admitted that the vulnerable government of MBs was more exclusive than inclusive (Nour, 2013). On top of that, many of the MBs' political or media figures abroad thought they had won a big deal by gaining the protection of Turkey (Zawba, 2021). This resulted in an even more exclusivist media speech, hated by every non-MB (Nasser, 2019) figure who had ever supported the turnover of the Mubarak regime.

Besides, televised episodes were released by Hamza Zawba, who once acted as the Spokesperson of the MBs, frequently blaming the Liberalist or the Socialist wings for bringing all the political and economic crises that followed the MBs' significant loss in the presidency. This public shaming of the more civilian-like compared to the religious and political figures continues. Non-MBs were even accused for the Rabaa square massacre (Elshamy). In fact, the military coup was behind this massacre. It relied heavily on public support to cover up the killings of the MB supporters in 2013, who, back then, were eager to challenge the military power and relied on political violence instead of popular support.

Nevertheless, the armed military personnel did use aggression while trying to control the anti-regime protesters in November 2012 on Mohamed Mahmoud's street (Taha), when all the aggression was aired on TV. Charges of disturbing the transitional period led by the military council were raised. The military tanks also smashed Copts' bodies in front of the Maspero nation-based TV institution in October 2011, when they protested the demolition of a Church in Aswan city that was claimed to be illegally built by Aswan's governor. MBs did rechallenge the military for another massacre by approaching a restricted military area, where they claimed the ex-president Mohamed Morsi was held hostage.

MBs have always claimed bloodshed was part of their ongoing struggle to preserve eternal justice and fairness when they protested in the 2013 military coup (Zawba, 2019). Later, they went on to protest against the military decision by

claiming it was a move against Islamizing the nation (Zawba, 2016), even though that was not the main reason Mohamed Morsi himself was elected. MBs' supporters lost their lives or were ready to lose theirs as martyrs. Such a miscalculation for the situation ended in the massacre led by both the military and MBs themselves, who blamed non-MB activists for the bloodshed in 2012–2013.

Populist vs elitist politics

It seems clear that most opponents of the ruling regime are not angry populist protesters who mobilised the public to revolt once before in 2011. Many of them ended up in prison and lost their social and professional rationale for living in Egypt. Nonetheless, the vast majority of the opponents represent the elitist politicians who have found another means for challenging the ruling military regime by calling for yet another populist revolution. Therefore, the main target of the present opposition in the diaspora is to replace the military regime with another that seems as religiously popular as possible. Although many of MBs once denied that their religious background impacted their public work when they were in power in 2012, many of them have gathered other political and media figures to reclaim their moderate public image among the majority of Egyptians. Moreover, other Liberalist politicians have decided to move forward by persuading the most powerful of all political groups, MBs from Turkey (Kamal), into an alliance in an attempt to eliminate the military rule in politics. They have been trying to implement the Turkish model in this fight.

Whereas the public in Egypt has been squeezed by the harsh socioeconomic conditions over the last ten years, the political opposition in the diaspora seems to be out of touch. Many of them are so bold as to repeat that bloodshed is for the sake of a better future for all people that claim the president's affiliations with Israel to justify bloodshed. These narratives clearly overlook that sombre reality of many Egyptian families having lost a beloved one, whether they got severely injured in a public protest, died in a political prison, or lost focus due to the restrictions on political activism. The Egyptian opposition aims to fight against the ruling regime forever. It expects the public to follow in its lead (Nasser, 2017) regardless of the changing political goals it targets, as previously explained.

The Regime vs the opposition civil work

MBs relied on civil or charity work to align themselves with the people's needs. However, this established a new form of social relationships between those who knew better about Islam and those who did not. Afterwards, this led to the emergence of powerful, engaged upper-level, and well-educated MB

members among human rights or community research groups. Plus, foreign activists involved with global media and legal institutions advocated for the rising political power of MBs in the Arab region. Over the past decade, the military rule and its consecutive governments have been willing to take over civil society work in Egypt. This is obvious when analysing the tight grid of restrictive laws aimed at controlling foreign funds for the so-called independent civil society in Egypt. Another military tactic is to make sure MBs do use it to promote opposition's support like they always have from inside Egypt. While MBs have not done much more than (Brechenmacher 41) align civil work with their newly claimed robust regime of Islamists, the rising sentiment of rejecting foreign influence seemed to be in the same vein as the strategy used by Mubarak's regime to keep the societal aspirations under control.

The Maat Organization for Peace, Development, and Human Rights received massive support from U.S. and EU donors to elevate the state of development and human rights in Egypt. That said, a recent investigation by an Italian journalist (Napoli) exposed Maat for its image clearing of the Egyptian regime to make it look more humanitarian and progressive regarding many socio-political issues.

In the meantime, MBs developed their national and international civil work into a more global movement for the so-called democratisation of the system (e.g. Najda Human Rights Organization). Finally, both sides try to build bottom-up local support on each side of the spectrum planned by pro-regime supporters inside Egypt or pro-MBs working in the diaspora, redirecting the public aspirations towards Islamist or non-Islamist goals. Therefore, the massive media campaigns led by both sides seem to reroute public interest through civil society organisations. This may cause future social conflicts if not cleared through media or counter-campaigns set at filtering the air for a better understanding of the conflict of interests.

Conclusion

The people of Egypt do not seem to decide on which front they would fight or continue to sacrifice their basic needs due to years of de-politicisation and the lack of a proper socialisation system. Nevertheless, MBs seem to target business moguls and prominent figures across the region by reclaiming their powerful religious influence on many intellectuals to support their media campaigns. For the moment, the poor have failed the MB and never protested since 2013 to promote the MB comeback. MBs, on the other side, are ignorant or arrogant in their media for not calling for transitional justice or any democratic transformations. Currently, more vulnerable supporters of the MB are turning their backs on politics and MB charity. However, their media influencers claim to fight for the democracy they see or wish for.

The reintegration process of the newly or previously released members of the MB does not seem to be going fine since the ruling regime has been restricting their businesses and regular interests from outside Egypt. Besides, the clear intention of imprisoning as many members of the MB as possible, with the newly built rehabilitation centres by the government, looks like it will be taking its toll on the MB, who have been outraged and ready to explode. The government of Egypt seems to be easy-going on building new prison facilities and ignoring any political freedoms, even for the most Liberalist side of activists. In other words, the more MBs insist on becoming part of the political scene in Egypt, the more political prisoners will be locked up for years until they give up on politics or their Islamic ideology. Nonetheless, the government of Egypt is not working that hard on reintegrating as many ex-members of the MB as possible; instead, silencing them is easier and softer than accepting such a large-populist Political Islam group from expanding in society all over again.

In the end, MBs claimed their readiness to sacrifice their lives and families for the sake of bringing about an Islamic state. However, this has never seemed to be a public demand. Also, MBs acted with heroic manners in favour of leading the public to a better political awareness level. Such heroism turned out to be dark in times of despair like the one seen since 2013 until the present time. Also, political misconceptions seem chaotic and lack rationality among MBs themselves. Many of them admitted to leading by trial and error. It may take them another decade to reintegrate and appeal to average Egyptians with shared goals that everybody inside the country aim for. Hence, the emotional religious aspirations of many of the MB's followers seemed to be one of the most precious experiences they would never forget, making them reconsider their whole political ideology with some stubbornness about the changes needed. Some current division lines run between the rich and the poor, the most educated and the less uneducated. Whether they shall present themselves as a Political Islam group or integrate among other socialist or Liberalist movements in the future does not seem to be decided yet.

Until now, none of the political factions, governmental or otherwise, has developed or promoted a more inclusive political change plan for a shared future of the country, joining forces with, for instance, feminist movements that have been suppressed by pre-existing political powers. Multiple socio-political dilemmas have been overcome by the ruling regimes. The state of human rights has not improved for religious and ethnic minorities (e.g. Bahais, Shiites, Sinai Bedouins) as they do not feel empowered after years of the proclaimed political stability established by military rule or by the revolutionary work of the MB. Likewise, MBs claimed the military regime in Egypt manipulated them into believing they had complete power over the nation since they won most votes in both the parliamentary and the presidential elections. Obviously, once the parliament got elected, the military institution was unwilling to give up its public budgetary discretion for a scrutinising

policy. MBs continue to find significant excuses for their mass losses in politics to give themselves a chance to start over spiritually as if nothing bad happened.

MBs went on claiming to be fighting with the military regime for a more civilian control over politics. However, this was not even the case. As an example, the Mohamed Mahmoud massacre in 2011 was a mere result of the major deal established between the military and MBs to prepare for the parliamentary elections instead of amending the constitution first. The latter option was preferred by the opposing political groups in the election. Finally, the opposing non-MB groups called for major protests to amend the constitution first instead of allowing the Islamist wing to win over all the other political factions in upcoming elections, which was readily anticipated. Therefore, these protests led to the violent oppression managed by military personnel who imprisoned young Liberals or Socialists, held virginity tests on female activists, and received public Islamist support. Afterwards, MBs failed to keep on negotiating with the military for power, believing that the presidency would have guaranteed them full access to the nation's most powerful institutions.

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Fear as a Political Tool: A Critical Analysis of Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene's Fearmongering Narratives

Abstract

This paper examines the fearmongering narratives employed by Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene from Georgia in her political strategy. By analyzing sources, such as campaign materials, legislative proposals, and press releases through a content analysis method, the paper identifies three primary fear-based narratives this politician uses: threats to the country, threats to freedom, and threats to children. Moreover, the impact of fearmongering in Rep. Greene's electoral strategy and its success in Georgia's 14th congressional district, known for its conservative leanings, are also explored. By understanding the effectiveness of fearmongering, this research

sheds light on the dynamics of contemporary political discourse in the United States and its potential consequences.

Keywords: Marjorie Taylor Greene, fearmongering, electoral strategies, fear, right-wing populism, campaign, USA, politics

Strach jako narzędzie polityczne: Krytyczna analiza użycia strachu w kampaniach kongresmenki Marjorie Taylor Greene

Abstrakt

Przedmiotem rozważań w niniejszym artykule są podsycające strach narracje stosowane w strategii politycznej przez kongresmenkę Marjorie Taylor Greene reprezentującą stan Georgia. W wyniku analizy źródeł, takich jak materiały wykorzystywane w kampanii wyborczej, propozycje ustawodawcze i komunikaty prasowe za pomocą metody analizy treści, w artykule zidentyfikowano trzy podstawowe narracje bazujące na poczuciu strachu, wykorzystywane przez tę polityk: zagrożenia dla kraju, zagrożenia dla swobód i zagrożenia dla dzieci. Badaniem objęto również wpływ działań obliczonych na szerzenie strachu w strategii wyborczej Greene i jej sukces w 14. okręgu kongresowym Georgii, znanym z konserwatywnych poglądów. W artykule podejmuje się próbę uzyskania wglądu w dynamikę współczesnego dyskursu politycznego w Stanach Zjednoczonych i jego potencjalne konsekwencje poprzez zrozumienie skuteczności strategii podsycania strachu.

Słowa kluczowe: Marjorie Taylor Greene, podsycanie strachu, strategię wyborcze, strach, prawicowy populizm, kampania, USA, polityka

Introduction

The Presidency of Donald J. Trump will undoubtedly be remembered as groundbreaking for several reasons. One of those is the number of lies and misleading statements a sitting president tells. During four years in office, according to the Washington Post count, Trump has made false claims 30 573 times, increasing his daily average of lies from 6 during his first year to 39 during his last (Kessler, Rizzo, and Kelly). While this political environment motivated many progressive individuals to run for office or simply vote, it also gave a sense of encouragement and safety to conservatives whose political views lie on the far-right side of the spectrum. Trump's presidency normalized controversy. It was in that type of political climate that misinformation could flourish. And just two years into his presidency, in a surprising electoral victory, Marjorie Taylor Greene, a CrossFit gym owner, gun enthusiast, rapid conspiracy theory believer, and a self-proclaimed non-politician, who prides herself in being a wife¹. A wife, mother, and Christian, above all, was elected as the U.S. representative for Georgia's 14th congressional district in a landslide win of 75%. Two years later, Rep. Greene won re-election with a large margin of 32% ("Marjorie Taylor Greene").

Interestingly, Greene's primary electoral strategy from the beginning was centred around villainizing leftist politicians, whom she labels as "socialists" and "communists", often interchangeably, and framing them as the biggest threat to America. That narrative has evolved, adding several major talking points and other villains. This type of electoral strategy can be classified as "fearmongering", sometimes known as "fear control", a tactic involving manipulating public sentiment deliberately through amplifying and exploiting fears and anxieties by a subject in a position of power. Politicians often employ this strategy to achieve various objectives, such as garnering public support, mobilizing voter bases, or advancing specific policy agendas. Fearmongering involves the strategic framing of issues so as to exaggerate potential threats, instil a sense of urgency, and portray opponents as dangerous or hostile forces plotting against the state's overall well-being ("Fearmongering").

Fearmongering seeks to shape public opinion and sway political outcomes through the skilful use of methods, such as emotionally charged language, vivid imagery, and selective presentation of information. Excessive use of this strategy goes hand in hand with political polarization. It can have severe consequences relating to the safety of vilified individuals or contributing to increased politically motivated violence, evidently seen at Capitol Hill on January 6th, 2021. Anxiety, fear of crime, general distrust, and belief in a dangerous world resulting from

¹ Identifying herself as a "wife first" was the focal point of her early campaigns, in which she evoked a specific Phyllis Schlafly type of (anti)feminism. As of 2022, that word disappeared from her websites after her husband filed for divorce, which was formalized later that year (Metzger).

successful campaigns of this type are also essential factors in high rates of gun ownership (Warner and Thrash 294), which in turn has an impact on gun violence rates.

This paper aims to identify and analyze the central tropes in Marjorie Taylor Greene's political narrative and determine how successful that type of strategy is. The methodology includes a content analysis of source materials in the form of Rep. Greene's legislative proposals, campaign materials, and press releases available on her official and archived websites. Elements of quantitative methods based on comparative statistical data, such as election results or results of elections, are also employed. Several data analysis tools, such as the Cook Partisan Voting Index, were used to provide an electoral context of the congressional district of this representative. Lastly, the implications of fear-based strategies on the democratic system, personal safety, and political polarization are stated.

The 14th Congressional District of Georgia analysis

Georgia's 14th Congressional area comprises rural and urban communities and spans several counties. This presents a distinctive political landscape. Recent years have seen a change in the demographics of the 14th Congressional District, particularly a rise in racial and economic diversity due to population growth. While the district's population is still predominantly white (as of Feb. 2023, 70% of active voters in the district were white and not of Hispanic Origin), there has been an increase in the number of people of colour. People who identify as African American or Black now constitute 12% of active voters but are still less than the overall percentage of Black voters in the state, which is 29% ("Election Data Hub | Georgia Secretary of State"). The political climate in the district may be impacted by this demographic change as candidates and campaigns increasingly tap into the racial tensions that can result from such diversification in a deeply conservative state. This racial tension is illustrated by 2021 data from the U.S. Department of Justice. The state of Georgia notes an annual increase in the number of hate crimes motivated by race, ethnicity, or ancestry, which more than doubled within the past few years – from 77 incidents in 2019 and 132 in 2020 to 164 in 2021 (U.S. Department of Justice).

The 14th Congressional District's predominately conservative leanings are one of its defining characteristics. Historically, the state of Georgia has continuously elected Republican legislators, making it a stronghold for the Party. For example, for the past 20 years, this state had only Republican governors. Since 1984, Democratic candidates have won in Georgia only twice out of ten presidential elections, including most recently in 2020, by a 0.2% margin, thanks to strong Democratic support in the urban and racially diverse Atlanta metro area.

The GA-14's voting habits reflect this conservative sway, with Republican candidates often drawing substantial support in both local and federal elections. For the past ten years, the district had only Republican representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives ("Georgia Presidential Election Voting History").

That is evident in the Cook Partisan Voting Index (Cook PVI), which "measures how each district performs at the presidential level compared to the nation as a whole." According to the newest report published in April 2023, GA-14 has a PVI of R+22, which means the district has performed an average of 22 points more Republican than the national average, coming 28th on the list of the most Republican districts in the country ("2023 Cook PVISM: District Map and List (118th Congress)"). Interestingly, in the 2017 report, GA-14 has a PVI of R+27 ("Partisan Voting Index Districts of the 115th Congress" 2A.3), meaning that Georgian voters from District 14 are now less likely to be voting for a Republican candidate than just a few years ago. That is reflected by the smaller margin of Rep. Greene's win during her re-election, compared to her first run for the office, which in 2020 constituted 50% and in 2022 32%. What is important to note is that Rep. Greene's 2020 win can be partially attributed to the withdrawal of the Democratic candidate, Kevin Van Ausdal, whose name, despite this, remained on the ballot, earning over 25% of the votes. Looking solely at the number of people who decided to cast their votes on her during her re-election, Rep. Greene's voter base decreased by about 26%, from 229,827 in 2020 to 170,162 in 2022 ("Marjorie Taylor Greene"). This means that Mrs Greene lost almost 60 thousand votes from her electoral base, indicating potential dissatisfaction among her constituents.

Overall, the 14th Congressional District of Georgia stands as an intriguing political entity, combining conservative values and evolving demographic trends. Its voting patterns, economic composition, and changing demographics make it a closely watched district during elections. Conservative principles prevalent in the area frequently align with concerns like little government intrusion, lower taxes, and a strong emphasis on individual liberty. The district's political landscape will likely continue to evolve as demographic shifts, economic developments, and evolving ideologies shape its future political trajectory.

Fearmongering narratives in Rep. Greene's political strategy

Researcher Davor Marko defines fear management as a subject of power's "ability to recognize the manipulative potential of fear, to define its content (the object of fear) and its scope, and to use various techniques to spread it in order to create a context of fear within which ordinary individuals will be easier manipulated and controlled" (Marko 201). To successfully exercise this type of strategy according

to Marko, one must define who or what is the object of fear or the “scapegoat” (various “others”, “enemies”), who is supposed to feel the fear and to be the receptor of the message and who is the mediator controlling the narrative and flow of fear in public space (Marko 202). Sociologist Barry Glassner identified three techniques of fearmongering – repetition, portraying isolated incidents as trends, and misdirection (Glassner 822).

During the past few years, the American public has noticed a significant increase in the popularity of right-wing populism, as voters are being increasingly attacked by fear-inducing narratives from the media, as well as from Republican politicians. A close look at Rep. Greene’s campaign materials, political statements, press releases, and introduced legislation shows a complex array of causes she is involved in that nevertheless form a complete picture. Her Congress campaign website showcases nine issues she put at the centre of her electoral strategy. She promises to: “Defund the FBI”, “Impeach Biden”, “Investigate [Anthony] Fauci”, “Protect children”, “End abortion in America”, “Protect the 2A [Second Amendment]”, “America First”, “Defend traditional American values” and “Secure the borders” (“Issues”). Her main website’s homepage highlights three initiatives: *Protect Children’s Innocence Act*, *Impeachment of President Joe Biden*, and *Protect America First Act* (“Representative Marjorie Greene”). These three acts are among thirty-nine she introduced during her term in office. Some of the others include the impeachments of Nicholas Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security, Merrick Garland, Attorney General, of Christopher Asher Wray, Director of the FBI, of Matthew Graves, US Attorney for the D.C., designating Antifa as a domestic terrorist organization, several acts, like *Protecting Mothers and Babies from Terrorism Act*, *21st Century FREE Speech Act*, *Justice for Vaccine Victims Act of 2022*, *Kyle H. Rittenhouse² Congressional Gold Medal Act*, *Fire Fauci Act*, and more. Her first-ever introduced legislation was to impeach President Biden for “enabling bribery and other high crimes and misdemeanours” (“House Sponsor”). Several tropes in MTG’s political narrative regarding fearmongering strategies can be detected. Most important can be divided into three categories: threats to the country rooted in the Red Scare era propaganda, threats to freedom, and threats to children.

The Red Scare refers to a period of intense fear and paranoia about communism, socialism, and leftist ideologies that swept across the United States during the early to mid-20th century. It emerged in two distinct waves: the First Red Scare related to the Russian Revolution, which occurred around World War I, and the Second Red Scare, which emerged during the Cold War era following World War II. Both periods were characterized by widespread fear of communist infiltration and espionage

² Kyle Rittenhouse is a teen who, during Black Lives Matter protests in Kenosha, Wisconsin, fatally shot two people and injured one more with his AR-15-style rifle. Claiming self-defence, he was later acquitted of all charges during a criminal trial. Subsequently, he became a rising star for Second Amendment rights defenders (Sullivan).

within the United States. This fear seems to take root deeply in the fabric of the U.S., as to this day, it can be, and still is, tapped into by conservative politicians. A lasting legacy like that can be easily abused. That is conspicuous in Marjorie Taylor Greene's campaign materials and political strategy in general. The most obvious example of that is her slogan: "Save America, Stop Communism", or a statement on her electoral site: "While the communist Democrat Party wields ever-more terrifying authoritarian power over the people of America, Marjorie Taylor Greene is leading the resistance" ("Marjorie Taylor Greene for America"). Of particular interest is her first campaign spot, now archived, which uses strong visual messages in the form of stark imagery of the so-called Squad (progressive Democratic representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, and Rashida Tlaib, two of whom are first Muslim women sworn into the House), vivid red images, and drastic font. Rep. Greene tries to convey a sense of threat to the U.S., which these four women seemingly pose along with their dangerous ideas. On the same site, Marjorie positions herself "against the left-wing socialists who want to wreck our country" ("Home – Marjorie Greene for Congress"). What can be noticed is a shift from villainizing "socialism" in the early stages to "communism" later on. These two terms are often used interchangeably, seemingly synonymous to her and her voters, yet "communism" seems to bring more terror among Americans, and perhaps that could be the reason for that shift in terminology. Lately, journalists like David Graham have started to point out a new conservative bogeyman – "wokeness", a trend he backs up by the popularity of this theme in Fox News (a Republican T.V. channel) and Google search trends (Graham).

One of her resolutions was to declare the ANTIFA (short for anti-fascist) movement a domestic terrorist organization despite a lack of evidence that people affiliating themselves with this social front are in any way organized or interconnected or that they pose any significant threat to the country – in contrast with various far-right groups responsible for example for the January 6th attack on Capitol. Marjorie writes "Over the past several years, Antifa-affiliated groups and individuals have been burning down cities across the country, destroying property, assaulting police officers, beating innocent people, and causing billions of dollars in damages" ("Congresswoman MTG Reintroduces..."). This most likely refers to the chaos that followed some Black Lives Matter protests. While governmental data usually refrains from using terms such as "far-right" or "far-left" when referring to domestic terrorists, instead opting for terms like "racially motivated" or "anti-government", a significant increase in crime and terrorist attacks attributed to the conservative side of the political spectrum can be noted all across the board. According to the Department of Homeland Security and FBI's reports, between 2020 and 2021, the number of federal investigations into cases of domestic terrorism almost doubled, and most of these were related to the Attack on the Capitol, fueled by many Republican politicians (FBI and DHS). Moreover,

an analysis of data provided through the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Crime Data Explorer tool shows that each year, the number of hate crimes committed by white offenders grows, and this group still commits the most crimes of this type, which could be the result of fearmongering strategies (FBI).

A significant trope in her public statements is the idea of a global conspiracy of elites, which includes the Democrats. Many of her statements also reflected the popular online conspiracy theory, QAnon, that glorified former President Donald Trump as "the chosen one" who will unleash "the storm" or unmask all the most influential conspirators. In line with that idea of depravation in the White House and on Capitol Hill, Mrs Greene often uses a juxtaposition to show she has nothing in common with them – she claims not to be a politician, and therefore not corrupt but instead acting in the best interest of her constituents (as opposed to "the evil leftist elites").

Fearmongering based on leftover red scare fears is very closely connected to the idea of an outside threat to the country. With time, the direction of the threat moved inwards (i.e. a fear of Soviet nuclear attacks transformed into a general sense of espionage-related paranoia or of hostile conspiracy within the U.S. government), and now, while outside threats are still crucial in that discourse, the spotlight is on internal, domestic dangers. Except for the conspiracy of the elites, one of the core causes for Rep. Greene is related to immigrants and policies that regulate migration, specifically from the southern border with Mexico. As Ms. Greene says: "Joe Biden is rewarding human traffickers and coyotes who smuggle illegal aliens across the border" ("Protect America First Act"). Moreover, "On our Southern border, Joe Biden has allowed hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of illegal aliens into our country. His administration, along with Kamala Harris, has violated our immigration laws, deprived our Border Patrol of workforce and resources, and created a national security crisis by allowing unknown foreign nationals into our country who wish to harm Americans" ("Impeachment of President Joe Biden"). It is through the use of stigmatising language and narratives like this one, that Rep. Greene manages to tap into both types of fears still evident in the American society: of an administration with a sinister agenda, hostile towards their own people, and of an "unknown", "illegal", "alien" outside threat, in the form of "foreign nationals (...) who wish to harm Americans".

Right-wing fearmongering narratives in the USA often centre around threats to freedom, specifically in the context of the Second Amendment right to bear arms, free speech, and the often controversial during the COVID-19 pandemic issue of vaccination or mask requirements. These narratives exploit fears and anxieties by framing potential restrictions or regulations as encroachments on individual liberties. Proponents of Second Amendment rights often amplify concerns that gun control measures will lead to the erosion of personal freedoms and the government infringing upon citizens' ability to protect themselves. Similarly, mask or

vaccine-related fearmongering narratives invoke arguments around individual autonomy and personal choice, emphasizing the perceived threat of mandated vaccinations as an infringement on personal freedom. As a response to multiple bans on most social media platforms for repeated coronavirus misinformation, hate speech, and general violation of terms and conditions, Rep. Greene has introduced Bill H.R. 7613, *21st Century Foundation for the Right to Express and Engage in Speech Act* through which social media platforms would have a limited scope of control over the content.

These narratives tap into deep-rooted beliefs and values associated with personal liberties, fostering a sense of urgency and resistance to perceived threats while disregarding the broader public health implications or the enormous issue of gun violence, especially towards schoolchildren. Interestingly, the same bodily autonomy that must be respected regarding masks and vaccines is ignored whenever the topic of abortion is brought up.

The third theme of MTG's strategies is related to children, arguably the most powerful tool she employs, which attracts especially undecided politically parents into her base, in whom such causes tend to strike a chord. Within that narrative, one can find two causes – fighting against inclusive services and communities for transgender people and a fight against abortion. Marjorie says: "America's children are being systematically indoctrinated with perverse gender ideology by teachers, mental health counsellors, and on social media platforms." ("Protect Children's Innocence Act"), trying to evoke a sense of danger and evil, perverse forces that lure the children towards deprivation. On the issue of abortion, on the other hand, she uses terminology common among anti-abortion activists, such as "unborn child" instead of the universally used within the medical sphere "fetus", which convinces the recipient of that message to think of abortion as murder instead of a medical procedure. She states: "Unborn children should not be condemned to a painful death for being "inconvenient." ("Issues"). Such narratives often LGBTQ+ and especially transgender people as potential predators or threats to children's safety despite a lack of evidence supporting such claims.

Similarly, the rhetoric surrounding abortion centres on portraying it as a "heinous act that endangers the lives of unborn children", appealing to individuals' protective instincts and moral sensibilities. By emphasizing these threats, fearmongering far-right political campaigns seek to mobilize conservative segments of the population, amplifying their concerns and solidifying support for their agendas. In doing so, they also contribute to the growing problem of terrorist acts committed in abortion or women's health clinics, further perpetuating the issue of unsafe work environment of countless women's health physicians across the country. (U.S. Government Accountability Office).

Returning to Marko's fear management baseline, it is clear that Ms Greene's campaign narratives fit into his definitions. She consequently and relentlessly

points out those of whom to fear – immigrants, LGBTQ+ queer, trans and non-binary people,, liberal political elites, and what to fear – change of the *status quo*, demographical diversification, abortion, and governmental control. She does so while appealing to her voter base, whom she describes God and country-loving, brave patriots with superior moral compasses, who stand tall in the face of the societal collapse of the country. As the mediator, she positions herself as a group member, opposing “corrupt” politicians and representing the people above all else. In line with Glassner’s identification of fearmongering techniques, Rep. Greene uses repetition, portraying isolated incidents as trends and misdirection when addressing various social issues.

An important question is whether spreading fear or fear-induced anger is a good political strategy. Some studies confirm that feelings of both anger and fear do boost political participation and engagement significantly more than feelings of enthusiasm (Valentino et al. 166). Moreover, political ads that use fear appeals were found to “provoke information seeking” among exposed voters (Brader 401). At the same time, an anxious type of fear was found to decrease the electoral tendency to participate in voting (Valentino et al. 168), yet anxiety dominated by anger – in this particular study, anger targeted at the U.S. government monitoring procedures – is related to increased political engagement of voters (Best and Krueger 103). This means that fearmongering, if done correctly, can motivate certain types of voters. Notably, the type of voter on whom this strategy works best is usually politically conservative, with a so-called Right Wing Authoritarianism ideological attitude (Duckitt and Sibley 104). Furthermore, psychologists argue that

Several different epistemic motives (dogmatism–intolerance of ambiguity; cognitive complexity; closed-mindedness; uncertainty avoidance; needs for order, structure, and closure), existential motives (self-esteem, terror management, fear, threat, anger, and pessimism), and ideological motives (self-interest, group dominance, and system justification) are all related to the expression of political conservatism. Theoretical and empirical considerations lead us to conclude that virtually all of the above motives originate in psychological attempts to manage uncertainty and fear (Jost et al. 351).

In other words, a politically conservative voter usually prefers a simplistic explanation of complex issues and would like their candidate to clearly point out those responsible for all the problems in the world. That juxtaposition of “us versus them” fits into their idea of the world. Moreover, these feelings of uncertainty and fear, related to changing the *status quo*, can quickly turn into feelings of threat and even aggression.

Marjorie Taylor Greene's climb to power

During her first two years in office, most GOP members looked at her with disdain and treated her as a fringe minority of the Party and someone who undoubtedly will be out of office by the next election term. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell described her as the “cancer” of the GOP because of her “loony lies and conspiracy theories” (Graham). However, month by month, despite the seemingly never-ending string of controversy surrounding her, Rep. Greene has been gaining popularity while undoubtedly sparking controversy wherever she went. Her scope of power is undeniable just a few years later, as reflected by the constant support and the words of the Republican Speaker of the House, Kevin McCarthy – “I will never leave that woman. I will always take care of her” (Swan and Edmondson). Rep. Greene shifted from the fringes of her Party to the centre within one election cycle. That is most evident in her committee responsibilities. At the beginning of 2021, she was stripped of several committee assignments, namely from the Education and Labor Committee and the Budget Committee, for incendiary and violent statements from 2018 and 2019 regarding executing Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton (Foran, Grayer, and Diaz), and yet just two years later, in 2023 Greene took up assignments on some of the most important committees in the Congress – the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability and the House Committee on Homeland Security (“Marjorie Taylor Greene – Biography”). A YouGov poll from January 2023 states that 31% of respondents see her as very or somewhat favourable, while 37% are somewhat unfavourable or very unfavourable (Hall).

Interestingly, Rep. Greene has also been labelled by the FiveThirtyEight political analysis website as a “bogyman” used by the Democrats to rile up their voting base. This claim is supported by T.V. News Archive data stating that “in January, CNN mentioned Greene in 472 15-second clips, MSNBC mentioned her in 393, and Fox News mentioned her in 31” (Rakich). This theory is confirmed by the most recent President Joe Biden campaign. Released on July 19th, 2023, a short clip of Marjorie Taylor Greene summing up presidential accomplishments in a clearly sarcastic tone of voice played over images of actual policies the Biden administration wanted to highlight. This video is one of his most viewed campaign materials ever released (Biden, 2023). So, in the end, one could say that Democrats also deploy fearmongering narratives – they put a spotlight on far-right politicians, like Rep. Greene, to underline the dangers that are characteristic of her conspiracy populism.

Marjorie Greene's immense popularity is reflected mainly in the number of small donations, which proves how efficient she can be. It might have seemed that after Trump's election loss, several controversies regarding Rep. Greene's highly controversial opinions, her expulsion from congressional committees, and the consequent weakening of her position in the House, far-right supporters would begin to chip away and retreat from controversial positions. Indeed, the Attack

on Capitol Hill has sobered some far-right Trump supporters, but there are still signs of support for Rep Greene. This is particularly evident in the ever-growing amount of funds she has raised for her activities and subsequent campaigns. In the first quarter of her term, she raised 3,2 million USD from over 100,000 individual donors, with an average donation of 32 USD. By comparison, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez raised 728,000 USD in the same time frame at the start of her term (Beavers and Zanona). Such a motivated voter response is most likely a response to MTG's removal from the Education and Budget committees. Only 17% of Republicans supported this decision, compared to 77% of Democrats. It also gained popularity, with her support rising from 25% to 40% among Republicans ("Republican Support..."). During the 2022 election cycle, Rep. Greene was one of the two top earners among right-wing House members in terms of total donations under 200 USD, having collected a whopping sum of 10,7 million USD. Interestingly, the most significant number of donations spikes occurred right after the January 6th, 2021, Capitol Hill insurrection. Three of those, as highlighted by David Byler from the Washington Times, can be noted during her first attempt to impeach Biden, around the time of her removal from committees, and around an attempt to expel Greene from Congress in March (Byler).

Although many Republican voters have become radicalized over the past year and turned to dangerous conspiracy theories, the GOP is resisting. Organizations have sprung up actively pushing for the removal of politicians who "disgrace the party's name", particularly those who did not end up questioning its legitimacy after losing the presidential election and those who did not disavow pro-Trump rhetoric after the Attack on Capitol Hill. Such organizations include Defending Democracy Together (DDT), which aims to nurture the Party's original conservative values while blunting authoritarian and conspiratorial leanings through grassroots attempts at education and activism. DDT has created several projects, such as Republican Voters Against Trump, a website with recordings of "anti-Trumpist" thoughts ("Republican Voters against Trump"), and the Republican Accountability Project (RAP), created as a response to the behaviour of some politicians during the peri-election period. RAP wants those inciting the "Trumpists" to attack through unsupported claims of election theft to be held accountable for their words as well as their actions, such as voting against approving the election results and voting against impeachment ("About"). The RAP has divided GOP politicians into two groups – the Brave and the Cowards, creating a list of "Defenders of Democracy" ("Courage") and a 'List of Shame' ("Cowardice"), which includes, among others, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene ("Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene"). Thus, attempts to resist a change in the policy direction of the Republican Party are evident, but to what extent they will prove successful – is difficult to assess.

Conclusions

Several major politicized issues spark fear in many conservative voters. Through a careful examination of Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene's rhetoric and narratives, three prominent themes have emerged: threats to the country rooted in the much older phenomenon of the Red Scare, threats to children, and threats to freedom. These fear-based strategies are designed to manipulate public opinion and consolidate support for her political agenda.

Greene uses fear tactics reminiscent of the Red Scare era to demonize politicians on the left, as well as immigrants. This fuels existing fears and divides the electorate, leading to unproductive political discourse and a climate of hostility and distrust. This approach can have disastrous consequences, putting the safety of targeted politicians at risk and undermining the democratic system as a whole. This is especially evident by the number of death threats received by leftist politicians targeted in Rep. Greene's campaigns, like representatives Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.³

Secondly, Greene leverages fear surrounding issues related to children, employing transphobic propaganda and advocating for a ban on abortions. By exploiting societal anxieties about morality, family values, and the well-being of children, she attempts to mobilize support from conservative segments of the population. This fearmongering tactic not only disregards the rights and dignity of marginalized groups but also contributes to a toxic and divisive social environment that further endangers the personal safety and often lives of LGBTQ+ communities people.⁴

Representative Greene also utilizes fear tactics that exploit the quintessentially American need for individual freedoms, including those related to vaccinations, masks, and gun rights. By portraying public health measures as violating personal liberties, she takes advantage of libertarian and anti-government beliefs. This approach not only hinders public health efforts but also promotes a culture of misinformation and opposition to necessary measures designed to protect the health and safety of the population.

Overall, Marjorie Taylor Greene's tactics involve exploiting public fears and creating a social division to strengthen her political power and promote her agenda. She does this by emphasizing threats to the country, children, and individual freedoms. In doing so, she tends to create a clear division of "us" vs "them", highlighting the otherness of groups like immigrants, sexual minorities or gender

³ Rep. Greene's attacks on Muslim members of the House, like Rep. Omar and Rep. Tlaib (Dodds), were tied to an increase in the number of death threats to these two representatives by Rep. Tlaib herself (Tlaib).

⁴ During the past few years, there has been a significant increase in hate crimes against LGBTQ+ communities in the U.S., which is related to Republican politicians' agendas focused on those marginalized groups (Gabbatt).

diverse people and leftist individuals, who, as she points out, are to blame for all that is wrong in the country. Additionally, framing herself as a “non-politician” but rather a member of “the people” standing up against conspiratory elites, Rep. Greene presents herself as a model far-right populist politician according to Jan-Werner Müller’s definition (Müller 101). Her fearmongering approach has proven effective, evidenced by her successful re-election and the substantial number of individual donations she has received, proving once again, that polarizing figures like Rep. Greene garner the most attention in the U.S. media, regardless of political stance.

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Escalation Ladder and the Game of Chances in the Ukraine War of 2022

Abstract

The paper refers to the most recent developments during the 2022–2023 Ukraine war, analysed from the perspective of selected insights derived from deterrence studies, most notably the escalation ladder. The reason for the publication is to point out dangerous escalatory steps in the context of Putin's Russia-Ukrainian war, including the abolishment of strategic arms control and tactical nuclear weapons deployment in the EU neighbourhood. V. Putin's regime's steps towards seizure or control of Ukraine's largest nuclear power plant were discussed internationally as a severe humanitarian hazard. The pre-1989 deterrence debate could add a vital research perspective missing in the analytic frames of the New Cold War. Notably,

the developments of the 2023 conduct of the Ukraine war with the support of the West countering the impact of a nuclear crisis scenario (tactical arsenal employment) could be analysed in the context of earlier concepts of limited war (1960s), as well as further elaborations on conditions of mutual vulnerability.

Keywords: The New Cold War, Ukrainian conflict, escalation ladder

Drabina eskalacyjna a gra losów w ukraińskiej wojnie 2022 roku

Abstrakt

Artykuł odnosi się do najnowszych wydarzeń, które rozegrały się w trakcie wojny w Ukrainie w latach 2022–2023, analizowanych z perspektywy wybranych spostrzeżeń pochodzących z badań nad odstraszeniem, w szczególności w ramach koncepcji drabiny eskalacyjnej. Powodem publikacji jest chęć zwrócenia uwagi na niebezpieczne kroki eskalacyjne w kontekście rozpętanej przez Putina wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej, w tym zniesienie kontroli zbrojeń strategicznych i rozmieszczenie taktycznej broni jądrowej w sąsiedztwie UE. Działania reżimu Władymira Putina zmierzające do przejęcia największej ukraińskiej elektrowni jądrowej lub uzyskania nad nią kontroli wzbudziły międzynarodową dyskusję na temat poważnego zagrożenia humanitarne. Debata na temat odstraszenia sprzed 1989 r. może wnieść ważną perspektywę badawczą, której dotychczas zabrakło w ramach analizy nowej zimnej wojny. W szczególności, rozwój sytuacji w 2023 r. w zakresie prowadzenia wojny w Ukrainie przy wsparciu Zachodu zapobiegającego realizacji scenariusza kryzysu nuklearnego (wykorzystanie arsenału taktycznego) można analizować w kontekście wcześniejszych koncepcji wojny lokalnej (lata 60.), a także dalszych opracowań dotyczących warunków wzajemnej podatności na zagrożenia.

Słowa kluczowe: Nowa zimna wojna, konflikt w Ukrainie, drabina eskalacyjna

Introduction

The research goals of the paper are centred on the possibility of matching the escalatory steps of the competing parts of the Ukraine contest with the earlier Cold War understandings of the escalation ladder. An escalation of a conventional conflict to the stage of a nuclear one was a leading hazard of excellent power rivalry since the August 1945 bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The threat of nuclear weapon use was later present during the Korean War of 1950–1953 (it related to a strike against China), during the Suez War of 1956 (USSR threats directed against Britain and France), or obviously in the case of the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. As Graham Allison summarised, the latter crisis of particular significance was resolved due to strong U.S. determination in pressure to remove Soviet missiles from Cuba, backed by strategic advantage, allowing at the time to imagine a “nuclear holocaust” against the USSR (62). Further efforts of the Soviet Union to neutralise U.S. advantage led to the strategic equilibrium and Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, which concluded with the 1972 agreement. The *détente* era of the 1970s ended with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979), opening a decade of new bipolar hostility. Despite the geopolitical breakthrough in 1989 and the dissolution of the USSR in December 1991, the strategic balance was maintained and formalised through the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, renewed in 2010 with the lowest limits of 1550 deployed strategic vehicles. The latter agreements were suspended by V. Putin in early 2023, an escalatory measure in the course of the Ukraine conflict.

The New Cold War analytical framework to understand the growing hostility between Russia and the West under the increasingly authoritarian Putin regime was introduced in 2008 by Edward Lucas, and the validity of such an approach was confirmed by the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Edward Lucas elaborated on the New Cold War environment with a conclusion that only the precise deterrence capability of NATO could prevent World War III (similarly to the earlier role of the Organization before the 1991 USSR dissolution). In contrast, the lack of defence funding prioritisation in Europe was a sign of weakness leading to Russian expansion in the post-Soviet neighbourhood (Loc 247–260).

In late March 2023, the Putin regime announced the deployment of new tactical nuclear weaponry in Belarus. Such a step could signal a scenario of a nuclearised solution to the Ukraine war (escalatory measure). Those preparations were a follow-up of earlier militarisation of Belarus, transformed into a permanent Russian military stronghold. After the short-lived rebellion in late June 2023, Wagner’s private military company, a part of critical clashes (seizure of Bakhmut), moved to Belarus to lead a hybrid war against NATO in the strategic Suwalki gap between Poland and Lithuania (Gera). While the conventional conflict could be prolonged into a years-long contest, the stakes of further escalatory steps are measured

by international appeal and practical utility alike. Devastated by shelling and missile strikes against soft targets, Ukraine would not be able either to provide counteroffensive capacity near the front lines or to pay for its reconstruction, owing the budgetary means to prolong resistance to Western donors.

The paper examines the historical founding of the escalation ladder in deterrence studies to find matchings with contemporary evaluations of setbacks and advantages in Western powers' engagement in Ukraine. Suppose the role of NATO and the U.S. could be explained as a gamble in the Ukrainian contest. In that case, the outcome depends on Russia's willingness to accept those rivals in the Kyiv power vacuum. Putin's gamble depends on Western public opinion and its susceptibility to strategic blackmail, as well as further reluctance to engage financially and militarily against Russia in the war-torn former Soviet republic (Europe's most prominent and vital as a potential buffer against Russian aggression). The stakes were evident by the end of 2022 when Ukraine's counteroffensive opened a path to the reconquest of the lost provinces.

Nonetheless, Putin's determination to go on with efforts to regain strategic initiative in the war changed the balance of conventional assets with a partly successful Bakhmut offence. Like the previous year's radical shifts on the battlefield, this one could confirm the value of allies. Without operational new heavy equipment from the West, most notably Leopard 2 tanks and MiG-29 jets, Ukraine could not offer staunch resistance and its military initiative (despite earlier deliveries of game-changing weaponry, mortars, HIMARS, drones, and MANPADS).

Deterrence studies may offer an inquisitive eye on the impact of deployments of particular strategic arms. However, the overall strategic balance following the analysed conflict may depend on a broader set of variables. Even if the total value of Western military assistance to Ukraine has grown to dozens of billions from U.S. and EU allies, the rating of such aid is not complete without a clear portfolio of actual arms transfers. The delay in jet delivery and limits regarding multirole fighter procurement were broadly accepted as a means of de-escalation in the context of Russia's criticism of Western support for Ukraine. So, were the limitations of arms sales to Ukraine explained just before the Russian invasion? None of the latter helped to de-escalate the conflict.

Nuclear escalation in deterrence studies

Selected views

Herman Kahn claimed that escalation (explained in the metaphor of a ladder and its rungs presenting the growth or decline of used forms of conflict engagement) could be analysed in international relations as a tool of bargaining, an effort to produce a more favourable outcome of the conflict in the form of concessions,

rather than the necessity of turning the dispute into an open war (12). Kahn stressed that the logic of escalation favours a stable set of rules accepted by both parts of the bipolar age rather than occasional benefits. In contrast, the balance of terror set the risk-taking limits (12–13). Would such a perspective based on the evidence of the Cuban missile crisis and mutual deterrence of former Cold War adversaries still be helpful to explain the controversial gamble of Putin, threatening the West both with his strategic missiles and tactical nuclear weapons to deter rivals from taking an active role in the Ukraine war?

Lawrence Freedman explained the problematic value of deterrence in international relations in terms of limited datasets used to validate expected benefits or behavioural patterns, norms imposed duly to suppress discord confronting international society. While the historical grounds of deterrence are most often linked to Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism, Freedman stressed the importance of earlier legal scholar Cesare Beccaria's study on capital punishment in developing deterrence logic (61–69).

Thomas Schelling added to criminal applications of deterrence also unobvious cases of using such an approach in childcare or between friends or allies on an international level in the European integration context, seeing marginalisation as a valid threat imposed on allied countries refusing to sign particular new treaties (10–11). Clearly, the discussion on the practical valour of nuclear weapons solely, as well as weapons of mass destruction after the Cold War, had to discern between the respectable powers applying those in the doctrinal schemes and the newly fashioned regional developing powers, the challenges or risks causing multiple threats from U.S. perspective.

Bernard Brodie, an often-quoted scholar of deterrence' early years, a forerunner in a new discipline of theoretical focus on nuclear weapons employment, explained a late 1950s debate in the field as a shift from massive retaliation (gradually reduced in the declared hierarchy of alternatives since earlier J. F. Dulles' brinkmanship) towards the acceptance of limited war as an outcome of thermonuclear stability (261–263, 305). Brodie concluded that deployments of the thermonuclear arsenal of both superpowers in the 1950s made the prospect of all-out war encompassing strategic blows against urban areas a clear fiasco or highly unlikely scenario, i.e. "suicidal absurdity" (305).

Further reform of strategic doctrine led by Maxwell Taylor elaborated on the notion of strategic stalemate caused by thermonuclear deployments, leading to flexible response (allowing tactical nuclear weapons in limited war scenarios). The drama of deterrence reliability was centred on fallacies standing behind soft targets' choice of potential strategic strikes ("countervalue"). Maxwell Taylor's proposal was a radical step in terms of giving up the benefits of massive retaliation-based deterrence (undermined by Soviet advances, thermonuclear and ballistic, a.o. Sputnik satellite) in order to provide more means to wage limited wars with

or without nuclear weapons, seeing in that context a necessity of modernisation of conventional forces and further overseas deployments of troops (63–65, 158–159). Nuclear plenty and equilibrium of the late 1960s and early 1970s relied on assured retaliation and possible “counterforce” options (aimed against critical military assets) instead of earlier “countervalue” focus regarding urban areas (Sloan 57).

New targeting following the strategic balance of the early 1970s was formalised within Schlesinger doctrine, which sustained that the counter value option became redundant, and the clear rationale stood behind the shift in strategic strike logic. As Terry Tariff pointed out, the secretary of defence under Nixon’s selective approach to nuclear targeting was about avoiding mutual destruction of cities by more careful choice of enemy’s assets, including military centres and locations of potential counterforce or retaliation capacity (1–2). The further evolution of such an approach, sustained under the Carter administration by a new effort to protect the U.S. retaliation capacity using an underground system of tunnels (after the Safeguard concept of ICBM protection through missile defence was abandoned), led to targeting focused on the enemy’s command and control centres.

Explaining the focus on missile defence under Ronald Reagan, S. Sarkesian, J.A. Williams, and S. Cimbala underlined the validity and endurance of mutual vulnerability doctrine, despite essential efforts to replace it (aside from futuristic assured survival of Reagan’s Strategic Defence Initiative, SDI) through escalation dominance, minimum deterrence, or assured retaliation doctrines (77). Escalation dominance describes a military imbalance between parts of the conflict, in which the dominating side could freely extend the range of used means. In contrast, the other part was incapable of such an equivocal enhancement, so the weaponry would not be of balanced value (Morgan et al. 15). Clearly, the Strategic Defense Initiative could not participate in the U.S.-Soviet struggle it was meant to prepare. Countermeasures against massive Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) attacks on the Earth’s orbit were never built. G.W. Bush’s administration made steps to provide ground-based midcourse defence against limited strategic strikes through a proposed third site in Poland (apart from Alaska and California). However, the Obama administration gave up on that plan to replace it with Aegis Ashore, which was short of an intercontinental reach. The Romanian Aegis base was completed by 2016, but the Polish one remained under construction by 2022 (Judson). Missile defence capacities appeared critically important when the Russian attempt to seize the entire Ukraine through an unprovoked armed invasion in 2022 marked the New Cold War’s dangerous hot phase.

So far, the mutual vulnerability (or mutually assured destruction, MAD) paradigm has not been dismantled despite ongoing efforts to enhance ballistic missile interception, confirmed by the December 2001 abandonment of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty by the G.W. Bush administration. The role of nuclear weapons as a critical component of the deterrence apparatus in military

policy after the Cold War was not balanced by comparable progress of missile defence as combat-proven equipment (Steff 178). Proponents of the latter sustained that it could offset the burden of nuclear retaliation or first-strike options, among many critically valid challenges of international security, including such misfortunes as accidental launches.

If John Mearsheimer was right in the 1990s, the course of events could no longer favour independent Ukraine without the nuclear hedge. The West-leaning of Ukraine in the 21st century was based on liberal democracy promotion, harshly criticised by this neorealist scholar as a risky adventurism in Russia's backyard (Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault" 77–78). Budapest Memorandum of 1994 was often referred to as proof of Russian unwillingness to respect its commitments, i.e. the integrity of Ukraine's borders, confirmed in return for the transfer of Soviet nuclear weapons from Ukraine to Russia ("Memorandum on security assurances"). In 1993, J. Mearsheimer assessed that without nuclear weapons, Ukraine could not defend itself from Russia, while the West (U.S.) would not be ready to provide security assurances counterweighing the Russian advantage and lifting pressure leading to war ("The Case for a Ukrainian Nuclear Deterrent" 50–51). The following passage underlines the strategic importance of Budapest memorandum, an obligation broken by Russian illegal annexation of Crimea and further illegal acts against Ukraine's territorial integrity: "The Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America reaffirm their commitment to Ukraine, in accordance with the principles of the CSCE Final Act, to respect the independence and the existing borders of Ukraine" ("Memorandum on security assurances" 169).

Neoconservative approach to security policy, dominating under the early Walker Bush administration, could not find a balance between the defence of critically essential goals of the U.S. as a superpower and the practical approach to daily hazards internationally, and the 9/11 plot surely did not help this camp to find such a needed harmony. Nonetheless, its weight in U.S. foreign security policy was not matched by any other fraction, as the heavy load of interventionism, most of it centred in Iraq and Afghanistan, led to a gradual decline of U.S. deterrence capacity globally. It is difficult not to see any linkage between the disgraceful collapse of the U.S.-supported regime in Afghanistan, a democratic one, and the speedy pressure to sort out the matter of another protégé within the circle of former Soviet empire ambition or its key component, Ukraine. For sure, the demise of the Iraq intervention (waged under the banner of democracy promotion) helped Russia and China to justify their autocratic regimes and gain support for interventions of their own ("Tony Blair").

Escalation ladder or escalation dominance: Russia's nuclear advantage in Ukraine

Clearly, when tactical nuclear weapon deployment outside Russia was announced, a sense of international urgency still overshadowed the war utility of such pressure, discussed in the context of the deterrence game between the Kremlin and NATO (Ljunggren). The controversial step was reversing the 1990s agreement on denuclearisation of other former Soviet republics than Russia, seen as a concession on the side of Ukraine that posed a risk to its independence (Gregory).

Preparing for the worst, the Ukrainian army and national leadership expected the best: Western military support to outweigh the grip of Russian conventional and nuclear advantage. Unfortunately, despite many efforts to change the approach of Western countries to the Ukraine war, any form of direct military engagement against illegal Russian aggression was labelled “escalatory” or leading to a general war between Russia and NATO with its worst possible consequences, i.e. nuclear annihilation. Finally, as some could expect, the prolonged conflict brought down another milestone in the arms control system, New START, suspended by Putin in February 2023 (“Vladimir Putin”). The 2010 treaty, prolonged until 2026, was the critical component of nuclear control, particularly important after earlier U.S. and NATO withdrawal from the INF treaty (intermediate missile ban) due to Russian breaches (Faulconbridge).

In March 2023, apart from the controversial decision to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus, Putin chose to suspend the exchange of information with the U.S. about missile tests after new mobile launchers were deployed in Siberia to scare Western countries off from engagement in Ukraine, as well as to prove that the land-based branch of nuclear triad of Russia was still unmatched by comparable capacity on the U.S. part (Isachenkov).

Conventional escalation of the Ukraine war was visible in Russian efforts to mobilise vast amounts of conscripts, an additional 200 thousand, by the end of 2022. When the fights in Bakhmut, a strategic industrial location of the Donbas front, were consuming an excessive number of troops, a private military company supporting Putin's regime, Wagner Group, owned by billionaire and close Putin ally Yevgeni Prigozhin, provided necessary contingents to continue the Winter 2022/2023 campaign until March 2023. The lack of adequate workforce to wage further offensive and prepare for an expected Ukrainian counterassault led to a further Russian drone campaign, threatening Kyiv. In late March, reports from the British defence ministry confirmed Russian preparations to recruit an additional volunteer army, if true, even 400 thousand strong (Zakir-Hussain and Rai).

The escalatory nature of Russia's 2022–2023 Ukraine war was precise from Putin's earliest steps. Declaring that the goal of the campaign lies in Donbas and calling it an anti-terrorist mission in this strategic industrial region, Putin opened an invasion leading to a conquest of an entire Ukraine, attacked from the northern, eastern and southern fronts (occupied Crimea) in attempts to capture central and east Ukraine, as well as to cut it off from the Azov Sea or even landlock fully. Russian forces seized Zaporozhe (the most extensive in Europe nuclear power plant Enerhodar), Kherson and merged occupation with the Azov coastline offensive. The most dangerous chapters of the war came in its early weeks, when from February 24 until April, Russian armoured columns invading from allied Belarus attempted to seize Kyiv to restore the rule of Russian-backed former president Viktor Yanukovich.

By Mid-2022, the U.S. delivered eight sets of High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), scheduled another 4, and provided necessary guidance of its operational use to secure grounds for further Ukrainian counteroffensive, the one that brought the largest military progress, the capture of Kherson. November 11, 2022, a victory made the Ukrainian command reliable enough to sustain President Zelensky's vision of the liberation of Crimea (Maynes and Westerman). The earlier September 2022 counteroffensive on the eastern front allowed Ukraine to recapture a larger portion of the Kharkiv region with an essential Iziurm centre to move closer to re-entering Luhansk province (Harding).

In March 2023, the first Western heavy-armoured vehicles were delivered to Ukraine. German-made Leopard-2 tanks could provide for a limited capacity to wage another counteroffensive on one of the critically important sections of the long front, stretching from the Black Sea coastline westwards of Crimea, a reconquered Kherson area, through Zaporozhe, north Azov Sea coast regions occupied by Russia, Doneck and Luhansk regions, and verges of Kharkiv region. The U.S., after lengthy disputes, decided to provide Ukraine with both Abrams tanks and desperately needed Patriot missile defence earlier than planned (the decision on the latter was announced in December 2022), but late seeing the terrible cost of Russian bombardments (Bertrand and Britzky). On April 19, 2023, the Patriots were officially delivered to Ukraine (Pemble).

The strategic value of Western military aid was limited due to the 2022 decision to give up on sending air support to Ukraine, apart from UAVs (U.S. Switchblade, Turkish Bayraktar helping to defeat armoured columns attacking Kyiv from the north). Luckily, the expected breakthrough was possible by early 2023 due to a determination of smaller NATO allies. Slovakia was the first country to deliver much-needed MiG-29 jets to Ukraine; next came Poland. On March 23, 2023, the Slovakian air force transferred the first 4 out of 13 granted MiG-29 fighters to Ukrainian air forces ("Slovakia delivers"). World media reported the March 16 announcement of Polish president Andrzej Duda, who declared that a transfer of

Polish MiG-29 jets in the number of 4 was underway, to be followed by further deliveries, possibly 13 jets (Mansoor).

If those deliveries had been made readily and the Ukrainian air force regained even partial operational capacity, there would have been a chance to seize the operational initiative for Ukraine by May 2023, which could have, under General Ben Hodges' optimistic scenario, even provided for Ukrainian victory by the end of the year (Stanton). Expected as breakthrough F-16 delivery was long rejected by the U.S. to de-escalate until the May 2023 G-7 summit declaration in Japan on the U.S. decision to deliver those multirole fighters (Bertrand). Without air advantage, the June–August 2023 Ukraine offensive against heavily entrenched Russian forces in Ukraine's occupied south and east-south regions between Zaporozhe and Azov was largely ineffective, liberating only 200 square km of territory ("Why Ukraine").

Escalation ladder logic seemed so far to determine Russia's advantage. Having the largest domestic civilian nuclear hedge of Ukraine under its military control or within the range of missiles and drones, the Russian war machine was capable of turning the conventional conflict into a humanitarian disaster. That was a challenge that Western powers could not offset or soften by military assistance. It was possible before the invasion and before Russian troops captured Enerhodar on March 5, 2022 (Heching). The efforts to reverse the crisis caused by that seizure were heading towards an international mission or control zone under the International Atomic Energy Agency's custody without significant progress due to a lack of support in the Kremlin for such a compromise (Nelson and Norteman). Fortunately, by April 2022, Ukrainian forces recaptured the Chernobyl area, seized by Russia early in the war causing the hazard of renewed radiation threat, the site of the most significant nuclear plant disaster in history in 1986 (Sparkes). Possible escalatory-related hazards to Enerhodar and nuclear energy safety were discussed in the context of the June 2023 unsolved explosion of the Kakhovka dam on the Dnepr river, which prevented the Ukrainian offensive from the Kherson eastwards (Falk).

Russia's measures to target or capture the Ukrainian power plant system could mark an escalatory outcome, extending the limits of conventional war. If those are exceeded, a nuclear blackmail could be imposed upon both the Ukrainian society and the international community. The latter found no means to exert any discipline on Russia, a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council enjoying the privilege of vetoing any of the Council's decisions. Putin's regime found no incentive from the Western powers or other leading actors, such as China, to withstand the pressure of war goals within the limits of armed forces operations against military targets only. The genocidal-scale atrocities were highlighted by a massive flight of civilians, reaching millions of refugees in the EU neighbourhood, as well as the humanitarian crisis in multiple Ukrainian cities caused by a lack of water

and heat energy in Winter months due to Russian shelling. Notably, on March 17, 2023, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant against Russian President Vladimir Putin for the crime of illegal deportation of children from occupied provinces of Ukraine to Russia (“Situation in Ukraine”).

Conclusion

The research area depicted in this paper encompasses the applicability of the bipolar age escalation ladder analysis to the present-day conventional war in Ukraine. The Cold War experience still seems valid due to the balance of former superpowers’ nuclear forces and the 1980s’ comparable set of strategic deterrence assets. Nonetheless, the geopolitical environment has become a distant derivative of the pre-1989 ordeal. Yalta’s order was revamped in favour of the Western integration enlargements, including former Soviet satellite countries of the Warsaw Pact. NATO’s eastern flank reached through Baltic states Narva and through Poland, Romania, Belarus and Moldova, respectively. In regard to deterrence postures, Obama’s European deployments (including Poland) gradually made the second-grade member states of NATO valid. Probably, on the part of the Kremlin’s empire-building rationale, a geopolitical imbalance postulated in the context of Western communities’ enlargements made escalatory steps in Ukraine seem a response to NATO (or allegedly “Nazi” military pressure). By August 2023, a nuclear escalation of the large-scale conventional war still appeared highly unlikely despite various threats coming from the Kremlin undermining the stability of measures excluding weapons of mass destruction. Further broader analysis of the discussed problems could probably benefit from a comparative re-examination of earlier mentioned Cold War crises involving potential nuclear employment.

In the deeper focus on the Ukraine case of 2022–2023, the uncharted waters (by August 2023) included the fate of a large southern offensive of the NATO-armoured Ukrainian forces, mostly ineffective since early June by early August (with the two-day Wagner “coup” interlude). Western assistance for Ukraine could be seen both as a response to Russian escalatory measures (START withdrawal and tactical nuclear deployments in Belarus) through engagement and as a form of extended deterrence.

Ukraine war waged by the Putin regime reached the scale of a genocidal conflict, and at the same time, it brought a threat of a nuclear disaster, almost forgotten since the Cold War era. The civilian losses and costs of destroyed infrastructure exceeded any substantial benefit Russia could take from the occupied provinces, considering the prolonged nature of such a war. Even frozen conflicts are extremely costly, both for the societies and the budgets, but the one between Russia and Ukraine could bring more damage than the international community may control. Escalatory

steps by Russia leading to the employment of parts of its nuclear arsenal to gain an advantage in the New Cold War game of chances regarding Ukraine's borders and integrity may spark a next European clash at large.

The events in 2022–2023 were a clear example of a lost partnership between the parties to the New START, represented by Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Joe Biden. The latter opted for more than a moderate deterrence game over Ukraine and any form of U.S. military engagement in that country. Nonetheless, U.S. support for Ukraine, amounting to dozens of billions by 2023, proved decisive in building a match for Russia's regional preponderance. Would it suffice to stop and reverse the tide of war, minding Russia's nuclear hedges? Notably, the EU countries, the second largest donor of aid for Ukraine, could become a game-changer, as multiple arms deliveries could prove, most notably heavy tanks and jet fighters, munitions and light military equipment, artillery units or air defence equipment.

Poland, as Ukraine's closest backer, has a fundamental and difficult challenge to take, giving new homes for millions of Ukrainians and a strategic lift in terms of the unprecedented range of Russia's invasion. Finally, Polish support proved its decisive political scope earlier during the Orange Revolution and Maidan protests. Politically, Poland is no match for Russia, but its voice in NATO and EU remains valid. Could Ukraine count on NATO membership or EU candidate faster track after Finland and Sweden's accession? Though unlikely to become fulfilled, the premise of NATO membership was a factor of Ukraine-Russia relations of double value, both a response to the growing hostility of Putin's Russia towards V. Zelensky's Kyiv and its rationale. Harsh objections of the Kremlin to EU and NATO membership undermined Ukrainian sovereignty despite earlier international obligations, such as the Budapest Memorandum of 1994.

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