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From the Editors

Equilibrium Amid Strife

Dear Readers,

Thank you for reading the Spring 2024 issue of the Jackson School Journal of International Studies. We are proud to showcase the exceptional work of our fellow undergraduate scholars.

The contours of our current global political climate are defined by significant turbulence and tension emerging from hegemonic competition, growing displacement, and salient human rights discourses. These challenges, though disparate, necessitate urgent globalized solutions and thus shape the focus of our latest edition.

In this issue, we explore the theme of "Equilibrium Amid Strife," delving into critical questions that initiate thought-provoking discussions and lay the foundation for achieving actionable solutions. Our first theme centers around how Taiwan’s technological and diplomatic efforts shape its global influence. Natalie Chiu delivers an incisive analysis of the role of the TSMC in Taiwan’s diplomatic strategy, examining how the semiconductor giant employs soft power and nation branding. Meanwhile, our interview with Indo-Pacific policy analyst Bonnie Glaser situates Taiwan within the broader context of the U.S.-China competition and offers insight on the implications of Taiwan’s recent election outcome on regional dynamics as well as diplomatic relations.

Our second theme seeks to shed light on some of the most pressing contemporary human rights challenges across the world. William Brown uses new modes of analysis to investigate the link between non-Western migration and the ascent of far-right politics in Europe, utilizing Denmark as a case study. Shifting attention from migration to disability, a former U.N. independent expert Ikponwosa Ero provides illuminating commentary on positionality, solidarity, and other challenges to albinism advocacy within the global disability rights movement. This year, our journal also includes a field note from the University of Washington’s Jamaica study abroad program, featuring thoughtful reflections on global health and universal human right challenges.

We hope you find this edition both enlightening and inspiring.

Annalisa Mueller-Eberstein, Max Cheung, Taisha Bayliss, Upajna Palepu, Yvonne Pan, Jingyi (Jane) Pan
The 2023-24 Editorial Board

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THEME I
FROM SILICON SUCCESS TO DIPLOMATIC DIALOGUES
Influence is a testament to the effectiveness of Taiwan's soft power. Given Taiwan's inability to wield the kind of hard and commanding power that Joseph Nye has characterized as the utilization of "coercion and payment" (Nye, 2009, p.160), the imperative arises to bolster the deployment of soft power in Taiwan's foreign policy pursuits. As Nye defines it, soft power encompasses the broad umbrella for the power of attraction, which refers to the use of appeal and persuasion to achieve a country's desired outcomes. This strategic approach of soft power has consistently served as a valuable instrument in the expansion of Taiwan's global presence by emphasizing its strengths and contributions to the international community. Taiwan's current foreign policy relies on fostering economic ties to compensate for the lack of official diplomatic relations resulting from Beijing's pressures and its enforcement of the "One China" principle. The efficacy of developing a strong national brand through the use of soft power has been particularly pronounced in the 21st century, as Taiwan sought to distinguish itself from China, while strengthening symbiotic relationships with unofficial partner countries.

Taiwan's recent overwhelming dominance in the semiconductor industry has reshaped the traditional geographical and economical components of the international status quo and the dynamics between countries' relationships. More specifically, semiconductors have become indispensable for the United States, China, and Taiwan (Cronin, 2022). Recent scholars have coined the theoretical terms "Silicon Shield" or "Chip Shield" to describe the phenomenon of Taiwan's role in the global economy. This terminology hints at Taiwan's crucial role in the global semiconductor supply chain — accounting for more than 90% of the production of high-end chips — and the "Silicon Shield" ensures that countries, including the U.S. and Japan, enact measures to attempt to prevent the Beijing government from invading Taiwan by force (Nordin & Stünkel, 2022).

The notion that economic power can serve as leverage for political and diplomatic purposes is widely acknowledged. However, the implications of "Silicon Shield" and "Chip Shield" remain controversial. Despite the contemporary importance, there is little scholarship that specifically seeks to dive into the causal mechanisms and connections between Taiwan's semiconductor industry dominance to its broader underlying interaction with Taiwan's global and domestic challenges.

The formulation of diplomatic strategies is complex, dynamic, and multifaceted; as such, it is hard to quantify the precise extent to which Taiwan's quest for legitimation and recognition are interrelated with its economic interactions. This paper proposes that Taiwan's dominant semiconductor industry has emerged as a defining phenomenon in the government's diverse appeal and interchanges with other entities, states, and countries. This paper argues that the semiconductor industry emerged as one of Taiwan's most important diplomatic tools – allowing the government to promote Taiwan's image to influential countries without directly challenging its independence from China. The industry strengthens Taiwan's security and enhances its interaction with the international community by creating opportunities for innovation and cooperation, consequently projecting soft power and nation branding.
Taiwan's semiconductor industry does not necessarily comprise a form of hard power since the government does not implement aggressive economic coercions, such as sanctions. Instead, it promotes Taiwan's image as a dependable partner in the global economy. By analyzing this complex relationship between Taiwanese enterprises with the Taiwanese government, this paper seeks to shed light on this particular dimension of Taiwan's diplomatic strategy and present a nuanced understanding of the centralized role that the semiconductor industry takes in the government's approach to shape Taiwan's legitimacy and credibility.

This research paper primarily centers on the dynamics of nation branding, diplomacy, and soft power in relation to Taiwan, rather than analyzing Taiwan in the context of U.S. and China relations. Before examining Taiwan's semiconductor industries' intertwinement with the nation's diplomatic approaches, it is important to consider the existing literature on Taiwan's unique background and historical context. Taiwan's diplomatic strategies and the global importance embodied by the Taiwanese Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) are recurring themes that warrant further understanding. According to Companies Market Cap, which ranks publicly listed semiconductor companies based on market capitalization, the semiconductor industry is also dominated by other Taiwanese companies, such as United Microelectronics Corporation, MediaTek Inc, and Advanced Semiconductor Engineering, Inc. However, given the logistical constraints of this study, the following paper will focus solely on TSMC. Moreover, it is beyond the scope of this research paper to engage in the suggestions or critique of current past policies and seek to predict Taiwan's future cross-strait tensions. Rather, the paper draws from the economic, political, and historical factors that have shaped the role of the Taiwanese Semiconductor Manufacturing Company in Taiwan's development, and aims to provide answers to the overarching question: how has diplomatic recognition emerged as a crucial phenomenon and become salient in Taiwan's semiconductor industry?

The paper is organized as follows: The first section provides context for understanding Taiwan's diplomatic strategy by presenting a historical overview of Taiwan's diplomatic status. It also explores the development of Taiwan's semiconductor industry, focusing on Taiwan's semiconductor industry. The second section adopts a mixed qualitative methodology approach, with a particular emphasis on case studies and in-depth interviews with subject matter experts aggregated to formulate a set of descriptive statistics. Case studies of TSMC's investments in Taiwan and the US, as well as specific Taiwanese government policies, provide insights into the ways in which soft power has emerged in actual implementation. Primarily, it also focuses on measures that Taiwan and TSMC have taken to preserve their dominance in the semiconductor industry.

Together, these sections complement the paper's overall argument and shed light on the complex relationship between Taiwan's semiconductor industry and related networks with other states.

Historical Background and Literature Review

This section provides historical context for the formulation of Taiwan's diplomatic isolation, Taiwan's economic development following Japan's withdrawal in 1945, and the emergence of the Taiwanese Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC). Subsequently, it presents a comprehensive analysis of the relevant existing literature regarding the concepts of statehood sovereignty and pragmatic diplomacy, soft power and nation branding, and how that interrelates with Taiwan's past, present, and future position.

Taiwan's Diplomatic Isolation

Following the defeat of the Nationalist Party (more notably known as Kuomintang) in the 1949 Chinese Civil War, KMT-led Chiang Kai Shek retreated to Taiwan to establish the Republic of China (ROC) in Taipei, while Mao Zedong's party established the People's Republic of China (PRC) in mainland China. Throughout, the Kuomintang, or KMT in Taiwan and the PRC in China both proclaimed themselves as the sole legitimate governing entity of China. At the time, both the ROC and the PRC rejected dual diplomatic recognition, implying that neither recognized the other as an independent and distinct sovereign state (Chiang, 2017). Matters quickly took a turn when in 1971, the United Nations General Assembly Resolution No. 2578 overwhelmingly voted to recognize the PRC's delegates as the sole representatives of China to the United Nations. The effects of the resolution were immediate, leading most countries (including the United States under Carter's administration in January 1979) to promptly shift to officially recognize the PRC as the sole legal government of China. Withdrawal from the UN marked a severe blow to ROC's legitimacy and its very existence, as it found itself marginalized and isolated from the international community. As of 2024, the PRC has formal diplomatic relations with 182 nations, compared to the mere 12 that Taiwan has. After Taiwan's transition from
an authoritarian regime under Martial Law to a prosperous democracy, various legal revisions have made it clear that the ROC has relinquished their claims to mainland China. Notably, this renunciation did not and does not signify that the ROC is then advocating for dual recognition. Rather, Taiwan's commitment to the PRC as the sole legitimate government of China provides it with considerable leeway to cultivate its respective political and economic objectives while "purporting to support the PRC's nationalist crusade" (Allen, 2004, p.196).

Through the various regime shifts and political movements between the late 1900s till early 2000s, many of the younger generations in Taiwan no longer resonate with the Chinese nationalism associations and ideologies that the Kuomintang placed on the 'Republic of China' (Lin, 2023). Nevertheless, PRC’s “One-China Policy” (一個中國原則) — the assertion that Taiwan is an inalienable territory of China — has persisted, and thus continues to impede Taiwan's attempts to achieve advancement in their legal and formal recognition as an independent state (Chan, 2009). It is important to note that Taiwan's identity does not just confine itself to the conflict between the PRC and the ROC. The historical roots of Taiwanese identity formation are significantly more complex and multifaceted, encompassing periods of aboriginal influence, Dutch colonization, Japanese rule, Spanish occupation, and Han Chinese immigration.

Taiwan's Economic Development Post 1950

Despite its relatively small domestic market, dense population, and limited natural resources, Taiwan has managed to transform itself into a strong export-oriented economy over the past few decades. Its economic development timeline is categorized into four main phases: the primary import substitution phase (1952-1957), the transition and export promotion phase (1958-1972), the secondary phase of import substitution (1973-1980), and the promotion of strategic and high-tech industries phase from 1981 to the present (Tsai, 1999).

During the primary import substitution phase, Taiwan resorted to interventions that sought to protect domestic infant industries through the implementation of trade barriers, U.S. economic aid, foreign exchange controls, and import restrictions. In the book Making Money: How Taiwanese Industrialists Embraced the Global Economy, Hamilton and Kao (2017) describe how the withdrawal of Japanese professionals from technical industries in 1952 caused a rift in human capital resources, subsequently forcing Taiwan to improve its approach in economic reconstruction. Under KMT leadership, Taiwan implemented land reforms which, while serving political objectives, also significantly enhanced agricultural productivity (Johnston & Kilby, 1975). The increased productivity in the agricultural sector led to a surplus in rice and sugar production. The tax payments collected from farmers helped support the expansion of three targeted industrial sectors: chemical fertilizers, plastics, and textiles, which in turn became the pillars for economic growth during the import substitution industrialization era (Tun-Jen, 2001).

While the import-substitution industries contributed greatly to Taiwan's economic growth through the 1950s, the overvalued currency and the reduction of US economic aid meant that this expansion quickly reached its limitations and was prone to destabilization (Ranis, 1979). To overcome this, Taiwan reoriented and transformed its economy to an export-oriented industrialized approach. In 1960, the 19-point programme was introduced "to encourage saving and investment, to reduce expenditure and to promote exports" (Tsai, 1999, p.73). This approach involved lifting previous protectionist measures, implementing fiscal incentives, and encouraging export financing for the development of private enterprises. This resulted in the surge and establishment of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) during this period.

With the implementation of export-oriented policies, labor-intensive industries quickly outpaced the former industries (fertilizers, plastics, textiles) and agricultural sectors that were targeted during the import-substitution era. However, in the early 1970s, Taiwanese individuals living in the United States provided valuable advice to policymakers in Taipei. This advice centered on industrial deepening strategies, which aimed to enhance the sophistication, efficiency, and value-added capabilities of Taiwan's industrial sector. They advocated for the prioritization of developing cutting-edge technologies, influencing the Taiwanese government to turn its focus on the privatization and development of science and technology capabilities for its revised industrial policy (Tung, 2001). Subsequently, the Taiwanese government made significant investments in bolstering the state’s information and communication technology (ICT) industry by cultivating human talent, developing infrastructure, and supporting research institutes. In particular, the establishment of the Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI) in 1973, and the Hsinchu Science-based Industrial Park (HSIP) in 1980 were instrumental. While ITRI was a non-profit organization free from bureaucratic control, it remained the recipient of considerable state support. The institute has been pivotal in the development of the ICT industry, as it coordinated research and development efforts on products, housed high-skilled engineers returnees from California's Silicon Valley, and enabled collaboration between SMEs.

This strategic shift laid the foundations for Taiwan's transformation into a high-tech powerhouse. Hobday argued that the government's motive in the promotion of
high-tech industries was to merely exploit the fast-growing opportunity that it presented, “in the early days there was little strategic thinking about the place of electronics and information technology in economic development” (Hobday, 1995). Regardless, by the late 1980s, Taiwan’s economy shifted away from lower-value agricultural, non-consumer goods, and the “export of labor-intensive industrial products” (Greene & Ash, 2007, p.39) and high technology manufacturing goods — semiconductors, personal computers, telecommunications — emerged as the primary drivers of the island’s economy.

The Creation of the Taiwanese Semiconductor Manufacturing Company

The information and communication technology (ICT) sector in Taiwan quickly took an upward turn, and by the end of 1999, output exceeded the $5 billion benchmark — ahead of France and the UK, and just behind the USA, Japan, and South Korea (Mathews, 1997). Fast forward to 2022, Taiwan ICT’s year-on-year revenue amounted to $168 billion (Taiwan Semiconductor Industry Association, 2022). Particularly, Taiwan dominates in the outsourcing of semiconductor, or integrated circuits (IC), manufacturing processes, known most notably as “fab”, or the “foundry” market. In the month of March in 2023, integrated circuits (IC) accounted for 41.3% of Taiwan’s total exports (Bureau of Trade, 2023). One particular player stands out in the forefront of this phase: the Taiwanese Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, commonly referred to as TSMC.

Founded in 1987 by Morris Chang, a veteran executive from Texas Instruments, TSMC pioneered the pure-play foundry business model. By exclusively focusing on the manufacturing of chips, TSMC allowed other chip design firms without fabs to flourish, while it allocated capital into the innovation of research and development of smaller and more complex integrated circuits (Feigenbaum, 2020). With this specialization business model, TSMC quickly rose to become the world’s largest semiconductor foundry in terms of market value, and as of December 2022, it was responsible for more than 56% of the world’s foundry market share (TrendForce, 2022). By comparison, South Korea’s Samsung accounted for 17% of the chip fabrication market share, and China accounted for a mere 8.5%. Moreover, it is worth noting that TSMC alone contributed to 4% of Taiwan’s GDP in 2018. Through its substantial investments in research and development, TSMC has become the pioneer in fabrication of cutting-edge advanced chips, which consist of those with dimensions below the node size of 10 nanometer (nm). As of 2023, the market for 5nm semiconductor chips is heavily monopolized, with TSMC and Samsung being the only ones capable of producing them. Notably, TSMC has attained an overwhelming market share of almost 90% in the production of advanced 5 nm to 10 nm nodes (Counterpoint Research, 2022). In December 2022, TSMC announced that the manufacturing of 3nm technology had commenced, with Apple reportedly ordering a mass supply of it.

TSMC’s unparalleled dominance in the semiconductor industry, its Taiwanese roots, and pivotal position in the global supply chain has garnered it the appellation Huguo Shenshan（護國神山）— the ‘magic mountain that protects the nation’ — among the general Taiwanese population. This term stems from the notion that TSMC’s success is inextricably linked to the success of Taiwan, and its company is consequently seen as an emblem asset that safeguards Taiwan’s sovereignty and economic independence. More so, TSMC has become synonymous as a representation of Taiwan’s technological prowess and innovation (Shattuck, 2021).

Statehood Sovereignty and Pragmatic Diplomacy

Article 1 of the 1933 ‘Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States’ outlines the international legal requirements for statehood, which includes the possession of the following qualifications: (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) government; and (d) the capacity to enter into relations with other states. Following this definition, it can be asserted that Taiwan meets the eligibility criteria for statehood. In practice, Taiwan operates as a de facto state, where it exercises authority over its own geographic boundaries, however its status as a sovereign de jure state is not universally recognized. Despite possessing the attributes of a de jure state, Taiwan is cautious about explicitly declaring formal statehood due to concerns about Beijing’s threats. However, without a formal declaration, Taiwan cannot achieve nor maintain statehood in the lens of international law (Grant, 1998). The lack of a de jure statehood presents Taiwan with challenges in limited options for official diplomatic relations, as well as exclusion from organizations that require statehood as membership legibility and the international community as a whole.

Through its democratic reforms, Taiwan has demonstrated that “that popular sovereignty is vested solely in the people of Taiwan” (Allen, 2004, p.202). Regardless of Taiwan’s advancements in the economic, cultural, and governance spheres, Janice E. Thomson defines the concept of a state’s sovereignty as “not an attribute of the state, but is attributed to the state by other states or state rulers” (Thomson, 1995, p.219). This definition highlights the notion that international actors matter, if not arguably more, than domestic factors in determining Taiwan’s sovereignty and ability to make independent decisions. Timothy Rich’s article, “Status for sale: Taiwan and the competition for diplomatic recognition”, complements this by arguing that more often than not, the mere presence of internal sovereignty is not sufficient enough to warrant or
cause international recognition (Rich, 2009). Rich contends that despite Taiwan's de facto governance, and it having control over its own geographic boundaries, its ability to secure diplomatic recognition largely depends on its ability to compete with China in terms of economic and strategic incentives to other states. While both recognized and unrecognized states are allowed to similarly engage with the international community, unrecognized states like Taiwan constantly find themselves “striving to secure international acknowledgment of its statehood” (Payne & Cassandra, 2002, p.440). Payne and Cassandra note that despite Taiwan's economic power, it still heavily invests in diplomatic efforts to seek recognition from less influential and smaller states, which underlies the crucial intertwining between recognition and state survival (Payne & Cassandra, 2002).

As best put in the words of Abid Hussain, diplomacy in a sense “acts like a bee which picks up nectar from flowers without ruffling the petals or preventing the flower from growing into a fruit” (Hussain, 2006, p.35). Thus, recognizing the importance that international actors have on its own political legitimacy and state security, Taiwan has since adopted a creative, flexible approach to diplomacy to cultivate and expand its unofficial partnerships. Jie Chen characterizes this approach, which was extensively practiced by Taiwan's first democratically elected president Lee Tung Hui, as “pragmatic diplomacy” (Chen, 2002). Pragmatic diplomacy, as Chen elaborates, emphasizes economic inducement returns, cultural exchanges, ideological alignments, as links to construct a collective identity and overcome the state's isolation in the international arena. In all, pragmatic diplomacy is a way to increase Taiwan's visibility worldwide (Hickey, 2006). Thus, it has been made clear throughout the years that, when the Taiwanese government interacts with other foreign bodies, economics serves as a critical aspect of Taiwan's foreign political objectives, rather than it being an autonomous, independent driver force (Rich, 2009). These efforts have been particularly practiced by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), whose goal centers around advocacy for a sovereign-independent Taiwan, free from unification with China. Lynch expands on this notion by suggesting that pragmatic diplomacy aims to reduce China's influence by emphasizing “Taiwanese subjectivity” (台灣主體性). The DPP then hopes that to some extent, the enhancement of these links can help Taiwan be understood as an independent collective (Lynch, 2004). In contrast, Leifer contends that these connections only serve to a certain degree of utility so long as the Taiwanese government does not take decisive actions to officially establish recognition of its ambiguous international status (Leifer, 2001).

Soft Power and Nation Branding

Pragmatic diplomacy can then be considered as a facet of soft power. Soft power, as characterized by Nye, refers to “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment” (Nye, 2008, p.94). In accordance with this definition, Taiwan has placed a strong emphasis on its economy as a means of enhancing its soft power. Delisle noted that between 2000 and 2010, as Taiwan's capital and labor faced increasing competition from China, Taiwan sought to assert its worth as a “valuable and reliable partner in an increasingly globalized economy and, especially, in that economy's higher-end segments” (DeLisle, 2010). To achieve this, Taiwan uses “nation branding” as a means of promoting a positive image of the state in the international arena. Rasool argues that soft power is in essence an exercise in nation branding, and while the breadth of nation branding is still an evolving developing field, it can be comprehensively defined by Simon Anholt as “the systematic process of aligning the actions, behaviors, investments, innovations and communications of a country around a clear strategy for achieving a strengthened competitive identity” (Anholt, 2008, p.22).

Taiwan's semiconductor industry, particularly TSMC, provides a context where Fan's (2006) terminology for nation branding, such as “product related” and “national level”, is pertinent. “Product related” pertains to the image of a product attributed to its country of origin, which in this context refers to Taiwanese chips. The term “national level” relates to the overall image of a country, that is Taiwan's portrayal as a “semiconductor powerhouse.” By managing its reputation as a leader in the semiconductor industry, Taiwan enhances its interests in the global competitive context, particularly given the constant marginalization that it faces in the international arena (Wang, 2008). However, it has been noted that the practice of nation branding reduces the complexity of a nation's intricate characteristics into a few key elements that the government deems attractive or desirable to the global market (Jordan, 2014). Furthermore, some have argued that the concept of “nation branding” is often used by states as a way to promote a country's image without addressing the underlying issues that affect its reputation (Anholt, 2010). Instead, Anholt (2010) notes that countries should focus on improving their governance, policies, and institutions, and let their reputation be shaped by their actions. While this simplified representation of TSMC can be effective in improving Taiwan's image to a certain extent, it risks glossing over the nuanced, diverse, and intricate aspects of the country. In other words, when the Taiwanese government projects itself as a semiconductor powerhouse, Taiwan's image is superficially tied to the industry.

It is evident that Taiwan has adopted a comprehensive approach to international relations that emphasizes soft power, pragmatic diplomacy, and nation branding.
By enhancing Taiwan's reputation and image, nation branding can help increase its soft power and influence, while pragmatic diplomacy can help build partnerships and collaborations that promote shared interests and values. This approach has enabled Taiwan to break through certain degrees of diplomatic isolation and participate in international economic entities, such as the World Trade Organization, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, and the Asian Development Bank. By relying on these organizations, Taiwan was able to maximize influence and amplify their voice on the global stage (Burger & Wivel, 2018).

Research Methodology

This research paper implements a mixed qualitative methodology approach, with the particular use of case studies and in-depth interviews that were aggregated to formulate a set of descriptive statistics. This method enables a close examination of the data within a specific context, as well as an investigation of the underlying relationships of real-life phenomena through detailed analysis of a limited number of conditions (Zainal, 2007). The mixed qualitative approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of the subject matter through the use of multiple data sources, case studies and in-depth interviews, while also accommodating the diverse perspectives of the participants.

Research Design

In order to examine how the rhetoric related to Taiwan’s diplomatic recognition is deployed in its economic integration with the global stage, I will analyze specific trade agreements and published public statements regarding TSMC’s 2022 fab expansion in Arizona, as well as TSMC’s capacity expansion in Taiwan. The recent introduction of the 2022 U.S. CHIPS and Science Act (referred to as the CHIPS Act), brought extensive global attention and discussion to Taiwan, prompting public statements from prominent political figures from the U.S. and Taiwan, including Joseph Wu, President Joe Biden, Economic Minister Wang Mei-Hua, and President Tsai Ing Wen. By subjecting political speeches to specific keywords, I will explore how politicians indicate a shift in policy implementation and frame these shifts in the context of underlying assumptions: that the ICT industry is an important means of diplomatic exchanges.

Subsequently, 13 in-depth interviews were conducted individually with subject matter experts who have demonstrated extensive engagement, either in an academic or professional capacity, in the study of Taiwan’s role in the international relations sphere. A total of 13 questions were prepared for the interviews, with the first seven questions aimed at assessing the interviewees’ subjective opinions on a scale ranging from 1 to 5. It was made explicit that the degree of 1 indicated the least confidence, importance, or integration with the question or statement, while the degree of 5 indicated the highest level of confidence, importance, or integration. The remaining six questions were open-ended questions meant to provide the interviewee with a level of agency in controlling the specific wording and content of their responses. This approach was employed to facilitate a more comprehensive and nuanced expression of the interviewees’ perspectives and experiences. I used an interpretivism approach on all 13 interviews, which included transcribing recorded responses, and subsequently aggregating them to formulate a set of descriptive statistics that would allow me to gain a subjective and broader knowledge. By complementing both methods, I aim to understand the Taiwanese phenomenon in a comprehensive and holistic manner; the interviews allow for an opportunity to gain insight into how experts interpret and order the world. Using this qualitative dataset, I anticipate that my investigation will uncover a pattern and phenomenon whereby the semiconductor industry has emerged as a form of soft power diplomacy in opportunities to network with other countries. By analyzing statements from politicians and interview responses from subject experts, I will examine the research question from a range of perspectives and better understand the underlying relationships in a broader and more generalizable context.

By using the U.S. CHIPS Act, TSMC’s domestic expansions, and Taiwan’s semiconductor investment in the U.S. as the primary case studies, I will use critical discourse analysis methods to reveal the role that the semiconductor industry plays in Taiwan’s search for national security and political recognition. Public statements and subject experts’ perspectives will showcase the implications of different trade policies as a response and reflection with respect to the way in which soft power, nation branding, and the semiconductor industry are connected, whether in an explicit or implicit manner. Subject experts’ responses or commentaries on policies will serve as an internal objective perspective, revealing the degree to which soft power and nation branding forms an implicit part of the data.

Case Study: TSMC’s $44 billion Fab Investment in Arizona

On December 6th, 2022, Taiwanese Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) publicly announced its construction of a second fab in addition to its first fab in Arizona. The initial facility is scheduled to commence the production of 4 nm process technology in the year of 2024, whereas the subsequent facility is expected to commence...
the production of 3 nm process technology in 2026. These substantial investments of nearly $40 billion constituted the most extensive foreign direct investment in the annals of Arizona and is among the largest foreign direct investments in the history of the United States (TSMC, 2022). This investment was announced in May of 2020, shortly after worldwide supply chains were disrupted due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. While TSMC has historically dedicated itself to the development of cutting-edge technology, the coronavirus pandemic marked a significant shift in its position, as the company found itself entangled in geopolitical considerations.

The pressure caused by global supply chain issues emphasized TSMC’s dominance and crucial role in the global economy and the chip shortages prompted President Biden’s administration to address and take aggressive proactive measures in the semiconductor manufacturing industry. The CHIPS Act was signed into law on August 9, 2022, with plans for the allocation of $54.2 billion in subsidies to bolster domestic semiconductor production and research. Additionally, the Act provides 25 percent tax credits for the manufacturing building and processing equipment of U.S. chip fabs, amounting to approximately $24.3 billion over five years (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2022). The CHIPS Act marked a commitment from the U.S. government to bolster its semiconductor manufacturing capabilities, thereby explicitly demonstrating its acknowledgement of the sector’s position as a matter of economic, national, and strategic security importance.

TSMC’s ceremonial event to commemorate the relocation of its inaugural machines at its Arizona manufacturing plant attracted a distinguished ensemble of attendees, including U.S. President Joe Biden, U.S. Secretary of Commerce Raimondo, TSMC’s founder Morris Chang, and an array of TSMC’s prominent customers, including executives from Apple and Nvidia. The presence of these notable figures emphasized the high regard in which TSMC is held within the United States. Noticeable throughout 2021 and 2022, over the course of ten distinct remarks and attendees’ interviews delivered under varying circumstances, a recurring theme began to materialize with regard to talk about Taiwan. Frequently utilized terms such as “security”, “partner”, and “stability” became increasingly interrelated and associated with concepts of “economic prosperity” and “supply chains.”

From an economic perspective, there is limited empirical evidence in support of TSMC’s investment in Arizona due to the significantly higher labor costs in comparison to other countries. During a conference talk at the Brookings Institution in April of 2022, TSMC’s founder Morris Chang noted that semiconductor manufacturing is 50 percent more expensive in the U.S. than it is in Taiwan. Additionally, there is a relative lack of human talent in the U.S. compared to Taiwan (Brookings, 2022). That being said, TSMC’s decision may be primarily attributed to two factors: (1) customers’ (e.g Apple and Nvidia) demands for geographic diversification (2) and a strategic move towards further integration in the global economy.

Case Study: Increase in Visits to Taiwan

While correlation does not indicate direct causation, it should be noted that the number of visits to Taiwan by high-level delegations of U.S. lawmakers has exponentially
increased from May 2020 to December 2022 in the wake of the global chip shortage and the CCP’s increased aggressiveness in the international sphere. This trend showcases a potential causal indication of the significance of Taiwan’s forefront role in the global supply chain, and its implications as a leverage tool in foreign interactions. Specifically, as observed in the news sector of the Government Portal of the Republic of China (Taiwan), delegation visits to President Tsai’s office surged dramatically following supply chain disruptions in 2020 (See Fig. 1).

With a closer look at the specifics of the visits, it can be derived that the level of visitors have increased as well. By “level”, this paper notes it under whether the attendee is from a superpower nation, and the political seniority of that particular attendee. Prior to 2020, most delegation visits were directed to the Department of International Cooperation in Taiwan, a unit under the Ministry of Economic Affairs, which engages in economic and technical cooperations with other foreign entities. Visits to President Tsai’s office were mostly from countries with official diplomatic ties to Taiwan, such as Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, and Paraguay (See Fig. 2).

After 2020, there has been an increasing frequency of visits involving higher-ranked officials from the U.S., Europe, and Japan – observable in Figure 1 and 3. Most notably, U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan in August 2022 made her the highest-ranking official to set foot in Taiwan in more than 25 years since 1997 (Taylor & Westfall, 2022). In a press event following the visit, Pelosi stated:

“I know that some Taiwan businesses, significant ones, are already planning to invest in manufacturing in the United States… the ingenuity, the entrepreneurial spirit, the brainpower, the intellectual resource that exists in Taiwan and the success of the tech industry here, for one sector, has been, really, a model. And again, we want to increase our relationships.” (Pelosi, 2022)

Apart from Nancy Pelosi, other senior American officials’ visits included Senator Markey, Senator Blackburn, Arizona Governor Ducey, Congresswoman Murphy, and members Wenstrup and Moulton from the US House of Representatives. All these visits to Taiwan and President Tsai’s office were publicized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and while the objective of the visits may have been to increase bilateral economic cooperations, they also served as a characterization of deeper ties, and a shift of diplomatic

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**FIGURE 2.** Official Visits to Taiwan from 2017 January to 2018 May.
interactions (See Fig 3).

Case Study: TSMC’s Domestic Expansion and Influence in Taiwan

Taiwan has demonstrated a keen awareness of the strategic implications that the semiconductor industry holds, particularly with respect to TSMC, in its pursuit for national security and enhancement of broader foreign relations. As argued in Chris Miller’s book *Chip War*, both TSMC and Taiwan are committed to maintaining the central position and dominance in the global chip industry (Miller, 2022). Despite TSMC’s $41 billion fab investment in Arizona, the company planned to increase investment in Taiwan through the expanding production facilities from the Hsinchu Science Park to central and southern parts of Taiwan. In fact, TSMC’s plans for a $60 billion fab investment in Southern Taiwan Science Park and a $16 billion fab investment in Kaohsiung, is already 2 times greater than its investment in Arizona (Liu, 2021).

TSMC has made it explicitly clear that it intends to retain the majority of its production capability and latest technology within Taiwan, including the most cutting-edge chips and its research and development facilities. TSMC’s chairman Mark Liu stated during a Taiwan Semiconductor Industry Association conference that despite the U.S. government’s subsidies, it’s improbable that this decision will be altered (Wu, 2023). TSMC’s Arizona fab is scheduled to begin the production of 4nm chips in 2024, followed by 3nm chips in 2026 (TSMC, 2022). The Ministry of Economic Affairs reiterated the capacity of the Arizona fab can only accommodate for a production of 20,000 chips per month, and with TSMC’s monthly production of 2 million chips, the US then only accounts for 10% of TSMC’s total monthly production (Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2022).

In a recent press briefing addressing Taiwan’s potential loss of its ‘silicon shield’, Minister of Finance Wang-Mei-Hua emphasized that “Taiwan’s complete supply chain system is undoubtedly TSMC’s most critical production base” (Reuters, 2022). She further followed up by citing TSMC’s President, Wei Zhejia, who stated that it is impossible to “de-Taiwanize” (去台化) Taiwan’s comparative advantage position in the semiconductor industry. This is evident in the constant reiteration that TSMC’s most advanced chips and technology will not be offshored to other countries, the heightened emphasis placed on the importance of

![FIGURE 3. Official Visits to Taiwan July 2022 to November 2022.](image-url)
seminconductors in public discourse among politicians, the recognition of Huguo Shenshan (護國神山) as an emblem of defense that is acknowledged among the Taiwanese populace, as well as the government's continued implementation of protective measures in this particular industry (Wuebbels, 2005). These actions altogether reflect Taiwan's understanding of the critical role that the semiconductor industry plays in bolstering its broader economic and geopolitical position in the international arena, as well as the government's commitment to safeguard its technological sovereignty and advantages.

**Government's Rhetoric and TSMC's Scope Expansion**

In January of 2023, the Legislative Yuan of Taiwan formally approved and ratified the amendments to Article 10-2 and Article 72 of the Statute for Industrial Innovation, which included, among other changes, the provision of 25 percent of tax credits for annual research and development and equipment procurement expenses (Statute for Industrial Innovation, 2023). While the Taiwanese government has always provided financial incentives and subsidies to business development projects, these new modifications serve as a testament to their unwavering commitment to promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, while concurrently strengthening the country's economic and national security interests through the integration of such policies. In the Executive Yuan overview, it was explicitly noted in written words that:

“Faced upon the pressure of international competition, our country should continue to maintain its existing comparative advantages, and further consolidate and enhance the position of our domestic industries in the global supply chain. This has become one of the strategic value of importance for national security and economic development, thus there exists the need to introduce additional tax incentives.” （面對國際局勢競爭壓力，我國應持續掌握現有優勢，進而鞏固並提升我國產業在國際供應鏈之地位，已成為國家安全及經濟發展之重要戰略，有必要新增租稅優惠措施。）（Statute for Industrial Innovation, 2023, p.1).

The Executive Yuan's legislative changes demonstrated a need for pressure within the government to protect their most precious and valuable asset: the semiconductor industry. The explicit use of the phrase "strategic value of importance for national security" demonstrates the semiconductor industry's use for leverage in both national security and the expansion of...
Taiwan’s international space. The Taiwanese government is not shy to admit the semiconductor’s strategic importance to the state and continues to consolidate its existing advantages (See Fig 4).

Throughout the increased legislative changes and government support, Taiwanese politicians have undergone a noticeable shift in their rhetorical emphasis on the country’s strategic value for defense. More specifically in public official statements, there has been a marked increase in the usage of terms such as “chips”, “supply chain”, and “key player.” In the 2022 National Day Address, President Tsai stated that “the concentration of the semiconductor sector in Taiwan is not a risk, but is the key to the reorganization of the global semiconductor industry.” This was followed by language denoting a stronger stance of ensuring that Taiwan “will continue to maintain its advantages and capacity in leading-edge semiconductor manufacturing processes, and will help optimize the worldwide restructuring of the semiconductor supply chain [emphasis added], giving our semiconductor firms an even more prominent role” (Office of the President, 2022, para. 25). In a visit to TSMC’s Fab 18 in Tainan, President Tsai reiterated: “we feel very proud of the TSMC name, and we will continue to be in the past many years and in the future”, further emphasizing that “the government pays much attention to the semiconductor industry because it is crucial strategic industry for national development” (Office of the President, 2019, para.6). TSMC, with the Taiwan name explicitly noted in its brand, has become strategically aligned with the branding of Taiwan as a nation in itself. During an address at the 2023 International Religious Freedom Summit, You Si-Kun, acting as speaker for the Taiwanese parliament, emphasized the significance of Taiwan’s position as a central player in the global supply chain, asserting that: “Taiwan has produced the best semiconductor chips and will be very important for global trade as well.” Further they expressed concern that “if Taiwan cannot be safeguarded very carefully, it will be very dangerous to global trade as well as global peace.”

At a conference hosted by the Brookings Institution in 2022, Taiwan’s Minister of Finance, Wang-Mei-Hua stressed Taiwan’s crucial role in the semiconductor supply chain in relation to Taiwan’s peace defense. Specifically, Wang noted that “Taiwan has a very important role in the semiconductor supply chain. We dominate the foundry area. Everyone needs more advanced semiconductors. Taiwan will be a key player in the world and to make global prosperity, and thus make Taiwan safer.” Effectively, through consistent emphasis on Taiwan’s pivotal role in the semiconductor industry, the government aims to solidify its association with these companies in the global supply chain and position itself as a leading innovative hub. This strategy achieves to affirm its status as a desirable partner for collaboration, thereby gaining diplomatic leverage and enhancing its international standing.

In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ (MOFA) proposed budget of the fiscal year of 2023, in one of the columns for international cooperation, a proposed project was to: “Utilize our country’s advantages in information and communication technology (ICT), and promote technology cooperation programs with our diplomatic or friendly developed countries. Through the assistance of our ICT advantage industries and technologies, we aim to enhance their level of information and drive the development of our country’s ICT industry.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, p.9)

Ever since 2015, budget proposals have started to explicitly include the ICT’s industry as a measure to promote bilateral relationships with other foreign entities. It is safe to say that Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has demonstrated an emergent awareness of the state’s comparative strengths in the semiconductor, information, and communication technology industries through these proposals. For the fiscal year 2020 budget proposal, MOFA stated on page 42 that Taiwan will “promote the strength of our high-tech industries and technological R&D capabilities, and build a good image of our high-tech country.” This could be interpreted to mean that the government hopes to leverage these strengths and translate the intensification of economic relations into showcasing the state’s legitimacy, as well as bolster its diplomatic power.

Taiwan has acknowledged the need to further explore new means to strengthen its ties with states that do not extend official diplomatic recognition. By being able to utilize nation branding and distinguish itself from the PRC, be it by highlighting its origin as a bubble tea producer, a vibrant democracy, or a semiconductor powerhouse, Taiwan is able to translate those symbolic assets to create opportunities that bolster its legitimacy and visibility in the world.

Taiwan’s Energy and Water Shortages

It is evident that the Taiwanese government has reached a consensus that the semiconductor industry is deemed of a larger importance than other industries — both locally and globally (Zhong & Chien, 2021). This notion of Huguo Shenshan has emerged to symbolize a national champion’s value of pride to the government.

However, the industry comes with substantial environmental costs. TSMC is a significant water consumer, requiring up to 30 liters of water to manufacture a singular chip that resides in a phone or a laptop (Rosen, 2016). The 2021 Annual Report of TSMC disclosed that the aggregate annual water usage (measured in cubic meters) was 82.6 million cubic meters, marking a 7 percent increase from the previous year (Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing
For comparison, Taiwan’s Ministry of Economic Affairs Water Resources Agency estimated that the national domestic consumption of water for the year of 2021 was 2.2 billion cubic meters, and 49.9 million cubic meters for the city of Hsinchu. This figure highlights the fact that TSMC alone used the equivalent of 3.6% of the national domestic water consumption, and 165.4% of the city of Hsinchu. This situation poses a huge environmental challenge for Taiwan, as it is already grappling with its worst drought in almost a century (United States Department of Agriculture, 2021).

Since early 2018, Taiwan has been tackling its crippling water shortage and droughts, directly affecting its two biggest industries, namely agriculture and semiconductors. In late 2020, the government, along with the Council of Agriculture, attempted to ration water usage by suspending water supplies for first and second crop of rice paddies farmlands in Taoyuan, Hsinchu, Miaoli, Taichung, Chiayi, and Tainan cities. While the semiconductor and other industrial industries were asked to reduce their water intakes by 13 percent, nonindustrial sectors such as hair salons, were asked to reduce it by 20 percent (HsinChu County Government, 2020). The water suspension, which impacted over 180,000 hectares of farmland, represented the largest such measure taken in the past two decades. Notwithstanding the offer of monetary compensation for lost income, the suspension had a significant negative impact on the livelihoods of over 60,000 Taiwanese farmers (Narvaez, 2022).

Despite the lost livelihoods of rice farmers, it can be deduced the Taiwanese government was willing to make that sacrifice and tradeoff, making the decision to choose the semiconductor industry over seemingly less important businesses. In a BBC interview, a farmer named Chuang, expressed his frustrations saying:

“We have also taken into consideration the national economy, but they (government) should not have completely cut off our water supply. They could have provided us with water for one or two days per week, and farmers would have found a way to cope. However, they have now completely severed our water supply, and farmers are left with no solution…They (government of Taiwan) have placed their entire focus on semiconductors” (Sui, 2021).

In another report by Mirror Media, when asked about the continuous water intake by semiconductor industries despite the severe water shortages, an anonymous former official from the Taiwanese Water Resources Agency explained, “that’s a requirement of national policy, and we have to comply. Agriculture consumes a large amount of water but has low output value, while industry has high output value. What would the factories worth tens of billions of dollars
do if we cut off their water supply?” (Yi, 2021). It is worth noting that, most protests by farmers were directed at the sudden water supply cut off by the government, rather than highlighting the unfair supply of water and favoritism to TSMC and other semiconductor companies. This case thus highlights Taiwan’s delicate balancing act between economic priorities and domestic concerns. The government must navigate the needs of industries with varying profit outputs while ensuring these sectors contribute to shaping the country’s diplomatic stance on the global stage.

Subject Expert Interviews

Interviewees Screening

In the context of Taiwan’s contemporary approach to its foreign policy and TSMC’s role in it, in-depth interviews were conducted to gain valuable insights from individuals who possess relevant knowledge and can contribute to understanding this specific research interest.

Over the course of two months, fifteen interviews, each lasting between 30 to 60 minutes were conducted. To ensure diversity of expert perspectives on this matter, a maximal variation approach was employed. This approach involved purposeful sampling of individuals, which differed in professions, or in particular characteristics and traits of interest (Creswell, 2002). Although not all of the interviewees have privileged access to the decision making procedures within the specific Taiwan domain, all of them have at least five years of particular research expertise in either cross strait relations, Taiwan’s foreign and domestic policies, international political economy, and/or security studies in the Pacific Asia. In this research, the fifteen subject experts’ perspective(s) on Taiwan were classified into one or more of the following categories: policy analysis (7), academics (9), and news editors (3). As in an exploratory expert interview, the interviewees from the field of interest can contribute as an external source of knowledge (Bogner & Menz, 2009).

Data Collection and Sample Size

In this study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were employed to explore the specific role of the semiconductor industry in the Taiwanese government’s pursuit of diplomacy. This approach was utilized primarily to take advantage of the method’s flexibility and versatility, and thus to avoid constraining subject responses. By providing subject experts with 10 minutes per question to express their views, semi-structured interviews allowed the opportunity for them to follow up on emerging ideas and explore the depth of their perspectives. Moreover, open-ended questions were utilized to minimize external influence and promote free expression, while providing the space for interviewees with the necessary safety to discuss politically sensitive topics. This was achieved by ensuring the interviewees that their full transcribed responses would not be released, as well as making known that they had the choice to decide on which specific responses they would not be comfortable answering.

FIGURE 6. Total Sum of Q1 to Q7 per Interviewee.
A list of guiding questions was created and used to help guide the interview process. The first seven questions were each answered on a 5-point scale, while the remaining seven questions were free-response and open-ended. The questions were designed such that all participants had the opportunity to address core issues of interest for this study.

**Findings & Interpretations**

An interpretive analytical approach was implemented to evaluate the relationship between Taiwan’s semiconductor industry and its foreign relations. The questionnaire employed a scoring system ranging from 1 to 5, with a maximum cumulative score of 35 and a minimum score of 7. A score of 35 would then suggest a direct, absolute, and significant relationship between Taiwan’s semiconductor industry and the government’s conduct of national security and diplomacy, as determined via aggregated responses across the fifteen interviewees.

The average score across interviewees from Question 1 to Question 7 ranged between 3.07 and 4.35 (See Fig. 6 and Fig. 7). Question 5 received the highest score among interviewees, and it referred to as: Morris Chang has said that “chip making is a vital industry for Taiwan, with a profound impact on the daily lives of its people, its economy, and national defense.” On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you agree with this statement? (Chang, 2021). For Question 5 — out of fifteen interviewees, eight people gave a full score of a 5, five people gave a score of 4, and two people for both remaining scores of 2 and 3. Most subject matter experts came to a general consensus that the semiconductor industry is an extremely vital industry for Taiwan, and composes a substantial share of its economy. A Professor of Political Science specializing in the international politics of East Asia reiterated that Taiwan’s rapid economic growth and development story is “hard to ignore with Taiwan’s semiconductor industry.”

A recurring theme throughout the interviews was the notion that Taiwan’s economic prosperity directly translates to some degree of diplomatic opportunities with other countries. Specifically, a Research Fellow and political scientist focusing on Taiwan politics mentioned how “Taiwan has opportunities in the economic space that it doesn’t in the diplomatic space.” For instance, Taiwan is both a current member of the WTO (World Trade Organization), and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. Thus as Taiwan is more effective in economic organizations, it is able to use its membership to advance its interests in the international setting in a way that it’s not able to at the United Nations or the World Health Organization, or any of the other organizations that require formal statehood.

Question 3: “On a scale of 1 to 5, what degree of importance would you place Taiwan’s semiconductor industry in its negotiation for some type of informal diplomacy interaction with other countries?” Most scholars placed the degree of importance at a mean score average of 3.82. While providing a rationale for the score, a journal editor observed that the broader public has limited knowledge of

![FIGURE 7. Individual Average Score per Question.](image-url)
Taiwan's crucial geopolitical role beyond its significance in the semiconductor industry. As a result, they may overlook other strategic factors that are equally important but not directly tied to the ongoing chip shortage. In contrast, a College of Arts and Sciences Dean highlighted TSMC's importance not only to Taiwan's economic prosperity but also to the nation's overall security; further, they noted that the concentration of the semiconductor industry in one particular place wasn't on most people's radar till the Covid-19 pandemic. A research associate focusing on geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific then emphasized that given Taiwan's limited diplomatic relations, TSMC's heightened visibility not only spotlights the company, but serves as a representative of Taiwan as a whole. While the rationale differed per interviewee, most agreed on TSMC's crucial role in the global supply chain, and that level of importance allowed Taiwan to amplify their voice in the global arena.

The question that scored the lowest amongst all the interviewees was Question 6 (seen in Fig 6, 7, 8). That question being: “The term 'silicon shield' coins the theory that Taiwan’s dominance in the semiconductor industry is what partially keeps it safe from a potential Chinese military invasion. On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you agree with the concept of 'silicon shield' and whether it actually possesses any influence?” Similarly to Question 3, interviewees noted that safeguarding Taiwan against a possible invasion by the PRC serves a purpose beyond merely securing the semiconductor industry. Notably, a Vice President for technology and policy think tank, a China and Taiwan analyst, and a Professor focusing on the international politics of East Asia all indicated Taiwan's long standing history with China. They pointed out that China's interest in reunifying with Taiwan is rooted in a concern for legitimacy, with the semiconductor industry serving as a secondary issue.

Throughout the interviews, it became evident that the semiconductor industry originally developed for Taiwan's economic growth and stability. However, its comparative advantage and role as a strategic leverage tool have since evolved as unintended consequences. As perceptions of Taiwan improve, there seems to have an impact on wanting to defend and protect Taiwan. Research fellow at a national academy highlighted that the Taiwanese government's lack of diplomatic relations prompts the government to think about questions such as: How do we best brand ourselves? What benefits us the most? What is the cheat code and secret ingredient? How do we get attention? Why hasn't Taiwan been successful in promoting their pop culture compared to Korea? More so, there just hasn't been a coordinated attempt — or a defining moment. Quite frankly, with the global supply chain shortage following the Covid-19 pandemic and increased U.S.-China tensions, Taiwan gained significant attention due to its dominant position in the semiconductor industry. The government was then able to capitalize on the situation, place a more centralized role in that narrative, and appeal to the international world their position in trade for semiconductors.

**Conclusion**

Despite a population of less than 23 million people, a geographic size slightly bigger than the US state of Maryland, and only 14 countries officially recognizing it as a sovereign state as of March 2023 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023), Taiwan is renowned as strategically important — serving as a perfect example of how a small state can “exploit a diplomatic niche that enhances its image and role” (Nye, 2008, p.104). Taiwan has become increasingly cognizant of the potential for strengthening its diplomatic ties through both official and unofficial channels. This has prompted a concerted effort to broaden the scope of its unofficial relations with countries such as the United States and Japan, seeking to leverage the vibrancy of Taiwan's democratic institutions and economic prosperity as means of further

**FIGURE 8.** Average Score for Questions 1-7 across Fifteen Interviewees.
integration into the global arena. However, as I have argued throughout the paper, the economic prosperity of Taiwan does not translate into the traditional hard power. The economic power does, however, serve as a viable key to increase their role as a relevant nation in its engagement with other countries and organizations.

Taiwan’s absence of formal diplomatic relations with major powers (e.g., Australia, United States, Japan) and the lack of membership in international organizations, has led scholars to characterize it as a “financially rich, but diplomatically poor” state (Chan, 1997, p.37). Moreover, Taiwan’s instability of recognition and press exposure has prompted the government and the wider business community in Taiwan to undertake a strategic approach aimed at garnering broader global attention and support for the state through soft power and nation branding. These efforts have involved the dissemination of a unique set of narratives that are designed to resonate with and appeal to diverse audiences. The emphasis of its role in the supply chains is a new strategy that Taiwan has adopted and implemented since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, by branding itself as a semiconductor powerhouse, that level of importance and interconnectedness consequently translates to some spillover importance to diplomatic presences. While some critics may be dubious about the strategic value of this strategy, Taiwan’s increased reputation as a critical member of the international supply chain has partially served as a principle to open conversations with other states.

Despite it being applicable in every state, economic prosperity and national security are inseparable in its quest for legitimacy when it comes to Taiwan’s specific case. While the future of Taiwan and China tensions remain uncertain, diplomatic exchanges have highlighted the rhetoric that the safety of the global supply chain is strictly contingent upon the security of Taiwan. As the dense semiconductor industry supply chain embeds Taiwan’s security in developing the global technology industry network, this presents a considerable leverage tool for the Taiwanese government in its interactions with foreign entities. With the word: Made in Taiwan, TSMC achievements extends beyond its commercial success, but emerges as a crucial strategic cornerstone in Taiwan’s nation branding and soft power efforts.

Endnotes


2 The term “Silicon Shield” first originated in Craig Adison’s 2001 book, Silicon Shield: Taiwan's Protection Against Chinese Attack. However, it was not until post the Covid-19 pandemic, where the term has exponentially increased its appearance in news articles and government speeches.

3 Largest semiconductor companies by market cap as of April, 2023. TSMC is ranked number 2 with a current cap of $442 billion dollars. In terms of companies in Taiwan, this is followed by MediaTek (rank 22 at $35.64 billion), UMC (rank 29 at $20.24 billion), and Advanced Semiconductor Engineering, Inc (rank 33 at $15.32 billion). Source retrieved from: https://companiesmarketcap.com/semiconductors/largest-semiconductor-companies-by-market-cap/

4 In this paper, the Republic of China (ROC) is interchangeably used to refer to Taiwan, and vice versa. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) is interchangeably used to refer to China, and vice versa.

5 See Roy (2003) for a more detailed literature concerning Taiwan’s history post the Chinese Civil War.

6 Note that all currencies mentioned in this paper are quoted in USD unless specified otherwise.

7 This paper has omitted some details on TSMC’s creation. See Mathews (1997) for more detailed information regarding the evolution of TSMC.

8 Fab refers to a semiconductor production and manufacturing facility.
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Appendix

Interviewee Questionnaire

Question 1: On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent do you believe Taiwan conducts its diplomatic strategies by prioritizing economic considerations — thereby compensating for traditional approaches that have tended to emphasize on the political and military dimensions?

Question 2: On a scale of 1 to 5, how interconnected or close would you describe the US and Taiwan to be? Do you believe in its 'deepening relationship' over the course of time?

Question 3: On a scale of 1 to 5, what degree of importance would you place Taiwan’s semiconductor industry in its negotiation for some type of informal diplomacy interaction with other countries?

Question 4: On a scale of 1 to 5, what degree would you place Taiwan's semiconductor industry as a leverage tool for national security?

Question 5: Morris Chang has said that "chip making is a vital industry for Taiwan, with a profound impact on the daily lives of its people, its economy, and national defense." On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you agree with this statement?

Question 6: The term 'silicon shield' coins the theory that Taiwan’s dominance in the semiconductor industry is what partially keeps it safe from a potential Chinese military invasion. On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you agree with the concept of 'silicon shield' and whether it actually possesses any influence?

Question 7: TSMC has been directly known as Hugoshenshan (護國神山) to Taiwanese people, on a scale of 1 to 5 how closely tied do you think semiconductor industries are to a sense of national identity and nationalism of Taiwanese people?
A Brief Conversation with Bonnie Glaser on U.S.-Taiwan-China Relations in Lai Ching-te’s Presidency

Jane Pan and Phillip Meng

January 17, 2024

Bonnie S. Glaser is the managing director of GMF’s Indo-Pacific program. She has worked at the intersection of Asia-Pacific geopolitics and U.S. policy for more than three decades. She is also a co-author of U.S.-Taiwan Relations: Will China’s Challenge Lead to a Crisis? (Brookings Press, April 2023). This interview is greatly supported by the Taiwan Studies Program at the University of Washington, featuring Bonnie Glaser’s book talk, U.S.-Taiwan Relations: Will China’s Challenges Lead to a Crisis? This interview has been edited for clarity.

Jackson School Journal: After January 13, 2024, the Taiwan presidential election, many people are discussing about U.S. and Taiwan relations. So, we really appreciate this opportunity to chat with you about this topic post the election date. Our first opening question is: What does the victory of Lai Ching-te mean for US-Taiwan relations?

Bonnie Glaser: Well, I think that the United States, first of all, would have wanted to continue to have very strong relations with Taiwan, regardless of who was elected president in Taiwan.

Although many people believe that the United States had a preference in this election, I think that is absolutely wrong. The United States was actually quite careful and prudent in the way that it engaged with and treated each of the candidates. The most important thing for the United States was that the election be free, fair, considered legitimate by the people of Taiwan, and that it produced an outcome that would contribute to the further strengthening of US-Taiwan relations.

Jackson School Journal: On the other hand, we take it that China had a preference, in so far, that its relationship with the DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) has been unfriendly. But now that the party has won its third consecutive term. Are there any indications that Beijing is pursuing a more constructive relationship with the DPP? In other words, is there a way for China to live with its success?

Bonnie Glaser: That’s a very difficult question to answer. First, I would say that I think there are different views in China, about the policy toward Taiwan. There are people who think that Beijing should reengage with the DPP, at least with DPP-affiliated scholars. Others even support the resumption of some semi-official dialogue with the incoming government. But that is not the majority view in China, and it is not likely to be the position of the government in China.

U.S. officials engaged many times with each of the candidates in the runup to the election. When Lai Ching-te was running for president, he emphasized that his goal would be to preserve the cross-strait status quo. He stated that he would continue to prioritize strengthening Taiwan’s defense. These are two issue areas that are very important to the United States. Lai Ching-te also said that he would inherit and build on President Tsai Ing-wen’s policies in those two areas. So, I think that we should expect a great deal of continuity in Lai Ching-te’s policies. The United States dispatched a delegation to Taiwan immediately following the election to talk with president-elect Lai. We don’t yet know who will occupy the key positions in his government. That’s something I think that the United States hopes to learn more about in the coming months--perhaps that was even discussed during the visit of this delegation. And, of course, for the next four months, President Tsai Ing-wen is still president. And I think that Washington will continue to work closely with her.

Jackson School Journal: That’s a very difficult question to answer. First, I would say that I think there are different views in China, about the policy toward Taiwan. There are people who think that Beijing should reengage with the DPP, at least with DPP-affiliated scholars. Others even support the resumption of some semi-official dialogue with the incoming government. But that is not the majority view in China, and it is not likely to be the position of the government in China.

I don’t think that there will be an assessment in Beijing that China’s approach to Taiwan has completely failed. They will take note that 60% of Taiwan’s voters did not vote for Lai and the DPP lost its majority in the Legislative Yuan. China’s policy toward Taiwan is always composed of carrots and sticks. The mix of carrots and sticks can change from one president to another, or one period to another, but I expect that they will continue to rely on carrots and sticks. Under Tsai Ing-wen’s presidency, we have seen the pressure that Beijing has applied grow: it has increased in military, economic, and diplomatic ways. China’s toolkit to apply pressure on Taiwan has expanded over the last eight years, and I expect we will see more pressure from Beijing over time.
The first action that Beijing took after Lai Ching-te was elected was to poach yet another of Taiwan’s diplomatic allies. I recall I was in Beijing in 2016 visiting the Taiwan Affairs Office, when it was announced that the Gambia was going to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing. Gambia had broken diplomatic ties with Taiwan in 2013, during the Ma Ying-jeou era (2008-2016). At that time there was a diplomatic truce across the strait, so Beijing wanted to keep a distance and not establish diplomatic relations with Gambia. But soon after Tsai Ing-wen they established diplomatic relations with Gambia. Now, Beijing has persuaded Nauru to flip. Taiwan is now left with 12 diplomatic allies.

I think the next action that Beijing may take, will be to reimpose tariffs on more of the products that are included in the cross-strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) that was signed between the two sides of the strait in 2010. I think it was about six or eight weeks ago, that China imposed tariffs on 12 of those products. And we are likely to see more going forward. Of course, we will see more military pressure as well. However, I do not think we will see anything on the scale of the big display that the PLA (People’s Liberation Army) engaged in after then-speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August of 2022. But I do think that we will see more military activity around Taiwan. My hope is that China will rethink its approach to Taiwan, and that maybe there will be some readjustment going forward. It’s interesting that Secretary of State Tony Blinken said, I think it was yesterday when he was in Davos, that China’s approach to Taiwan has been counterproductive. I agree with that assessment, and I certainly hope that more people in China recognize that as well.

Jackson School Journal: Thank you very much for your comments. We know that Taiwan has strong economic ties with a lot of other countries. We want to know more specifically, how do economic ties between China and Taiwan, influence or limit Beijing and Taipei’s management of cross-strait relations?

Bonnie Glaser: I think both Taiwan and China have a stake in their economic relationship. It would be harmful to both sides if trade stopped, which is highly unlikely. China has a high degree of dependence on Taiwan for ICT (Information and communications technology) products. A large percentage of its semiconductor chips come from Taiwan. Taiwan’s investment has historically been extremely important to China. That has begun to diminish in the last couple of years, which is consistent with the decline of overall investment from other countries into China.

Taiwan has recognized that its excessive reliance on mainland China is a vulnerability for Taiwan. Nearly 45% of Taiwan’s exports went to China and Hong Kong in 2020. That’s very high. Last year, that dropped to 35%. That was partly due to China’s economic slowdown, but also a result of President Tsai Ing-wen’s policies that seek diversification of Taiwan’s markets. The New Southbound Policy is one part of that. And I think there has been some success. I also think that during the COVID period, the economic relationship was affected between the two sides of the strait. I support Tsai Ing-wen’s goal of diversifying. I think Taiwanese companies, many of them also want to diversify, which is similar to companies all around the world that don’t want to put all of their eggs in one basket. Apple Computer is a very good example. They’re now shifting some of their manufacturing to India.

At the same time, neither side of the strait wants to completely cut off their economic engagements. Taiwan and China are so geographically close, it makes sense for them to have a significant volume of trade. But from the perspective of Taiwan’s security, it just needs to be done in a careful way. And there should not be over-dependence on any single market, and certainly not a market in a country that poses a security threat.

Jackson School Journal: When it comes to diversification, I want to focus on the United States, as an economic partner for Taiwan. So last month, the House Select Committee suggested that the United States establish a bilateral trade agreement with Taiwan. In your view, is the domestic political support in Taiwan conducive to such a step? And how might China respond?

Bonnie Glaser: I have been advocating a free trade agreement between the United States and Taiwan for a long time. And I participated in a hearing in 2022 on the issue of the future of US-Taiwan trade. It took place right after Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan. The hearing was held by the Ways and Means Committee to consider the prospect of a trade agreement between the United States and Taiwan. This has been an issue that has been discussed for decades, both in the United States and Taiwan. The fact that it has not been realized, is in part due to the lack of political support in the United States for free trade agreements in general. I think it is unlikely that we will realize negotiations on a US-Taiwan free trade agreement in the near term. That said, I think the US-Taiwan Initiative on 21st Century Trade mirrors the IPEF negotiations (Indo-Pacific Economic Framework) that the United States is having with other trading partners. We’ve already signed an initial agreement with Taiwan.
that covers five areas in our bilateral trading relationship, including anti-corruption, small- and medium-sized enterprises, and trade facilitation. Both Taiwan and the United States have the ambition to close the deal by the end of the Biden administration. I certainly hope that that is achieved. Of course, the easy things were done first, and some of the more difficult challenges will be addressed in the second part of the negotiations. These include agriculture, labor, and the environment.

If we can complete that agreement, that essentially brings the United States and Taiwan very close to what we could call a free-trade agreement. But it will not have market access provisions. Unfortunately, I think that that has reduced the support for this in Taiwan, because Taiwan very much wants to have expanded market access in the United States. The other possible agreement that is being negotiated is the double taxation agreement. This agreement would prevent companies from being taxed twice, whether they’re American companies investing in Taiwan or Taiwanese companies investing in the United States. And I think that that would benefit both sides as well.

Jackson School Journal: Not a question, but it is important to note that the Taiwanese economic Minister, Wang Mei-hua, when she visited Seattle last year, really touted the double taxation agreement.

In addition to that, we would like to know what is your opinion on the US Trade Representative’s comments about the economic neglect of Taiwan when they visited Tokyo for the IPEF (Indo-Pacific Economic Framework) meeting?

Bonnie Glaser: I think the only thing that I can say is that the United States’ approach to the Indo-Pacific region has lacked a very strong economic pillar. There has been a strong emphasis on US military presence, and secondarily on diplomatic engagement. Countries throughout the Indo-Pacific have urged the United States for years, both under the Trump administration and the Biden administration, to strengthen our economic relationships with the region. When President Trump withdrew from CPTPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership), which Hillary Clinton would have done anyway if she had been elected, the United States really had no concrete plans to strengthen our economic relationships with countries in the region. At the same time, China was continuing to expand its economic ties with its neighbors. Last year, China put in a bid to join the CPTPP.

So, I give the Biden administration a lot of credit for coming up with a plan to bolster our economic presence in the region. That is what IPEF is, and they attached a lot of importance to getting as many countries as possible to join it on the ground floor. Several of those countries—I speculate here—likely privately indicated that they might not join if Taiwan was a member. And that presented the Biden administration with a conundrum, what should it do? The choice was made to prioritize the inclusion of as many countries as possible in IPEF; and at the same time to separately launch the trade negotiations with Taiwan, on virtually the same set of issues. Perhaps our agreement with Taiwan will get across the finish line before the United States finishes negotiating IPEF—and if that happens, that will be a good outcome. So, it was a second-best solution, and it was unfortunate that the United States decided to exclude Taiwan. But I understand the circumstances and the drivers of that decision.

Jackson School Journal: Final question, we recognize that this is a difficult situation for the Taiwanese people to be contending with, both the fears of invasion and the risks of other kinds of non-kinetic escalations. So, we would like to know what do you think Taiwanese leaders and their public expect from the United States? What kind of reassurance do they seek from us?

Bonnie Glaser: I think there are different views on that in Taiwan. There are some people that want the United States to change what has been a long-standing position of what’s referred to as “strategic ambiguity” and instead adopt a policy of “strategic clarity”: give Taiwan an ironclad commitment to its defense, that regardless of the circumstances, the US would defend Taiwan if it were attacked. There are many people in Taiwan’s military who think that a clear US commitment would be very beneficial, because then they would know what missions the US military would be responsible for and what missions Taiwan should focus on. So, the United States’ position on defending Taiwan is one area where there are many people in Taiwan who would like greater assurance.

Of course, reassurance comes in many different forms. The fact that our AIT (American Institute in Taiwan) chair and two former senior US officials were in Taiwan right after the election, was intended to signal reassurance. The dilemma that the United States faces is that we do a lot with Taiwan that cannot or should not, be made public. And that probably will not change going forward. Sometimes some of the things we are doing with Taiwan in the defense realm are leaked and become known by the public. This
happened several times during the Trump administration. In my view, that does not serve Taiwan's interests. I think there are many aspects of our relationship with Taiwan that they should be kept secret. But there are plenty of other things that the United States and Taiwan do that I think signal to their public that we have a very, very strong relationship.

The GCTF, the Global Cooperation Training Framework, is one example. The many delegations that go to Taiwan from our Congress, the trade relationship, and bilateral cooperation on a host of issues such as human rights, women's empowerment, anti-corruption, it's a long list. But regardless of what we do, people in Taiwan will probably always have some anxiety about their relationship with the United States. There's a lot of discussion about the "yimei lun" (疑美論 or the American Skepticism Theory) in Taiwan. And that's unfortunate, I think we have to think about ways that we can reduce the suspicions that people have in Taiwan toward the United States. Beijing is using many different means to try and undermine the confidence that the people of Taiwan have, both in their government and the United States. Ultimately, that undermines deterrence, and it puts Taiwan's security, prosperity, and autonomy in jeopardy. So, I think that's an area that requires greater attention.

Jackson School Journal: Thank you so much!

Endnotes

THEME II
HUMAN RIGHTS AND GLOBAL ADVOCACY
Throughout Europe, far-right political parties have achieved increasing electoral success, forming governing coalitions in Italy, Poland, and Hungary. Many explanations for this shift point toward the backlash against immigration, as far-right parties often establish themselves through anti-immigration positions (Inglehart & Norris 2017; Margalit 2019).

Denmark represents an interesting case due to unprecedented developments in its immigration policy. Starting in 2019, the Danish parliament has introduced a variety of new measures commonly known as the paradigmeskift (paradigm shift), under pressure from growing public sentiment against Muslim immigrants. While the leading far-right party — the Danish People’s Party (DPP) — lost 21 seats and 13% of the overall vote share in 2019 compared to the previous election in 2015, their anti-immigration position was adopted by the governing coalition led by the Social Democrats (Mariager & Olesen 2020). This new wave of legislation was directed especially towards refugees. Asylum protection became temporary, residence permits gained new requirements, and a measure allowed for refugees to be deported to non-EU states for processing (Bailey-Morley & Kumar 2022). Additionally, hundreds of Syrian refugees were informed that they would need to return to Damascus after a Danish Refugee Council (DRC) report claimed the area was safe for return. While several European states such as Poland and Belarus have taken steps to limit the inflow of migrants, Denmark's paradigmeskift marks the region’s most notable refusal of integration and move towards threats of mass deportation.

Like many far-right political parties, the Danish far-right primarily focuses on the perceived cultural changes resulting from immigration. Thus, it is essential to find what types of immigration constitute cultural disruption for the Danish public. Gerdes & Wadensjö (2008) argue this is best understood by splitting immigration between Western and non-Western immigrants to properly show the effect of xenophobic factors. In their historical investigation of Denmark from 1989-2001, the authors found evidence supporting this contention with a prominent link between non-Western immigration and far-right vote share. Similarly, the present study asserts that local non-Western immigration creates a perceived cultural threat to ethnic Danes, leading to increased local electoral support for far-right political parties. Using an updated timeline of 2007-2022, analysis indicates that local rates of non-Western immigration are significantly correlated with votes for the far-right.

The following section will review the relevant literature on immigration and far-right electoral success, and outline the conceptual framework. Next, a portrayal of the empirical methodology will be provided. Finally, the results and potential improvements of the methodology will be discussed, and the paper will conclude.
Immigration has increasingly been considered as the driving factor for this new emergence of far-right political success (Inglehart & Norris 2017; Margalit 2019). Immigration to Europe has grown significantly in recent years, with an especially large influx of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Differing cultural practices such as values, language, religion, and attire brought by such immigrants have led to widespread political backlash in many European countries, as some fear changes to national culture (Inglehart & Norris 2017).

Many of the explanations for this hypothesis draw upon Blumer’s (1958) group threat theory, which stipulates that a society’s dominant group will sustain an increasingly negative view of the outgroup as the outgroup increases in size. In the context of political responses to immigration, this argument contends that anti-immigrant preferences can result from a threat to cultural practices, where culturally dominant citizens fear changing cultural norms and respond by voting in more conservative parties to restrict the minority group’s perceived disruption (Etzerodt & Kongshøj 2022; Hjerm & Nagayoshi 2011; Quillian 1995; Semyonov et al. 2006). Recent studies across Europe have generally found that increases in refugees and immigrant populations tend to enhance far-right support: Though time periods and methods differ, localized research by Halla et al. (2017) in Austria, Hangartner et al. (2018) in Greece, and Mehic (2021) in Sweden reinforce this assertion.

Studies on Denmark have shown this correlation between immigration and far-right success to be largely true historically. In the 1960s, Denmark’s booming economy and labor shortages opened the door to immigrants, but this changed in the dwindling economy of the early 1970s. The far-right party Fremskridtspartiet (The Progress Party) entered the Danish parliament for the first time in 1973, and immigration has continued to be extremely restricted ever since. In the 1980s, salience of this issue was renewed from new immigration flows — largely family reunification immigrants and a growing number of refugees. Scholars such as Harmon (2018) and Gerdes and Wadensjö (2008) have thus investigated the time period from the 1980s to the close of the century, finding that localized immigration increases preference for the far-right among Danish voters.

Harmon (2018) used a timeline of 1981-2001 to perform an instrumental variable analysis, measuring ethnic diversity in housing stock and the electoral success of various political parties. His findings showed that far-right parties won seats as populations of non-Western immigrants and their descendants increased, consistent in both municipal and national elections. However, the results of this study may be understated if we understand election results to represent voter sentiments, particularly in the national parliament. Denmark’s proportional electoral system allows for the multi-party representation seen across European parliaments, but outlier groups still face an uphill battle to gain seats (Gerdes and Wadensjö 2008). With far-right groups often acting as fringe extremist parties, it can be difficult to gauge the perception of voters based solely on elections. Additionally, the use of ethnic composition rather than immigration figures would cause difficulties when focusing on cultural changes. Established immigrants and their descendants tend to be relatively integrated into the dominant society (Heath & Schneider 2021; Vink et al. 2021), reducing their potential for cultural strain. On the other hand, newer immigrants forming their own communities tend to keep their cultural practices and norms, increasing cultural strain (Heath & Schneider 2021). Therefore, measures of immigration are a more accurate embodiment of change to the local cultural environment.

To address the limitations of ethnic and election figures, this study will utilize other variables to gain better access to the connection between immigration and the success of far-right political parties. Vote share will be used in place of election results to reduce underrepresentation of far-right parties. In addition, immigration data will be used rather than ethnic diversity figures, as this highlights the cultural differences at the heart of this issue.

Two studies have already analyzed historical evidence focusing on Danish far-right growth with a similar methodology. Gerdes and Wadensjö (2008) investigated the impact of non-Western immigration on the vote share of far-right parties. Their analysis, spanning from 1989 to 2001, revealed a substantial surge in far-right party support in municipalities that experienced a higher influx of non-Western immigrants. Similarly, Dustmann et al. (2019) took advantage of the random allocation of refugees among Danish municipalities from 1986 to 1998, wherein refugees were randomly assigned residency between each of the municipalities according to the municipal population. Their study discovered a positive correlation between refugee proportions and far-right vote share for the vast majority of municipalities. Each of these studies found significant results in both local and national elections. With more recent data, this work utilizes a similar methodology to evaluate whether these results are consistent with present immigration politics, and uncover the role of immigration within the recent growth of the Danish far-right.

Methodology

The following empirical analysis draws upon data from the last five parliamentary elections to estimate the effect of recent increases in migration on far-right vote share at the municipal level. With the primary interest of non-Western
immigration’s impact on far-right voting, total immigration to each municipality was aggregated into those originating from Western states (EU/EEA members, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) and non-Western states (all others, including stateless refugees).

To calculate the vote share of far-right parties, three parties were selected: the Denmark Democrats (Danmarksdemokraterne), the New Right (Nye Borgerlige), and the Danish People’s Party (Dansk Folkeparti). Populist only classifies the New Right and the Danish People’s Party as far-right populist parties, but this is due to outdated data from the previous election in 2019. Founded in 2022, the Denmark Democrats are widely considered to be a far-right party (Switzer & Beauduin 2023), and their website alone shows clear indicators of a radically anti-immigration position: refugees are described as “Islamist bogeymen” who make up a “criminal immigrant milieu.” Votes for these parties as a percentage of the overall vote was calculated for each municipality in each year.

Voting in Denmark is highly regionalized, with some municipalities consistently favoring specific parties (Gerdes & Wadensjö 2008; Mehic 2021). To properly measure the effect of immigration on far-right voting, several steps have been taken to reduce false correlations in the data. First, vote-share percentages for each of the far-right parties were combined within each municipality to avoid undue bias towards any specific party in a high-migration area. This elucidates a clearer picture of far-right electoral preferences as a whole. Secondly, the dataset only includes results from parliamentary elections, as municipal government elections often discriminate against more mainstream parties, leading to increased support for outlier groups.

### Data

The data in this study was obtained from Statistics Denmark’s municipal-level immigration registries, electoral archives, and extensive population measures. These were calculated for the parliamentary election years between 2007 and 2022. The independent variable of municipal-level immigration is expressed as an annual rate of municipal population to negate bias towards larger municipalities, which sustained consistently high immigration. In consequence, these values are extremely low: total immigration ranged from 0.00-3.64%, with a median of only 0.81%.

For control variables on the municipal-level, the dataset contains averages for income and age, as well as calculated rates of unemployment, violent crime, and working age dependence on public benefit programs based on municipality populations in each year. Data from each of the 98 Danish municipalities are included.

Four models were constructed to better understand immigration’s effects on far-right voting. The first two models show total immigration with and without control variables added. The final two models show immigration split between Western and non-Western, again with and without controls. This method of analysis will give a much

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**FIGURE 1.** Table 1: Total Immigration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Immigration</strong></td>
<td>4.7619*** (0.5054)</td>
<td>6.2199*** (0.6164)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>1.4943*** (0.2013)</td>
<td>1.4943*** (0.2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td>-6.6394*** (0.8921)</td>
<td>-6.6394*** (0.8921)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benefit Usage</strong></td>
<td>0.4343** (0.1617)</td>
<td>0.4343** (0.1617)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unemployment</strong></td>
<td>-1.9092** (0.5916)</td>
<td>-1.9092** (0.5916)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Violent Crime</strong></td>
<td>-1.8969*** (0.1925)</td>
<td>-1.8969*** (0.1925)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors in parentheses
N = 490, ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1

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**FIGURE 2.** Table 2: Split Immigration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Western Immigration</strong></td>
<td>-3.1443* (1.3514)</td>
<td>-0.2096 (1.1001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Western Immigration</strong></td>
<td>9.7006*** (0.9340)</td>
<td>11.472*** (0.9594)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>1.5745*** (0.1905)</td>
<td>1.5745*** (0.1905)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td>-7.3321*** (0.8489)</td>
<td>-7.3321*** (0.8489)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benefit Usage</strong></td>
<td>0.2472 (0.1552)</td>
<td>0.2472 (0.1552)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unemployment</strong></td>
<td>-1.1010* (0.5711)</td>
<td>-1.1010* (0.5711)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Violent Crime</strong></td>
<td>-1.6046*** (0.1868)</td>
<td>-1.6046*** (0.1868)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors in parentheses
N = 490, *p<0.1, ***p<0.001
clearer picture as to whether immigration has an effect on far-right voting, and further highlight if the origin of immigrants has a role. Finally, each model was analyzed through a linear panel regression at a 95% confidence interval to account for the impact of immigration on far-right voting in individual municipalities over time, and across the municipalities.

**Results**

Results from the first two panel regressions show that total immigration is positively correlated even when taking controls into account, demonstrating that unspecified local immigration significantly predicts far-right voting. Table 1 shows this correlation of total immigration to far-right vote share, both without controls (A) and with all controls included (B). Based on these results, a 1% increase in immigration will lead to an average rise of 6% in votes for far-right parties, accounting for all controls. However, control variables show that other factors may influence far-right support, such as income and age. Municipal populations with lower income and higher age produce greater electoral support for far-right political parties.

Despite the significant positive correlation from these models, neither indicate how the origin of immigrants may impact far-right voting. To properly test this hypothesis, total immigration is then dissected into immigration from Western and non-Western states.

With this adjustment, the effect of specific types of immigration is more visible. Table 2 shows the correlation of Western and non-Western immigration to far-right vote share, again both without controls (A) and with controls (B). In both models, non-Western immigration has significant predictive power; while Western immigration has a minimal impact, becoming insignificant when controls are added. These results support the hypothesis that immigration of non-Westerners, not immigration as a whole, is the ideal predictive factor in local far-right voting. In model B, non-Western immigration causes an 11% increase in local far-right voting per 1% increase in local immigration. While the range of this immigration is limited (0-1.6%), their correlation is substantial.

These results show that a more nuanced view of immigration’s impact is needed. The association between immigration and far-right voting oversimplifies the interaction of these variables. Instead, the specific category of non-Western immigration represents a key driver of local-level far-right voting, showing a clear discrimination by voters between immigration from different regions. Figure 1 plots this correlation with the absence of controls, showing a distinct upward slope with data from all municipalities.

The control variables also show several insights. Just as with the previous models, older and less wealthy populations tend to increase electoral support for the far-right, consistent with recent findings in Western Europe (Hall 2016; O’Grady 2023). Violent crime is correlated with decreased vote share for far-right parties — though as violent crime increases with municipal population, this is likely due to population and density factors. This will be explored while limitations of the model are discussed. Last, and perhaps most surprisingly, unemployment has a marginally significant negative correlation with the far-

![FIGURE 3. Non-Western Immigration vs. Far-Right Vote Share in All Municipalities.](source: Own calculations based on Statistics Denmark data (2007-2022).)
right vote. Though a number of studies relating economic insecurity to far-right support use unemployment as a key variable (Algan et al. 2017; Vlandas & Halikiopoulou 2019), these results suggest otherwise. The possibility remains that unemployment in Denmark may be a poor indicator of economic insecurity, as income has a very significant correlation with far-right vote share. Further investigation may be needed to explain the connection between unemployment and far-right voting for the case of Denmark.

Limitations and Improvements

While this research indicates that non-Western immigration increases far-right electoral support, there are limitations concerning municipal population and immigration salience. Notably, Copenhagen and the other most populous municipalities (Frederiksberg, Aarhus, and Odense) show a negative correlation between non-Western immigration and far-right vote share (Figure 2). By 2022, Copenhagen had the lowest far-right vote in the country at just 4.4%. This is consistent with the findings of Dustman et al. (2019) which tentatively showed increased refugee allocation within the largest 5% of municipalities was correlated with a decrease in far-right voting for both local and municipal elections. Their study suggests that for the majority of municipalities in a rural setting, expanding refugee populations led to competition for social and cultural dominance, increasing anti-immigrant sentiments and far-right vote share. This supports group threat theory (Blumer 1958), as the present study argues. However, the authors further asserted that urbanized areas had increased rates of close interaction with immigrants, which led to a decrease in anti-immigrant sentiments. The empirical analysis makes no claim regarding the causal factors for decreased support for far-right parties in highly urbanized areas, but additional research focused on cities may explain this continued phenomenon to a greater extent.

An evident obstacle in this model is the lack of an immigration salience variable measuring the importance of immigration to Danish voters. Figure 3 shows the national salience of immigration in Denmark, defined as the percentage of respondents who identified immigration as a key issue. Salience peaked in 2015, aligning with the European migrant crisis that vastly increased Danish immigration, and the dramatic rise in electoral success of far-right parties. Although local non-Western immigration (particularly refugee inflow) in 2015 likely increased local electoral support for far-right parties, this analysis does not make a causal claim through the use of local saliency, as no data was available. However, it is clear from a broader perspective that issue salience matters in this analysis. Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7 illustrate this visually, with darker areas showing increased immigration in Figures 4 and 5, and increased far-right vote share in Figures 6 and 7. There is a correlation between non-Western immigration and far-right voting in both 2015 and 2022, particularly in the northern midlands and western areas of Denmark. However, rates of far-right voting are significantly higher across the municipalities in 2015, despite lower rates of non-Western immigration. This points to the impact of immigration issue salience in the far-right vote — a topic that should receive further study for the case of Denmark and beyond. Finally, these maps also show more clearly how the Copenhagen area (in the east) and other large

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**FIGURE 4.** Non-Western Immigration vs. Far-Right Vote Share in All Municipalities Largest Municipalities.

population areas have consistently low rates of far-right vote share despite high levels of immigration.

Conclusion

Analyzing municipal data across five Danish election cycles, this study demonstrates that non-Western immigration strongly impacts far-right vote share. However, the sizable effect of other factors such as age, income, population density, and issue salience show that far-right electoral preference remains a complex topic. This study prompts questions about the role of multiculturalism and urbanization in political preferences, with a more thorough analysis of local factors needed to completely determine the cause of far-right political victories.

Despite these limitations, this research complicates the common narrative associating far-right success with overall immigration trends, and emphasizes the importance of differentiating between Western and non-Western immigration. While total immigration exhibits a positive correlation with far-right vote share, this effect is largely driven by non-Western immigration, which proves to be a significant predictor even when accounting for multiple control variables. These findings extend the current literature on the Danish case by providing contemporary analysis which supports the claims of Gerdes and Wadensjö (2008) and, to a more limited extent, Dustmann et al. (2019). Additionally, the results substantiate beliefs that the geographic origin of local immigrants influences the political behavior of native residents. With such a strong response to recent European immigration, it is essential to consider cultural and demographic factors in election outcomes to truly understand the growing support for far-right movements.
Endnotes

1 Far-right political parties in Poland are no longer within the majority coalition as of October 2023. See “Poland - 2023 general election.” Available at: https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/poland/.

2 See “Populists in Europe – especially those on the right – have increased their vote shares in recent elections.” Available at: https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/10/06/populists-in-europe-especially-those-on-the-right-have-increased-their-vote-shares-in-recent-elections/

3 11 of the 12 experts cited in this report condemned the relocation decision, claiming the DRC misrepresented their findings. See “Denmark asylum: The Syrian refugees no longer welcome to stay.” Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57156835

4 See “A roadmap for European asylum and refugee integration policy.” Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/articles/a-roadmap-for-european-asylum-and-refugee-integration-policy/


6 See “Migration Flows to Europe: Arrivals” Available at: https://dtm.iom.int/europe/arrivals?type=arrivals


8 “Islamistiske mørkemænd.” ‘Mørkemænd’ translates literally as ‘dark men,’ but approximates in English as ‘bogeyman.’ Available at: https://danmarksdemokraterne.dk/forside/udlaendingepolitik/.

9 “Kriminelle indvandrermiljøer.” Available at: https://danmarksdemokraterne.dk/forside/udlaendingepolitik/.

10 Full dataset available upon request.

11 Income in Danish Krones (DKK), expressed as ((income)*10-5) to simplify analysis.

12 Ages 16-67

13 The study conducted by Dustman et al. (2019) used data from before the 2007 reforms (1986-98), which grouped the previous 271 municipalities into the current 98. Thus, the largest 5% of municipalities represented in population size included a larger grouping of municipalities (13) than the data may otherwise suggest, yet represent similar areas in the most urbanized settings around Copenhagen and other major cities.
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A Conversation with Ikponwosa Ero: Insights from a Former UN Independent Expert on Albinism who Fought Goliath—And Won.

Taisha Bayliss

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Ikponwosa Ero is a lawyer by training and the first United Nations Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism. Ms. Ero’s work is extensive, ranging from crafting groundbreaking, landmark advocacy initiatives, including the African Union Plan of Action on Albinism in Africa (2021-2031) and the Pan African Parliament Guidelines on Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks: Eliminating Harmful Practices and other Human Rights Violations. This interview is greatly supported by the Center of Global Studies, featuring Ms. Ero’s public lecture on albinism human rights. This interview has been edited for clarity.

Jackson School Journal: Firstly, thank you for making time for this interview. You often speak of having albinism yourself and how that experience and the discrimination you’ve faced have played a role in your desire to work in the field of human rights for people with albinism. How much do you believe positionality contributes to people’s ability to work on specific human rights issues?

Ikponwosa Ero: I believe having what people call lived experience and what you’ve described as “positionality” really contribute to the richness of what you can do working in human rights. However, that has to be tempered with a more objective reality. Positionality, or lived experience, is not objective reality, and that’s very important. It’s necessary that the person who has that positionality be aware that they are part of a larger paradigm of human rights and that they need, for instance, to bring in allies, people who don’t have that positionality, to their side. Because, if we’re talking about inclusion, and inclusion is one of the ultimate goals of human rights, then you need people who don’t have the positionality to be understanding of your position. So, while positionality is key, it is not the only necessary element.

Jackson School Journal: Regarding collaboration and solidarity, you mentioned in your talk that you had some issues trying to find where albinism fit within the human rights community. When you approached the disability community, there was a sentiment that your issue was detracting from the solidarity [of the larger movement] had their reasons, and it is very important that we listen to each other. The issue is whether the reasons are justified. Are they good? Can I see reason with you? Some reasons I heard were: “You guys are taking away from what we’ve worked so hard to do.” And I think what they did was formidable. Uniting one billion people with disabilities around one cause is not an easy thing to do, and they ultimately got a convention out of that. I think that’s huge. The Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities was adopted in 2006. Then we showed up about seven years later, saying, “Should we pay attention to people with albinism?” I think [the larger human rights community] was enjoying the benefits of solidarity when we showed up, so it was very jarring [for them to be asked to focus on albinism]. Other people had tried to do things outside the movement, but they were not as visible, so maybe they did not appear as threatening as we did. However, we gained a lot of visibility right away because albinism is quite intriguing from different angles, and I think this made us appear threatening to the larger disability community. It made us look like we were going to detract from the solidarity of their movement. So, I think they had a reason to feel like they did.

Ikponwosa Ero: I believe that the people who complained about albinism detracting from the solidarity [of the larger movement] had their reasons, and it is very important that we listen to each other. The issue is whether the reasons are justified. Are they good? Can I see reason with you? Some reasons I heard were: “You guys are taking away from what we’ve worked so hard to do.” And I think what they did was formidable. Uniting one billion people with disabilities around one cause is not an easy thing to do, and they ultimately got a convention out of that. I think that’s huge. The Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities was adopted in 2006. Then we showed up about seven years later, saying, “Should we pay attention to people with albinism?” I think [the larger human rights community] was enjoying the benefits of solidarity when we showed up, so it was very jarring [for them to be asked to focus on albinism]. Other people had tried to do things outside the movement, but they were not as visible, so maybe they did not appear as threatening as we did. However, we gained a lot of visibility right away because albinism is quite intriguing from different angles, and I think this made us appear threatening to the larger disability community. It made us look like we were going to detract from the solidarity of their movement. So, I think they had a reason to feel like they did.

The one thing I regret is that we [as advocates for the human rights of people with Albinism] could have done more to engage the disability community. Although we
did try, it didn’t work. We knew that we had an emergency on our hands [people with albinism were being murdered and dismembered], so we kind of went “rogue” because we believed in the convention. That was the funny thing: we used the convention to justify our actions. The convention has specific measures to bring people from behind, you can call it affirmative action. [This affirmative action] applies to people with disabilities as a whole, so, by extension, it applies to specific groups within the movement. So, what we’re asking for is support. Even if you stop supporting us after 10 or 20 years, that’s fine. We’re going to take advantage of that time and do a lot with it. So that’s how we started selling specific measures to remove the perception of the threat we imposed on the disability community.

Jackson School Journal: On this question of solidarity, it seems that there is a framing that solidarity means rallying around an issue that we can all agree on and sidelining these kinds of “spoiler issues” that generally concern minorities within these already marginalized groups. Do you believe that that is true solidarity? Or is there something else we can agree is more attuned to true solidarity that can allow us to show solidarity for these minority issues without framing them as detractors or “spoiler issues”?

Ikponwosa Ero: Solidarity does have to have a certain level of fluidity in practice so that we can change the circumstances and not become rigid. What solidarity meant at one point when we were trying to get the convention is different from what solidarity meant after the convention. The convention is like a collection of standards on how we want to treat people with disabilities, and once that has been achieved, then solidarity needs to be reconsidered. For example, we need to think about whether we need everyone to be towed into the same line. Yes. Before the convention, we did have to show the outside world [a united front] that we needed the convention. We had to stand together, have a strong, united voice, and see exactly what we wanted. Because if detraction happened at that point, it wouldn’t be good for establishing a set of standards.

Once that standard was adopted, it became a question of what solidarity meant in terms of implementing the convention. Does it really mean everyone is tooting the same party line? Does it really mean gatekeeping and making sure only certain people are allowed so that only the elite in the movement can speak? And once a convention is adopted and it is time to focus on implementation, do you need the same elite? Probably not. So, I think most movements would have to reconsider what solidarity means at that point and maybe allow for more voices and welcome a wider variety of elites beyond what you need while working on the convention. We need elites in terms of implementation because we need knowledge in language translation and in terms of promoting the issue. So, we basically need to declassify the movement while being united or maintaining solidarity around the convention. The convention itself is the consequence of solidarity, not so much of people. So, solidarity should shift, and the people themselves become more diverse in terms of who among them should become speakers for the movement. Even I am working through this process because I’m witnessing how solidarity progresses within the movement. [Currently] the kind of solidarity we have is not serving us well because it’s the same as the solidarity pre-convention; it is what we’re still carrying over, and we are realizing we have to shift.

Jackson School Journal: Related to this concept of broadening the scope of solidarity, declassifying movements, and diversifying the leadership and voices in the disability movement and the human rights struggle generally, you’ve been quoted several times stating that the principal role of human rights movements should be “leaving no one behind” and “starting with the furthest behind first.” Along with dispelling these myths about minority issues creating a “spoiler effect” within movements, how else can we highlight the importance of solidarity with these kinds of minority groups, and emphasize this principle of starting with the furthest behind first and elucidate the way that prioritizing those furthest behind does indeed benefit the entire human rights movement?

Ikponwosa Ero: One of the ways to do that is action planning. For example, have a very practical implementation strategy in writing so everyone can see what you’re doing and where you’re going. That’s engaging because [otherwise] nobody knows what you’re thinking. One of the things we did was to come up with an action plan for Africa [because] that’s where the urgent issues were. In the plan, we had short-term, mid-term, and long-term [strategies]. So, people could see that in the short term, we were going to do a lot of specific measures for people with albinism, and in the long term we were setting the bones of integrating albinism back into the larger disability contingent. I think that helped people settle down because they could see our vision. This two-track approach was the standard approach, specifically to integrate into a broader movement. So, when people saw the published plan in around 2018, there was a lot less resistance because people could see that we were not denying being a part of the disability community. We just wanted to inject short-term measures to settle the attacks, or at least eliminate them if we could, and then,
in the long term, integrate people with albinism into the disability movement. So, I think when that was up and public, everyone saw what we were thinking, and it was more engaging. Sometimes, you also need to engage your so-called detractors in that process. We invited a lot of people who surveyed people with disabilities to our action-planning processes so that they could see that we were actually not their enemies. We just needed short-term to mid-term measures, and, in the long term, we would come back into the movement full-time.

Jackson School Journal: Thank you for sharing this adaptive, strategic, and cohesive way of addressing these concerns. Some of this sentiment about detraction and this idea of “spoiler issues” comes from the fear that there are limited resources and attention or focus for these human rights issues and global justice. It can be easy to feel pulled in a million directions and struggle to figure out where to start. How do we, as a global community of individuals, prioritize where to focus our energy and resources when fighting for human rights?

Ikponwosa Ero: This is a pressing question. It is very central for funders [of human rights movements] right now because they get approached by many pressing issues. It's an easy question to answer on the private level because people naturally gravitate to what drives them and gives them energy, which is good. This work is tough, so you need to go where you will have the energy to sustain yourself, and the answer to that is going to issues that are more personal to you. For example, supporting people who have this certain condition because your family member had it is totally fine. We need people to go where they have passion, where it's easy for them to have empathy, where it's easy for them to regenerate themselves. So, that's on the private level.

In terms of the funders, it's very challenging. I will be on the panel for an event to discuss this issue in one month. It's a funders-only event, and it was by invitation only. They are asking us, as activists, “What would you do if you were us?” “We’ve been approached by all these amazingly necessary issues, and we only have limited funds. What would you suggest we do?” So, one of the approaches that my colleagues and I on the panel are going to propose is intersectional funding. For example, If you're supporting women, then make sure that in the game of women, you are supporting women with disabilities. I have thought out the implications of those resources, and it seems that you will need somebody who drives the partnerships, drives the processes, and ensures that people are included and evaluated. This also means that it’s extra money, but it will cost less in the long run instead of supporting women and disabilities as silos. So, everyone kind of agrees with that, but how to do it is something we have to figure out in the next few years.

Jackson School Journal: Related to this issue of intersectionality, there has always been much discussion about whether human rights and documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) are fundamentally Western conceptions and whether we can achieve true liberation or human rights using mechanisms of Western ideology. Do you believe that these are fundamentally Western conceptions? And if they are, can these Western systems be used to achieve liberation?

Ikponwosa Ero: The answer is yes and no. Yes, they are Western, but no, they’re also not Western; they are human. Human experiences are different, but they are also similar. So, it's both, and that's why we're kind of paradoxical creatures. After fighting so many wars and seeing the horrors of humanity, coming up with a document to prevent that is quite commendable. Because firings have happened everywhere, everyone can benefit from the Western approach to resolving and preventing conflict. But non-Western people also have an opportunity to take what’s good about human rights and adapt them to their situation. The question about that is ensuring the right people are in the room.

For instance, when the African Charter on Human and People's Rights was drafted, of course it mirrored a lot of the fundamental rights of the UDHR. However, they took time to change things a little. Their own document is called the Charter on Human and People's Rights. By doing so, they recognize that the African sentiment is not only about an individual’s rights but also about the people’s rights as a collective. Because there are a lot of indigenous groups, there is also a lot of emphasis on community-centered cultures, and cultural rights are not individual; they are inherently collective rights and are therefore included in the Charter on Human and People's Rights. So, right away, they picked up on that and changed their charter to reflect this. Now, could they have done more? Yes, but I think even just having that was a huge example of how you can take what's good from elsewhere and adapt it to your situation. Because of this, our own charter has some particular rights of peoples. African individuality is quite different from Western notions, and they tried to fix that in their own charter. So yes, the UDHR came from a Western culture, but we also know there's something human about it that we
can take, use, and assimilate into our own realities.

Jackson School Journal: Regarding rights, some believe that our civil rights protect and enscorce our human rights, and they, therefore, should proceed our human rights, and other people believe that our human rights by virtue of being human rights are intrinsic and they should precede our civil rights. So, there’s this division that’s created and sometimes a hierarchy between civil and human rights. How do you perceive this division? Is it beneficial? Is it necessary? What is your opinion on the way that some countries seem to prioritize only some sets of rights and not others?

Ikponwosa Ero: So, two types of dichotomies happen: there’s one between civil and political rights on the one hand and economic, social, and cultural rights on the other. So, there’s that dichotomy. They take human rights and split them into those related mostly to the state protecting the citizens, for instance, the state giving people basic human rights to shelter. Civil and political rights also include the right to life, the right to security, economic and social rights, the right to housing, the right to work, and all that the state feels will take time [to provide to its citizens]. Then there’s also another dichotomy between people who feel development should come before human rights. So, for example, let’s allow Walmart into the country to get people jobs before you start badgering us for human rights. Because when there are people employed, there will be fewer people without their rights basically. And it does make some sense because if a Walmart is there, this right to work has been fulfilled, and the right to health and health insurance is also fulfilled. So, there’s these two debates.

I believe the dichotomy between civil and political rights and economic and social rights is artificial because they’re so interlinked. If you want to provide people with life and security, you better give them the right to health and work. The other dichotomy of development versus human rights is also a non-starter because it’s a chicken-and-egg situation. You can put one over the other, except when the context demands that countries push either human rights or development. For example, if there’s a war or imminent war, it makes more sense to focus on human rights rather than development at that point. If there’s no war, and the country just doesn’t have any funding - for example, I spoke to a friend from Malawi who works in the government, and he told me, “The government is broke. We don’t have money”. So, for now, it makes sense for the government of Malawi to welcome Walmart before it does have money to focus on human rights. Things are not so black and white, and these debates are kind of artificial because, at the end of the day, it’s mostly contextual.

Jackson School Journal: It seems like for people with albinism, the right to life without guaranteed health care is a bit useless when many people with albinism die before the age of 40 because they don’t have access to health care, sunscreen, cancer screenings, and the like. And on the issue of development versus human rights, you deal with the argument that states make that this is an issue of development, and we should just work on the country’s development. But the attacks are urgent; people are getting mutilated and murdered now; what good is the development of the country to a group of people suffering this immense violence right now? So, when you further flesh out this weird division of rights that happens, both false dichotomies pose horrible outcomes.

Ikponwosa Ero: Exactly. Some issues are more immediate. States try to separate what they see as immediate human rights from progressive realization of human rights so that when we move into account, they can say, “No, no, that’s immediate, so we’re going to do something about it, but that one is progressive realization, so, we need like 50 years or more.” The states’ goal usually is to try to push as much as possible under the principle of progressive realization as opposed to considering them as immediate. For example, they see war as an immediate issue or something like Ebola as a crisis or an immediate issue. For them, everything else is seen as an issue of progressive realization unless it’s an issue with the right to life, which our issue fell under. But because the right to life [in our case] was not everyone being attacked at the same time, it was kind of one-at-a-time, individual attacks; so, for some of them, this also fit under progressive realization. It was not all the states that said that, but there was at least one country that was really bent on demarcating between these two things and was saying, “People with albinism, they’re like, okay” or, “well, the attacks have slowed down, so now, let’s focus on progressive realization.”

Jackson School Journal: So, would you say that these dichotomies are largely artificial and damaging to the advancement of human rights in the interest of economic progress and other such projects?

Ikponwosa Ero: They can be damaging depending on the situation. Suppose an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) comes into the UN reporting on what is happening with albinism, and the country responds by...
saying that it is an issue of development. In that case, the UN can look back at the record. It’s open to the world, so you can immediately see if something is not adding up. But it’s not reasonable to say that this is a development issue. States have to wait for their capital city to sign off on statements, so they usually don’t come out using that dichotomy. They usually only use it when there is a gray area. For example, in the beginning, when we were pushing for a response to the attacks on people with albinism, we didn’t hear anything from the state because they knew it would be bad to use that language of development. But as soon as there was a decline in the attacks, then you heard them say, “The effects are going down. Here’s proof. Can we now move this issue to more of a development issue/progressive realization?” That way, we would stop putting the fire on their behind, so to speak.

Jackson School Journal: The UN has little actionable power outside of naming and shaming and other “soft power.” What is the true benefit of the kinds of actions that the UN can take using this kind of soft power? Do you believe the UN should adopt some sort of human rights enforcement agency? Would it be beneficial, or is it dangerous to have some kind of international enforcement agency that can override or supersede the sovereignty of nation-states?

Ikponwosa Ero: The UN was founded principally on sovereignty, aside from human rights. So, the UN’s units are countries, and the people who drive the UN are countries. Anything that would override sovereignty will probably be rejected, as we have learned from the European Union. There will be lots of backlash because countries don’t like being controlled when the agency barely knows what is happening on the ground.

There is also this principle in the philosophy of subsidiarity that people closer to the issues are in the best position to solve them. For example, you can’t have someone from Nevada or New York controlling what is happening in Seattle. That makes no sense. And it’s almost an insult to the human rights community of people in that place because they have a right to self-determination and to decide the outcome for themselves, which I think is why there’s no enforcement mechanism. Let’s not deny that power is unequal at the UN. Some people contribute more to the system than others and feel they are more entitled to control things. So, as a country, why would I donate millions to a system that then comes and enforces my rights? A lot of countries will not stand for that. The best thing they’re doing right now is naming and shaming, or at least bringing to light what’s happening in countries.

Every convention at the UN has a committee that governs documentation. For example, the Committee on the Rights of People with Disabilities would call in a country every few years to report on how they have implemented the constitution from year to year. The committee also receives reports from CSOs (Civil Society Organizations) saying, “Don’t listen to the country’s report; this is what is really happening.” Then, the committee takes all the reports and issues its own third report, making recommendations. It’s all politics. Everyone can say, “This country is not doing these things because I believe the CSO over the government.” Countries care how they look, even though some try not to show it. They do. The fact that they try to address the issues in their own report shows that they care. So, I think naming and shaming has more power than we think because people care about their country’s reputation at the end of the day.

Jackson School Journal: On a separate note, you mentioned that some scholarship has been produced linking the capitalist wave in Africa to the rise of incidents of Harmful Practices Associated with Witchcraft and Rituals (HPAWR). Do you believe there’s an intersection between capitalism and the commodification of the bodies of people with albinism as it concerns the harvesting, selling, and trade of human remains and body parts for the uptick in Harmful Practices Associated with Witchcraft and Rituals?

Ikponwosa Ero: I think in some countries like Tanzania, where the study by Cimpric’ was done, it makes sense that it was a contributing factor. I have to clarify that I am not anti-capitalist. I have seen capitalism take people out of poverty. It’s like every system; it has its good and bad sides; it just has to be done properly and checked. I’ve seen a lot of good come from it in terms of helping people in a dignified way because sometimes, the charity or even the service model can be very undignified. Whereas if people get loans, they can start their own businesses which is very uplifting. So, capitalism is not a terrible thing. However, it’s nicer when people grow into the system so that they know how to operate the system. When a government suddenly says, “We are now taking away all the safeguards, and now we’re going to be capitalist.” It’s very jarring to people who’ve never been in that system. Especially if they’re coming from a more communist/socialist system where care for one another is emphasized. Because sharing goods and services is central, a push for harsh individualization would make absolutely no sense to socialists. So, yes, I think in some countries like Tanzania, where the study by Cimpric was done, it makes sense that [capitalism] was a factor. Because people didn’t understand how you’re wealthy so quickly. So, what made sense was to blame it on witchcraft because that
was the tool they had to understand it. Also, the so-called “witch doctors” are capitalists because they capitalize on this thinking and say, “Hey, I can make you rich too, so give me money.” So, capitalism [can go very wrong when the] system is not checked. But I don’t think capitalism by itself is a causal factor, but unchecked, it was a contributing factor. The government probably also did not anticipate capitalism meshing with harmful practices in that manner. I don’t think anyone foresaw that, especially in that country.

Jackson School Journal: Do you believe this was a very specific case in Tanzania in which we saw this kind of odd effect of capitalism on harmful practices?

Ikponwosa Ero: It takes other forms in other countries. For instance, when I was working on harmful practices related to witchcraft as a whole, I worked with some NGOs based in Nigeria who were fighting against child witchcraft accusations. These were often propelled by so-called pastors and Christian pastors. They’re called “pastoral premiers” because, these pastors are using their congregants to make money. So, that’s another type of capitalization outside of Tanzania. The Pastors would say, “Your child is a witch,” even though the child just has autism. Then, they will move along and say, “I can exorcise them. Give me a small amount of money, and I’ll do it,” and this was capitalization as well. So, it’s similar to the question you asked about human rights being a Western ideal. Capitalism is a Western idea that we inherently have adopted, but we need to adapt it. It takes other forms in other countries. It’s a delicate balance and takes a constantly high level of self-awareness. A high level of awareness of the potential of others, a very high emotional capacity, empathy, and high EQ (Emotional Quotient) to be able to gauge other people’s potentiality by testing other people’s potential through psychometric testing to see what their natural talents are and how they use that. Even if you don’t have access to psychometric testing, you can still observe them long enough and listen to them deeply enough to see what their likes, dislikes, and strengths are. Then, you can know when to bring them into the orchestra and what instrument to give them to play. That way, they feel engaged and like they’re used in a good way, and you don’t have to carry the burden alone, and you can protect your mental health in the process. This is something that I feel is necessary in every field. At the heart of the reason why people are collapsing more readily under mental health issues is that the complexities are getting more complex, and the tools are not readily available. So, in my current transition to coaching young managers and executives, this is part of what we’re trying to get at (myself and my business partners) to help people anticipate and manage complexity.

Jackson School Journal: Related to this subject of how Human Rights issues for people with Albinism vary by country, you’ve been able to achieve a nearly impossible task of getting many different countries to coalesce around one human rights issue and work together towards the elimination of violence against people with albinism. How do you get so many people to cooperate on something? How do you garner so much support for an issue, tactically speaking?

Ikponwosa Ero: This is my favorite question because I’m trying to push and replicate it in other people’s lives right now. It’s a current interest for me because I realized that school doesn’t prepare you for dealing with complexity. We have become specialists in instruments, but life is an orchestra. So how do you then make sure that these instruments coordinate? The ones you’ve played and ones you don’t play, and then produce beautiful music out of it. That takes conducting, in a way, managing complexity without being crushed. It’s a delicate balance and takes a constantly high level of self-awareness. A high level of awareness of the potential of others, a very high emotional capacity, empathy, and high EQ (Emotional Quotient) to be able to gauge other people’s potentiality by testing other people’s potential through psychometric testing to see what their natural talents are and how they use that. Even if you don’t have access to psychometric testing, you can still observe them long enough and listen to them deeply enough to see what their likes, dislikes, and strengths are.

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Ikponwosa Ero: This is my favorite question because I’m trying to push and replicate it in other people’s lives right now. It’s a current interest for me because I realized that school doesn’t prepare you for dealing with complexity. We have become specialists in instruments, but life is an orchestra. So how do you then make sure that these instruments coordinate? The ones you’ve played and ones you don’t play, and then produce beautiful music out of it. That takes conducting, in a way, managing complexity without being crushed. It’s a delicate balance and takes a constantly high level of self-awareness. A high level of awareness of the potential of others, a very high emotional capacity, empathy, and high EQ (Emotional Quotient) to be able to gauge other people’s potentiality by testing other people’s potential through psychometric testing to see what their natural talents are and how they use that. Even if you don’t have access to psychometric testing, you can still observe them long enough and listen to them deeply enough to see what their likes, dislikes, and strengths are. Then, you can know when to bring them into the orchestra and what instrument to give them to play. That way, they feel engaged and like they’re used in a good way, and you don’t have to carry the burden alone, and you can protect your mental health in the process. This is something that I feel is necessary in every field. At the heart of the reason why people are collapsing more readily under mental health issues is that the complexities are getting more complex, and the tools are not readily available. So, in my current transition to coaching young managers and executives, this is part of what we’re trying to get at (myself and my business partners) to help people anticipate and manage complexity.
Endnotes

Notes from the Field: Disability Inclusion in the Healthcare Sector in Jamaica

Lily Kim

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an internationally negotiated set of goals unanimously adopted by the United Nations in 2015. The Agenda outlines the objectives and vision for progress and development around the world by the year 2030 and is described by the UN as “a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity” that “seeks to strengthen universal peace in greater freedom” (Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). The agenda comprises 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will be used as benchmarks and targets for development worldwide. These goals span a wide range from abolishing poverty to promulgating health, well-being, peace, justice, and sustainable development. Additionally, at the end of each year, a progress report will be issued to assess the completion of these goals. The 2030 Agenda also categorizes persons with disabilities, the elderly, people living with HIV/AIDS, indigenous people, refugees and internally displaced persons, and migrants as vulnerable people who must be empowered, placing a particular emphasis on their marginality. Of the SDGs, one in particular best applies to specific vulnerabilities and needs of people with disabilities: SDG 3, which is focused on health and well-being. During my time abroad through the Law, Societies, and Justice/Jackson School of International Studies Disability, Aging, and Development in Jamaica Study Abroad program during the summer of 2023, I had the opportunity to conduct research on disability in Jamaica and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This paper will analyze disability in Jamaica based on these observations and field notes, Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3), and Jamaica’s progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development overall.

What is SDG 3?

The overarching goal for Sustainable Development Goal 3 is to enact the UN’s mission to prioritize healthy living for all countries participating in the 2030 sustainable development plan. In the Agenda, the UN states that “ensuring healthy lives and promote[ing] well-being is important to building prosperous societies” (UN Photo / Hien Macline, n.d.). SDG 3, which is broken down into specific targets, each with its own indicators, aims to uplift healthcare systems by tracking the progress that centers on global mortality rates, a limitation in the spread of diseases, promotion of mental health, a reduction in substance abuse, a decrease in global deaths and injuries, and an overall push to broaden the scope of universal healthcare coverage and improve existing healthcare systems (UN Photo / Hien Macline, n.d.).

The Place of Disability in SDG 3

While disability rights may not be explicit goals in the 2030 Agenda, the UN emphasizes the principle of “Leave[ing] No One Behind,” including historically marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities ((Leave No One Behind, n.d.)). Thus, in 2018, three years after the 2030 Agenda was written, the UN Flagship Disability and Development Report was created to outline how each SDG should be adapted to apply to persons with disabilities.

In the 2018 Disability and Development Report, the UN recognizes that access to good quality, effective, and affordable healthcare services is necessary for anyone to achieve a certain acceptable standard of health. However, this standard of health is not often achieved for persons with disabilities due to inaccessibility, lack of financial resources, and stigma as the most prominent barriers faced by persons with disabilities who are seeking healthcare services. According to the UN Flagship Report on Disability and Development (2018), persons with disabilities are more likely to be unable to transport themselves to a healthcare facility due to either the lack of accessible public transportation or the high costs of private transport, or both. The same report (2018) notes that in addition to transport barriers, the healthcare facilities themselves are also often inaccessible due to physical barriers, like a lack of ramps or elevators, or the healthcare staff are inaccessible due to communication barriers, such as the lack of information in simple language, which presents comprehension issues for someone who with an intellectual disability, the lack of sign language interpretation for Deaf and hard of hearing persons, or the lack of Braille texts or audio files for someone blind. Finally, persons with disabilities are more likely to be unable to afford healthcare services due to a lower level of employment and earnings amongst persons with...
disabilities. Affording healthcare services and insurance is one of the most prevalent issues for persons with disabilities seeking healthcare access. People with disabilities are also more likely to be treated with less legitimacy and respect by healthcare personnel due to the ever-prevalent stigmas regarding disability status and feel fearful of seeking medical treatment due to possible discrimination or other adverse outcomes due to the stigma surrounding disabled persons (UN Flagship Report on Disability and Development, 2018).

All these factors are intrinsically connected to the fact that persons with disabilities have more healthcare needs than their able-bodied counterparts but are often unable to obtain the care they need to help support these healthcare needs. Disability is not inherently “unhealthy,” but because persons with disabilities are often excluded from quality education, formal employment opportunities, and other fundamental rights due to the lack of access or simply outright discrimination, they are simultaneously at higher risk of poor health outcomes and having unmet healthcare needs. This results in catastrophic health outcomes for persons with disabilities. According to the UN, Persons with disabilities have an overall shorter life expectancy with a much higher chance of developing additional medical complications, such as depression, pain, and osteoporosis, compared to their non-disabled counterparts. Further, in countries with lower levels of GDP per capita, as many as 80 percent of persons with disabilities report poor health (UN Flagship Report on Disability and Development, 2018).

SDG 3 was created to promote healthcare for all, which, though not explicitly stated, according to the UN, includes persons with disabilities. In order to reinforce this, the 2018 Flagship Disability and Development Report provides the basis for ensuring the implementation of this goal in the specific case of people with disabilities. Because of this intersection between persons with disabilities and SDG 3, interpreted in the light of the 2018 Disability Development Report, this application of SDG 3 is a vital area for research to determine what is happening in practice.

Why Jamaica?

Jamaica is a small country in the Caribbean that experiences poverty and is still trying to find its footing after gaining independence from the United Kingdom in 1962. It is home to a rapidly aging society with a relatively high number of persons with disabilities estimated to be as high as 18% (Jamaica - Country Profile, 2023). Jamaica was also a prominent participant in the negotiation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the very first country to sign and ratify it in 2007 (UNTC, 2007). Therefore, it is an ideal location to learn about disability rights in the context of a government and country still establishing many policies and learning to advocate for their vulnerable populations. The University of Washington's three-week study abroad program in Jamaica aims to educate students on the various existing disability rights advocacy groups active in the country and their advocacy work promoting health and well-being on the island.

Vision 2030 Jamaica & SDG 3

Jamaica's own Vision 2030 plan is Jamaica's blueprint for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and other fundamental rights and development goals. Jamaica's Vision 2030 was created in response to overall poor conditions in the country since its independence in 1962. The plan sets out to “provide quality and timely healthcare for the mental, physical and emotional well-being of [the] people; provide full access to efficient and reliable infrastructure and services” and contains a promise to “fully integrate” persons with disabilities and ensure they “have access to appropriate care and support services and are treated as valuable human resources” (Vision 2030 Jamaica National Development Plan, n.d.). The national strategies can be categorized into three main themes for improvement in the healthcare sector when specifically discussing persons with disabilities: accessibility, finances, and the successful implementation of equitable healthcare systems and infrastructure addressing disability stigma. Although Vision 2030 Jamaica does not provide a specific section to address goals for persons with disabilities within the healthcare sector, like the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development and Vision 2030. The initiative strives for persons with disabilities to be included in all goals, national outcomes, and national strategies.

Observations from Jamaica in Barriers to Accessibility

There are many barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities that can be observed in Jamaican society, generally categorized as follows: Physical, financial, institutional and social barriers, stigma and associated systemic barriers, and communication barriers. In the following section this paper will analyze each of these within Jamaican society utilizing both research done in the field during the UW's Disability, Aging, and Development in Jamaica, and supplementary research done before and after the program.

Physical Barriers

Barriers to accessibility can take many forms. However, physical barriers to access are the most tangible, visible and easily remedied through adding accessible infrastructure.
Throughout my time in Jamaica, it was apparent that one of the most significant barriers to persons with disabilities obtaining healthcare services is the lack of physically accessible infrastructure.

The most fundamental solution for any accessibility issue is the availability of transportation, especially public transit. People need to be able to transport themselves to facilities and doctors’ offices to receive any kind of care. Sidewalks and roads are extremely underdeveloped; many have numerous potholes, uneven surfaces, and sometimes a complete lack of structure, making the surfaces challenging to navigate. Additionally, some of the pathways have added obstacles, such as light poles in the middle of the sidewalk, making it nearly impossible for someone who may have a disability to navigate without having to go onto the road. When speaking to the Jamaican Council for Senior Citizens, one person remarked that for some people with physical disabilities, the sidewalks are so inaccessible that it’s “the road or nothing;” posing an extreme risk for those persons to experience a fatal traffic accident. Further, the sidewalks and roads are not functional, and the transit and transportation systems that run upon them are not as well.

When speaking with the Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities (JCPD), we were told that out of the 50 new buses the city of Kingston received, only five were wheelchair accessible, a mere 10% out of the new buses, which does not encompass the dozens already running in the system. It is also vital to note that there is no island-wide transportation, which makes it very difficult for people living in rural areas to navigate to the capital and receive care that may only be available in the city. The inaccessibility and hardships do not end with physical barriers, however. Once inside the healthcare facility, there are additional barriers to accessibility while they may not be explicitly physical.

Financial Barriers

While physical barriers are a considerable portion of the problem in Jamaica, one could argue that financial barriers are even more insurmountable. Seventy-eight thousand Jamaicans are classified as multidimensionally poor, and 141 thousand Jamaicans are seen as vulnerable to multidimensional poverty (“Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023,” 2023). People with disabilities are even more likely to suffer multidimensional poverty because of the high rate of unemployment and underemployment of people with disabilities (UN Flagship Report on Disability and Development, n.d.). Even though healthcare in Jamaica is free and anyone can access public health clinics and hospitals for no charge, many people experiencing multidimensional poverty, such as people with disabilities, still encounter several financial restraints when seeking comprehensive care. For example, according to several Jamaican residents we met across several locations, including the John Golding Rehabilitation Center, public health clinics and hospitals cover most medical needs but do not provide services such as diagnostic testing. In order to receive these services, patients have to navigate private medical centers, which are often less accessible financially and physically. Certain specialists are often only available in Kingston, posing a significant barrier for persons living in other parts of the country. A prime example of how this issue relates to persons with disabilities is the Sir John Golding Rehabilitation Center in Kingston, which is the only center on the entire island that provides rehabilitation services to those who have recently become disabled.

These patients are taken to a hospital where they are often turned away due to the lack of rehabilitation services in public hospitals. They are usually then referred to the Sir John Golding Rehabilitation Center to receive rehabilitative care, where they may not even be admitted due to the months-long wait or the inability to pay since the center is a private rehabilitation center. It is also important to note that this rehabilitation center does not accept patients at risk of houselessness or do not have sufficient income. It is unsurprising, then, why so many disability advocacy groups and disabled persons on the island stated that financial accessibility was a significant barrier to those with disabilities due to many of the additional services they may have to access due to their disability that they are not able to because these services are only available in private centers.

Financial capabilities are also restricted on a structural level. A recurring issue I observed throughout my time in Jamaica was the lack of resources to fund the actual efforts being made around the island. For example, although the John Golding Rehabilitation Center is the only of its kind able to house Jamaicans with new physical disabilities. However, the equipment in the center is extremely outdated and insufficient for comprehensive care of some of the health issues the center manages. The center manager expressed her frustration with the inability to obtain new resources, both due to the lack of funds and the process of obtaining the equipment. She recounted to us that she has been trying to order a new piece of equipment that would benefit her patients for over a year now, but the process and prices to obtain said equipment are constantly changing and never stay the same for a long enough period of time to obtain the equipment. As Gloria Goffe of the Combined Disabilities Association remarked, “We do not lack vision or drive, but the resources to achieve them.”

Finally, transportation is also highly inaccessible to most Jamaicans due to the unreasonably high prices, which impact persons with disabilities more since, according to the UN, they are more likely to be unemployed (UN Flagship Report on Disability and Development, n.d.). In Jamaica, more often
than not, the only way to be transported around the island is through a private mode of transportation, such as a taxi or a bus with a ticketing system. Both of these systems are costly and thus inaccessible to most persons with disabilities financially, besides being inaccessible physically.

Institutional and Social Barriers

Once inside a treatment facility, a person with a disability must now face even more barriers to healthcare access, such as long queues or waiting lists to access the care they need. For example, at the John Golding Centre for Rehabilitation, the head of the physical therapy department informed us that the waitlist for physical therapy was booked three months out. The manager of the Centre informed us that there is a long waitlist for those who seek long-term admission as well, stating that the waitlist is “indefinite” and depends entirely on the recovery rate of existing patients. Even if there is no waitlist to join, proper documentation is often required, which in and of its own can pose a barrier to access as a large percentage of elderly people with disabilities do not have birth certificates, which are necessary to receive care. Unfortunately, this lack of birth certificates among people with disabilities is due to the stigma surrounding disability in Jamaica. Historically, the parents of persons born with disabilities have chosen to forego getting their children birth certificates due to a belief that persons with disabilities are not active members of society and thus have no need for proper documentation such as a birth certificate. Therefore, in addition to the societal stigma, institutional and social barriers become a salient factor that impacts the persons with disability negatively.

Stigma and Associated Systemic Barriers

In a predominantly Christian country like Jamaica, disability is often seen as a sin or a punishment from God. Multiple stories were shared by parents, community members, friends, family, etc., who were ashamed to be associated with someone who has a disability. The extent of this stigmatization of people with disabilities became incredibly clear to me when we visited UNICEF Jamaica. The visit included a presentation that included a quote from a mother of a child with a disability who “wished and prayed” that her daughter would “just be normal.” Parents or family members who feel this way about their children or relatives are much less likely to take someone with a disability to receive the care they need because they have a “what’s the point” mentality. Unfortunately, this is a common mindset in Jamaica.

This non-acceptance of persons with disabilities is so ingrained throughout Jamaican society that even medical personnel still have biases towards persons with disabilities and do not treat these persons with the respect and care that is required when inside a medical facility. Several persons with disabilities and advocates expressed that when someone with a disability goes to the doctor, they are hardly actually addressed, but the person with them at the appointment is addressed instead, even though it is the person with the disability who needs care. The attitudinal barriers that persons with disabilities face in Jamaican society are still as ever prevalent, and the discrimination they face makes establishing impactful, equitable, and accurate healthcare much more difficult.

Communication Barriers

Communication barriers can be less noticeable or visible and more difficult to address since they often require education or technological solutions. However, these barriers are just as damaging and alienate persons with disabilities from their communities. Persons with various disabilities may be unable to access accurate, comprehensive, and timely healthcare due to impairments in understanding information. For example, a blind person may be unable to see an infographic about COVID-19, or a Deaf person may be unable to hear a town crier communicating local mask suggestions. Persons with learning disabilities, too, may be unable to understand complex medical language used to communicate public health messages. This is an issue because it serves as yet again, another additional barrier to accessing and understanding how to utilize healthcare. All of these barriers – and even more that have not been discussed – make accessibility to healthcare for persons with disabilities extremely difficult to achieve.

Conclusion

In the face of many seemingly insurmountable barriers, Jamaica has still shown significant progress, including implementing the Jamaican Disabilities Act (JCPD The Disabilities Act 2014, n.d.). Though the act was passed in 2014, it has recently been officially established and begun to be implemented in Jamaican law in February of 2022. This new act will force newly established buildings, roads, and other public spaces to be physically accessible for persons with disabilities. This new act also contains a Disability Rights Tribunal, which will be able to prosecute those who do not comply with the act and those who discriminate against persons with disabilities, including medical personnel.

Professor Stephen Meyers remarked that while he was initially worried that some of these organizations might be shut down because of the pandemic, he was surprised and thrilled to see that not only have many of these organizations “survived, but [they] thrived.” The work that organizations such as the Combined Disabilities Association, the Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities, the Jamaican Society

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for the Blind, UNICEF, USAID, and many others have done for persons with disabilities has been exceptional. Whether it is the JCPD establishing Operation Birthright, which provides birth certificates to those with disabilities who were never given one at birth, or the CDA launching a new HIV + AIDs campaign to spread awareness to those with disabilities about the danger of these diseases, or the Jamaican Society for the Blind providing subsidized specialty low vision eye care to those who cannot afford it, these organizations are getting things done.

Despite barriers to achieving the full potential of healthcare, such as lack of accessibility, financial barriers, and stigma, the direction of disability advocacy in terms of healthcare in Jamaica is headed in the right direction. With the continued trend of disability rights, Jamaica is on the right track to ensuring accurate and accessible healthcare options for those with disabilities.

References


