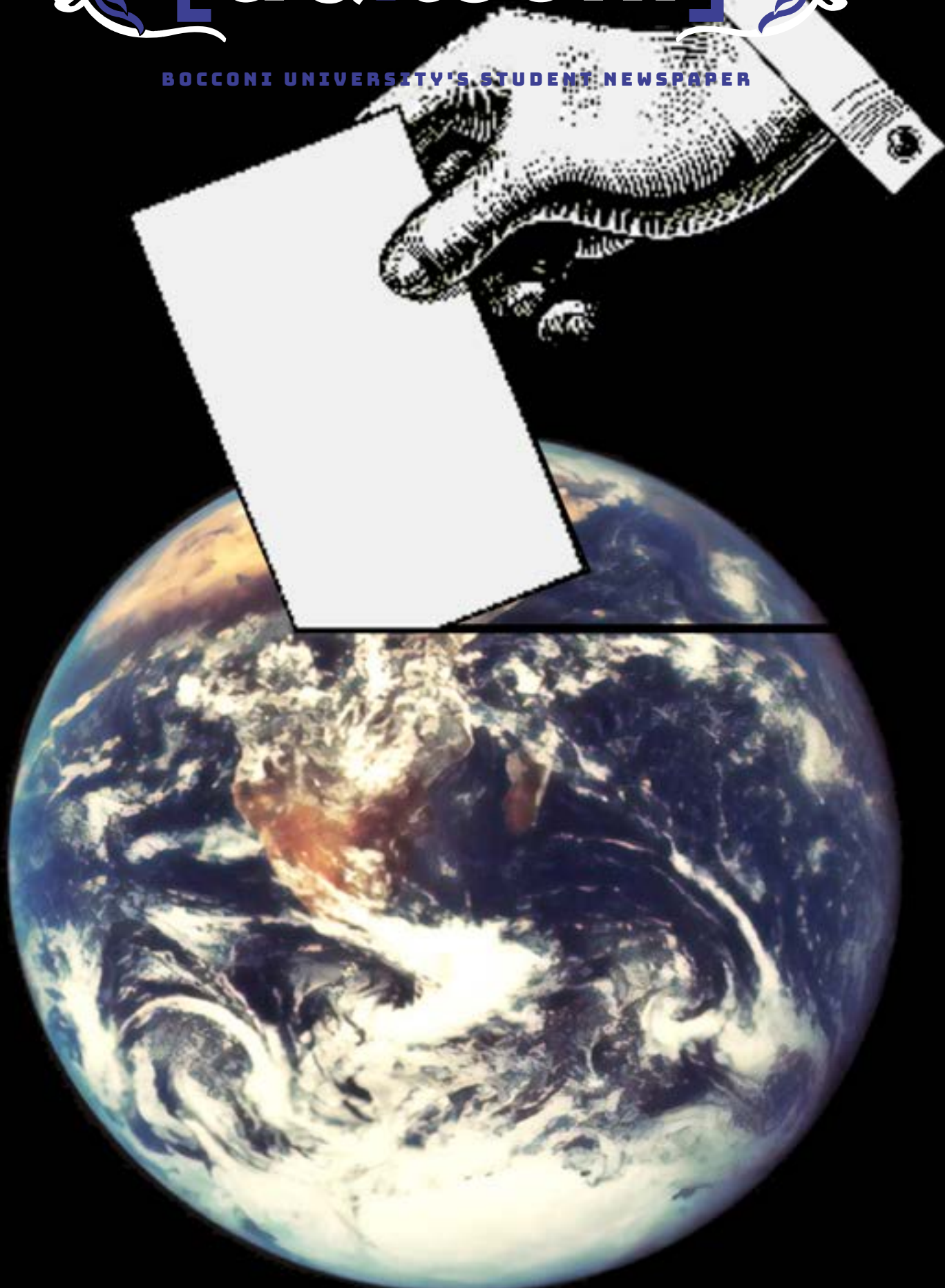


# [traileoni]

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## CONTENTS

- 2 Editorial
- 3 [A breach in the canister: Thor Pederson's journey around the world](#)
- 4 [Interview with Catherine De Vries, dean for Diversity and Inclusion](#)
- 5 [Small country, big impact](#)
- 6 [The European approach to U.S. elections](#)
- 7 [Il cambiamento della comunicazione politica: l'esempio Americano](#)
- 8-9 [This is war!](#)
- 10 [Unpack your suits: Assessment Centres in the Covid era](#)
- 11 ["Howdy Modi" no more?](#)
- 12-13 [Is Chile's new constitution really the solution?](#)
- 14-15 [The World Food Program and the framework of humanitarian action](#)
- 16-17 [The backlash against gender studies](#)
- 18-19 [Dynamics of Cyberconflict](#)
- 20-21 [Dancing in the age of Social Distancing: reimagining performances](#)
- 22 [For the love of bread](#)
- 23 [A un metro da Milano](#)



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In the past few months, we seemed to live in a time of closure, of national egoism, unprecedented in recent times. Too young to have experienced the ideological-geopolitical clashes of the past centuries, we have been used to imagine the world as becoming increasingly integrated and interdependent. That is certainly the case if we look at the lengths of history, that over the past millennia has seen different clusters of human civilizations turn into one; yet in the short run – as we love to call it in economics – backlashes are frequent.

The Italian political thinker Niccolò Machiavelli wrote in his masterpiece, *Il Principe*, that people are friendly and available (and loyal, that was his interest – but for the sake of paraphrasing, let us ignore it...) in good times, but when difficulties come, their good intentions vanish. This Covid-19 pandemic has proven no exception to this general rule: during the past months, we assisted to some countries denying others access to their nationally-produced medical equipment; to one in particular preventing WHO inspectors from enquiring on the origins of the pandemic, while conducting an aggressive foreign policy and cracking down on civil liberties and human rights; to the cradle of modern democracy helplessly self-isolating. Just to name a few.

As a European citizen, these are phenomena I stand firmly against. What is more, as students diverse in origin, way of living and creed, but similar in our openness towards the world, we editors of *Tra i Leoni* have decided to dedicate this edition to the celebration of internationalism, which as you

will read, is a reality we discuss about also in the realm of our University. Here at Bocconi, shielded from the storms of reactionism and nationalism, we can afford to search for signs of improvement rather than complain about the current state of things.

And the question we investigate is: were (and are) we living in a temporary period of backlash, or has the trend permanently changed towards closure, following perhaps events occurred in the second half of the last decade such as Brexit and the election of President Trump? The picture we draw is that of a confused time of change.

Here in Europe, we welcome the outcome of the Lithuanian elections, that promise to inaugurate a path of intensive social progress – you will read more in the next pages. Yet we cannot ignore that part of the block that is siding against the rule of law and the basic principles of democracy, threatening the very foundations of the Union. Our democracies are by nature weak creatures, always on the brink of degenerating into ochlocracy or authoritarianism – as the people currently striking in Poland know well.

Are things to be better on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean? As our authors discuss in this edition of *Tra i Leoni*, the recent US elections have implications that stretch to the whole globe – even though one writer provocatively told us she “does not care”, as there are other issues around the globe. We can learn much from this vote, not last about the evolution of political communication, and how powerful it is in framing voters' perceptions.

May our diversity and broad perspective be a recognizable brand: despite all the global turmoil and the Covid-19 crisis, *Tra i Leoni* is flourishing. Now that our recruitment process is finally over, you will get accustomed to more authors, ideas, editorial proposals. We heard that our market is getting a bit crowded, lately: beware of imitations!

## CULTURE

## A breach in the canister: *Thor Pederson's journey around the world*



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After visiting a fourth of the countries in the world, the Danish traveler Thor Pederson stumbled upon an article indicating a record was still up to grab: Nobody ever visited all countries without flying. George Hughes claimed to have achieved this record, but he came home between his travels, creating a blur line as if he accomplished it in one or multiple trips. In search of new challenges, it seemed to be a great opportunity for Thor, and he started planning thoroughly his journey. Ten months of itineraries and documentation later, he left Denmark in 2013 to begin his one-of-a-kind adventure, travelling by trains, buses, locals' cars, and boats. His rules were set in his mind: he must stay a minimum of 24 hours in each country, use only ground transportation and most importantly, never come back home until the project is done. Of course, he knew this was going to be a demanding trip because of cultural clashes, loneliness, or bureaucracy. Over the years, he managed to overcome extreme racism, relatives' death, and cerebral malaria and each time he could have given up. However, the explorer is not a quitter and has the focus needed to go on with such a project. He has been on the road for 3,000 days and has stepped foot in 194 countries so far. Still, he was far from knowing a new barrier would dress up on his road and prevent him to go farther: the infamous coronavirus.

Coronavirus has important repercussions on the travel industry all around the globe as most countries have restraint access to tourists. This pandemic did not spare Thor's journey. His global itinerary indicated his world tour would end with Asia then Oceania. 2020 started when he was at the end of his stay in Asia. However, when things got complicated and the virus was spreading all around the continent, he found himself stuck in Hong Kong. With all borders closed and the world in lockdown, he had no choice but to delay his departure from the small country and to wait until it gets better. The rest is history: we all know the situation did not really improve and we all had to postpone our projects accordingly. It might have triggered you not to visit your family this summer, but at least you were safe and sound in the comfort of your home, and I believe it makes the pill easier to swallow. These uncertain times are hard for any

adventures-driven souls who always want to hit the road and get moving. This time was different, and no one could choose where to go next: either you stayed where you were, or you returned home. Thor knew better than anyone that if he were going back home, he would break his rule not to go back until the project was completed. That means the thought of taking a flight back to Denmark to wait for that world-awaited “better” was not conceivable. More than 300 days in Hong Kong later, he is still choosing to stay rather than throwing the towel. Though it would surely end his anxiety and his constant internal struggle, he would have to kiss goodbye to his dream of becoming the first man visiting all countries without flying and that is not an option for now.

Nine to go. He has only nine countries left blank on his map: Australia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, and six Pacific Island countries. None of these have opened borders yet and while Thor would prefer to go to Sri Lanka, New Zealand, or Australia for logistics reasons, he doubts these isolated locations would be amongst the firsts to open to the world. He nonetheless stays positive that one of the remaining nations would welcome foreigners again soon and that he will find a boat to finally sail out of his adopted country by default. Hong Kong immigration officers urge him to find another host country by December 23rd. Until now, he did not have too many difficulties to renew his tourist visa, but bureaucracy has now given him an ultimatum, judging that more than 300 days is enough for a tourist to see every hidden gems of the country. His best bet is that a neighboring land will let him in, and that this country would be a safe exit. Would he be in worst situation to be stuck on a small island with precarious services than in a developed nation?

Palau and Vanuatu, two of the remaining islands to go, were in the top of the world's most dangerous places to live and you surely do not want to get stuck on there for another 300 days, which complicates the decision.

Uncertainty currently keeps everyone suspended, given that we do not want to risk planning anything and later having these plans upturned. The

traveler compares his situation to being in jail and having the key in his hands. Except freedom is not a no-brainer this time: The past seven years of hard work and commitment weight heavily in the scales. Thor is looking forward to see his home again: “Once I return home the stress will disappear. Either because I completed the project or because I gave up.” If you have watched Everest, a historical movie relating the story of an expedition group through their journey to Mount Everest, you know that the true demonstration of bravery is to know when to give up, not to reach the summit. In the movie, the intrepid hikers get caught into a storm that delays their estimated arrival time to the summit. Only two hours away from the top, they knew that if they climbed up there, they would lack oxygen and potentially die. However, turning back so close to their goal did not seem to be an option after all the efforts invested. Thor seems to be hours away from his own summit and he now has the choice to fill his canister or to take the risk of being out of breath.

In life as in business, you cannot ignore the return on investment in making choices. Are the incremental benefits worth the additional efforts? Maybe not. Thor Pederson is aware of that and he confirms he would consider ending his journey: “If I came to the conclusion that the price of completing the Saga outweighs a reason for returning home – then I will quit and go home.” One more time, Thor proves he is not a quitter: he is a real Viking, careful to any possible breach in his canister.





## Interview with Catherine De Vries, dean for Diversity and Inclusion



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**D**iversity and inclusiveness are top priorities for our University. For this reason, Rector Gianmario Verona appointed Catherine De Vries, full professor at the Department of Social and Political Sciences, as Dean for Diversity and Inclusion, a new role within the Rectoral Committee.

Professor De Vries is Dutch by birth, but she has built an international career. After her studies in Germany, USA and Netherlands, she worked for almost ten years in the UK, at Oxford University and University of Essex. In 2018 she became an affiliate professor at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Very recently, in January 2020, she joined Bocconi University, where she teaches European Politics and Public Opinion and Media. Her work focuses on the key challenges for Europe nowadays, such as Euroscepticism, political fragmentation, migration and corruption.

The importance of diversity, the challenges and the goals within this role are some points that we discussed in an interview with Professor De Vries.

### Professor De Vries, why did you choose to come to Bocconi University?

Bocconi is a very good university. The research quality is excellent and there are some great academics in my Department. The community strives to be international and this fits my personality. After having worked abroad for a long time, I consider Bocconi the best place to stay now: I am not too far away from my country, the Netherlands, but at the same time I am not in it.

### How has your experience at Bocconi been so far?

I moved to Milan about a year ago, before Christmas. The first couple of months were great: meeting new people, being in a new place, my daughter going to school etc. Then, we went into lockdown and in-person interactions stopped. Luckily, I had great support from my Bocconi colleagues and from people in Milan in general. It was a very strange but also beautiful introduction.

### Why do we need a Dean for Diversity and Inclusion?

Like in many other universities and private sector organizations, there has been a lot of work at Bocconi to try to internationalize and to have different viewpoints within the campus. Indeed, it is not only a matter of nationality, but also of gender, ethnic backgrounds, religious, sexual orientation, convictions. It is important to work on the matter of disability, to make the campus more accessible, and to deal with mental health issues. Before the creation of the role of Dean for Diversity and Inclusion, these activities were spread out around the university and there was no one responsible for the coordination of them. However, Bocconi must pay attention to these matters in many circumstances: every time a new event is organized, when a new building is open, when someone is hired, when we teach etc.

### Why do you think to fit well in this role?

I have experience in a similar position: since 2018 I am Chair of the Diversity Committee of the European Political Science Association (EPSA). Also, I am perhaps not what you would think about when you think of a stereotypical Bocconi Professor: I am a woman and a foreigner. So, I can

give some personal insights to the matters too.

### Currently, what is the situation at Bocconi in terms of Diversity and Inclusion? What could be improved?

No university is perfect when it comes to these themes. Decades ago, Bocconi was very much focused on Italian students and professors, while in recent years it changed its profile. This made it necessary to work on the new needs which were introduced with these changes, for example the integration of international students and faculty in the campus life. Bocconi has been great to address them: Equal Opportunities committees were set up. However, the challenge is not only in terms of procedure, but also in terms of culture and communication. For example, some activities are still carried out only in Italian. Sometimes this is needed because of the topic, but sometimes these could be more inclusive. Building a community that is the most inclusive as possible is still work in progress.

### What are your goals for the next months?

I will serve the university in the best way possible. I want to make sure that it is an open space for ideas, which allows to achieve academic quality, and that all students, faculty and staff are involved. So, the first step will be to map the achievements of the past and make those procedures and activities better: for example, by ensuring that the various groups dealing with the issues within the university communicate with us. Also, I will look at the good practices of other organizations.

### Why is diversity important?

I believe that you can talk about diversity from two standpoints: from a philosophical point of view and one more "practical". Philosophically, we know that there are inequalities in education and academia and that organizations should try to reduce them. We must foster talents regardless of where they come from. This is especially relevant in a time in which we get more and more information about systemic discrimination. The more practical answer is drawn up from research. Diverse teams tend to operate better and innovate more.

### You mentioned systemic discrimination. Considering your research works and late developments, do you think that we are currently facing a sort of backlash in inclusive conducts worldwide?

It is true that we are witnessing some backlash against diversity in society and that recently these sentiments have been mobilized by political parties. Research suggests is mainly due to uncertainty, economic (status) anxiety and nostalgia. One factor is the perceived competition for resources or for jobs: on this point I am currently carrying out research. Another explanation is that there may be cultural roots to it: some people are more socially conservative than others. However, despite these widespread conducts, we are still doing extremely well compared to decades ago. More and more people of different gender/race/sexual orientation are now holding positions that before could not hold. One clear example is Ursula Von Der Leyen, president of the EU Commission, who [was] the guest speaker of Bocconi's academic year opening ceremony. A woman at the head of one of Europe's most powerful institutions with important responsibility in the Covid-19 crisis.

## Small country, big impact

*the historic result of Lithuania's parliamentary election*



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photo by J. Stacevicius / LRT photo

**T**his November USA is not the only one undergoing political transition. A small state in the Baltic region, Lithuania, held its parliamentary elections which take place every four years. The recent one was of particular importance as it led to the formation of a liberal coalition comprised of three female-led parties, a phenomenon that has never occurred before in the Baltic region. The ruling coalition is promising social progress in terms of LGBTQ+ rights, gender and ethnic equality. However, the new political season might entail some downsides, too.

For the past 4 years, Lithuania was ruled by a centre-left coalition made up of the Farmers and Greens party (LVŽS) and the Social Democratic Party (LSDP). The two parties ran on relatively conservative political views, aiming to please the elderly and the unemployed and holding the lower middle class as their key electorate. However, the coalition suffered a huge backlash due to failure to implement effective socioeconomic reforms, while being corrupt and negligent towards the nation. Despite claiming to stand for "social wellbeing", the alliance was heavily criticised for failing to deal with ethnic intolerance and LGBTQ+ discrimination – issues that became highly prominent in the period 2016-2020. Failure to showcase social progress led to the fall in LVŽS and LSDP popularity, while implementation of radical reforms didn't help either. The coalition tried battling substance abuse by imposing strict laws on alcohol purchase and drug possession (e.g. criminal sentencing of 2 to 8 years for any amount of marijuana possessed). However, the status quo seems to be changing as the new coalition is about to take power.

The elections of October 2020 have led to a creation of a liberal ruling bloc consisting of three parties: the Homeland Union (TS-LKD), the Liberal Movement (LRLS) and the Freedom Party (LP). Out of the three, the latter one deserves its own spotlight as this party established itself only in the summer of 2019. The Freedom Party advocates for equal LGBTQ+ rights, protection of small businesses and marijuana legalisation among plenty of other issues that have been consistently neglected by the past coalition. It is crucial to note that the majority of the Lithuanian electorate is comprised of the middle-aged and the elderly who tend to be less aware of the latter problems and hence see them as irrelevant. Thus, the emergence and success of the Freedom Party came unexpectedly, yet many, especially the youth, are waiting for the new reforms that would lead the country to significant social progress. The composition of these parties is noticeable since all three are female-led, making this a historic election for the entire region of the Baltic states. In particular, one of them is TS-LKD leader Ingrida Šimonytė who ran for the post of President last May. Highly praised for her progressive views and policy reforms, she is best known as an economics expert. While the allocation of the Prime Minister's post is still unclear, it is more than likely that Šimonytė will be taking over the PM's position. In any case, the new Prime Minister of Lithuania will

be a female, marking a historic moment since this is the first time a woman is allocated the PM's position within the state. In the entire Baltic states' history, she would be only the second female Prime Minister, since Laimdota Straujuma was appointed as PM in Latvia 4 years ago. Therefore, it seems that Lithuania is starting a completely new path striving for inclusion, equality and social progress.

The intended reforms are also worthy of attention. The main goal of the coalition is eliminating corruption, nepotism and the culture of lying; this is particularly important in the context of Lithuania. The contemporary ruling coalition lost the nation's trust by failing to ensure a steady flow of information. For instance, during the COVID-19 outbreak the government failed to provide real numbers of cases and did not implement protective measures timely, resulting in mass collateral damage (e.g. number of infections skyrocketing from 40 to 2000 in the scope of 4 months). Moreover, the coalition is planning to change the educational system by enhancing funds for school vouchers and teacher preparation systems. This way, the stagnant Lithuanian schooling system would finally have a growth prospect. This is even more likely considering that the coalition plans to spend 1.5% of Lithuania's GDP to fund promotion of IT classes nationwide and to majorly increase teachers' wages – an issue that has caused several protest breakouts in the recent years. The liberal bloc is also planning to reform the healthcare system. All three parties intend to give medical professionals more voice in determining patients' needs and are working on improving the system as a whole. Hence, it seems that Lithuanians will finally witness a complete reformation of the state for which they have been waiting.

Despite the bloc's liberal alignment, there might be some conflict over specific issues. For instance, while the LP sees marriage equality as one of the most important issues, the LRLS does not.

This means that the latter might have to look for support in the Opposition, while the Freedom Party will have to persuade the Homeland Union in approving the reform. Reforms affecting spheres like the state economy are likely not come into force soon, too, since even prior to the election LP seemed to have barely any economic policy apart from obscure tax reforms. Although TS-LKD and LRLS have proposed more extensive plans for future economic reforms, it might still cause problems since compromising could be hard. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that Šimonytė has already faced massive backlash due to implementing austerity measures during the 2008 economic crisis. Despite her expertise in state recovery, it is unclear to what extent the electorate will trust and support the policies proposed by her and the TS-LKD.

At the end of the day, Lithuania hopes to see the liberal coalition bring social progress in terms of human rights together with complete reformation of the state's stagnant institutions. While there might be problems caused by disagreements within the ruling parties, only time will show how successful the coalition will be. As for now, Lithuania is in the hands of three inspiring women – let that be not taken lightly.

# Il cambiamento della comunicazione politica: l'esempio Americano



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**L**a campagna elettorale per la corsa alla Casa Bianca è sempre stata un laboratorio di comunicazione politica, che ha permesso agli esperti del settore di prevedere alcuni trend che successivamente si sono presentati nel resto del mondo. È quindi interessante analizzare come questa è cambiata in seguito all'affermarsi delle piattaforme di social network sulla scena del dibattito pubblico.

Tutto ha inizio con la comunicazione social di Barack Obama, che gli ha permesso di guadagnare vantaggio rispetto ai repubblicani per due tornate elettorali di fila: la presenza social di Obama, infatti, è stata molto più sofisticata rispetto a quella dei candidati repubblicani John McCain e Mitt Romney.

Nel 2016, invece, si è vista una campagna molto digital da parte del partito repubblicano, che rimarrà nella storia a causa dello scandalo che ha colpito la società Cambridge Analytica, che ha raccolto in modo illecito i dati personali di milioni di account Facebook al fine di usarli per scopi elettorali riconducibili alla campagna di Donald Trump.

Infine, quest'anno abbiamo assistito a una campagna che ha visto una forte attenzione da parte di entrambi i principali candidati alla presidenza nei confronti della comunicazione attraverso i social network.

In un articolo, Paolo Bovio e Pietro Bellini, due esperti di comunicazione social, definiscono questa campagna elettorale come "la più digital di sempre", anche a causa del fatto che l'emergenza sanitaria che stiamo vivendo ha ridotto l'incidenza di tecniche di comunicazione tradizionali come i volantini, il porta-a-porta e gli eventi dal vivo.

Un dato interessante di questa campagna è che il presidente uscente partiva molto avvantaggiato, potendo comunicare a un ampio pubblico che ha costruito sulla base della notorietà acquisita in questi anni. Infatti, la somma dei follower di Donald Trump sulle varie

piattaforme supera quella dello sfidante Joe Biden di oltre sette volte; il candidato democratico non arriva a 19 milioni di follower quando il presidente uscente si aggira sui 140 milioni.

Invece, passando all'aspetto economico: quanto hanno investito i due candidati in questa campagna social? Una risposta ce la può fornire l'"Online Political Transparency Project" della New York University: secondo i dati collezionati da luglio fino a due settimane prima dell'elezione day, il presidente uscente avrebbe speso 74 milioni di dollari, a fronte di 52,5 milioni spesi dal rivale Joe Biden.

Tra le novità che rappresentano elementi di discontinuità con la comunicazione politica messa in atto nel corso delle scorse campagne elettorali, salta subito all'occhio la decisione della nota congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, che al fine di sensibilizzare le generazioni più giovani e portarle al voto ha realizzato la terza diretta più seguita di sempre sulla piattaforma di streaming Twitch, giocando al gioco "Among Us".

In che modo è invece variata la comunicazione tradizionale? Un altro ruolo chiave all'interno della narrazione che si è creata in questa campagna elettorale è stato giocato dai tradizionali dibattiti televisivi, che però secondo Dino Amenduni, docente di comunicazione politica all'Università di Perugia, hanno subito una perdita di centralità ed efficacia rispetto al passato.

Secondo l'esperto di comunicazione politica, questo fenomeno sarebbe stato determinato da vari fattori, primo fra tutti l'aumento delle occasioni di accesso ai contenuti politici, e secondo il fatto che il racconto e la narrazione che si creano sul confronto coinvolgono un numero di persone superiore rispetto a chi ha effettivamente assistito al dibattito. In altre parole, lo spin su come è andata è diventato il vero terreno di confronto.

Infine, parte di questa perdita di centralità sarebbe anche da attribuire ai li-

miti di struttura che presentano i dibattiti, poiché la televisione offre tempi ridotti ai candidati per potersi esprimere su temi complessi, e questo li porterebbe a semplificare enormemente il loro pensiero; si va così alla ricerca della frase ad effetto che può condizionare la valutazione della performance del candidato nel suo insieme, invece di sviluppare un ragionamento compiuto.

Questa tesi trova conferma nei dati: il primo dibattito presidenziale è stato visto da 11 milioni di persone in meno rispetto al primo confronto del 2016 tra Donald Trump e Hillary Clinton.

Infine, nel corso dello spoglio delle schede elettorali abbiamo assistito ad un altro fatto insolito, quando ad un certo punto i principali network televisivi hanno interrotto la messa in onda del discorso in diretta dalla Casa Bianca di Donald Trump, sostenendo che le sue dichiarazioni non andassero trasmesse in quanto false.

Sempre secondo Amenduni, "questa vicenda ricorda ancora una volta il potere dei media tradizionali, anche nel 2020, anche se cala ogni anno un pochino. Trump, contrariamente a quanto si è detto, non è stato "il presidente Twitter", così come Obama non era stato "il presidente Facebook": sono stati i media tradizionali a fornire un meccanismo di accelerazione delle dinamiche digitali".

In conclusione, quest'anno abbiamo assistito a una campagna elettorale caratterizzata da una comunicazione che si è contraddistinta rispetto agli anni precedenti nei numeri e nei modi, presentando vari elementi di discontinuità che potrebbero rappresentare dei trend che andranno a influenzare la comunicazione politica delle prossime campagne elettorali nel resto del mondo. Generalizzando, si potrebbe affermare che anche la politica sta diventando sempre più social, e che i mezzi di comunicazione tradizionali stanno perdendo un po' alla volta la propria centralità.

# The European approach to U.S. elections

*Why are Europeans more concerned with American elections than their own?*



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**T**he 2020 elections in the United States and their aftermath were among the most chaotic and uncertain events of recent history. Results turned out to be the same of four years ago in terms of Electoral College, albeit it was the Democrats prevailing this time. Republicans, who defined the 2016 victory as a "resounding" one, are now refusing to admit defeat while trying to hamper the transfer of power to the Biden administration. However, our readers are likely to be already very well acquainted with such information, and they are in good company. As a matter of fact, American elections were followed with spasmodic interest throughout Europe, perhaps even too much if compared to the regular media coverage and attention span that Europeans dedicate to their own elections, be them EU Parliamentary elections or other countries' national ones around the Continent.

This peculiar phenomenon filled our lives during the past weeks: we all know at least one tireless friend or relative who spent hours updating Google trying to find out the final results in Arizona. Most of us are now very familiar with even tiny details of the American electoral system, such as the number of presidential electors needed to win the race, or heard awkward names of remote US counties that became renowned due to alleged 'fraud ballots', such as Maricopa County. Maybe some of your friends turned into annoying while explaining the importance of the Democrats' triumph in a traditionally 'red state' like Georgia and, if you don't know anyone of this sort, then it's probably you.

The point is: pick the same friend who is now sharing some CNN posts about Joe Biden or Kamala Harris in her IG story and ask her who Margrethe Vestager is, or to name three Presidents of the European Commission. There is high chance to receive a hesitant reply if any. Therefore, the key question we should ask ourselves is why Europeans look more concerned by American elections and politics than their own. One could assert it is just a matter of trade, since the US are the main trading partner of the entire EU, but in reality, it goes far beyond that. Germany and France are the main trading partners for the vast majority of European nations, yet the public attention generated by German or French affairs is actually far less intense.

Let us take one step back to the 2019 EU Parliamentary elections: the eventual turnout was 50.66%, an encouraging figure showing a positive trend with respect to previous occasions, yet substantially lower than regular national turnouts. Most importantly, this number tells us that half Europeans did not vote. This signals a relatively scarce engagement of Europeans in EU politics, which is paradoxical when compared to the outstanding thoughtfulness reserved to a distant continent like North America.

Back to our topic, there may be three potential factors behind our enquiry: the complexity of the EU electoral system, the perceived actual influence of EU Parliament and Commission and, of course, the language barrier.

When asked about the reasons why they decided not to vote at the last EU elections, 14% of the abstainers pointed out that voting had no consequences or did not change anything, while 8% of respondents said they did not know much about the European Union or the European Parliament.<sup>1</sup>

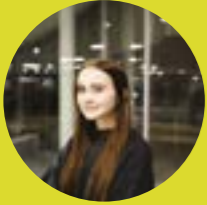
EU Parliamentary elections, as well as European institutions in general are indeed terribly complex for regular people. American presidential elections are much easier to comprehend in comparison, despite their peculiar features: two candidates, two parties, one clear winner. All in all, it is quite straightforward. On the other hand, it is often tough to designate a winner of EU elections, where roughly the same coalition made by socialists and populars always form the majority. Moreover, the current President of the EU Commission, once informally chosen by parliamentary groups through the Spitzenkandidat procedure, was actually proposed by the Council. In any parliamentary systems, it would be quite strange to see the majority in the Parliament not having a say in appointing its leader and just approving one decided externally.

While the POTUS is provided with strongly defined powers, such as commanding the armed forces or controlling foreign policy, the powers of the EU Parliament & Commission are somehow limited compared to national bodies. For example, the Commission has no fiscal power, while foreign policy is not unitary within the Union. As for the Next Generation EU program, the main decisions are eventually taken by the Council, which is not the expression of the European democracy, but rather the sum of single Member States. Electors may therefore conclude that it is sufficient to vote at a national level to bring their stakes also in Europe.

Last but not least, the language barrier. The EU has 24 official languages, which makes it difficult to build a true Continental public debate, given that only 38% of citizens have sufficient knowledge to hold a conversation in English. On the other hand, US only have one language, although the Spanish-speaking community is relevant in the country.

What could be done to raise Europeans' engagement towards their own elections would be for sure to raise the English literacy rate across the EU, so as to give Europeans more occasions to confront with each other while allowing Continental media to spread. Explaining EU institutions at school would also help, but the true turning policy would be to enhance the extent of powers that the EU Parliament & Commission are entitled to, in order to improve the impact of European elections and their perceived importance. A reform of the current electoral system might also be required, so to decide once and for all who gets to choose the President of the Commission. Then perhaps, in ten or twenty years, your daughter will be primarily concerned by who won in some faraway Finnish village rather than North Carolina, and it will be for her best.

# This is war!



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On the 22nd of October, the High Court of Poland, consisting of 15 judges controlled by the Law and Justice Party (PiS), tightened what was already one of Europe's most repressive abortion laws. As the law stands, abortions for fetal anomalies violate the Polish Constitution.

Abortions in case of severe fetus abnormalities constituted 98% of legal terminations last year; yet, 200,000 Polish women had abortions either illegally or abroad each year. The new statute allows Poles to abort their children only in the instance of rape, incest, and when the mother's life is in danger. Although it hardly means that the new law is enforceable: the abortions would be most likely carried out at the cost of worse conditions and higher prices, disproportionately affecting the most underprivileged Polish families.

Enraged by the statute, Poles went out on the streets, staging the most widespread protests Poland has seen since the fall of Communism in 1989. Defying the ban on demonstrations, for 14 nights following the ruling, Poles have been marching on the streets of big cities, carrying I wish I could

abort my government banners. The mass demonstrations, led by All-Polish Women's Strike (OSK), exposed much more than just a popular social discontent.

The new abortion law has been baptized as a trigger point. People on the streets were chanting: This is War! not without reason: much more than just abortion rights are at stake in Poland shaped by the PiS narrative. Having called it a revolution, Marta Lempart - one of OSK's leaders - implied that this is not the only reason that has enraged the society and the consequences emerging from the social discontent will be countless. This battle is equally fought for women's reproductive rights as it is for the economic, social, and political freedoms of all the marginalized in Poland governed by PiS.

These are the patriarchal culture and steady erosion of democratic norms practiced by PiS that underlie observed social frustration, finding its outlet in the mass demonstrations. The politicization of the judiciary, the oppression of the LGBTQ community, and the fundamentalist religiosity - all these have been challenged by the protesters, whether it be by defacing

churches or disrupting public services. The strikes are, therefore, by no means decontextualized: Poles are gathering together to protest for their democratic freedoms that - owing to the decisions of unconstitutional and far-from-democratic institutions - are being gradually taken away.

The court ruling is interpreted by many as a tactical move of a PiS leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, to solicit support on the traditionalist right, simultaneously bypassing the Parliament, where PiS has a razor-thin majority. In turn, unexpected for the leadership has appeared to be the extent of popular fury, unlike any PiS has ever seen. As many analysts anticipate, in the short-term social unrest could have been mitigated by playing along with the demands of protesters or slightly deradicalizing the proposed statutes in the response for the strikes. Yet, expeditiously growing discontent might shake the nationalist core of PiS in the long-time perspective, handicapping future decision-making.

The response of the influential decision-makers only fanned up the situation. While addressing the strikes, Deputy Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki called the protest-

ers the criminals. In his public speech, PM asked people to protect the country, which was interpreted by many as permission for violence. Similarly, the Minister of Education, Przemysław Czarnek, threatened institutions, teachers, and professors who support the protests. In effect, many students who have propagated pro-strike behaviors were threatened to be suspended by the teachers calling them vandals and terrorists. Meanwhile, the Deputy Minister of Justice, Michał Woś, promised a harsh treatment of the marches' organizers, threatening them with up to 8 years in prison for exposing themselves and others to harm.

Although only 15% of Poles admitted to be in favor of the proposed law, the PiS supporters seem to act in line with the leaders. During one of the demonstrations, the driver of a car ran into two protesters. As it turned out, he is an employee of the Internal Security Agency (ABW). Consequently, willing to charge the ABW officer with a criminal charge, the district prosecutor ruling the case was dismissed from the investigation. In turn, the aggressor was held responsible for a mere driving violation - the Polish women have been deprived of

the guarantee of security by the services most authorized to provide them.

Yet, the Polish reproductive rights crisis seems to echo loudly across the European countries. The Polish parliamentarians and MPs were speaking up on the international arena, increasing social awareness. Effectively, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the Czech Republic, and Iceland have become the first countries willing to implement changes in their laws in order to allow Polish women to legally terminate their pregnancies in these countries. For instance, an Icelandic deputy, Rósa Björk Brynjólfssdóttir, supported by 18 other politicians, has just submitted a draft resolution to the Icelandic parliament, allowing people who have lost the right to legal abortion within their own country, the ability to take advantage of free abortion in Iceland. That procedure would be free for Polish women, requiring only an EHIC card. Similarly, in the Czech Republic, a spot well-known in Poland for their abortion practices, Czech Pirate Party appealed to the Czech government to provide Polish women with the possibility of legal abortion in the country.

In response to the international criticism

and domestic protests, the Polish government prevented the court's decision from coming into play by indefinitely postponing its publication. No protesting Pole, however, considers it good news, but rather a simple practice of buying time - time for the new law to be taken down from the headlines of every newspaper both in the country and abroad. Additional time might be also necessary for the government to take any safety measures, plan strategies, and organize the country before the imposition of a national state of emergency due to COVID-19. With that lay of the land, people's hands would be tied: if on the streets, every protestant would be arrested right away.

Although with the announcement of the President, Andrzej Duda, about the probable alteration in the law, scores of Poles breathed a sigh of relief, many forgot that it was a mere PR effort, as pointed out by the political analysts. As a regular puppet in the hands of Kaczyński, Duda has no real decision-making power that would bring a real difference to the Polish social landscape. As long as the ruling is not entirely dismissed, Polish women will have to roll up their sleeves.

# Is Chile's new constitution really the solution?

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**F**riday, October 18th. The year is 2020. Smoke and tear gas fill up the air. The sound of explosions and screams echo in the ambiance. Chile is in agony. Newspaper headlines read: "Chile Anniversary Rallies Turn Violent as Churched Burned, Police Fire Tear Gas", "Chile protests turn violent on anniversary". But somehow, the world seems to be deaf. What is really going on in Chile?

South America. A continent that has been hit by political instability throughout its history. Some argue that it is because of the Forms of Government chosen by the countries. Other argue it is because of the lack of proper education, equal opportunities and qualified politicians. Regardless of the explanation as to why this continent seems to be so propense to military coups, one thing is certain: almost all of the countries in South America have been victims of military dictatorships in the past century. And this is no stranger to Chile, who suffered a 17-year-old one.

In 1970, presidential elections in Chile had as a result the victory of Salvador Allende, the first ever Marxist to be elected president in a liberal democracy in Latin America. During his 3 years in power, Allende left Chile with the worst economy in its history; inflation sky-rocketed, medicine and food were scarce, and a social-economic crisis disturbed the citizens. On September 11th, 1973, Chile's military moved to oust Allende in a coup d'état. Led by the General Augusto Pinochet, this military coup ended with the suicide of Allende, but Pinochet refused to return authority.

Chile ended up being ruled by a military junta from 1973 until 1990, where the Congress was dissolved, the Constitution was suspended and at least 3,095 civilians were killed. Pinochet self-declared as President of the Republic in 1974, becoming de facto dictator of Chile. During his almost 20 years as Head of State, Pinochet managed to overturn Chile's deeply depressed economy with a 606% inflation through an economic policy of free-market reforms, where Chile's economy soon became one of the strongest ones in Latin America.

In fact, Robert Packenham and William Ratliff, two professors of political science at Stanford University's Hoover Institution stated that "The first country in the world to make that momentous break with the past—away from socialism and extreme state capitalism toward more market-oriented structures and policies—was not Deng Xiaoping's China or Margaret Thatcher's Britain in the late 1970s, Ronald Reagan's United States in 1981, or any other country in Latin America or elsewhere. It was Pinochet's Chile in 1975."

However, Pinochet's dictatorship was also characterized for

being a regime that violated human rights, shut down political parties, and most importantly drafted a constitution in 1980 that had ruled Chile until October 25, 2020. Terror roamed the streets, opposition was massacred, and freedom became a luxury. After Pinochet's step down in 1990, he continued his career as a "senator-for-life" in accordance to his constitution. By the time of his death in 2006, 300 criminal charges were still pending against him for numerous human rights violations.

After his death, Chile implemented an unwritten rule: to never talk about Pinochet again. In the 1990s, the constitution created under Pinochet's dictatorship was reformed, and Pinochet's signature was replaced by Ricardo Lagos', a social-democratic politician who served as president from 2000 to 2006. Regardless of Lagos being from the opposition party, and his signature being on the constitution, Chile's citizens still considered the current constitution as Pinochet's Constitution.

On October 18th, 2019, the "estallido social", also known as Chile's social outbreak, occurred. It began in Santiago, the capital, and it quickly spread through the country. The immediate cause of these protests was an increase in the ticket fare for public transportation. Secondary school students began taking over Santiago's main train stations, and soon other social groups joined the protests. But soon, the protestors' demands evolved. They realized that the main issue was the economic inequalities that haunted them due to the poor governance. These violent riots became political, and as open battles swept Santiago de Chile, the president Sebastian Piñera decided to attend his granddaughter's birthday party and completely disregarded the protests. This infuriated the demonstrators, which led to even more violence and crimes in order to be heard. 17 train stations were completely burned down, over a million Chileans took the streets of the capital to protest, and the total cost of damages surpassed 1 billion dollars.

As a consequence, Piñera implemented a state of emergency and abolished the fare increase. But, although many warned him that sincere, immediate dialogue was necessary, the president refused to act accordingly. This led to what is now considered the second biggest protest in the history of Chile, where over a million people demanded for his resignation. The actions taken by the president were enough to silence the Chilean population and calm the social unrests for a while, but none of the demands were actually heard. At the end of January 2020, the "estallido social" resumed, but police forces began using extreme measures to control these. The National Institute of Human Rights reported that at the end of January 2020, 427 citizens had received eye injuries at the hands of the police.

Due to the pandemic, the protests had to come to a halt. This permitted the government to completely undermine the previous requests and protests, and they tried to hide and erase all the inequalities and socio-economic problems present due to years of misgovernance. However, this only made the protests more aggressive. On September 11, 2020, the 47th anniversary of the Pinochet coup, protestors decided to demonstrate at the central plaza, where they clashed with police officers and over 100 arrests were made. Three symbolic churches were burned to the ground by rioters, and demonstrations began getting out of hand once again. Therefore, in order to hush and tranquilize the whole situation, Piñera announced that he would create a plebiscite in order to vote on whether to change the 1980s constitution. But how is this actually going to solve all the problems Chileans face every day due to misgovernance?

On October 25th, 2020, in a historic voting process, 78% of Chileans voted in favor of drafting a new constitution. This elections had the greatest voter turnout in Chile's history, with more than 7.5 million citizens expressing their preferences, even though Chile declared in 2012 that it was not mandatory to cast one's vote during elections. This process will be carried out by a constitutional convention, which for the first time in Chile's history will include women. This result was a huge victory for many and it is often categorized as "Chile's advancement from Pinochet's era". Even though "Pinochet's constitution" had been reformed more than 50 times, Chile still voted in favor of burying it in the past. To fully understand why this decision was taken by the people, one has to take a look at three main issues. One of the main issues that led to Pinochet's dictatorship is the presidential system that is exerted in Chile, where the executive power relies almost entirely on the president, ending up with an almost unlimited power.

Back in 1973, after realizing Allende's failed presidency had led to economic decline and inflation, the only peaceful and legal way to remove him from power was through impeachment. This procedure is rarely practiced in presidential systems due to its complexity. Because of this inflexibility of presidential systems, along with the high concentration of power in the hands of one politician (the president), the only way the opposition viewed out was through a military coup. Now, in 2020 with Piñera's presidency demonstrating poor results, the fear of a military coup resurfaced, leading the president to conclude that the optimal solution for him to remain in power was to blame all the problems his government was unable to fix on the constitution. Latin American countries have been affected by 'hyper-presidentialisms', where the Head of State enhances their power by creating institutions that give them greater free-

dom to act. In other words, these countries have a supposed separation of power, but without the checks and balances. But, will this new constitution create a meaningful change in the distribution of power in the government?

Another aspect that is important to analyze when it comes to understanding what this new constitution will bring to the table is the application. A great example that has been used by many of the voters against the new constitution is the following: Bolivia's constitution has an article that states that its citizens and the country itself have the right to an ocean. But does this mean that Bolivia has an ocean? The new constitution will only make a representative change if it is followed through by the following governments. Citizens are demanding better education, a fairer and more equal economy and a more competent government. But the constitution of 1980 already has articles in it that express those demands, the problem is that it is not being exercised correctly. Consequently, the question that needs to be addressed is: how is this new constitution going to ensure the compliance to these demands?

Lastly, this new constitution will certainly introduce a significant period of political uncertainty in Chile. Even though the referendum was approved by an outstanding majority, it is just the first step into a long, demanding journey. Is now, in the middle of a global pandemic where uncertainty already roams, the right time to decide to create such change? What consequences might this bring? What comes next will be defined by the decisions, either good or bad, that will be taken. The real question now is who will take these decisions? Will this uncertainty period end up giving even more power to the president, and will he feel entitled to make all the important calls? And how will this affect the country economically?

Now, it needs to be defined who will take part as an official member of the constitutional convention, which will be composed of 255 members. In March of 2021, the drafting will begin, and these members will face the challenge of writing the constitution from scratch. 155 members out of the 255 will be popularly elected, and a requisite imposed is that they are not part of the Senate or the Congress. The world is eager to see how this all will develop. After the elections for the members are made, they will have 9 months to draft this new constitution, with a possible prorogation of 3 more months. Will Chile finally be freed of Latin America's vicious political instability cycle? Is this constitution an outcome of the demands of the citizens, or the easy way out for the current government to get off the hook? Will the constitution be finished in time, and will it pass the last plebiscite needed in order for it to be applied? It is now all in the hands of Chileans, and only time will tell.

# Unpack your suits: Assessment Centres in the Covid era



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What to make of online assessment centres? Our most loyal readers might recall how the author got the privilege of experiencing what was probably one of the first virtual assessment centres back in February. I have since grown older and wiser, gone through another round of applications and constructed a somewhat decent sample of both versions.

As I was staring – fully suited – at my computer while virtually sitting in a Zoom lobby I was hit with full-fledged nostalgia of ‘old’ and, perhaps, better times. Sure, by now we are probably used to the online version of anything, but this did not prevent me from dwelling on what exactly I was missing. I would dare say it is safe to exclude squeezing in the London underground at rush hour. Ruling out one-day round trips and sleepless nights in some hotel would, in all likelihood, not prove too brave of an assumption either.

There are few memories that, instead, I hold very dear to my heart. It was an ungodly hour, something between 4.00 and 6.00 AM of an unspecified date of fall 2019. I was at the Linate airport, wearing my usual black suit and carrying a cabin-size trolley. At the gate for the flight to London City, I found a silent mass of businessmen and businesswomen, each with their own suits and trolleys, just like me. It was probably the university student version of playing grown-up, and yet I felt like I was part of something.

Shortly after, I randomly met other Bocconi students on their way to – who would have thought? – an assessment centre. As usual, our sense of community is more than enough to bring us *Bocconiani* together in times like these and travelling with someone I could relate to most certainly helped ease the tension.

Fast forward a few hours, I vividly remember getting off the Jubilee line, joining the orderly yet hasty multitude heading towards the exit, running along the imaginary ‘fast lane’ of the escalator and looking up to the Canary Wharf skyline. On the right, Thomson Reuters with its characteristic news ticker. On the left, the behemoths I dreamt of working

for. Everything screamed ‘finance’. Waiting together with the other candidates was part of the package as well. Awkward silence and small talk might not be anyone’s favourite, but I enjoyed having a look at the competition, sharing impressions of the interviews or simply meeting new people. What is more, I could not help but notice how *Bocconiani* were overrepresented in the pool – a pleasant reminder of what a bright bunch we are. Another major difference I have personally noticed so far is how I could once get a sense of the impression I had made on interviewers and feel a distinct positive or negative vibe as I walked out, which I now lack completely.

I might surprise you in saying that perhaps I miss the after-AC part even more than all of the above. I have a sort of tradition of mine of going to a specific restaurant with the other candidates once interviews are over. The Covid-adjusted version of this ritual was ordering delivery from the same chain here in Milan, but somehow it does not taste quite the same. A creature of habit, I also sit all year round in ‘my spot’ in class (first row, right at the centre, in case anyone was wondering). However, after an assessment centre I would make an exception and sit close to the exit (or entrance, actually, as they were still interchangeable at the time), an eye on my phone, ready to sprint out and take the call. A casual observer could even have mistaken this for a remake of ‘He’s just not that into you’. I miss that too – just sitting at home knowing I cannot possibly ignore the loud ringtone I set up for the occasion feels awfully plain.

Should we get *the offer*, we are out of options in terms of celebrating – virtual drinks on Zoom? We are also left asking ourselves whether we will physically make it to London this time around. And will we ever have in-person interviews again? I wonder if firms have come to the conclusion that maybe paying for our travel is not worth it, Covid or not.

Sure, there are perks to the new format too. One can now save time and energy once devoted to travelling and invest them in extra

rest or preparation. We can wait in the comfort of our own home in lieu of a room full of strangers. No need to polish our shoes nor to worry about our handshake being too aggressive or too unassertive. As soon as we are done with the video-calls, we can throw ourselves on our bed and enter a coma in a matter of minutes.

In the pre-Covid era, skipping lectures in the name of AC prep was a sort of irreversible action – I have been guilty myself of having skipped perhaps one too many statistics classes – while now we can watch recordings at 2x speed and get to convince ourselves that we are catching up, a possibility I was most recently delighted to take advantage of.

But there is more to the story. You might agree with me that, under lockdown, every day can easily start feeling the same and most activities distinctly lack any excitement– Netflix, making bread, you name it – not exactly what makes you feel alive, despite being entertaining. Instead, when we receive an invitation, this represents a disruption to an otherwise dull schedule: we can trash our study plan while barely feeling guilty and forget about everything else, even – may I? – coronavirus and lockdowns.

Playing the upcoming assessment centre card still works like wonder when it comes to avoiding some of my responsibilities, I admit it, and I continue to feel part of a community that gets just the same experience, be it *Women in Finance* or Bocconi at large.

This form of escapism is a rare commodity nowadays, and I soon realised how I had started to crave something that might cause some stress or disrupt my routine, but at least makes my heart beat a little faster. It wakes up the dormant Bocconian spirit: ambitious, determined, open, resourceful and – why not? – competitive. Let us dust off (the part framed by the camera of) our favourite suits, our best-lit rooms and fastest internet connections. It takes more than a screen to prevent us from coming through, from getting *the call* and *the offer*, in the best Bocconian tradition.

# "Howdy Modi" no more?

The past, present and  
future of US-INDIA  
relations



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On the morning of May 21, 2019, my family and I were taken aback as we flipped through news channels across Indian TV announcing the same thing: the incumbent Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been reelected by a landslide. As non-resident Indians (NRIs) living in the Middle East, the news has been a prime link connecting us to home. In the weeks leading up to election day, Modi’s economic and foreign policy actions were heavily scrutinized by the media. India’s contracting economy and rising tension on border with Pakistan, provoked by an airstrike just months before elections seemed like strong grounds to give Modi a win by a slim margin at most.

However, Modi’s sweeping win was not all that surprising to our friends and family in the Middle East who support his “masculine” leadership style. Since running for his first term as prime minister in 2014, Modi was able to concoct an image of component and masculine leadership, which was served in batches to the public by Indian mass media. Self-proclaimed as the savior of “Mother India”, he ridiculed India’s defensive foreign policy measures led by past PMs. This is why when Modi directed airstrikes to Pakistani borders, it was seen as a display of brute nationalistic masculinity and a major plus in the eyes of many Indians both within and outside India.

Since re-election in 2019, Modi and his political party, the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) – founded on the belief that India is the land of Hindus – have aggressively persisted to establish a Hindu-nationalist agenda. The first blow was struck when the administration moved quickly to revoke the autonomous status of Muslim majority Kashmir and kept the region under a communications shutdown for months. This was followed by a legal jab to Muslim refugees seeking asylum in India who are now dismissed on the basis of their religion with the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act. Political actions like these have led to mass scale religious violence and protests across the country that was only brought to a stop at the advent of COVID 19 in India.

Modi’s political style relies heavily on his perceivable “strongman” public persona. This reliance on personality appeal closely mirrors that of his dear friend Donald Trump. While Modi uses the law to vocalize his far-right beliefs and his charisma as a cover for a more insidious nationalistic agenda, his comrade Trump outwardly voices his support for white supremacists, mistrust in the political left, science, and the constitution. His brazen attitude has garnered a cult-like following of those tainted by the disease of “Trumpism”. Although Trump lost the popular vote in the 2020 elections, it must be noted that over 10 million more Americans have voted for him since 2016. Consequently, it comes to me as no surprise that both Modi and Trump are magnetically drawn to each other’s infectious personalities.

Modi and Trump’s international bromance has been documented by several pictures of the two leaders sharing a long embrace, hands held

firmly together to an audience of enthusiastic Trump and Modi supporters in rallies held by each leader to welcome the other to their country. During his presidency, Trump has spoken highly of his friend Modi, upon several occasions – most notably on his last visit to India where he noted his utmost belief that PM Modi “works for the people of his country” while 17 lost their lives under a violent protest in India’s capital New Delhi. Additionally, on more than one occasion Trump offered to mediate border conflict between India and Pakistan but never once has he commented on any of Modi’s hostile acts towards Muslims in India.

One reason why Trump has been persistent to win over Modi is that he hoped to consolidate the vote of 1.2 million Indian American votes from the key swing states of Florida, Pennsylvania and Texas – where Trump hosted the “Howdy Modi” rally to welcome the Indian Prime Minister to the USA. Historically, Indian Americans have voted Democrat. The GOP hoped to capture the vote of this key demographic that makes up more than 1% of all eligible voters in the 2020 elections.

However, a study done by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, shows that the GOP were not as successful as they would like to believe. The study surveyed over 2 million Indian Americans who would be voting in 2020. They found that over 72% of Indian Americans would vote Biden and just 22% would Trump. Additionally, the study also found that only 3% of Indian American voters view the US-INDIA ties as an important factor in their choice for president – which puts a significant shame to the efforts Trump has exerted to convince Indians (both within and outside the states) of the love America has for them.

One of the most important points of this study was that 45% of this demographic said that they were now more likely to vote with Harris on the ticket as VP. Vice President Elect Kamala Harris is a half-black, half-Indian lawyer who upon many occasions has displayed her connection to family in both Jamaica and India. Her mother hails from the South Indian city of Chennai where billboards adorned with Harris’s face were launched as soon as the news that Biden had won the presidency was announced. As a lawyer, Harris has actively stated her opposition to Modi’s foreign policy measures. Harris’ appeal as VP elect draws heavily on her historic standing on the basis of gender and race and less so on her contentious career as a prosecutor.

Nonetheless, it is safe to say that the Harris nomination has won the hearts of Indians all over the world in a way that is different from Trump’s aspirations to woo the Indian diaspora through transitivity via his friendship with Modi. I have had family actively seeking to learn about Harris with a sense of pride saying that one of their own has made it. From where we stand, the future of Harris’ approach to leadership is yet to be seen. Despite her strong stance against the current PM’s policies, I, as well as my fellow Indians remain optimistic to what Harris brings to the table.

# The World Food Program and the framework of humanitarian action



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The decision of the Norwegian Nobel Committee to award the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize to the World Food Program (WFP), while representing a deserved recognition of the organization's worldwide humanitarian efforts, can also be seen as a deeply symbolic gesture. In a year in which the global political and economic frameworks have been scaled back at such an unusual and perhaps unprecedented rate, rewarding an organization that actively attempts to provide concrete help to those communities who are currently facing conflict, famine or have non-sufficient access to appropriate health care, serves as a reminder to those of us who are lucky enough to enjoy a comforting degree of social and financial stability. A reminder that there are still large portions of the world that are far from having such stability and that a widespread awareness of this may lead to more extensive and efficient action to combat it, which is ultimately bound to increase the global welfare and have positive consequences for global human development.

The current figures alone are enough to indicate that the situation is extremely alarming. According to WFP's data, there are currently roughly 821 million undernourished people worldwide, meaning about 11% of the world population. Of those 821 million, 700 million are considered "hungry", meaning "chronically food insecure", and 60% of them live in areas that are currently facing conflict. War, in fact, remains a harsh reality for many communities around the world. According to the International Crisis Group, in the past five years the trends concerning number of conflicts, number of people killed and number of civilians targeted by war have all worsened. What is startling other than the trend itself is the involvement of non-state actors in such wars, which is continuously increasing; that makes the modality and consequences of conflicts more unpredictable and therefore more difficult to operate within. Moreover, the World Health Organization has estimated that nearly half of the world population still lacks coverage for the most essential health expenses. That means that the coverage of personal medical care tends to threaten many people's financial stability; in fact, 100 million people a year are forced into extreme poverty due to health expenses. Considering that all these figures are likely to worsen as the consequences of the pandemic keep unfolding,

the combination of these numbers shows that global welfare is being disturbingly threatened.

The humanitarian actions of organizations such as WFP, while certainly extremely notable, are not enough to guarantee an across-the-board development that will truly resolve these issues in the long run, especially since new conflicts keep arising in different parts of the world. What WFP has managed to build over the past few decades, though, is a framework designed to make humanitarian action efficient, dynamic and lasting in time; a framework that can credibly serve as a model for other organizations that have similar humanitarian purposes as WFP's.

Founded in 1962, the World Food Program is the food-branch of the United Nations and, as of today, the world's largest humanitarian organization. Originally designed to be solely a food distributor for communities in situations classified as "emergencies" (usually conflict areas but possibly also places where food production is inhibited by droughts and/or natural disasters), WFP has since evolved and expanded to become an organization that does not simply distribute food as a final good to people suffering from malnutrition or chronic hunger, but that employs its resources – all of which come from private donations by individuals and governments – to prevent famine and to preserve or reinstate a minimally acceptable level of personal welfare. That involves investing in technologies that prevent natural disasters or at least limit their impact on people's wellbeing, aiding reconstruction in war-torn cities and, where possible, working with local governments to increase their capacity to combat hunger in their respective countries. Last year, WFP reports to have assisted 97 million people in 88 different countries, distributing more than 15 billion rations by mobilizing 5,600 trucks, 30 ships and nearly 100 planes on any given day.

A huge part of what makes WFP's humanitarian action unique is its extremely developed and intricate delivery system, designed to ultimately coincide with an increase in human development for the places that are receiving the organization's aid rather than simply providing a series of temporary handouts. Since it has offices all around the world, WFP works to be able to understand local economic dynamics of

countries in which it operates and to navigate within their bureaucracy. That is particularly shown by WFP's collaboration with local private logistics sectors, especially within the transport sector. The result is that WFP can utilize local warehouse units to store the food it needs to distribute, while pieces of infrastructure such as roads, harbors and aviation stations that connect remote communities to bigger cities are built. Initially, the goal of this is to allow for WFP to mobilize its vehicles and distribute food and/or resources in isolated communities, but intuitively those same isolated communities will be able to utilize these pieces of infrastructure even after the emergency has passed, which means that they will be more connected to bigger cities. This has positive effects for everyone's wellbeing: for example, the partnership that WFP managed to establish with 11 Syrian transport companies to lead its operation within the country when the conflict broke out in 2011, is deemed to have had a positive effect on employment as well as on Syrian economy in general, while also giving WFP the chance to efficiently provide some aid to the many civilians whose lives were torn apart by the conflict.

Another extremely important feature of WFP's framework that makes its operations unique is its cash-based transfers system. Where the nature and condition of the financial sector allows it, WFP issues assistance in the form of physical bank notes, e-money, value vouchers or other formats of money. The main reason behind such a strategy is to empower the people that receive this kind of assistance by giving them the choice of how to be assisted and improve their own wellbeing. Usually, food still ends up being the most crucial element to such wellbeing, but some individuals may find medical care more immediately necessary and therefore choose to spend a larger portion of the money received that way. Introduced for the first time in 2010, WFP's cash-based transfers system today constitutes 38% of the organization's assistance portfolio, for a total of \$ 2.1 billion having been utilized in cash-based transfers in 2019. Through this system, money is directly injected in the local economy, which leads to economic growth as well as an increase in human development and in purchasing power, all elements that bring a country closer to self-sufficiency, which is the ultimate goal.

Obviously, adopting a cash-based transfer system involves many nuances that make the operational strategy quite complex, since there are many questions to be answered in order to provide a level of assistance that is appropriate for the circumstances that a given emergency or community requires. For each project, WFP needs to assess whether the country's financial system allows for cash-based transfers to be effective, or whether food distribution is more suitable; in some cases, a combination of the two is the best option. Then, in case cash-based transfers are agreed to be the best form of assistance, there must be an idea of their format, and a decision on the most appropriate amount of money to be devoted to each individual needs to be made, which involves knowing things like the cost of a basket of essential goods in such country. Moreover, an efficient framework to monitor the way in which such money is spent by individuals has to be designed. These are all very complex matters that the WFP network attempts to provide an answer to by means of quantitative analysis. The results provided, though, have mostly been successful, since there is data that shows how cash-based transfer systems led to significant development, among others, in Bangladesh, Kenya, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq in the past few years.

Although there certainly are some flaws within the system that the World Food Program has designed and operates within, and although there is room for improving and perfecting certain components of its framework, WFP's humanitarian action is undoubtedly proof of a relentless attempt to try guaranteeing human rights in contexts where they would otherwise be impossible to guarantee. Therefore, rewarding the actions of WFP with the Nobel Peace Prize is the sort of recognition that encourages a continuous development in humanitarian action around the world, and simultaneously gives the alarming figures presented above some much-needed spotlight. It is crucial for as many people to be active on these issues, especially at a time in which new potentially alarming contexts keep arising, such as Ethiopia being declared on the verge of civil war following the central government's order to attack one of its regions, and in which established devastating conflicts such as the ones in Yemen, in Somalia, in Syria, in South Sudan and in many others, are still far from being over.



# The backlash against gender studies



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In the year that marks the 30th anniversary of the release of *Gender Trouble*, the most influential book in the history of Gender Studies, the backlash against the ideas and fights that the discipline has advanced is stronger than ever. It is clear, and it has been for years, that reactionary political groups, conservative religious factions and - most vehemently - the Catholic Church are mounting an offensive against what they see as a destabilizing ideology, with the potential to make the social structures they uphold less relevant and binding.

Despite not being new by any measure, this opposition has been consolidating and organizing throughout the past two decades, and now boasts several adherents in position of power. Virtually no geographical region is exempt. The backlash is strong in Latin America, with Brazilian President Bolsonaro vowing in his 2019 inaugural address to fight “gender ideology”. North America is at the same time the academic center of the Gender Studies discipline and the site where the most heated opposition to it is being displayed, with Evangelicals and Catholics joining forces to condemn it. European countries have been a hotbed for gender skepticism in the 2010s. Most recently, political action has been taken in Hungary, where the government has not only defunded Gender Studies but also sought to legislate trans people out of existence, Poland, where a third of the country was declared “LGBT-free zone”, and Italy, where conservative groups and MPs have assembled and voiced their opposition to legislation aiming to counter homophobia, transphobia and ableism. But what is it really that is being contested?

Gender Studies is a broadly interdisciplinary research field born in the 1980s whose object of inquiry is gender and its intersection with society, sexuality, power and a whole host of related structures. To understand the subject, it is essential to grasp the sex-gender distinction. By sex, we mean our anatomical and biological understanding of a person’s reproductive organs. Gender, on the other hand, is the socially constructed set of characteristics that a person identifies with, possibly but not necessarily in relation to their sex. Those features include identity, social roles and ways of inhabiting and exhibiting gendered bodies. When we say that an individual is a man, a woman or non-binary, we are referring to the individual’s gender. Confusion often arises because of the imprecision with which these terms are used. For instance, when the phrase “gender-reveal party” is used, the term “gender” is improperly deployed, since what is being announced in a gender-reveal party is merely the baby’s assigned sex, most definitely not their gender, which they will come to figure out and live with throughout their life. Many people understand the three separate concepts of sex, gender and desire to be one and the same. By that logic, an individual of female sex must identify as a woman and be attracted to men. Symmetrically, an individual of male sex must identify as a man and be attracted to women. Research in Gender Studies asserts that such ways of thinking are heteronormative and should be rejected. Heteronormativity is the notion that being attracted to the opposite

gender and identifying with the sex one was assigned at birth by medical authorities are the only correct ways of living one’s affectivity, sexuality and gendered life. Notably, heteronormativity is a strong force in society undermining the LGBTQ+ community’s claims to equal rights and fight against discrimination.

The academic enterprise of Gender Studies has, since its very beginning, been tightly intertwined with feminism, feminist theory and women’s studies. Many influential texts in Gender Studies designate Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* as a reference point for the development of the discipline. In the two-volume book, the French philosopher argues that “One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one”. This sentence is taken to signify that one’s womanhood is not a fixed, pre-existing reality, but rather a process that is shaped and influenced by norms, contingent regulatory ideals as well as other internal and external factors. One of the many analyses that were sparked by the reading of Beauvoir’s acclaimed text is contained in a milestone of the Gender Studies literature, namely *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), by UC Berkeley Professor Judith Butler, now widely regarded as an academic superstar.

In *Gender Trouble*, reaching its 30th anniversary this year, Butler departs from the seemingly uncontroversial assumption that feminist politics should be founded on the subject of “the woman”. The category of womanhood or what constitutes an acceptable female identity, she argues, is in itself a product of oppressive and patriarchal structures and traditions that prevent any struggle for affirmation from being effective. For feminism to be effective, then, it is necessary that the category of “woman” be opened to question, redefinition and reappropriation. The author then presents her theory of gender performativity. In Butler’s conceptualization, gender is not something we are, but rather something we do, a kind of performance we are trained to enact from birth to fit into predefined boxes imposed by society and discourse. In the author’s eloquent phrasing: “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance”. However, only the appeal of substance is present in gender. A way to see the author’s point is to consider drag: the performance of femininity by men through the use of makeup and female clothing, popularized in shows like RuPaul’s Drag Race. Drag defies the traditional epistemology of gender, inasmuch as we are unable to discern the sex of the performer when they are presenting as the opposite gender. From this, we gather that gender is, in large part, merely a group of signifiers used to attach a label to people.

This and many other theories and philosophies developed by academics working in Gender Studies have ruffled the Vatican’s feathers from very early on. The Catholic Church, an institution with a history of opposing women’s fight for equal standing, has firmly rejected even the possibility to consider a sex-gender distinction, most prominently through the words of Pope Benedict XVI. A 2004 letter by the Pontifical Council on the Family to the Bishops of the Church alleged that “gender” would undermine the stability of the family in society and foster

conflict between the sexes. In 2013, Pope Francis went even further by comparing gender theory to nuclear arms, and in 2016 he described gender theory as a denial of the “difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman”, stating that the field “envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family”.

Another side of the backlash, often related to the religious one, is largely discussed in the book *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, edited by Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, and it consists of nationalist and right-wing movements. The protests that those movements have organized across Europe share a specific mode of action: firstly, they use the phrases “gender theory” or “gender ideology” to refer not to the Gender Studies literature - which is generally inaccessible to them - but to claims of gender equality, women’s rights, LGBTQ+ rights and anti-discrimination regulation in general; secondly, they frame their discourse in the rhetoric of freedom of speech and often religion, arguing that undermining the legitimacy of women’s and LGBTQ+ people’s struggle for equal treatment is within their rights.

This gives us enough context to draw two important conclusions. The first is that a large chunk of the backlash against gender research is based on a (willful?) misconstruction of its arguments. No respectable gender theorist “envisages a society without sexual differences”. If anything, Gender Studies is all about cultivating an accepting and inclusive space where gender diversity is welcomed and not a basis for discrimination. What is more, a frequent misconception concerning the social constructionist argument is that it affirms that, since gender is socially constructed, it must not be real. Nothing could be farther from a correct interpretation. To see this, consider money: money is a social construct, but that does not make it less real. Anybody taking an introductory class in macroeconomics learns that the value of fiat currency resides in our collective accepting it as a means for payment. The same applies to gender: it works as a category because we allow it to do so. Secondly, the Pope’s words and the demonstrations of conservative political groups betray an anxiety that Gender Studies have the potential to shake the foundation of the established social order.

The issue with the backlash against gender is that people’s lives are at stake. Few verses from a poem by femme author Alok Vaid Menon go a long way to depict the violence that trans bodies are continuously and excruciatingly subjected to:

“today a man on the street pointed to me and said / “what the hell is that!?” / i wanted to turn around, / tell him that i got this dress on sale / and i got this body for free / but you have been making me pay for both / ever since.”

Trans and gender non-conforming bodies are constantly policed and politicized, when not attacked and murdered. That is tragic but surely not news to anybody. Why, then, are members of anti-gender movements, who often identify themselves as Christians, willing to vehemently oppose a discourse that empowers and lifts the downtrodden? Whose status and influence are so strongly dependent on constructs such as gender norms and the so-called traditional family that they would need to mount such gargantuan scaremongering campaigns to fend off the claims for equality and safety?

The only clear conclusion is that those individuals have a lot to lose. Being almost entirely white, straight and cisgender, those opposing gender diversity and affirmation have always occupied positions of power and privilege in society and have thus far managed to impose and uphold structures of oppression and discrimination to hold on to their status. But the marginalized have now become stronger than ever, in part thanks to the research of an academic field that advocated the deconstruction of dogmatic norms and the exploration of new and more authentic modes of living one’s identity.



# Dynamics of Cyberconflict

## *a new era of political competition*



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Many claim that we are currently living in the age of the Second Cold War, that we are possibly experiencing a Third World War. Others suggest that we have already started experiencing the very intensified international wave of deglobalization. Looking through the lens of politics and rational decision-making will not answer the question of which of the above is true. In a decade when much has already started coming under scrutiny, when political developments occur at an unyielding pace and when economies have become the weapons of choice, we have to rethink what conflict means for us and how the game will unfold in the times to come.

Now more than ever, we stumble across references to artificial intelligence, big data and quantitative tools which interpret rapid political developments. Not so long ago, decoding leaders' political decisions or organizations' pivots in the global arena could simply be put down to ideological preferences or misalignment of interests. Now, however, it all comes down to the dynam-

ics of recent means of technology which are here to change the nature of conflict. The classic image of armies disembarking planes and entering warzones is one that has been branded in our minds, yet the face of warfare may now turn more subtle and far more lethal.

Cyberwarfare is a topic that resembles some faraway reality, and even that cannot have concrete implications on human development. This is partly because no media attention has been placed on an issue that is increasingly permeating across sectors of political, social and economic development. In the sphere of cyberwarfare, cyberattacks seem to have become the norm; they are considered natural, necessary and normal. Reports of hacks, espionage, leaks and attacks perpetrated through cyberspace may not be flamboyantly mentioned in the news, but if you look close enough, you will always see references in major stories. Internationally, many actors, most notably Iran, have openly declared their interest in the future emphasis that will be placed on these newly introduced means of effective warfare.

Despite their attractiveness due to their efficiency, they are complex strategies with constantly changing characteristics. They may be the tools of the elites, but they are understudied and greatly undiscovered. These drawbacks are certainly attributed to the uncertainty that dominates the field of cybersecurity and cyberconflict. Un-

certainty pervades a broad set of cyber issues, such as the potential political and legal restraints in cyberspace, the viability of export control, the strategic value of cyber operations and the way in which state and non-state actors can cooperate, clash and homogenize their individual preferences.

Cyberconflict is the new era of warfare, not just because of the elite tactics, means and methods that are employed in a constantly changing world where everything is being questioned. It is the future of war due to its ability to overstep the notion of boundaries, disregard the concept of borders and redefine the idea of national sovereignty. This initiates a discussion on the relationship between decision-makers, perpetrators and citizens. Clarity rarely constitutes the building blocks of these relationships, which only raises the barriers of the cyber community and makes the cyber field less permeable. This only harms the prospects of stability and harmonized actions.

The rising timeliness of the matter is made even more intense when US foreign policy actions come under scrutiny. Ever since the end of the Cold War and little before the collapse of the USSR, the US primarily focused on topics of deterrence, resiliency, acquisition of ideological space and the maintenance of the international status quo. After the end of the 20th century, however, the US became increasingly more engaged in persistent engagement across international spheres and decisive

yet subtle involvement on a global basis. The US example brings forth food for thought on the way cyberconflict will become a cornerstone of national security, of international stability and of the future of political developments as it will determine the way resources are allocated, borders are secured and countries halt destabilization from the outside.

In a time when all political developments become increasingly harder to follow given continuous technological developments, the COVID-19 pandemic has additionally highlighted the interconnectedness of states and the linkage between societies around the world. Ideally, the pandemic would have made differences between international actors less stark and would have roused states from their deep geopolitical bitterness and nationalistic insularity. On the contrary, it further flamed distrust, suspicions, geoeconomic rivalries and challenges. This implies that nations will now be more caught up in world tensions and will need to prepare for a more contested cyberspace, in which information, strategies and rapid actions will become harder to keep secret.

What the current pandemic also showcased was the prioritization of national actions. For many, deepening their political competition with one another was far more important than contributing to research and development towards the elimination of the virus. The US-China trade war hard turned into a war that has already affected or is soon to affect many actors, such as emerging Asian nations and Latin American countries in crisis. The concerns for economic and political intimidation by their rival made both US and China keep up with the issuing

of threats and challenges and the pursuing of means to destabilize the already weak international order. Flexing muscles by pursuing economic coercion, low-intensity violence and cyber operations deviates from the traditional issuing of challenges and moves towards a grey zone composed of non-military means to achieve goals. These actions seek to gain advantage without provoking direct conventional military responses; this makes it increasingly difficult for free-market democracies to predict, counter and overcome. And this is exactly why cyberconflict has become the epicenter of contemporary warfare.

Cyber operations in the grey zone may still be a complex and not clearly defined issue, yet the increasingly frequency with which it is employed stresses how significant it is. It has the potential to undermine and intimidate opponents, influence allies, and reshape entire regional orders. From the seemingly simplistic practices of hacking the digital infrastructure and networks to cognitive attacks that weaponize national information, cyber operations impose indirect pressures on governments to pursue different policies and to adopt new economic initiatives.

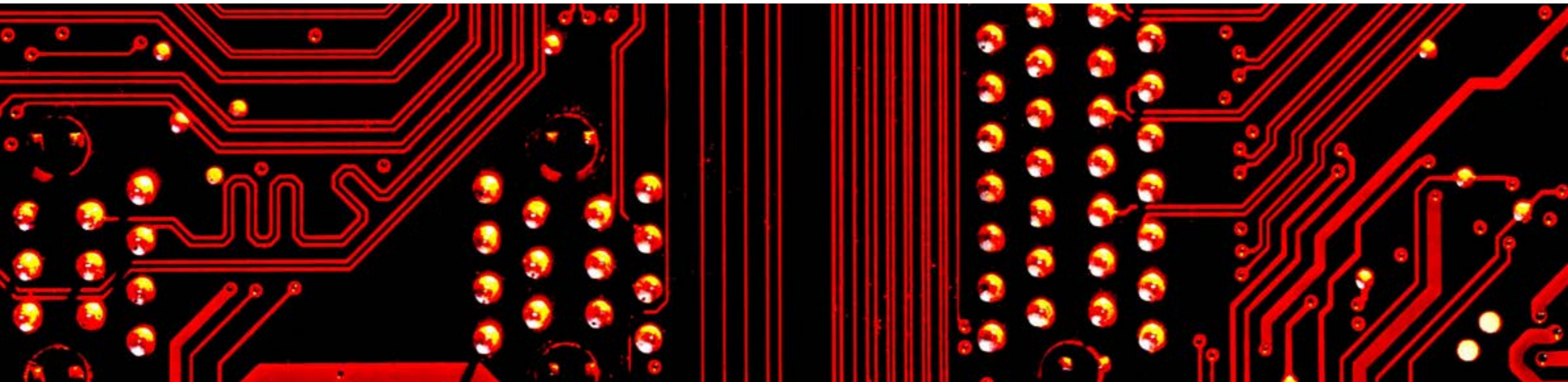
The world is filled with examples of constant cyberattacks. When Australia experienced a cyberattack campaign, all eyes turned to its pacific neighbor, China, shortly after Australia called for research into the origins of the virus. In Indo-China, at the disputed Himalayan border, strategic analysts have suggested that China has stepped up its efforts using cyberattacks to extract national information from neighbors like India and Pakistan. Not so far away, explosions in sensitive locations in Iran have been al-

legedly caused due to US-originated computer worm, intended to extract data.

Looking ahead, it becomes clear that cyberattacks are going to intensify rather than simmer down and they will become far more common than governments are currently prepared for. As the current pandemic and its aftermath are expected to linger for quite some time, states may need to rebalance their national budgets, placing greater emphasis on national health and marginalizing spending on conventional security. This is what will ultimately revive the digitalized economy, interconnected operations and will bring cyberspace to the forefront. Actors, unitary and states alike, may exploit the still properly undefined and vast cyberspace and pursue overconfident attacks, which may ultimately lead to greater digitalization of economies, societies and politics, as actions rely more heavily on indispensable technology tools.

The ones caught up in this whirlwind of changes will need to learn how to increase their resiliency, brace themselves for unpredictable actions and pursue policies that will strengthen the homogeneity of their states. As support for multilateralism declines, states must learn to be independent in a still very interlinked world. States will have to employ grey zone tactics, like subtle hacking or more elite practices to circumvent conventional warfare costs that they will no longer be able or willing to endure.

In a period when geopolitical tensions are increasingly more entrenched, we may be called to revisit Thucydides' Melian Dialogue and wonder whether "the difference between right and wrong" is as blurred as we believe and whether "strength is what makes a change".



# Dancing in the age of Social Distancing: reimagining performances

**T**he Lincoln Center, the Bolshoi Theater, the Royal Opera House: places once filled with lively sounds, dances, and passion, now stand empty at the will of a global pandemic. The past few months have marked the wake of a new era for the entertainment industry, as events worldwide have had to be postponed, canceled, or digitalized, and the industry of ballet companies is no exception to the rule.

The official website for the National Ballet of Canada reads “it is with a heavy heart I announce that the remainder of the 2020/21 season has been canceled.” The New York City Ballet announced back in October the postponement of its Winter and Spring season as well, without plans of reopening before September of 2021. These companies do not stand alone, as dancers across the world have seen their living rooms slowly turn into their dance studios and their long training sessions take the shape of Zoom classes.

But as times have brought uncertainty, they have also brought innovation and potential for new ideas.

Both the American Ballet Theater and New York City Ballet have seen an increase in their digital content. Discussions, open rehearsals, and lectures, things that were usually reserved for donors of the company, are now being made available online and reaching a broader audience. At the same time, dancers have been taking to social media and uploading on their own, bringing performances from their kitchen to all over the world.

The New York City Ballet, while canceling the season, also decided to put on a show. “New Works Festival” consists of videos of five different dances, by five different choreographers. The dances contained multiple paradoxes and complicated movements; not only were dancers asked to dance in the water of the Reclining Figure pond, but

they were also to stay six feet apart at all times.

For just a few minutes in five different performances, dancers in waterproof booties gave life to the surrounding areas of Lincoln Center. Andrea Miller, one of the five choreographers, compared the empty buildings to “a temple without prayer, without people is just stones.” And described being able to perform outside every day as conjuring the passion and belief they have in dance. “Even though all of the theaters are closed, artists and art are very much alive,” said Unity Phelan, one of the soloists in the piece.

The National Canadian Ballet announced a partnership with VIBE Art, an organization dedicated to the education of children and youth, at the beginning of November to offer virtual content to a younger audience. The content offers workshops organized by people with first-hand experience in the world of ballet companies and dance, such as dancers, teachers, and other staff members.

The Canadian company has also been attempting to continue with their digital season, kicking it off with *In Between*, a performance choreographed by Alysa Pires. The choreography, like many others during the digital season, had to be adapted from the originally planned four dancers to be a solo and was to be performed in outdoor spaces in order to comply with the coronavirus guidelines. The dance, as Pires puts it, “conveys a sense of yearning and restlessness that feels especially prescient in the context of the coronavirus pandemic.”

In April, the ballet dancers of the Paris Opera performed multiple at-home dances in homage to France’s first-responders. One such performance was the sequence to Prokofiev’s “The Dance of the Knights” from *Romeo and Juliet*. The end of the performance is a verbal commendation to those first-responders and la-



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borers during COVID, stating, “we thank the doctors and all the nursing staff, farmers, teachers, researchers, traders, supermarket staff, garbage collectors... everyone who mobilized for all of us.”

On the other side of the world, The Australian Ballet introduced *At Home with Ballet TV* in response to the COVID-19 at the beginning of the pandemic. As the official website explains, “Throughout its centuries of history, ballet has always offered the most wonderful escape from troubled times, and even though our theatres are closed, we want to offer you that gift.” In the span of this project, they filmed and produced performances of numerous famous pieces, including, but not limited to, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Paquita*, *Giselle*, and *Swan Lake*.

While coronavirus cases have been soaring across Europe, ballet companies in Australia have been able to return to a relative level of normalcy and hold live performances due to the very low number of COVID-19 infections. West Australian Ballet for example, which reopened in June with very strict guidelines enforcing social distancing, temperature checks, and ensuring small audiences, was just recently able to increase its audience capacity to 60% and offer more tickets for their upcoming *Nutcracker* performance this Christmas.

Also in Cuba ballet companies have been able to slowly reopen. Starting in October ballet companies, such as the Cuban National Ballet, were allowed to once again hold in person classes and start rehearsing for performances in the theater of Alicia Alonso. Dancers had been confined to practicing at home from the beginning of March, and during the summer some companies televised their choreographies and rehearsals.

Before reopening in September, dancers from the famous Bolshoi Theatre spent time isolated but continuing to practice and perform as they were. Ivan

Vasiliev and Emilia Vinogradova shared a one meter ballet bar in a 66 square foot attic to continue practicing, stretching, for two-hours a day.

Vladimir Urin, the director of the Bolshoi, although not confident about the theatre’s reopening, was not pessimistic about fearing budget cuts. He states, “A little over 60% of our budget comes from state subsidies. The rest is our income and sponsorship money. All sponsorship money and state subsidies have been maintained for us so far, although we are not working at the moment.” Now with the theatre open once again, these dancers and directors may have new chances to create amazing performances on stage.

Most companies, however, who have not been able to steadily reopen and hold live performances are facing great economic struggles, regardless of whether they are holding online events or not.

The arts, a sector already relatively underfunded in many countries, might be at the brick of a global catastrophe if they are not able to reopen next year and make up for some of the revenue lost.

The New York City Ballet lost about eight million dollars for just canceling their Spring season and expects losses of over fourteen million dollars without this year’s sales of the *Nutcracker*.

The world of ballet was already a financially unstable one. While some companies have tried to keep paying their dancers, the pandemic has inevitably financially affected dancers all over the world. In May, ballerinas Misty Copeland and Joseph Phillips organized a virtual performance with thirty-two dancers from fourteen different countries meant to raise funds for dancers impacted during lockdown worldwide. The video was titled *Swans for Relief* and had raised 290k dollars out of their 500k goal as of mid-November, with donations still open on Go Fund Me.

# For the love of bread



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**M**ilan shares with other Italian cities several key characteristics: looming churches and imposing cathedrals, Renaissance statues eternally posing, vast piazzas, and a love for locally sourced cuisine. The business that exemplifies this appreciation for locality the most is the panetteria, or bread shop (though they usually sell much more than bread). With the basic ingredients of flour, water, and yeast, panetterie all over Italy are able to combine these three into various works of culinary art. Each also has its own distinct identity, with many acting as a center for bread-related needs for their neighborhoods. In my neighborhood, the small chain store of GustaMi occupies this honorable position.

Spurred by curiosity into the inner mechanisms of this humble shop, I requested and gratefully received some answers to my questions by GustaMi's owner's wife, Ivana. The following is a summary of our interview. Please note that she responded in Italian and thus her answers were translated into English.

GustaMi is a small panetteria with four locations around Milan. With 30 employees and a lot of competition from larger chain stores like PAM and Carrefour, GustaMi has to work the extra mile to make itself stand out. With a business philosophy expressed by the motto "per amore di acqua e farina", the owners of GustaMi strive to bring to their customers fresh products made from local ingredients with no food conservatives. According to Ivana, their bread simply contains "flour, water, and yeast"; nothing else. For six days a week, starting at 5am, the owner and other bakers arrive at their stores to begin baking. GustaMi bakers bring back the old ways, using their hands rather than machines to work the dough and traditional cooking methods to create delicious bread with crunchy exteriors, and soft, decadent interiors. The rest of the workday consists of selling these products to customers who are drawn into GustaMi's shops by the intoxicating aroma of newly baked goods.

Alongside multiple types of breads, GustaMi also creates pastries, simple pizzas, and serves coffees at some locations. Once again, the emphasis is on "local and fresh". "Local" is reflected in the form of ingredients that come in from nearby Italian producers of flour, yeast, and agricultural products like tomatoes. "Fresh", on the other hand, comes from the fact that every product on GustaMi's shelves is made that same day.

Despite these uplifting descriptions, it is difficult to operate a small business. Profit margins are generally much tighter than those of a larger company that has the benefit of economies of scale and discount rates. Additionally, if an employee tasked with baking is lost, then the costs of training a new baker are high. A smaller workforce necessitates more task-splitting and little room for comfort. Moreover, manually making bread every day is an arduous physical task that can be taxing.

With this year's pandemic, GustaMi's road ahead has gotten tougher. Like many small businesses around the world, GustaMi relies on close connections with its community and foot traffic to bring in revenue. With the restrictions on movement bringing in less customers, GustaMi management was faced with difficult decisions. They were able to retain their 30-person workforce thanks to committing to an 80% retention of the workers' original salary, with the final 20% paid by the cassa integrazione. For those not familiar with the term, the cassa integrazione is a fund provided by Italy's National Institute for Social Security (Istituto nazionale della previdenza sociale) in order to help businesses retain their employees. They also had to spread the employees' workhours, as they could not utilize everyone fully due to lower revenue.

Ivana also stated that attaining ingredients has become increasingly difficult. For example, GustaMi has had trouble procuring alcohol, an ingredient that is crucial in some pastries. To remedy this, GustaMi was forced to start searching for alternatives, a risky move in the science of pastry-making. As pandemic restrictions also require that people no longer sit down at cafes, eateries like GustaMi had to develop their ability to provide to-go containers. For example, attaining disposable, portable cups for espressos has been challenging, as GustaMi vies with every other business that sells ready-made coffee (so essentially nearly all eateries in Italy) for a limited supply.

As Ivana stated, "è tutta una catena"; the supply chains for GustaMi have gotten more sluggish as operations have been reduced. They have to make orders for supplies much earlier in order to be able to receive what they need on time. This is an issue that all small businesses have had to contend with in the past nine months. In addition, as all Milanese citizens are familiar with now, only one to two customers are allowed in GustaMi at a time, every time with a mask. No mask, no business.

Regardless of these difficulties, Ivana expressed with that trademark Italian optimism that GustaMi is still moving forward. When asked about how the pandemic has influenced GustaMi's future, she responded with "con voglia di mettersi in gioco di nuovo" ("we have the desire to get back into the game"). She conveys that Italians are a people with a history of hanging on through tough situations, and that small acts of genialità will pull them through.

GustaMi is one of many small panetterie in the city of Milan. One can find it by the following enthralling fragrance of their bread or simply by looking on your phone map. Tough times are ahead for all small businesses, so please take the opportunity to support your local shops when you go shopping. In grim times like this, good bread can be a repose for the weary.

*A special thank you to the staff and owners of GustaMi for being so open and helpful with the interview.*

# A un metro da Milano

Castel Sant'Angelo, Roma  
image by Martina Destino, winner of the Tra i Leoni photo contest



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**Milano è tutta nuda, come fanciulla, nasconde i brufoli sotto un manto di foglie e dice ascolta nel tonfo di una pigna domanda abbraccia ha bisogno di noi ma di un noi un po' diverso di un nostro sentire più antico dei nostri sguardi promessi del tocco audace di un bimbo curioso della melodia del mondo.**

**Non punge più il ticchettio dei miei passi e respira Terra, bianca tela di misteriosi intrecci di sentieri infiniti oscuro gioco, e tratteggia Terra le nostre traiettorie segrete, il teorema dello sbocciare di un fiore in ogni umana convergenza, in ogni incrocio ballerino di occhi distratti in cui s'addensa pavida la favilla del vulcano e sui visi coperti le pupille gorgogliano il canto delle nostre battaglie.**

**Milano è nuda del rumore del tempo, spoglia della fatica dei secondi per stare dentro ai minuti stretti stretti, in sessanta**

**in uno scricchiolio che ci appartiene poco. Si è vestita di un mantello grigio del sussurro del vento d'autunno e sento il suo richiamo nella corsa di un cane che gioca nella stretta del seme al terreno nel silenzio al centro del parco nella vittoria del plenilunio una sera d'ottobre.**

**Abbiamo solo gli occhi per sentirla irrompere e arruffare le nostre solitudini terrestri e magnetizzare le anime e raccoglierle quanto basta. Un metro preziosa distanza in cui risorgere assieme a ogni filo d'erba seguire il viaggio del seme aprire le braccia al cielo accorgersi che è grigio. La prima goccia di pioggia il più rosso degli aceri il loro intimo incontro.**

**Solo occhi tempo del respiro respiro del tempo a Milano mancava Meraviglia.**

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“ Stare **tra i leoni** significa passare dove nessuno osa, indagare ciò di cui nessuno vuole parlare, significa descrivere, raccontare, scavare liberi dai timori, superstizioni e reverenze la realtà universitaria che ci circonda.

**Matteo Erede, 1997**

### CONTATTI

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