

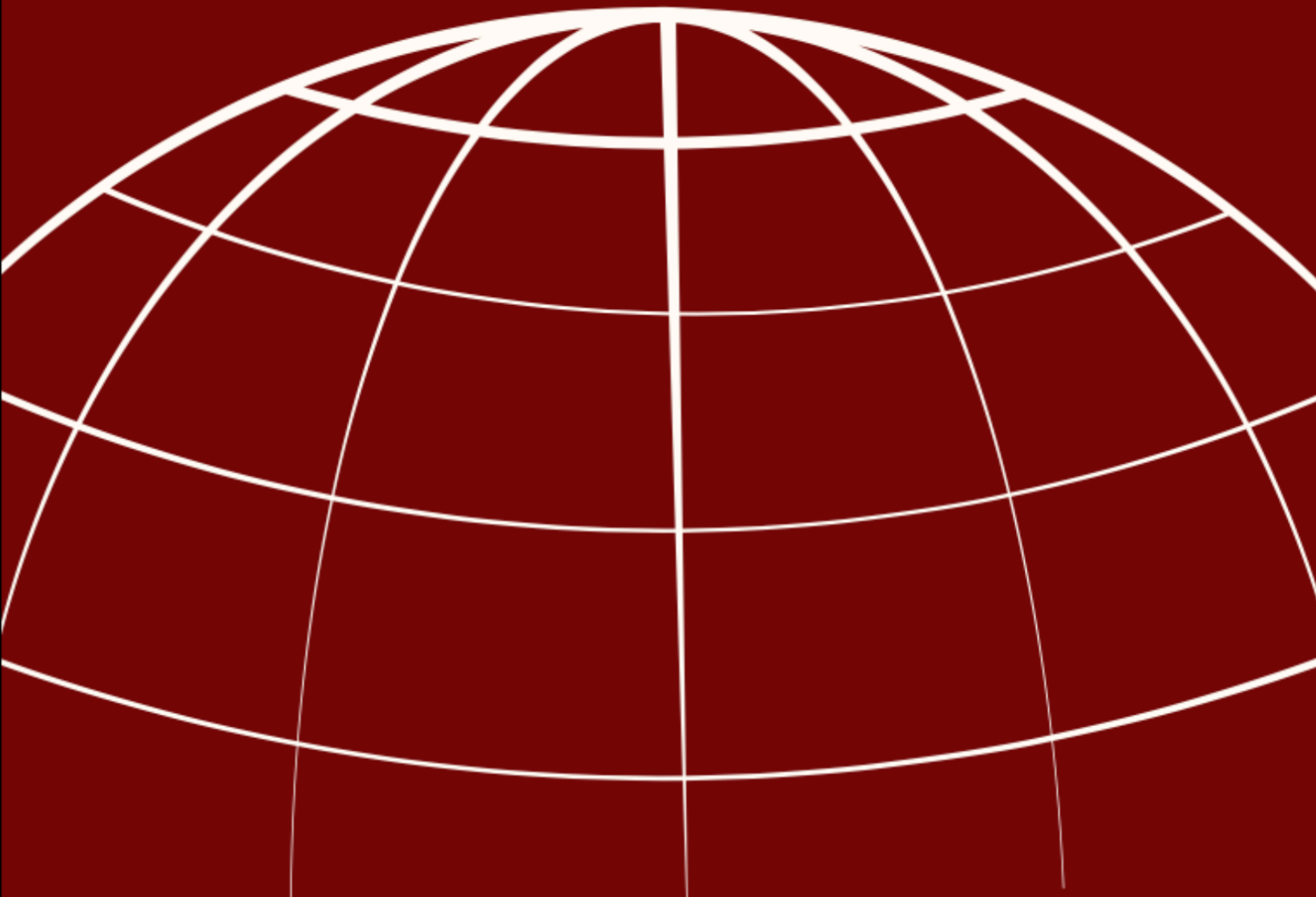
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# POLITIKA

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## PRÉFACE

Ce volume réunit une série de travaux de recherche qui témoignent de la complexité de la vie politique contemporaine. Chaque article, à sa manière, s'engage avec les dynamiques qui structurent notre société : la relation entre pouvoir et gouvernance, le rôle des institutions et des idées dans l'élaboration des politiques publiques, ainsi que la négociation constante entre stabilité, changement et pratique démocratique.

Bien que les contributions abordent des thématiques variées, elles sont unies par une préoccupation analytique commune. Les articles reviennent, explicitement ou implicitement, sur la question de la construction, de la remise en question et du maintien de l'autorité, tant au Canada et à travers le monde. Ils mettent en lumière l'interconnexion croissante entre affaires internationales et dynamiques domestiques, ainsi que l'influence réciproque entre les forces globales et les réalités locales.

La Revue de premier cycle des affaires internationales et politiques vise à offrir une plateforme de publication pour des recherches de premier cycle à la fois rigoureuses et critiques. Nous espérons que les travaux présentés ici contribueront aux débats académiques plus larges portant sur les affaires internationales, la politique et la théorie politique.

— *Le comité de rédaction*

*Revue de premier cycle des affaires internationales et politiques*

## FOREWARD

This volume brings together a range of scholarship that reflects the complexity of political life today. Each article, in its own way, engages with the dynamics that structure our society: the relationship between power and governance, the role of institutions and ideas in shaping policy, and the ongoing negotiation between stability, change, and democratic practice.

Although the contributions span diverse topics, they are united by a shared analytical concern. The articles return, explicitly or implicitly, to questions of how authority is constructed, challenged, and maintained within Canada and throughout the world. They highlight the ways in which international and domestic affairs are increasingly interconnected, and how global forces shape and are shaped by local realities.

The Undergraduate Journal of International Affairs, Politics and Policy seeks to provide a platform for undergraduate research that is both rigorous and critically engaged. We hope that the works presented here contribute to broader academic conversations on international affairs, politics, and political theory.

— *Editorial Board*

*Undergraduate Journal of International Affairs, Politics and Policy*

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Affaires internationales

# L'ascension des sociétés militaires privées en Irak

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## Abstrait

L'essor des sociétés militaires privées (SMP) a profondément influencé la guerre en Irak menée par les États-Unis à partir de 2003. Face à des enjeux budgétaires et à la complexité des conflits asymétriques, l'armée américaine a largement externalisé certaines missions militaires et logistiques à ces entreprises, qui ont rapidement pris une place centrale dans les opérations. Cependant, leur intervention a soulevé de nombreuses controverses, notamment en raison de leur implication dans des scandales, comme la tuerie de Nissour Square ou les abus à la prison d'Abu Ghraib. Ces événements ont terni la légitimité de l'intervention américaine et exacerbé le sentiment anti-américain en Irak. De plus, la dépendance aux SMP a compliqué la reconstruction du pays, favorisant des intérêts économiques au détriment de la stabilité politique. Enfin, l'absence de cadre juridique clair et le manque de contrôle ont entraîné une impunité préoccupante pour ces entreprises, posant un défi majeur pour l'avenir des conflits armés et la régulation de ces acteurs privés.

## Mots clés

Sociétés militaires privées, guerre en Irak, responsabilité dans les conflits armés

## Introduction

Les attentats de 2001 ont déclenché la guerre contre les menaces transnationales, notamment le terrorisme, donnant ainsi aux États-Unis une raison supplémentaire d'entrer en guerre (Makki, 2007). Lancée en mars 2003 par les États-Unis, avec l'appui d'une coalition internationale, cette guerre avait pour objectif affiché de neutraliser les armes de destruction massive supposément détenues par le régime de Saddam Hussein. Toutefois, aucune de ces armes n'a été retrouvée, et le conflit s'est rapidement transformé en une occupation longue et chaotique, marquée par une insurrection violente, des tensions interconfessionnelles et une déstabilisation profonde du pays. Ainsi, afin de répondre au manque de force à sa disposition mais aussi pour faire des

économies (Makki, 2004), les forces de la coalition (américaine et britannique) ont fait de plus en plus appel aux sociétés militaires privées. En Irak, on considère que plus de 60 compagnies de ce type

ont été engagées et représentaient à peu près le deuxième contingent de forces après celui des États-Unis en Irak (Makki, 2007). Aujourd'hui, le marché des sociétés militaires est très fructueux dans le monde des conflits où par exemple on compte « 1,5 milliard de dollars pour la fourniture de services et de systèmes de soutien au commandement des forces spéciales américaines » (Makki, 2007, p. 11), avec des législations parfois outrepassées (Danet, 2009), ou bien un manque totale de ces dernières (Sartre, 2008). Ce conflit a aussi

révélé de nombreux scandales (comme celui de la tuerie de Nissour Square ou des actes de tortures dans la prison d'Abu Ghraib) qui ont mis en lumière leurs agissements mais aussi fait élever la voix des opposants à ce système d'externalisation.

Avec ce contexte et ces révélations nous pouvons alors nous demander dans quelle mesure et par quels moyens le développement des SMP a modifié la manière de faire la guerre et quelles en sont les conséquences ? Nous soutiendrons que cela montre un tournant dans la manière de faire la guerre et cela en évitant un maximum de conséquences directes pour les dirigeants et les armées conventionnelles comme il y'en a eu par le passé. Pour cela, nous verrons dans un premier temps l'émergence et le rôle de ces sociétés en Irak, en nous penchant sur la manière dont elles ont rempli les tâches délaissées par la puissance étatique. Dans un second temps, nous nous pencherons sur les conséquences socio-politiques qu'ont engendrées les SMP durant et après ce conflit, avec un impact sur la légitimité américaine mais aussi sur la reconstruction et la stabilité post-conflit. Enfin, nous terminerons ce travail sur les défis et les risques que pose la croissance des SMP.

### **Émergence et rôle des SMP en Irak**

#### **Besoins sécuritaires et recours massif aux SMP**

Aujourd'hui, comme l'explique Paul Singer, on distingue trois types de SMP agissant dans des domaines différents. Il y a les entreprises prestataires de services militaire, en lien direct avec le front, les entreprises prestataires de consultations et formations des troupes locales, et les entreprises prestataires de soutiens, sur des domaines tels que la vie des troupes comme la restauration, le logement, le transport (Singer, *Corporate Warriors : The Rise of*

*the Privatized Military Industry*, 2005, p. 119-132, cité dans Danet, 2009). Leur présence et importance ont évolué au fil du temps.

À partir de la fin du XXe siècle, un nouveau type d'entreprise est apparu dans le secteur très fermé de la guerre (Sartre, 2008). En effet, après le ralentissement durant la période de 1969 à 1979 dit la « détente », puis la fin de la guerre froide, les budgets alloués aux armées, notamment celle des États-Unis, ont fortement chuté (Makki, 2007). Le déclenchement de la guerre en Irak en 2003 contre le gouvernement de Saddam Hussein puis contre les terroristes, a poussé les américains à avoir recours à ce type d'entreprises pour plus de flexibilité, mais aussi pour éviter les coûts politiques et économiques engendrés par un plus grand contingent de soldats (Makki, 2004).

La guerre en Irak représente les nouveaux types de guerre asymétriques face à des armées et des combattants la plupart du temps non conventionnels où la supériorité militaire ne suffit pas (Brustlein, 2018). Les États-Unis ont donc dû s'adapter et ont également changé leur manière de mener la guerre en externalisant les missions militaires les moins vitales auprès de ces SMP (Makki, 2007), créant ainsi un nouveau type de partenariat public-privé. Jusqu'à alors l'économie soutenait la guerre par le biais de l'industrie militaire mais n'avait que très peu de liens direct avec les théâtres d'opération en eux même. Comme toute relation celle-ci évolue et l'un et l'autre sont plus que jamais intimement reliés et interdépendants (Makki, 2007). Auparavant une présence accrue du secteur économique pendant la guerre se traduisait par un climat de guerre totale, ce qui n'était pas le cas de l'Irak. En effet toutes les ressources de l'État américain ou anglais n'y étaient pas engagées qu'elles soient économique, politique ou même civile. C'est une guerre

préventive pour la préservation de la sécurité américaine et du monde (Makki, 2004). La guerre en Irak a renforcé la crédibilité de ces entreprises, tout en facilitant la présence américaine et en réduisant les coûts de l'armée. En effet, ces entreprises et leurs contractuels, ont rempli de nombreuses tâches vitales au bon fonctionnement de l'armée américaine, telles que la protection des convois de ressources depuis le Koweït (Jacquin, 2010), le pays où les américains étaient déjà intervenus est devenu la base arrière pour le ravitaillement des troupes depuis le Golfe persique.

Le fait que ces sociétés ne soient pas intégrées à une chaîne de commandement militaire présente certes des défis, mais leur confère également un avantage significatif dans l'exécution des missions (Jacquin, 2010). Elles bénéficient ainsi d'une plus grande autonomie opérationnelle et d'une capacité d'adaptation rapide notamment en raison de leur effectif réduit. Ainsi, entre 2003 et 2008, plus de 100 milliards de dollars ont été accordés aux contrats avec ce type d'entreprises (Danet, 2009) matérialisant ainsi ce changement dans la manière de faire la guerre.

### **Exemples de sociétés militaires privées opérant en Irak**

Ces contrats colossaux étaient répartis entre plus de 60 sociétés militaires privées aux compétences diverses. Ces entreprises intervenaient dans des domaines variés, allant du soutien logistique à la protection rapprochée, en passant par la formation et la reconstruction. Certaines SMP n'ont parfois aucun rapport avec le combat armé. Ainsi, la logistique, la reconstruction et l'équipement spécifique des forces (Makki, 2007) seront les principaux domaines d'emploi de ces sociétés. On constate le rôle crucial que ces sociétés ont occupé, la plupart du temps dans l'ombre. On assiste alors à l'émergence d'un complexe militaro-industriel, où les

enjeux financiers sont si importants que le jeu des influences et de la corruption prend de plus en plus de place sur ce marché, créant ainsi de nombreux scandales (Makki, 2007).

En effet, pour une entreprise, obtenir un contrat en Irak lui permettait non seulement de recevoir des sommes faramineuses, mais également de développer sur le terrain des compétences opérationnelles et des techniques qu'il aurait été difficile d'acquérir dans un autre cadre. Ces sociétés intervenaient dans des contextes complexes mêlant opérations humanitaires, missions de stabilisation de la paix et actions de combat (Danet, 2009), ce qui leur offrait l'occasion d'affiner des méthodes polyvalentes et adaptables à des environnements instables. Ainsi, des entreprises comme L3-COM ont profité de ce contexte pour perfectionner et commercialiser leurs systèmes de haute technologie, devenant aujourd'hui des acteurs mondiaux majeurs (Makki, 2007). De même, dans le domaine de la sécurité et de la formation, la société Erinys a décroché un contrat de 104 millions de dollars pour former et encadrer 15 000 vigiles irakiens chargés de la surveillance des oléoducs, illustrant l'impact direct et structurant de ces sociétés dans le processus de reconstruction irakien (Jacquin, 2010). Ce choix stratégique s'explique notamment par la nécessité de protéger un secteur clé de l'économie nationale, à savoir l'exploitation des hydrocarbures, dont les Américains étaient pleinement conscients de l'importance géopolitique. Par ailleurs, les forces armées régulières se désintéressent de ces missions de protection économique jugées secondaires (Jacquin, 2010).

Cependant, bien que la plupart de ces sociétés n'aient pas de fonctions directement liées aux combats, elles se retrouvent parfois involontairement exposées à des affrontements. Des sociétés comme KBR,

expertes en reconstruction et en énergies, ont perdu plus de 122 employés lors de leur passage en Irak, avec plus de 850 blessés (Jacquin, 2010).

### **Conséquences socio-politiques des SMP en Irak**

#### **Impact sur la légitimité de l'intervention américaine**

Comme mentionné précédemment, les sociétés employées par les forces armées américaines ne répondaient à aucun commandement central. Cependant, comme nous allons le voir, certaines de leurs actions vont impacter directement la légitimité de ces entreprises qui agissent sous contrats avec les forces de la coalition.

À de nombreuses reprises, des incidents et des accrochages avec la population vont remettre très nettement en cause leur légitimité. L'opinion internationale s'est tournée de plus en plus vers ces entreprises avec la tuerie de Nissour Square à Bagdad, lorsque des employés de Blackwater (services militaires) ont ouvert le feu sans raison légitime sur la foule (Soubrouillard, 2014). Lors d'un convoi de l'Ambassade américaine en Irak le 16 septembre 2007, sécurisé par les contractuels de Blackwater la situation dérape. En effet, les employés de la firme vont tuer plus de 17 personnes et faire plus de 20 blessés (BBC News, 2007). Ainsi, à partir de cet événement, de nombreuses affaires similaires ont refait surface à la suite d'enquêtes menées par le Sénat américain. Nous pouvons donc citer l'exemple de la prison d'Abu Ghraib ou des employés de la société CACI international, Inc seront en charge des interrogatoires (Sartre, 2008). Encore aujourd'hui les photos et vidéos des actes de tortures commis dans cette prison perpétré par ces contractuels aux côtés de soldats américains et membres de la Central Intelligence Agency sont disponibles sur internet. Auprès

de la population locale, ces entreprises sont très peu populaires (Danet, 2009) et nous pouvons donc déduire qu'elles sont perçues comme incontrôlable aux vu des différents dérapages. Elle contribue au sentiment anti-américain (Soubrouillard, 2014) que l'on retrouve au sein de la population locale. Cette haine contre les employés de ces entreprises sera matérialisée par la pendaison et l'immolation de quatre d'entre eux à Fallouja en 2004 (Makki, 2004).

Par ces agissements ces entreprises remettent alors en question la légitimité de la violence qui a été mise en place non sans difficultés depuis plus d'un siècle (Sartre, 2008), bousculant le monopole de la violence étatique. En effet, selon Max Weber, le monopole de la violence légitime constitue le fondement des régimes étatiques modernes. L'État est historiquement perçu comme la seule entité disposant de la légitimité pour user de la force physique sur un territoire donné, que ce soit à des fins de maintien de l'ordre ou de défense nationale. Cette prérogative exclusive garantit le contrôle social et la souveraineté territoriale, et dans l'imaginaire collectif des sociétés occidentales, seules les armées nationales sont habilitées à intervenir dans des conflits extérieurs. L'arrivée des sociétés militaires privées remet progressivement en question ce principe en brouillant la frontière entre forces armées régulières et acteurs privés du secteur militaire. Dans l'imaginaire collectif de nos sociétés occidentales nous voyons seulement nos armées nationales en capacité et en légitimité d'intervenir dans des conflits extérieurs (Makki, 2004). Aujourd'hui cela est donc fortement remis en question. Pour les forces armées mais aussi les simples citoyens, l'arrivée de ces sociétés, au fur et à mesure, a rendu les frontières entre soutien et action opérationnelle floues (une petite partie des SMP encore une fois).

Malgré ces ambiguïtés, la dépendance aux SMP n'a cessé de croître jusqu'au retrait des troupes américaines. Le retrait des GI américains a aussi fait le jeu des entreprises de logistiques qui ont supporté et effectué la mise en œuvre du départ des troupes de l'oncle Sam (Chapleau, 2009). En raison de la compétitivité du marché, toutes les tentatives de mise en place d'un commandement centralisé ont échoué, rendant encore plus difficile la reconstruction du pays (Danet, 2009).

### **Répercussions sur la reconstruction et la stabilité post-conflit**

Après le départ des Américains et sous un nouveau gouvernement irakien en bons termes avec les États-Unis, les locaux ont eu la possibilité (aux premiers abords) de conserver et signer des contrats avec ces entreprises pour la reconstruction du pays, et les entreprises notamment pétrolières, de continuer à solliciter leurs services. Ainsi, même après le retrait des forces étatiques américaines et de la coalition, les sociétés militaires privées ont poursuivi leurs activités en Irak, en se concentrant principalement sur la protection des intérêts économiques et stratégiques des États-Unis, notamment dans les secteurs pétrolier et logistique. Cette présence prolongée d'acteurs privés étrangers, œuvrant davantage pour la sécurisation de contrats et d'investissements que pour la reconstruction institutionnelle et politique du pays, constitue un frein à la stabilisation durable de l'Irak. En effet, ces sociétés, motivées par des logiques de rentabilité et d'opportunités économiques dans un contexte de conflit, peuvent perpétuer un climat d'instabilité favorable à leurs activités. Cela entre en contradiction avec les aspirations locales de souveraineté et de sécurité nationale, et alimente le sentiment d'ingérence étrangère au sein de la population irakienne. En effet le marché de ces entreprises se base sur l'instabilité mondiale (Jacquin, 2010), les

réalités politiques locales qui veulent aller de l'avant se confronte aux intérêts économiques des entreprises américaines ce qui est un frein majeur à la stabilisation du pays (Makki, 2004). Par exemple, des entreprises avaient déjà commencé à décrocher des contrats avant même le début de la guerre pour la future reconstruction, comme l'entreprise KBR (Leandre, 2010). On constate donc que les futures opportunités économiques pour les SMP américaines avaient été anticipés bien avant de savoir ce qu'il allait advenir de l'Irak ou bien de la future forme du gouvernement avec lequel ils allaient devoir collaborer pour une reconstruction efficace et stable quelle soit de nature politique ou matérielle. La guerre a permis à ces entreprises de gagner de nombreux marchés et donc de grossir d'une telle façon que cela n'aurait jamais été possible sans l'Irak. En effet, « sur le terrain, les contractors emploient approximativement 190 000 personnes. Ce nombre est quasiment égal à celui des forces armées américaines » (Danet, 2009, p. 4). Il est évident qu'un tel nombre n'aurait jamais pu être atteint sans une guerre de la taille ou bien même de la portée que celle en Irak.

On constate malgré tout au fil du temps que les intérêts des SMP vont à l'encontre de ceux des pays de l'Organisation du traité de l'Atlantique Nord (Lagarde, 2010). Même si les pays de la coalition sont leurs employeurs en ce qui concerne le soutien militaire ou matériel, les armées régulières veulent mettre fin au conflit le plus rapidement possible pour éviter le plus de pertes possibles, tandis que les SMP ont une logique de retour sur investissement et veulent alors rentabiliser leur présence le plus possible (Lagarde, 2010). Cela soulève alors des questions sur l'influence exercée par ces sociétés sur la diplomatie en coulisse. Ainsi, on peut dire que la survie de ces entreprises dépend de l'instabilité mondiale. Comme le souligne Danet (2009),

ces sociétés « sapent les processus de reconstruction, ravivent la tentation néo-colonialiste et agissent dans un cadre juridique qui n'est plus celui des lois nationales ou internationales mais celui des contrats et de l'autorégulation » (p. 11).

Cela étant dit, des voies au sein du milieu de la Défense américaine avaient commencé à exprimer des inquiétudes quant à la reconstruction (Makki, 2007) lorsque l'armée américaine était encore présente sur le territoire Irakien. En effet, la multiplicité d'acteurs sans commandement central apparaît comme une difficulté supplémentaire au processus de stabilisation (Danet, 2009). Chacun a donc une analyse technique (conseils stratégiques, mise en place du processus sur le terrain) (Makki, 2007) différente de ce processus. Chaque entreprise a donc des intérêts différents à défendre, puisque cela reste un secteur qui s'applique aux lois du marché. De plus, toutes leurs actions et leurs prises de décisions se font dans une crainte limitée de la justice ce qui facilite la prise de décisions.

### **Défis et risques posés par les SMP en Irak**

Les dérives de ces sociétés et leur impunité face aux droits de l'homme (Sartre, 2008) ont raisonné jusqu'au sein du milieu politico-militaire américain du fait de leurs agissements (Soubrouillard, 2014). La Convention de Genève a été signée par de nombreux pays en 1949 pour interdire et pénaliser le mercenariat. Malgré tout, la frontière avec les SMP reste très floue (Organisation des Nations unies, 1989) et ces sociétés ne sont soumises à presque aucune juridiction, incluant celle des États-Unis. Mais cela montre aussi qu'elles ne sont pas prises en compte par le respect du statut de prisonnier selon le droit international, qui ne s'applique pas à ses contractuels (Nations Unies, 1989).

Pour continuer sur cette voie de l'impunité des SMP en Irak, Paul Bremer, l'administrateur américain, en Irak (chef de l'État irakien après la mise en place de l'autorité provisoire de la coalition en 2003) a joué le jeu de ces entreprises en empêchant le nouveau gouvernement local de mettre en place une juridiction contre les SMP (Makki, 2007). Cela explique donc dans un certain sens pourquoi suites aux dérives Face aux dérives répétées des sociétés militaires privées et notamment après le massacre de Nissour Square, les autorités irakiennes ont tenté de reprendre le contrôle de la situation sécuritaire en réclamant l'annulation des licences d'opération de l'ensemble des SMP présentes sur leur territoire. Cette décision visait particulièrement Blackwater, directement impliquée dans ce drame, dont la licence a été révoquée dans un second temps. Toutefois, en raison de la pression politique et diplomatique exercée par les États-Unis, ces décisions ont souvent été partiellement appliquées ou contournées, illustrant la difficulté pour le gouvernement irakien de s'imposer face à des acteurs privés protégés par des intérêts étrangers puissants (Sartre, 2008). De plus, aucun membre n'a jamais été jugé en Irak malgré le massacre de Nissour Square par Blackwater, et lorsqu'ils ont été jugés aux États-Unis, ils ont été graciés par le président Donald Trump (Lanteaume, 2020). En revanche plus de 300 soldats de l'armée régulière américaine ont été jugés durant la période 2003-2008 (Jacquin, 2010). Les gouvernements américains protègent ou bien cachent les agissements de ces entreprises qui évoluent sous leur mandat, *de facto* les tribunaux ont très peu de prise et de contrôle sur les SMP.

Aujourd'hui on constate qu'obtenir un prix défiant toute concurrence pour faire la guerre est possible mais avec du recul, les prestations ne sont pas toujours satisfaisantes, les SMP suivent donc ce

schéma : leur prix est partiellement moins cher, mais les conséquences sur les droits humains sont très souvent compromises (Makki, 2004). Ainsi, pour une plus grande légitimité on aspire à une meilleure transparence des contrats, du recrutement et des actions de ces sociétés pour un avenir plus sûr et pour éviter que les erreurs se reproduisent, le tout étant soumis à une juridiction compétente (Chapleau, 2009).

Il doit donc s'agir d'un mouvement international, sachant que ces sociétés ne sont pas employées que par les États-Unis, mais cela est compliqué lorsque l'on sait que les institutions spécialisées des Nations unies (font-elles aussi de plus en plus appel aux services de SMP (Madonna, 2013)). Les préoccupations internationales sont également soulignées par le magazine *Marianne*, qui révèle que les « sociétés de sécurité, toutes-puissantes à Bagdad, ont même pris le contrôle de l'administration policière, militaire et diplomatique américaine » (Soubrouillard, 2014) pendant le conflit.

### Conclusion

L'émergence et le rôle croissant des SMP en Irak ont profondément transformé la manière de mener la guerre et ont engendré des répercussions socio-politiques significatives. Leur utilisation massive, principalement par les forces de la coalition dirigée par les États-Unis, a permis de

pallier les contraintes budgétaires et de répondre aux besoins sécuritaires dans un contexte de guerre asymétrique.

Cependant, cette externalisation des fonctions militaires a soulevé des questions majeures concernant la légitimité de l'intervention américaine et a exacerbé les tensions avec la population locale. Les incidents tragiques impliquant des SMP, tels que la tuerie de Nissour Square, ont remis en question leur contrôle et leur responsabilité, mettant en lumière les risques d'impunité et les atteintes aux droits de l'homme. De plus, ces sociétés ont influencé la reconstruction post-conflit et ont contribué à façonner un paysage politique et économique marqué par la prédominance du complexe militaro-industriel et des intérêts privés.

Pour relever ces défis, une réglementation stricte, une transparence accrue et une responsabilisation des acteurs impliqués sont nécessaires, aussi bien au niveau national qu'international. Il est crucial de mettre en place des mécanismes de contrôle et de surveillance efficaces pour prévenir les abus et garantir la protection des droits fondamentaux, tout en veillant à ce que les opérations militaires demeurent conformes aux normes éthiques et légales. Ces types de suggestions sont notamment proposés afin que les événements d'Irak n'adviennent plus.

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International Affairs

# Between Stability and Suppression: China's Golden Shield and the Struggle for Cohesion

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## Abstract

This paper examines the Golden Shield Project as a cornerstone of the People's Republic of China's censorship and surveillance architecture, analyzing its implications on state control, economic strain, and social unrest. While China nominally guarantees freedom of speech, its legal apparatus allows for sweeping restrictions on information, reinforcing a governance model grounded in centralized narratives and pervasive digital monitoring. The expansion of the domestic security apparatus following the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests illustrates the state's increasing reliance on surveillance to suppress dissent. However, this strategy carries substantial financial and societal costs: rising domestic security expenditures have paralleled an increase in public dissent. Through a comparative analysis of Canada's governance framework, this paper highlights how China's prioritization of suppression over reform entrenches a self-perpetuating cycle of unrest. Drawing on historical patterns, insights from economic data, and case studies of protest movements, this analysis underscores the unintended consequences of censorship. It concludes by exploring alternative governance models rooted in transparency, participatory decision-making, and public trust as more sustainable pathways in the era of global interconnectedness.

## Key Words

China, Golden Shield Project, censorship, social unrest, authoritarianism

## Introduction

In democratic societies, the right to free speech is a foundational principle. Free speech is widely regarded as essential for fostering accountability and ensuring governments prioritize the interests of their citizens. This freedom reinforces social cohesion by enabling a participatory political culture and provides states with legitimacy rooted in public trust. In contrast, authoritarian governments adopt a fundamentally different approach to maintaining social cohesion—one that prioritizes control over discourse and suppresses dissent to preserve state authority

(Schedler & Hoffmann, 2016). In such systems, governmental legitimacy does not emerge from transparency or responsiveness,

it is instead constructed through centralized and curated narratives, enforced by invasive

surveillance and censorship mechanisms.

The People's Republic of China's (PRC) framework for controlling information exemplifies this approach. Multi-faceted and deeply complex, it operates through overlapping layers of state programs, institutions, and private organizations, administered by all levels of government

(Zhang et al., 2024). Central to this strategy is the Golden Shield Project (GSP), an extensive information technology (IT) modernization initiative implemented by the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) to regulate internet activity, thereby reinforcing broader societal conformity (Pei, 2024). The GSP's implementation timeline has been marked by successive expansions of scope and capabilities, reflecting both technological advancements and the state's increasing reliance on surveillance to enforce its narratives and maintain control (Pei, 2024).

However, this evolving framework has coincided with concerning trends: domestic security expenditures exceed those of China's formidable national defence budget, amid rising incidences of civil unrest. As this paper will argue, these outcomes suggest that the rollout of measures designed to suppress dissent, paradoxically, exacerbate societal discontent, perpetuating cycles of grievance and resistance. An analysis of the Golden Shield Project's censorship methods highlights a paradox within authoritarian governance: while increased surveillance aims to maintain social stability, it often exacerbates societal unrest and imposes significant economic costs, raising questions regarding the long-term viability of such models in a deeply interconnected yet increasingly isolationist world.

### **Historical Evolution of China's Mechanisms of Control**

In 1984, Chinese Statesman Deng Xiaoping aptly remarked, “[I]f you open the window for fresh air, you have to expect some flies to blow in” (as cited in MacKinnon, 2007, p. 33). With China's entry onto the global economic stage following the Cultural Revolution, the Communist Party of China (CPC) further entrenched censorship and surveillance as critical tools to control dissent, maintain national unity, and uphold its legitimacy— “swatting flies” of

unwanted ideologies in the process (MacKinnon, 2007, p. 33). A pivotal moment in this narrative was the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, a pro-democracy movement led primarily by students advocating for political reform, freedom of speech, and government accountability. The Chinese government responded with a violent crackdown, declaring martial law and deploying the military, which resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians (Henry, 2022). Faced with a crisis of legitimacy and growing demands for political change, the Chinese government responded by significantly expanding its domestic security apparatus. While investing in expanding its traditional activities and manpower, it also began developing new technologies to monitor and suppress potential political threats (Pei, 2024).

While the Constitution of the PRC (1982, Art. 35 § 2) nominally guarantees “freedom of speech, the press, assembly, association, procession, and demonstration,” these rights are significantly curtailed by laws that contain ambiguous provisions. Phrases such as “[to] organize, scheme or carry out subverting of the state's political power” (Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China 1997, Art. 103 § 2), “disturbing public order by spreading any rumor” (Public Security Administration Punishments Law, 2012, Art. 25.1.2 § 1), “engag[ing] in activities endangering national security, national honor, and national interests” and “[to] create or disseminate false information” (Cybersecurity Law of the People's Republic of China, 2016, Art. 12 § 2), grant authorities broad discretion to monitor and suppress activities, information, or individuals deemed problematic. This could include censoring public posts on Weibo (a Chinese microblogging platform, similar to X (formally Twitter)), surveilling private WeChat (a popular Chinese messaging,

social media, and mobile payment app) conversations, and forcing internet service providers to track and remove content classified as “information that the law or administrative regulations prohibit the publication or transmission of” (Cybersecurity Law of the People’s Republic of China, 2016, Art. 47). By contrast, similarly invasive surveillance activities conducted by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service require judicial authorization and due process, must adhere to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and are subject to oversight from other government departments (Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act, 1985, Art. 3.1 § 12). This establishes a system of checks that balances public safety and an individual’s rights to privacy.

The adoption of the GSP in 1998 marked a new beginning in China's surveillance and censorship capabilities (Pei, 2024). Integrating advanced technologies and new administrative measures, the project enables comprehensive online monitoring, policing, and censorship among other capabilities (Pei, 2024). One of these is Deep Packet Inspection, a network sniffing technology and one of the GSP’s most effective tools (Farnan & Wright, 2014). By inspecting individual data packets in real-time, such as an image or a keyword, operators are able to quickly identify prohibited content, such as references to political dissent, banned organizations, or sensitive historical events (Farnan & Wright, 2014). With these technologies, the MPS is able to efficiently enforce the monitoring, blocking, redirection, or throttling of internet connections automatically (Pei, 2024). While users sometimes circumvent these measures through memes, neologisms, and homophones, the system remains dynamic, frequently updating its prohibited content databases. A notable illustration of this adaptive censorship is the case of the children's television character Winnie the

Pooh, which was systematically removed from Chinese digital platforms following the emergence of satirical visual comparisons between the fictional bear and President Xi Jinping (McDonell, 2017). This instance demonstrates how even seemingly innocuous cultural references become subject to censorship when they acquire politically sensitive connotations.

Further reinforcing these surveillance mechanisms, internet service providers, search engines, and social media platforms are mandated to comply with government directives, ensuring respect for “social morality” is maintained (Cybersecurity Law of the People’s Republic of China, 2016, Art. 9). This could include blocking and removing prohibited content and maintaining user activity databases, enabling authorities to track individuals suspected of dissent (Cybersecurity Law of the People’s Republic of China, 2016, Art. 28, 29, 55). The introduction of compulsory real-name registration further strengthens this system, ensuring behavioural conformity while simplifying the identification of those engaged in restricted activities (Fu et al., 2013). Together, these measures form a robust framework for control, allowing the Chinese government to tightly regulate online content and consolidate its political authority.

### **Economic Strain and Rising Unrest**

Domestic security spending in China encompasses funding for an extensive array of institutions and activities, including the MPS, the People’s Armed Police, national security agencies, prisons, the justice system, and various other measures aimed at suppressing social unrest (Greitens, 2017). In March 2011, Reuters reported that China’s domestic security spending had, for the first time, surpassed the budget allocated to the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), highlighting the rapidly escalating costs of

maintaining internal stability. In subsequent years, these budgets became shrouded in secrecy. By 2014, official domestic security spending was reported at 205 billion yuan—down from 769.1 billion yuan in 2013—as China’s central government deliberately excluded provincial and regional public security budgets from the publicly disclosed total (Martina, 2014). The decision to curtail transparency in economic reporting reflects not only a desire to obscure the scale of internal unrest and rising investment in domestic security, but also a strategic effort to conceal the rapid advancement of censorship and surveillance capabilities (Pei, 2024). Official statistics across various areas remain deeply compromised by political incentives: local and regional governments frequently distort fiscal data to appease central authorities

(Gong et al., 2025), while national reporting selectively omits or obscures key data, such as excluding students and rural residents from the youth unemployment rate (Bu & Woo, 2025). Based on my independent aggregation of provincial and regional public finance data sourced from China’s Ministry of Finance, public security spending across all jurisdictions in 2023 totalled approximately 1.476 trillion yuan (Figure 1), underscoring the growing financial burden of internal security. These figures should also be interpreted with caution, as China only scores in the 2nd quintile in the World Bank’s Statistical Performance Indicators framework. This indicates a below average reliability of statistical data and raises questions about whether internal reporting reflects the full extent of security expenditures.

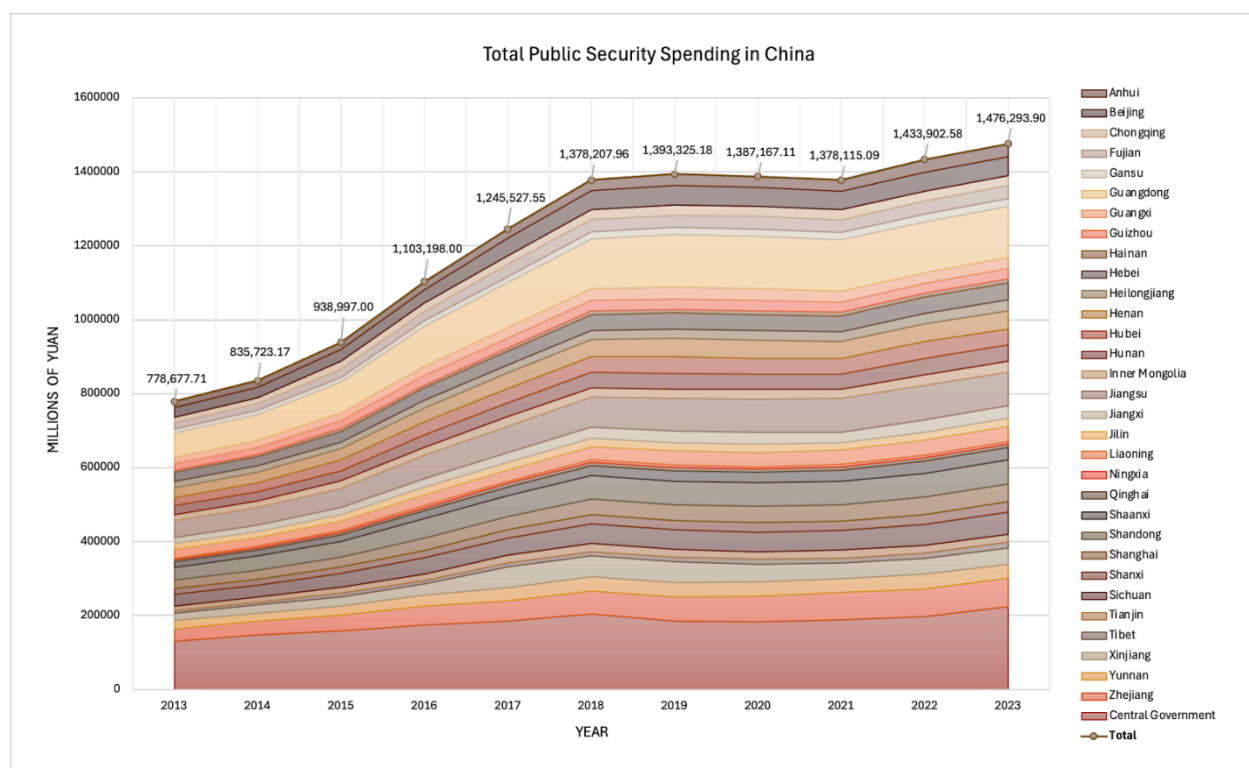


Figure 1: Public security spending in China by jurisdiction (2013–2023).

Note. Data sourced from the Ministry of Finance of the People’s Republic of China (accessed via the China Economic Information Centre (CEIC)).

Tracing spending back to the early phases of the GSP, the financial strain immediately

becomes apparent. Between 2004 and 2011, total domestic security expenditure surged

from 154.8 billion yuan (~30 bn CAD) to 522 billion yuan (~102 bn CAD), proportionally outpacing China's rapid economic growth during this period (Pei, 2024). Such spending coincides with the dramatic rise in what China's categorizes as "mass incidents"—a euphemism encompassing protests, demonstrations, riots, and other forms of collective action challenging authority (Steinhardt, 2017). These incidents reflect a growing public discontent with social, economic, and political grievances.

Although official statistics on mass incidents have become increasingly restricted, academic reconstructions based on accumulated reports estimate that incidents involving more than 15 participants rose from approximately 8,700 events in 1993 to 74,000 in 2004 (Zhang & Wu, 2017). These figures suggest a steep escalation in collective unrest during the late 1990s and early 2000s. By 2010, unofficial estimates based on the Chinese General Social Survey indicated that the number had soared to 180,000 (Steinhardt, 2017). These incidents, encompassing a broad range of public grievances such as land disputes, cultural repression, and allegations of corruption, reflect growing public dissatisfaction with local governance and systemic inequalities. Land disputes, in particular, accounted for nearly 65% of reported mass incidents during this period, as rapid urbanization led to widespread forced acquisitions of rural land, often without adequate compensation, deepening resentment toward local authorities (Göbel & Ong, 2012).

In the 2010s, as surveillance and censorship intensified under Xi Jinping's leadership (Pei, 2024), the character and scale of mass incidents evolved. Protests in this period often matched or exceeded the intensity of earlier unrest, underscoring the persistence of public grievances despite heightened government control. The 2019 Hong Kong protests, for example, drew international

attention as hundreds of thousands mobilized against proposed extradition laws to mainland China (Purbrick, 2019). More recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, public frustrations over extreme lockdowns and inadequate government support culminated in the 2022 White Paper Protests, named for the blank sheets of paper held by demonstrators to symbolize censorship (Henry, 2022). Similarly, starting in mid-2022, protests and mortgage boycotts erupted across China after major real-estate developers, notably Evergrande Group, defaulted on over \$300 billion in liabilities (Kirton & Pomfret, 2024). This marked a significant shift, as the middle classes—who had long upheld an implicit bargain with the CPC, accepting authoritarian control in exchange for economic prosperity (Miao, 2016)—began actively participating in dissent (Kirton & Pomfret, 2024). The government responded with censorship, silencing discussions on social media and blocking accounts. Yet, the mass incidents continue, reflecting the cyclical nature of discontent fueled by unaddressed systemic grievances.

The scale of China's domestic security spending is even more striking when contrasted with countries like Canada, where public security comprises a smaller share of national budgets. Liberal democracies typically rely on input driven institutional legitimacy and social services to maintain order (Keman, 2025), resulting in proportionally lower domestic security spending (Eurostat, 2025). These systems typically emphasize national defence over internal policing when coercive spending is necessary (Van Vark, 2021). Yet as Figure 2 shows, China not only sustains a large military apparatus, it also devotes a high proportion of its total government expenditure to internal security. From 2013 to 2023, China's public security spending consistently exceeded 6% of total government expenditure and shows no sign

of dramatically slowing, reflecting the significant financial commitment required to uphold security infrastructure and maintain domestic stability. Canada's proportion over the same period remained around 2.5%, with public security and defence spending tracking closely—reflecting, in part, Canada's chronic underinvestment in its military, a point of frequent criticism in North Atlantic Treaty Organization circles

(Fitz-Gerald & Padalko, 2025). This comparison illustrates not just a difference in spending levels, but a divergence in governance philosophy: while China emphasizes internal control and coercive capacity, Canada places a greater proportional weight on trust-building through accountability and the provision of broad public services.

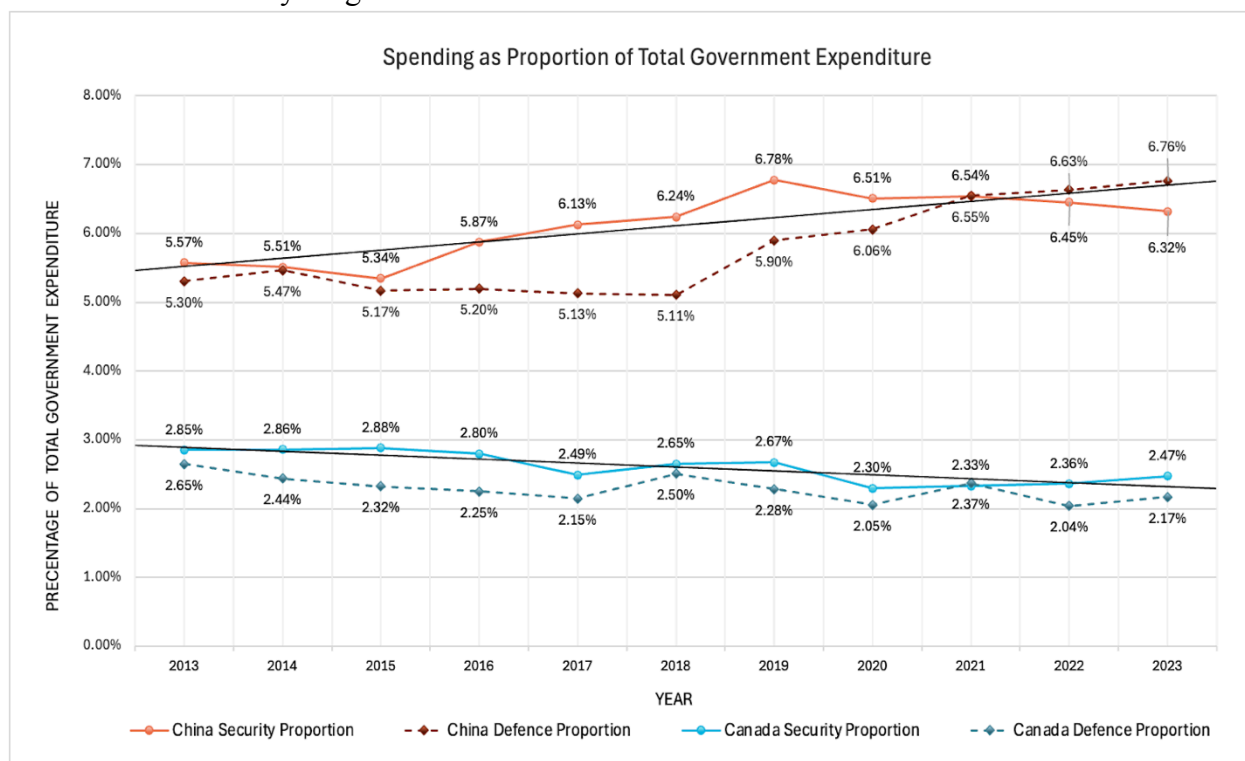


Figure 2: Spending as a proportion of total government expenditure (2013–2023).

*Note.* Data sourced from the Ministry of Finance of the People's Republic of China (via CEIC), National Bureau of Statistics of China (via Statista), Statistics Canada, and the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. Canadian public security spending encompasses police services, justice departments/institutions, correctional services, intelligence agencies, and border services across all jurisdictions. 2019 police services data substituted for unavailable 2020 data.

As China's domestic security costs continue to escalate, the resulting financial strain disproportionately impacts smaller, less affluent local governments, which face increasing difficulty meeting centrally dictated mandates (Greitens, 2017). Unlike wealthier coastal provinces that can absorb these costs through flexible budgets, poorer

inland and rural regions are compelled into reactionary governance practices—such as aggressively imposing fines or prioritizing short-term coercive measures—to manage immediate stability targets at the expense of longer-term investment in essential services and infrastructure (Göbel & Ong, 2012; Zhang & Wu, 2017). This dynamic

exacerbates existing regional disparities, entrenching patterns of reactive and performative governance that undermine national cohesion and institutional effectiveness (Jia, 2024). A more balanced governance framework—particularly crucial for a country as populous and diverse as China—would prioritize substantive fiscal decentralization, enhanced local autonomy, and more robust accountability mechanisms. Such reforms would mitigate structural inequities, reduce reliance on coercion, and foster sustainable stability grounded in public trust and responsive governance (Wu et al., 2017).

The financial strain and increasing protests reveal a deeper societal cost: the erosion of trust in government and the perpetuation of a cycle of dissent. These dynamics not only question the sustainability of China's governance model but also underscore the broader societal consequences of its surveillance and suppression strategies. This invites a closer look at how censorship and authoritarian control impose broader social and economic trade-offs, further compounding cycles of unrest.

### **The Cycle of Suppression and Resistance**

Beyond the financial burden, China's efforts to suppress dissent through surveillance and censorship impose profound social and opportunity costs. While these measures are designed to maintain stability, they often yield unintended consequences by exacerbating societal grievances, stifling social cohesion, and undermining trust in the government.

China's strategies primarily target the organization and logistics of protests, using internet censorship and surveillance to purge content such as meeting times, locations, and tactical details (Qin et al., 2024). However, dissent often manifests in subtler forms. Signaling “windows of opportunity”

for collective action through emotionally resonant content allows protestors to mobilize without relying on overt coordination (Qin et al., 2024). These adaptations illustrate the limits of censorship in suppressing public discontent. Moreover, increased awareness of censorship laws can paradoxically fuel political expression (Lu & Zhao, 2018), as citizens express grievances in ways that further challenge state control.

China's censorship and surveillance apparatus, while expansive, creates a self-reinforcing cycle of discontent. By restricting legitimate channels for grievance expression, such as petitions or public critique, the government drives protests underground, intensifying public frustration (Göbel & Ong, 2012). Grievances such as corruption, housing disputes, environmental concerns, and inadequate labour protections—accounting for nearly 80% of all mass incidents (Qin et al., 2024)—highlight the systemic roots of public unrest. Addressing these grievances directly, rather than suppressing them, could reduce the frequency of dissent and build trust in governance.

The social and opportunity costs of censorship extend beyond societal discontent and slowed progress; they can manifest in more existential movements like “lying flat”, reflecting broader disillusionment with

authoritarian control. By opting out of competitive societal and economic structures, Chinese youth challenge the state's emphasis on productivity and growth (Berkeley Economic Review, 2023). This quiet resistance not only critiques systemic inequalities but also exposes the vulnerabilities of a governance model heavily reliant on economic performance for legitimacy. The broader impacts of laying flat extend into the economy and social cohesion. Reduced workforce participation,

a byproduct of this movement (Yeh, 2022), could further hamper China's ability to sustain high growth rates and exacerbate existing demographic pressures—above all a quickly shrinking working-age population brought on by record low fertility and rapid ageing (Sun et al., 2023). Moreover, the symbolic rejection of state narratives around collective striving undermines the CPC's authority by fostering alternative social values and identities. These dynamics, compounded by the government's suppression of dissent, suggest that the current strategy of control inadvertently fuels cycles of resistance and weakens different aspects of society. This illustrates how censorship creates ripple effects that not only hinder individual potential but also compromises broader state objectives. The true cost of control, as demonstrated by these phenomena, is perhaps greater than its benefits.

### Conclusion

These observations on the cycle of control invite a deeper reflection on alternative governance philosophies, particularly those with roots in Chinese tradition. To paraphrase the *Dao De Jing*—a classical Daoist text that has had a lasting influence on Chinese political thought and culture—“[t]he Great Dao flows everywhere, at our every right and left. Relying upon it, the things of the world are born, yet it remains wordless; its work done it takes no name as the doer. [...] It may be termed small. The things of the world return to it but it never acts as their lord — it may be termed great. Because it never takes itself to be great, it is able to complete its greatness.” (Laozi, trans. Eno, 2010, ch. 34). Taken alongside Confucian notions of *dé* (moral virtue) and *minběn* (people as the foundation), this passage reminds us that legitimacy in the Chinese tradition is conditioned on moral

leadership more than coercion. China's contemporary reliance on censorship and surveillance may have suppressed overt dissent, but it has also generated mounting financial burdens, social costs, and an undercurrent of public resistance.

These strains expose the fragility of a system that prioritizes suppression over responsiveness. Local governments struggle with ballooning security budgets while citizens protest over housing, corruption, and land expropriation—grievances that rigid controls cannot permanently silence. Arguments discussing an imminent “collapse,” however, are overstated (Lin, 2025). A more plausible scenario is a protracted period of slower growth—already evident in the continuing post-2013 economic slowdown (Li & Zheng, 2025)—coupled with demographic headwinds that could eventually erode the fiscal base needed to fund high-cost coercive tools. With a Politburo Standing Committee dominated by Xi loyalists, the central government is unlikely to significantly alter its current approach in the near term (Tian & Munroe, 2022). Nevertheless, the long-term calculus still favours reforms that reduce suspicion of ordinary citizens and embrace more transparent, participatory governance.

China's experience therefore poses a wider question: in a rapidly changing world, can durable social cohesion be achieved through pervasive control, or does it ultimately rest on the trust and confidence of the governed? The answer depends not only on whether China can rebalance toward a less totalitarian, more collaborative model, but also on how other societies negotiate their own balance between stability, liberty, and legitimacy in an era of democratic backsliding.

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International Affairs

# The African Development Strategy: How Does it Need to Evolve?

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## Abstract

Economic and social development in African countries has not been progressing at the same rate as observed in countries in other world regions. This is despite the fact that African countries have implemented the trade liberalization policies and reduced state intervention models that have helped other countries, particularly in Europe, develop. This paper suggests parties interested in contributing to the development of African countries should focus less on offering economic policy solutions and more on strategies which enable African countries to gain both the agency and autonomy they need to build strong institutions (educational and infrastructural amongst others). This is essential because current African development strategies treat Africa as a monolith. African development affects different African countries with different local contexts. In recognition of this, African development policies should focus on building local agency, autonomy, and institutions. African countries need to develop strong institutions grounded in local contexts to successfully implement development policies to help their countries grow fiscally and societally.

## Key Words

International development, African development, autonomy, local agency

## Introduction

Despite African countries implementing various international development programs and policies suggested by allies and international organizations, they have not experienced the same socio-economic growth observed by countries in other world regions (Comelli et al., 2023). This paper proposes that the failure of development strategies in Africa is a result of the repercussions of the historical and modern harms that African countries have faced. These harms have weakened the agency of African countries, resulting in their inability to build strong public institutions. These harms have also resulted in the African continent being seen as a monolith in

development, with one uniform development policy being applied to African countries that have different local contexts. Since understanding local context is necessary to creating development policies for African countries,

African countries (who understand their local context best) should be at the head of their development policy creation. This paper argues that the stakeholders in the socio-economic development of African countries should focus on jointly creating policies with African countries that build their autonomy and agency. This will in turn help them create the strong public institutions (educational and infrastructural

amongst others) required to implement successful development policy. To ensure the long-term sustainability of the public institutions built and the development policies implemented, both the public institutions and the development policies would need to be adapted to the local context of the countries they will be based in.

### **The African Development Context**

To understand the flaws of the current global approach to international development policies for Africa, it is essential to understand the context of African development. There are various stakeholders involved in the development of African countries, including the International Development Association (IDA) and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) within the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The IDA is made up of 175 contributing and borrowing countries, and DAC member countries are mostly from the Global West (with some observer organizations). There are also non-African countries who contribute independently to African development like the United States, Japan, and China (Usman & Washington, 2024). This means that a majority of the stakeholders to African development are outside Africa. These stakeholders provide funds for African development as well as ideas on how to achieve socio-economic development in Africa. However, they are not the only parties involved in African development. Some initiatives to develop Africa infrastructurally, maintain political stability, and increase economic capacity are led by African countries like South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya (Dizolele & Elebe, 2025; Leistner, 1990; Oshewolo et al., 2024). Moreover, the most prominent organization in African development is the African Development Bank Group (AfDB); a key organization responsible for ensuring

social and economic growth across the continent. The AfDB consists of 54 regional member countries (African countries) and 27 non-regional member countries (non-African countries which include the two largest non-regional shareholders, the United States and Japan). Its resources and funding come from subscriptions from all member states, donations to the African Development Fund (ADF), and the Nigerian Trust Fund (NTF) (AfDB, 2024). International organizations and non-regional member countries are heavily involved in African development as mentioned in the previous section. As such, these groups have varying degrees of political influence over the region's policy implementation because they are significant shareholders and contributors to African development or the AfDB (Anyiam-Osigwe & Vreeland, 2024). Financial institutions influenced by the Global West like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have influence over the policy prescriptions of the AfDB (Anyiam-Osigwe & Vreeland, 2024). Similarly, the United States, while remaining a supporter to African development at the AfDB, tends to use bilateral agreements and its power in the IMF and World Bank to influence African countries into changing their national policies to achieve American foreign policy goals (Anyiam-Osigwe & Vreeland, 2024).

These influences are harmful to African countries' development, especially when they use mechanisms like conditional aid, unsustainable lending, and sanctions. Firstly, these methods weaken the agency of African countries and slow down their long-term growth to achieve the goals of western countries or western influenced organizations (AfDB, 2019; Hofmeier 1991; Mahoney, 2023). Secondly, these influences enable non-African stakeholders dictate the direction African development policy should take. This results in a uniform African

development policy that does not take the local context of each country into consideration during either its creation or implementation. Unfortunately, these harms cannot be avoided as they are able to occur as a result of African countries' need for financing. Countries like the United States are major contributors of aid to African countries as well as a member of most organizations that support African development (with the United States being a member of the IDA, DAC, and the AfDB) so their influence on African development policies cannot be avoided. The influences of countries like the United States in African development policy creation and implementation often seeks to further their interests even if it is to the detriment of African countries. As African countries hold key natural resources and an abundance of votes at the United Nations General Assembly (Anyiam-Osigwe & Vreeland, 2024; Bassou, 2017), Western aid contributors utilize development aid as a tool to achieve political and economic goal like obtaining voting support, trade agreements, or material resources, thereby contributing to the erosion of the freedom African countries have in creating and implementing their development agendas.

The context of the current African development reflects the inequalities that African countries have traditionally faced on the international stage platform. Post-independence, many African countries faced diverse setbacks because of the ways that colonial powers damaged their economic, social, and political systems with colonialism and neo-colonialism (Rodney, 2018). These setbacks have placed them in a position where they are viewed as lagging behind their non-African counterparts amongst the international community. Over time, this issue has grown to be more complex due to international interest in the development of African countries and has

led to development policies and assistance that are often fitted with conditions that address the goals of Western foreign policy but do not take the local context of individual countries into consideration, ultimately slowing down the development of African countries (Fentahun, 2023). This is seen with donors' use of mechanisms like conditional aid and unsustainable lending (AfDB, 2019; Hofmeier, 1991) to achieve goals like obtaining voting support, trade agreements, or material resources. Overall, these conditions have led to economic dependency and weakened the agency of African countries (Anyiam-Osigwe & Vreeland, 2024; Broome, 2020). Thus, development policies for African countries are influenced by external pressure exertions from non-African stakeholders to African development. These pressures are not easily avoided as a result of African countries' need for financial support as well as the fact their position in the international community is perceived as lower than Western countries due to historical harms.

### **The Importance of Local Autonomy and Agency to Development**

This paper proposes that African development policies should focus on building autonomy and agency in African countries to enable them to create strong public institutions that will promote rapid socio-economic development. To understand this, it is vital to break the idea into two parts: the importance of local agency in development and the importance of public institutions grounded in local contexts.

Local autonomy and agency in development contexts is vital to adapting development policy to local context. The idea that establishing local freedom enables countries to rapidly adapt development policy to local context is corroborated through several theories. Firstly, development policies are

known to be most effective when they are adapted to the context of the country they are in (Barder, 2012). This idea is supported by capability theorists Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. Amartya Sen promotes the idea of capabilities and freedoms being deeply rooted in local contexts and Martha Nussbaum delves into the importance of agency in achieving capabilities and freedoms (Gasper, 1997). Through these theorists, it is understood that adapting development policy to local contexts improves said policy's efficacy. This observation is seen in many countries across the world. An example is the development policy utilized by the Chinese government. The policy utilized state-owned enterprises in its development (Cheng-Han, 2017) which aligned with China's cultural and political leanings. Similarly, Japan's protectionist policies aligned with its desire to protect its local culture and avoid colonialism, a mentality deeply influenced by the Sakoku period in the country over 150 years ago (Garside, 2024). Adapting development policy to local context is also seen when examining the Marshall Plan. The plan was a financial aid program fundamental in helping Europe recover from the effects of the Second World War. Through it, Europe experienced sustained economic growth, revitalized industries and increased investments (Gossé et al., 2021). This scale of success was possible in part because it gave its participant countries flexibility in the ways they could implement the conditionalities within their borders. As a result, the conditionalities proposed by the plan were adapted to the contexts of the recipient countries (Gossé et al., 2021).

### **The Importance of Strong Public Institutions Grounded in Local Context**

In order for development policy to be adapted to the local context, strong public institutions rooted in the local context of the country are necessary (Ostrom, 1990;

Rodrick 2004). This is important since the existence of these institutions are necessary in bridging the gap between the local and global levels (Colombo & Cuda, 2023). Moreover, these local institutions are responsible for transforming global goals into actionable local plans and ensuring the cooperation of locals in the plans. The role of public institutions as the bridge between the local and the global means that they must be rooted in the local context in order to be sustainable and long-lasting. When strong public institutions are grounded in local context, it fosters a sense of ownership within the community and ensures the longevity of the institution. Moreover, it ensures the institutions remain relevant in catering to the needs of the country or community it serves.

Rooting both public institutions and development policy in the local context of each African country restores their autonomy and agency to them because they are in control of the running of institutions and implementation of development policy through their local contexts. They are equipped to implement and make changes to national development policies as they see fit. In using strong institutions grounded in local context to adapt global policy to local context, African countries will be able to better utilize existing development policy strategies suggested by their allies to develop more rapidly.

### **The Potential Outcome of the New African Development Strategy**

To successfully develop their economies, African countries need not attempt to create new development policy but instead must focus on creating the conditions that can make current development policy implementation successful. Since African countries are aware of their need to develop (Senghor, 1962), this new approach to

development policy could revitalize the drive to develop from within Africa. Similarly, the international community (international organizations, states and other relevant parties) needs to focus on jointly implementing development policies such that African countries establish the freedom they need to create strong institutions rooted in their local contexts. This will enable them to adapt international development policies and lessons to their local contexts, ensuring both these institutions and development policy implementations can last in the long-term. As such, African countries will finally be able to move past the historical and modern inequalities they have faced to develop more rapidly.

Examining South Africa and its development in recent years shows that this shift in approach is both feasible and efficient. South Africa established stable and functional public institutions (political and educational amongst others) rooted in their local context and that has given the country the stability it needs to begin adapting development policies to its local context for its social and economic growth (Stewart et al, 2019). These changes in their development strategy have enabled them rise to become an economic leader on the African continent, both in annual GDP and industrial capacity (International Monetary Fund, 2024). Similarly, Ethiopia, by prioritizing the development of strong public institutions rooted in its local context, has been able to adapt development lessons to its local context and grow exponentially in the past few years (Planning and Development Commission, Ethiopia, n.d.; World Bank, 2024). In contrast, countries unable to develop strong public institutions rooted in their local contexts have not been able to develop because they do not have the capacity to adapt international policies to their local contexts (Jundi, 2023). This is corroborated when examining the attempt of

the Ugandan government to revitalize their domestically oriented industrial policies. The Ugandan government replicated industrial policies like government intervention that were vital to the successful development of countries in East Asia (Cheng-Han, 2017). However, these policies were not adapted to their local contexts and eventually failed to achieve the anticipated level of success (Behuria, 2021). This shows that regardless of how good a policy is, if it is not adapted to suit the country it is implemented in, it cannot attain high levels of success.

### **Conclusion**

The current African development context involves several different parties with various

The current African development context involves several different parties with various agendas – some which may ultimately conflict with the development of African countries. Historical and modern harms done to African countries create a situation where current African development strategies address African development as a monolith without taking individual local contexts into consideration. This system continues because African countries are unable to go against non-African stakeholders to African development because of their perceived international status and need for financial support. To improve on future development policies for Africa, the stakeholders in the socio-economic development of African countries should focus on jointly creating policies with African countries that build their autonomy and agency. This will in turn help them create the strong public institutions (educational and infrastructural amongst others) required to implement successful development policy. However, creating those development strategies does not mean ignoring the past lessons from the development of other regions. It means

adapting development policies suggested by allies and implemented in other world regions to fit local contexts. This is done using strong public institutions grounded in local context to adapt existing development

strategies to local contexts. In doing this, African countries can move past the harms they have faced to experience incremental socio- economic growth

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La Politique

## ***Checks and balances* dans le système parlementaire canadien**

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### **Abstrait**

Cet essai examine l'application informelle du concept de *checks and balances* au Canada, en s'inspirant du modèle américain de séparation des pouvoirs, fondé au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle pour prévenir toute concentration excessive de l'autorité. Bien que la séparation des pouvoirs au Canada ait été institutionnalisée de manière explicite après la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, et plus particulièrement après la proclamation de la Loi constitutionnelle de 1982, cet essai soutient que le système canadien reflète, par le biais de conventions constitutionnelles et de l'évolution du rôle de la Cour suprême, une adaptation des principes américains de contrôle mutuel entre les branches exécutive, législative et judiciaire. L'analyse s'appuie sur l'étude de l'évolution du pouvoir judiciaire au Canada, notamment en ce qui concerne les révisions constitutionnelles, et sur l'impact de la médiatisation de la politique, qui permet de créer de nouveaux contrepoids. En explorant ces dynamiques, cet essai met en lumière les mécanismes par lesquels le Canada, bien que ne disposant pas d'un modèle formel de *checks and balances*, parvient à maintenir un équilibre des pouvoirs et à limiter les dérives autoritaires, dans un contexte où les branches du gouvernement fonctionnent de manière interconnectée.

### **Mots clés**

Séparation des pouvoirs, contrepoids, système parlementaire, évolution judiciaire, média

### **Introduction**

L'un des principes fondateurs d'une démocratie est la séparation des pouvoirs. De ce fait, lors de l'écriture de la Constitution américaine, les auteurs ont introduit le concept de *checks and balances*, inspiré d'idées introduites par les travaux de Montesquieu puis popularisé par Blackston en Angleterre. Ce concept de séparation des pouvoirs, datant du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, était enraciné dans leur aversion pour toute forme de gouvernement despotique, qu'il soit d'origine monarchique ou républicaine. Ce système de *checks and balances* fut instauré dans le but de prévenir la concentration de

l'autorité entre les mains d'une seule personne.

La séparation des pouvoirs actuellement est un modèle qui divise le gouvernement en plusieurs branches, chacune ayant des pouvoirs distincts et indépendants. Au Canada, la séparation de la branche exécutive, législative et judiciaire est apparue après la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, et plus particulièrement après la proclamation de la loi constitutionnelle de 1982 (Resnick, 1987). Ce mécanisme de contrôle des pouvoirs avait pour but d'assurer qu'aucune branche ne soit plus

puissante qu'une autre. Cet essai démontre que le concept américain des *checks and balances* est informellement mis en place au Canada entre le pouvoir exécutif, législatif et judiciaire.

Tout d'abord, je vais démontrer que les conventions constitutionnelles ont permis au gouvernement canadien d'émuler les poids et les contrepoids issus du système américain. Puis j'établirai que le pouvoir des révisions de la Cour suprême du Canada s'est construit avec le temps. Enfin, j'examinerai comment la médiatisation croissante de la sphère politique contribue à l'émergence de nouveaux contrepoids.

### **Les conventions constitutionnelles comme contrepoids informels au Canada**

L'idée de *check and balances* américain est fréquemment mentionnée de manière informelle pour expliquer le fonctionnement des différentes branches du pouvoir canadien. Ces rapprochements sont effectués alors que la constitution canadienne est basée sur celle de Westminster plutôt que celle des États-Unis. Cette constitution, établie par le gouvernement britannique, définit les entités gouvernementales tout en décrivant leurs pouvoirs, sans pour autant établir un système de contrepoids. Ce système repose sur une répartition des pouvoirs entre différentes branches du gouvernement, assurant leur indépendance respective et visant à prévenir toute concentration excessive de pouvoir dans l'une branche. Bien qu'une comparaison directe entre les systèmes canadien et américain demeure complexe en raison de leurs cadres constitutionnels respectifs, il est possible d'observer certaines convergences dans les pratiques gouvernementales canadiennes, notamment en ce qui concerne les mécanismes de contrepoids et de contrôle du pouvoir exécutif. Ainsi, le Canada semble, à certains égards, avoir adopté des dynamiques institutionnelles qui rappellent le modèle américain des *checks*

*and balances*. Avec le temps, le système canadien s'est ajusté et adapté aux évolutions de certains contrepoids, comme le rôle croissant de la Cour suprême ou l'influence de la médiatisation politique. Toutefois, ces rapprochements doivent être envisagés avec précaution, car ils ne traduisent pas une équivalence structurelle entre les deux régimes.

La Constitution du Canada est un regroupement de la *Loi constitutionnelle de 1867*, le *Statut de Westminster 1931*, et de la *loi constitutionnelle de 1982*. Il s'agit donc d'un mélange de lois, mais aussi d'ordonnances, de jurisprudences britanniques et canadiennes, et de conventions constitutionnelles (McConnell, 2022). Elle définit donc les pouvoirs associés aux différentes branches exécutives du gouvernement et des législatures, tant au niveau fédéral que provincial. On remarque donc que celle-ci inclut majoritairement des caractéristiques et une vision britannique du gouvernement, inspiré directement du Système de Westminster. De ce fait, les trois pouvoirs sont indépendants, mais interreliés grâce à leurs coopérations. Quant au système américain, il est fondé sur une séparation stricte des pouvoirs, afin d'empêcher les abus de pouvoir, ce qui a donné naissance au système de *checks and balances* (Mitchell, 2020). Malgré la différence fondamentale entre les fondements constitutionnels du Canada et ceux des États-Unis, le Canada a développé des conventions constitutionnelles qui reproduisent certaines logiques de contrepoids. Ces ajustements répondent avant tout aux besoins spécifiques de la gouvernance canadienne et à son contexte institutionnel particulier.

Les conventions constitutionnelles sont les règles non écrites, comblant donc les brèches de la Constitution. Elles « sont des règles découlant de la Constitution, mais dont l'exécution ne peut être ordonnée par

les tribunaux, parce qu'elles ne sont pas des lois » (Hurtubise-Loranger, 2006, p. 1) permettant ainsi au gouvernement une certaine forme de liberté et de flexibilité. Ces conventions permettent donc au gouvernement d'appliquer certaines formes de contrepoids entre les pouvoirs bien qu'elle ne soit pas déterminée par la constitution. Grâce à sa nature, le système parlementaire canadien favorise une interaction plus dynamique entre l'exécutif et le législatif, alors que la branche judiciaire garantit que les actions gouvernementales respectent les dispositions de la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés, cette dernière est un texte fondamental de la Constitution du Canada. Par exemple, lors de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, « le gouvernement a dû, dès lors, s'impliquer dans tous les secteurs de l'économie ce qui a provoqué un transfert des pouvoirs du Parlement vers le Premier ministre et le gouvernement » (Savoie, 1997, p. 493), accentuant ainsi le rôle déterminant des conventions constitutionnelles. En effet, le pouvoir exécutif appartient à la Reine, mais en vertu d'une convention constitutionnelle, ces pouvoirs sont exercés par les ministres et la Chambre des communes (Gouvernement du Canada, 2021). En conséquence, les conventions constitutionnelles rendent les limites des pouvoirs floues. D'ailleurs, les conventions constitutionnelles ne sont pas les seuls outils de contrepoids de la constitution canadienne. Le pouvoir de contrôle du législatif par le judiciaire, exercé par la Cour suprême du Canada, s'est considérablement renforcé avec l'adoption de la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés.

### **Une autorité en construction : la Cour suprême et la révision des lois**

Bien que le pouvoir judiciaire joue un rôle déterminant en tant que contrepoids institutionnel, il serait réducteur de négliger les mécanismes de contrôle exercés par les deux autres branches du pouvoir. En

particulier, le pouvoir législatif occupe une position stratégique dans l'équilibre des forces, notamment en assurant une surveillance constante des actions de l'exécutif. Mertens (2019) soutient que « le pouvoir législatif se transforme de plus en plus en organe de contrôle et de validation des décisions du pouvoir exécutif » (p. 509). Le Parlement canadien, à travers son autorité en matière de contrôle budgétaire, ses prérogatives en matière de vote, ainsi que sa participation active à l'élaboration des lois, constitue un instrument fondamental de limitation de l'influence exécutive (Mertens, 2019). Ce rôle de contre-pouvoir, souvent relégué au second plan dans l'analyse politique, s'avère pourtant essentiel à la compréhension des dynamiques institutionnelles propres au système canadien.

En effet, alors que le système parlementaire canadien favorise une interaction dynamique entre l'exécutif et le législatif, la branche judiciaire est distincte et indépendante des deux autres pouvoirs (Cour suprême du Canada, 2018). Elle garantit alors que les actions gouvernementales respectent les dispositions de la *Charte canadienne des droits et libertés* (Sanschagrin, 2022). Elle protège les droits des citoyens canadiens contre les actions, les politiques et les lois des gouvernements fédéraux et provinciaux. Le judiciaire joue un rôle essentiel en tant que gardien de la Constitution et assure la protection des droits des citoyens. En effet, la Cour suprême a la capacité d'annuler des lois jugées inconstitutionnelles, ce qui représente un mécanisme de contrôle sur l'exécutif et le législatif (Mertens, 2019). Cette action crée des précédents, appelés la jurisprudence, qui ont un impact sur le droit et assurent la continuité des principes juridiques. On peut donc penser que la Cour Suprême agit comme un contrepoids, mais surtout comme un contre-pouvoir par son

habilité à annuler des lois et à appliquer la constitution.

Selon l'article 53 de la Loi sur la Cour suprême, cette dernière a le pouvoir de répondre à toute question relative à l'interprétation de la Constitution, à la constitutionnalité des lois ou aux pouvoirs du Parlement (Cour suprême du Canada, 2018). La Loi sur la Cour suprême, adoptée en 1985, accorde à cette dernière un pouvoir de révision, alors que la Constitution canadienne se compose de plusieurs documents datant de 1867, 1931 et 1982. Cela illustre que la Constitution canadienne s'est construite progressivement au fil du temps, contrairement à la Constitution américaine, qui est un unique document. Sanschagrin (2022) déclare que « la Cour a connu une autonomisation graduelle jusqu'à devenir l'institution centrale d'un champ social, devenu, puissant et doté de sa propre logique, qui joue un rôle central au cœur du métachamp de l'État au Canada, en énonçant les raisons d'être du régime canadien » (p. 190). On peut donc affirmer que le pouvoir de révision de la Cour suprême canadienne s'est développé au fil du temps et n'est pas explicitement inclus dans la Constitution.

Depuis la ratification de la constitution, l'indépendance conférée à la Cour Suprême lui a permis de se positionner comme une institution capable d'endosser le rôle de gardienne des libertés et des valeurs communes (Sanschagrin, 2022). Grâce à ses pouvoirs de contrôle, elle est en mesure d'intervenir sur les lois provenant du législatif ou de l'exécutif et donc de générer des éléments de jurisprudence. Par exemple, la Cour a invalidé la loi canadienne sur l'avortement, la déclarant inconstitutionnelle créant ainsi le précédent *R. v. Morgentaler* (1988) (Crann, 1989), limitant toutes les futures lois émises par les deux autres pouvoirs sur l'avortement. La Cour jouit désormais d'une très grande légitimité

auprès de la population: « sur les questions de droits et libertés, le public fait davantage confiance à la Cour qu'aux élus » (Sanschagrin, 2022, p. 235).

En effet l'article intitulé *Encore une tentative d'instrumentalisation de la Cour suprême du Canada*, discute de l'enjeu de la « portée de la disposition de souveraineté parlementaire (clause nonobstant) de l'article 33 de la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés » (Turp, 2023) à la suite de la demande du premier ministre. Cette disposition permet au Parlement de passer outre certaines décisions de la Cour suprême concernant les droits fondamentaux, mais elle a été récemment invoquée par le premier ministre. L'auteur établit que dans le cas d'un renvoi devant la Cour suprême du Canada, la Cour ne devrait pas appliquer son droit de contrepoids, en raison de la nature politique de cet enjeu, il va jusqu'à dire: « Il ne devrait faire aucun doute qu'il s'agit d'une question de nature politique puisque la réponse attendue vise essentiellement à court-circuiter l'obligation de procéder à une modification de la Constitution du Canada et d'appliquer la procédure applicable en l'espèce » (Turp, 2023). Montrant ainsi l'importance de l'indépendance de la Cour, tout en soulignant que ses pouvoirs commencent à être influencés par des enjeux politiques.

En plus de l'élargissement du rôle de la branche judiciaire, la médiatisation de la sphère publique grâce aux réseaux sociaux et aux médias à créer de nouvelles institutions non traditionnelles agissant comme contrepoids.

### **La médiatisation : catalyseur contemporain des contrepoids politiques**

L'essor des technologies numériques et des médias sociaux a profondément modifié l'équilibre des pouvoirs au sein du système parlementaire canadien. Loin d'être de simples outils de communication, ces

technologies jouent aujourd’hui un rôle structurant dans les mécanismes de surveillance démocratique (Pătruț & Pătruț, 2014). En facilitant un accès immédiat et massif à l’information politique, elles ont permis aux citoyens de s’approprier des enjeux autrefois réservés aux élites, et d’exercer une pression directe sur les détenteurs du pouvoir (Pătruț & Pătruț, 2014). Gingras (2019) cite par exemple « la création du compte Twitter du président des États-Unis «@POTUS» (acronyme de ‘*President of the United States*’), qui permet de s’adresser directement aux millions de ses abonnés pour leur faire part des priorités de son administration » (p. 91). Cette transformation du dialogue politique ouvre la voie à une interaction plus transparente entre gouvernants et gouvernés (Gingras, 2019), et impose une responsabilité accrue aux représentants élus, tout en forçant les institutions exécutives, législatives et judiciaires à une plus grande réceptivité face aux attentes citoyennes.

Ce phénomène s’est accompagné de l’émergence d’acteurs non institutionnels—tels que les médias, les groupes militants, ou les simples utilisateurs de réseaux sociaux—qui exercent désormais une fonction de contre-pouvoir indispensable. Ce ‘quatrième pouvoir’ contemporain (Gingras, 2019), bien que non prévu dans les textes constitutionnels, participe activement à la régulation des excès de pouvoir, tout en imposant une vigilance constante aux institutions. Pătruț et Pătruț (2014) explique cette situation: « en raison [du] ‘*floutage*’ de ce qui est public et privé sur les médias sociaux, il est plus facile de surveiller et d’examiner le monde politique » (p. 81). En plus, la presse joue toujours un rôle déterminant dans la dénonciation des dérives et dans la restauration de l’équilibre démocratique. L’affaire du Watergate, où deux journalistes du *Washington Post* ont révélé les abus du président Nixon (Weaver,

1974), reste un exemple historique et fondateur du pouvoir de la presse comme un contrepoids lors de dérives politiques.

Plus près de nous, au Canada, la presse a également démontré son rôle de contrepoids dans la sphère politique. Le cas du député libéral Randy Boissonnault, contraint de quitter le cabinet à la suite de révélations médiatiques sur son entreprise ayant revendiqué une identité autochtone (Tasker, 2024), montre que les médias peuvent déclencher des réponses institutionnelles concrètes. De même, le scandale SNC-Lavalin, dans lequel le premier ministre Justin Trudeau et son équipe son accusé d’avoir fait pression sur la ministre de la Justice et procureure générale, afin qu’elles n’interviennent pas dans une affaire en cours impliquant l’entreprise SNC-Lavalin (Sampson, 2019), a largement été relayé par la presse. Cet couverture médiatique a exposé les tensions internes au sein du gouvernement et provoqué une série de démissions significatives (Marland, 2020). Ces évènements révèlent que, même en l’absence d’un système formel de *checks and balances*, des mécanismes effectifs de régulation peuvent émerger à travers la société civile et les médias.

Les transformations technologiques et médiatiques ont profondément redéfini les dynamiques de contre-pouvoir au sein du système parlementaire canadien. Elles ont permis une démocratisation de la surveillance politique, favorisé l’émergence d’institutions non conventionnelles et imposé une transparence accrue aux acteurs institutionnels. Si cette modernisation s’accompagne de nouveaux défis —notamment la désinformation et la polarisation—, elle constitue également une opportunité inédite de renforcer les mécanismes de responsabilité démocratique.

## Conclusion

Bien que le système canadien ne soit pas fondé sur un mécanisme de *check and balances* explicite comme aux États-Unis, il existe des formes de contrepoids informelles qui assurent la stabilité et l'équilibre du gouvernement. La Constitution canadienne, héritée de la tradition britannique, a permis l'émergence de conventions constitutionnelles et l'évolution du rôle de la Cour suprême, établissant ainsi des mécanismes de contrepoids et de contrôle. Ce système se rapproche ainsi du modèle américain.

Ces contrepoids, qu'ils soient institutionnels, juridiques ou médiatiques, ne sont pas figés. Ils sont le fruit d'une évolution continue des pratiques politiques et juridiques, influencées par la société, les valeurs démocratiques et les nouveaux enjeux technologiques. Cependant, cette flexibilité comporte aussi des défis, notamment en ce

qui concerne la politisation des institutions judiciaires et l'impact de la désinformation sur le débat public. Ainsi, bien que le Canada n'ait pas formellement adopté un système de *checks and balances* comme celui des États-Unis, il n'en reste pas moins qu'une série de mécanismes informels a permis de maintenir un équilibre et une certaine responsabilité démocratique face à l'exercice du pouvoir.

En conclusion, le Canada s'illustre par un modèle parlementaire où les contrepoids informels jouent un rôle clé dans l'équilibre des pouvoirs, favorisant une démocratie plus interactive et réactive aux attentes des citoyens tout en respectant les principes fondamentaux de la Constitution. Cette évolution montre à quel point les systèmes politiques peuvent évoluer pour mieux répondre aux défis contemporains de leurs sociétés.

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Politics

# Abortion as a Political Tool: The Republican Party's Strategic Use of Pro-Life Rhetoric

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the relationship between the Republican Party and abortion politics in the United States. Drawing from research conducted by political experts, a comprehensive examination of the Republican Party's position and motivation is presented. More specifically, this paper highlights the relationship between perceived voting behaviour and Republican abortion policy.

## Key Words

Republican, abortion, pro-life, voter, ideology

## Introduction

Often used by politicians and political parties to garner votes and encourage polarisation, abortion is one of the most contentious issues in contemporary American politics. However, abortion was not always a political issue; it was just a fact of life and common practice. For over a thousand years, women used herbs to terminate unwanted pregnancies by inducing miscarriage with little to no societal intervention (McSpedon, 2022). During the early 19th century, the first American abortion laws were passed, intended to prevent pregnant women from accidentally consuming drugs that would induce miscarriage as opposed to regulating intentional abortions (McSpedon, 2022). In the modern day, most Americans hold personal beliefs about the ethics of abortion and what the government's role should be in enforcing their own ethical standards. Moreover, religion, particularly Christianity, in the United States commands a strong influence on politics and, consequently,

abortion dialogue (Bohrer, 2022). Abortion is a hotly debated topic in American politics, particularly in our current post-*Roe v. Wade* era. This paper argues that the Republican Party has successfully used anti-

abortion rhetoric in the United States to the extent that it significantly influences votes because electoral politics shapes both policy and party trajectory. It analyses the foundation of the Republican Party's pro-life stance and the application of deceptive strategies to appeal to anti-choice voters, leading to the orchestration of the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*.

## The Establishment of the Republican Party's Abortion Stance

The Republican Party, also referred to as the Grand Old Party (GOP), is traditionally the more conservative of the two major American political parties. In the 1950s and 1960s the modern Republican Party took shape by intentionally attracting those who were resistant to social change in order to

surmount decades of unsuccessful attempts at creating conservative majorities in Congress (Stonecash, 2024). This included the adoption of policies that were anti-immigration, anti-civil rights and pro-gun ownership (Stonecash, 2024). Overall, the Republican Party aims to support the perceived ideals of conservative, Christian, white, working-class America (Stonecash, 2024). The issue of abortion has become so deeply entrenched in the identity of the modern Republican Party that pro-life sentiment appears to be a fundamental value of the party. However, in actuality, Republican Party proponents or Republicans cynically used pro-life sentiments to attract voters in the 1970s, resulting in the merger of pro-life ideology and the Republican Party.

While anti-abortion rhetoric has recently become a recurring theme in Republican campaign platforms, speeches, debates and social media posts, the Republican Party's stance on abortion was relatively moderate and included supporters of liberal abortion laws before the 1970s (Williams, 2011). It was the 1973 Supreme Court case of *Roe v. Wade* that first triggered mainstream discourse among the general public and the development of the Republican Party's stance on abortion (Munson, 2024). The landmark verdict of *Roe v. Wade* concluded that the right to an abortion is protected by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution (*Roe v. Wade*, 1973). All previous abortion bans were overturned and all future laws were required to fit within the framework of *Roe v. Wade*, making it a pivotal case for American politics and a crucial moment for the Republican Party (*Roe v. Wade*, 1973). To capitalise on the rise of social conservatism and attract votes from anti-choice conservative Catholics and Evangelicals, the Republican Party took a

strong stance against abortion in subsequent elections (Williams, 2011).

The first official Republican Party stance was taken in Gerald Ford's 1976 platform, where they declared that "[t]he Republican Party favours a continuance of the public dialogue on abortion and supports the efforts of those who seek enactment of a constitutional amendment to restore protection of the right to life for unborn children" (Munson, 2024, Republican Party Platform of 1976, 1976). Likewise, Ronald Reagan's 1980 platform vowed to appoint pro-life Supreme Court justices and amend the Constitution to prevent abortions (Flowers, 2018; Republican Party Platform of 1980, 1980). Reagan's tactic was eventually successful, as the Republican Party became the party of Catholics and Evangelicals (Williams, 2011). The Republican abortion position was solidified by partisan shifts, occurring over the course of four decades (Deckman et al., 2024). Voters altered their abortion beliefs to align with the party position or altered their party allegiance to align with their beliefs, when previously Republicans had been marginally more pro-choice than Democrats and the issue was not as partisan (Deckman et al., 2024). Beginning with Reagan's 1980 election campaign, the decade following *Roe v. Wade* in the United States shaped the Republican pro-life agenda and provided the basis for an anti-choice identity within the party.

### **Republican Electoral Abortion Tactics**

Having made abortion an important plank in the Republican platform, the party uses performative tactics to attract a pro-life demographic and incentivise voter turnout as part of an electoral strategy, with the nexus between abortion and morality distinguishing the Republican use of pro-choice discourse from other political issues. Historically, Republicans start

campaigning on abortion when running for high office, when they previously expressed more progressive support for abortion rights. Every Republican presidential candidate between 1980 and 2016, with the exception of Bob Dole, has amended their abortion stance to being pro-life (Lewis, 2019). For example, while campaigning for a Senate position and later for governor of Massachusetts, Republican Mitt Romney was in favour of legal abortion (Lewis, 2019). Conversely, Romney supported overturning *Roe v. Wade* at the Republican National Convention in 2007 when running for the Republican presidential nomination (Lewis, 2019). A pro-choice stance is an electoral benefit in a traditionally progressive state, like Massachusetts, but a pitfall when appealing to voters in historically conservative states needed to win the Republican nomination. Ultimately, while it is possible that some Republican presidential candidates genuinely changed their mind, the frequency at which said candidates revert their position likely indicates deliberately altering positions they do not hold. This is significant because abortion falls at the intersection of morality, religion, autonomy, and women's rights issues. Early Republican abortion strategy reveals that it was believed Catholic women would be incentivised to vote on the abortion issue alone, while the issue would not be an altering factor for Republican women who were pro-choice (Baylor, 2018). Primarily, an anti-choice stance is seen to benefit a candidate and produce very little opposition from Republican voters (Baylor, 2018).

In addition, a considerable amount of pro-life Republican abortion legislation is designed to pass through legislative bodies, but ultimately be struck down by judicial bodies, or enjoined, because it appeals to their voter base. According to Munson (2024), Republicans often promote

“legislation that has little or no chance of becoming law under existing political and legal constraints” (p. 518). The legislature of the State of Mississippi passed such a law in 2019 that banned abortion past 15 weeks, being thereafter enjoined (Roth & Lee, 2023). The same year, Mississippi passed an equally impermissible six-week ban (Roth & Lee, 2023). Within the legal framework of the United States at the time, under the protections of *Roe v. Wade*, the Mississippi State Legislature would reasonably have known both laws would be enjoined, as the judge who enjoined the second ban noted that “6 weeks is fewer than fifteen” (Roth & Lee, 2023, p. 524). Therefore, the 2019 ban, which eventually led to the Dobbs decision, was used as a tool of virtue signaling to present a righteous Christian position to voters. According to a 2019 study conducted by Pew Research, 38% of voters consider abortion to be an important aspect of the electoral decision, making the presentation of a pro-life agenda possibly a deciding element for some voters (Fahmy, 2020). Regardless of the actuality of voting behaviour, which is difficult to quantify, it is likely that the Republican Party believes abortion influences votes to the extent that the benefits of campaigning as pro-life outweigh potential drawbacks.

### **The Overturn of *Roe v. Wade***

As has been established, anti-abortionist thinking is part of the ideology of the Republican Party, and the Republican platform is successful at attracting voters by presenting the position of traditional family values in part because they employ pro-life dialogue and legislation. Undoubtedly, overturning *Roe v. Wade* is the core of the Republican Party's pro-life agenda and the most tangible impact of Republican abortion politics. The 2022 overturn of *Roe v. Wade* was, in part, luck, because President Donald Trump was still in office when progressive Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg

died, which was an uncontrollable factor for both major political parties. But it can also be seen as the culmination of promises that over 40 years of Republican politicians, especially on the campaign trail, have made to voters. A significant factor contributing to the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* was Trump's instatement of a conservative majority in the Supreme Court. Following the death of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia in early 2016, then-president Barack Obama was prevented by the Republican-controlled Senate from successfully appointing progressive judge Merrick Garland (Nemacheck, 2021). As leader of the Senate, Mitch McConnell refused to meet with the Supreme Court nominee and insisted that the next president appoint Scalia's replacement, going against standard practice and laying the groundwork for a Republican Supreme Court pick (Nemacheck, 2021). Combined with a list of potential Supreme Court Justices released by Trump, an electoral first, and the promise of overturning *Roe v. Wade* during his run for president in 2016, McConnell's tactics likely contributed to Trump's victory, in true Republican campaign fashion (Nemacheck, 2021). Right-wing justices Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett were subsequently appointed by Trump, resulting in a conservative supermajority with the power to realise Republican aims. Trump and McConnell's maneuvering, while not exclusively aimed at abortion rights, intended to establish a justice system in accordance with conservative ideology.

Equally, the Republican Mississippi legislature and the State Attorney General's Office contributed to the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*. A Mississippi abortion ban initiated the case *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organisation*, which overturned the precedent set by *Roe v. Wade*. The Mississippi Attorney General's Office argued the 1973 *Roe* decision was a

misjudgement; therefore, the *Mississippi Gestational Age Act*, which bans abortion past 15 weeks, is permissible (*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organisation*, 2022). Mississippi's petition to the Supreme Court to nullify *Roe v. Wade* acted as the catalyst for its overturn as the court ruled that "the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion" (*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organisation*, 2022). The *Roe v. Wade* overturn is a clear victory for a Republican establishment that seeks to use abortion as electoral fodder, as *Roe* was symbolic of the abortion movement for many; the final step in solidifying Republicans as anti-choice in modern politics (Munson, 2024). The 2022 midterm election following the *Dobbs* decision showed a correlation between voting behaviours and abortion sentiment, indicating that the Supreme Court case may have contributed to increased voter polarisation on both sides and influenced electoral choices (Kann et al., 2024). Abortion has remained an issue across numerous elections, influencing voter behaviour, because it is one of the only women's rights issues that remains divisive among the American population and part of the "culture war" which still appears winnable to conservatives among recent losses, including same-sex marriage and civil rights.

### **Conclusion**

Anti-choice thought has played a key role in molding the current Republican party. In attempts to appeal to conservative and pro-life voters, pro-life ideology has ingrained itself in Republican policy and campaigning. Starting after the constitutional protection of abortion in 1973, Republicans instituted a distinctly anti-abortion position to attract votes. Hereinafter, successful Republican politicians are pro-life politicians. The GOP as a whole displays patterns of

virtue-signalling through abortion legislation and presents a duplicitous position on abortion. Decades of strategic decision-making by the Republican Party and a desire to appeal to right-wing, pro-life voters culminated in the eventual 2022 overturn of *Roe v. Wade*. Nonetheless, all historical precedent suggests that *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organisation* is not

the end of both pro and anti-abortion movements. Abortion is arguably more central to American politics than ever before. In all probability, the Republican Party will continue to enact pro-life policy until their tactic is no longer effective and social conservatism is no longer desired by American voters.

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La Politique

# La campagne sur la souveraineté-association de 1980 : Trouver le point de vue franco-ontarien à travers les journaux d'époque

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## Abstrait

La campagne référendaire de 1980 est un moment clé dans l'histoire du Québec. Dans ce travail, la perception des Franco-Ontariens de cet événement est analysée en détail afin de comprendre leurs perceptions sur cet enjeu. Le but de l'auteur est d'offrir une analyse nuancée sur les motivations des Franco-Ontariens, qui mettent en valeur leurs intérêts en tant que francophones vivant dans un pays qui n'a pas encore de charte des valeurs qui défend leurs intérêts en tant que minorité linguistique.

## Mots clés

Francophonie, Ontario, Québec, referendum

## Introduction

Les États-généraux du Canada-français de 1967 marquent un point de rupture entre le Québec et les Francophones hors Québec. On note l'importance de la motion du Québec cherchant à reconnaître la province comme le foyer du Canada-Français et son droit à l'autodétermination dans cette soi-disant rupture. Un peu plus d'une décennie plus tard, alors que l'Ontario-Français est en pleine crise scolaire à Penetanguishene, le Parti Québécois est au pouvoir à Québec et lance une campagne référendaire sur la souveraineté-association. Ce bouillonnement de situation amène une réflexion importante à savoir quels étaient les points de vue des articles de presse concernant les Franco-Ontariens et leur relation avec la campagne référendaire sur la souveraineté-association de 1980 ?

Dans ce travail, je vais analyser le lien entre les Franco-ontariens et la campagne référendaire en examinant comment leurs enjeux locaux ont influencé la campagne, notamment à travers les interventions de Bill Davis

et la crise scolaire de Penetanguishene. Je m'intéresserai également aux diverses positions exprimées publiquement par les acteurs de la communauté franco-ontarienne en ce qui concerne la souveraineté-association, afin de mieux comprendre leur rôle et leurs préoccupations dans ce contexte.

## Méthodologie et limites

Pour cette enquête, j'ai utilisé des articles, chroniques et éditoriaux provenant de journaux francophones de l'époque, couvrant des sujets liés à l'expérience des Franco-Ontariens et à la campagne du

référendum sur la souveraineté-association de 1980. Les publications utilisées ont été publiées entre le 20 décembre 1979, date à laquelle la question référendaire a été dévoilée par le gouvernement du Québec, et le 23 mai 1980, trois jours après le référendum, avec un accent particulier sur avril et mai, pendant la campagne officielle. Un processus de codage inductif a été utilisé pour ce texte, au fur et à mesure que les articles de journaux ont été retrouvés et analysés.

### **Bill Davis et la question franco-ontarienne dans le cadre de la campagne référendaire**

Dans les journaux d'époques, on retrouve plusieurs sources qui parlent des Franco-ontariens ainsi que des difficultés que ceux-ci vivent comme source de discussion vis-à-vis la campagne sur la souveraineté-association. Dès le dévoilement de la question référendaire, le 20 décembre 1979, on voit des réactions de la part des Franco-ontariens dans les journaux. Le lendemain, le 21 décembre, Gérard Lévesque, secrétaire général de l'Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario (ACFO), critique l'intervention médiatique de Bill Davis, le Premier ministre ontarien, dans la campagne référendaire. Ce dernier avait critiqué la formule de la question, qui d'après lui était trop vague et que la formule utilisée, quelle qu'elle soit, mène à l'indépendance et affirme un refus de négocier. Lévesque, quant à lui, critiquera cette intervention en affirmant que la non-reconnaissance des droits des francophones de la part du gouvernement pourrait influencer le résultat du vote (*Le Soleil*, 1979).

En avril et mai 1980, alors que Davis est en tournée au Québec afin de faire campagne pour le NON, on voit que l'ACFO et Lévesque le talonnent. Le 30 avril 1980, le secrétaire général de l'ACFO ainsi que sa

présidente, Jeanine Séguin, font une intervention dans les médias afin de dénoncer la campagne de Bill Davis pour le Non. Selon eux, les critiques que Davis fait de la loi 101 ainsi que du mouvement souverainiste sont invalidées par le fait que la minorité anglophone du Québec est beaucoup mieux desservie que la minorité francophone de l'Ontario (Paquin, 1980). Comme exemple, ceux-ci se réfèrent au fait que « [la] Loi 101 reconnaît, par exemple, le droit à des services en Anglais au Québec; en Ontario, les règlements et les lois n'accordent pas un statut comparable au Français ; « on tolère le français dans certains ministères » (Paquin, 1980, p. A13).

Deux jours plus tard, le 2 mai 1980, un article dans le journal *Le Droit* rapporte un discours fait par Davis à Montréal, où il définit le Canada comme un pays biculturel qui a mûri, comme argument contre la souveraineté (Duhaim, 1980). Il se fait toutefois confronter par des membres de l'ACFO qui lui reproche de ne pas offrir adéquatement de services en Français aux Franco-Ontariens. Il répond en mentionnant que 100 000 jeunes étudient à des établissements de langue française, et que les services devraient être offerts graduellement en Ontario (Duhaim, 1980). Même si elle appuie aussi le NON, l'ACFO critique durement Davis, en affirmant que si les choses s'étaient en effet améliorées dans les dernières années, c'était dû à de longues batailles entreprises par la communauté franco-ontarienne (Duhaim, 1980).

Toutefois, les interventions de Davis sont bien vues de la part de la presse fédéraliste. Dans un éditorial de *La Presse*, Vincent Prince applaudit le discours de Davis, ainsi qu'une entrevue qu'il a donnée au journal. En ce qui a trait aux Franco-Ontariens, Prince mentionne que malgré certains enjeux, le sort des Franco-Ontariens s'est nettement amélioré sous Davis, ignorant les

plaidoyers d'organisations comme l'ACFO (Prince, 1980).

Dans un article publié le 10 mai 1980, Michael Cassidy, chef du NPD ontarien, partage la position de Davis sur la souveraineté-association, mais fait écho sur les critiques de l'ACFO. Il affirme que la crédibilité des leaders ontariens a été affectée par le fait qu'à plusieurs reprises les Franco-ontariens ont dû se battre pour leurs services, alors que ceux-ci auraient dû être garantis comme droits et que la province ontarienne doit garantir les droits francophones une fois pour toutes (Le Nouvelliste, 1980).

### **Penetanguishene, symbole de la lutte franco-ontarienne dans un moment de crise nationale**

Toutefois, on peut se permettre de se demander qu'est-ce qui pousse l'ACFO et d'autres comme Cassidy à critiquer si sévèrement Davis. Parmi les luttes historiques et persistantes des Franco-ontariens, l'une d'elles se distingue particulièrement pour expliquer l'engagement constant de l'ACFO à suivre Bill Davis au Québec durant ses diverses interventions : la crise scolaire de Penetanguishene, qui survient pendant la campagne. Elle se centre sur le refus du gouvernement ontarien d'accorder aux francophones de Penetanguishene le droit de disposer d'une école de langue française (Dexter, 1980). Celui-ci justifie son refus de donner une école à la population de Penetanguishene en disant que « ce ne serait là qu'un geste symbolique et qu'il préférerait donc une action plus concrète » et est sévèrement critiqué sur ce sujet par le chroniqueur Alain Dexter du journal *Le Droit*, qui affirme que les Franco-ontariens ont aussi besoin de symboles (Dexter, 1980).

Alors que la crise bat de plein fouet, son existence est utilisée par certains partisans de la souveraineté-association comme un argument qui justifie la séparation du Québec et du Canada. En février 1980, une entrevue de Jean Alfred, député péquiste, est publiée dans le journal *Le Droit* dans laquelle il critique sévèrement la proposition fédéraliste de Claude Ryan, chef du Parti libéral du Québec (PLQ). Il invite les Québécois à se méfier des propositions qui chercheraient à renouveler le fédéralisme canadien et met l'accent sur la crise scolaire de Penetanguishene. Selon lui, le refus de l'Ontario de donner une école de langue française aux résidents de Penetanguishene est une raison parmi tant d'autres pour laquelle il serait futile de « négocier les droits linguistiques » des Franco-québécois avec le Canada-Anglais (Chartrand, 1980, p. 12).

De l'autre côté de l'argument, l'ACFO et le président du conseil des minorités québécoises, Eric Maldoff, affirment aussi que Davis et son attitude dans la crise de Penetanguishene nuit à la cause du camp du non. Ses gestes en tant que premier ministre ne respectent pas les minorités ontariennes de langue française et que les Québécois préféreraient de l'action plutôt que des paroles dut à sa mauvaise gestion des écoles francophones (Le Devoir, 1980).

Le 24 avril 1980, un article apparaît dans *Le Droit* annonçant la fin de la crise scolaire (Bouchard, 1980). Face aux critiques visant Davis et à l'impact perçu sur l'unité nationale, ainsi qu'à la résolution de la crise moins d'un mois avant le référendum, il est plausible que le gouvernement ontarien ait cherché à améliorer son image auprès des Franco-Ontariens aux yeux des Québécois. Alain Dexter, dans une chronique publiée quelques jours après le règlement de la crise, propose une vision qui s'aligne avec cette thèse. Selon lui, le règlement de la crise de Penetanguishene est certes une victoire,

mais il met en garde les Franco-ontariens qu'il faudra continuer la bataille dans les plus brefs délais. Il met d'ailleurs l'accent sur l'impact que la campagne référendaire aurait eu sur le règlement de la crise et affirme que les Franco-ontariens devraient en profiter pour demander plus de concessions de la part du gouvernement ontarien (Dexter, 1980).

Le règlement de la crise de Penetanguishene n'a toutefois pas empêché les organismes comme l'ACFO ont continué à critiquer Davis au Québec alors qu'il faisait campagne pour le NON. Comme nous l'avons vu plus haut, les interventions de l'ACFO vis-à-vis Davis continuent en mai 1980 (Duhaime, 1980).

#### **Un OUI franco-ontarien, est-ce possible?**

On pourrait facilement supposer qu'en raison de la régionalisation de l'identité canadienne-française dans les années 60, les Franco-ontariens auraient instinctivement soutenu le camp du NON lors du référendum de 1980. Comme nous avons vu plus haut, l'ACFO appuie le camp du Non, mais le fait avec un certain recul, en talonnant notamment Bill Davis lors de sa tournée pour le NON au Québec et en rappelant au public l'état du Français en Ontario sous Davis (Duhaime, 1980). Les membres de la direction de l'ACFO, comme Gérard Lévesque, reconnaissent d'ailleurs que la communauté franco-ontarienne est divisée entre le camp du OUI et du NON (Le Devoir, 1980).

Les articles publiés dans les journaux durant la campagne semblent d'ailleurs soutenir l'idée que les Franco-Ontariens étaient divisés sur la question nationale. Le 22 avril 1980, on trouve au moins deux articles rapportant les interventions de personnalités politiques franco-ontariennes qui se sont prononcées en faveur du NON lors de la campagne électorale. Tout d'abord, il est

rapporté que Jean-Jacques Blais, ministre fédéral des Approvisionnements et Services, a participé à un rallye de Claude Ryan à Thetford Mines, où il a affirmé que l'avenir des Franco-Ontariens et des autres francophones hors Québec se joue lors du référendum sur la Souveraineté-Association (Sévigny, 1980). Jean-Robert Gauthier, député d'Ottawa-Vanier pour le parti libéral et franco-ontarien, affirme qu'une victoire du OUI relèguerait les Franco-ontariens à devenir des « Palestiniens » ontariens dus au fait qu'ils seraient un peuple sans foyer national. En revanche, il reconnaît que le manque de droit pour les francophones Hors-Québec rendait sa défense du fédéralisme difficile (La tribune, 1980, p. B1). Puis, encore de la part d'un député libéral, Denis Ethier, représentant de la circonscription de Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, on voit une autre défense du NON dans *Le Nouvelliste*, le 10 mai. Dans son plaidoyer, il affirme que la fin du Québec dans le Canada serait aussi la fin des francophones Hors-Québec et du peu de privilèges qu'ils ont obtenus dans les autres provinces (Ethier, 1980). On voit donc que plusieurs députés libéraux franco-ontariens sont actifs à l'époque pour le camp du NON.

Toutefois, ces interventions en faveur du NON de la part de Franco-ontariens, comme l'ACFO et les députés libéraux n'excluent pas l'existence de partisans du OUI dans cette communauté. Ethier, dans le même article où il défend le NON, reconnaît que des groupements acadiens, fransaskois et franco-manitobains ont tous supporté le OUI, mais estime que ce support vient plutôt d'une frustration envers leurs gouvernements provinciaux (Ethier, 1980).

Que cela soit vrai ou non, on ne peut nier qu'il y a un support substantiel pour le OUI de la part de plusieurs groupements francophones hors Québec. On voit parmi

ces groupements, un support de la part du Parti Acadien au Nouveau-Brunswick, qui cherchait à créer une province pour les Acadiens. Celui-ci croit qu'à l'extérieur du Québec, seuls les Franco-ontariens et les Acadiens ont une chance de survie et que leurs survies ne dépendraient pas du gouvernement fédéral si le Québec se séparerait (Le Nouvelliste, 1980).

Les francophones supportant le OUI à l'extérieur du Québec ne se trouvent pas seulement qu'en Acadie ou dans les prairies, mais on en trouve aussi en Ontario. Le 9 mai 1980, la filiale du Grand-Nord de l'ACFO, représentant les Franco-ontariens du Nord ontarien, publie un communiqué de presse écrit où les membres de la direction annoncent qu'ils supporteraient le OUI au référendum. Les auteurs du communiqué justifient leur soutien au OUI en soulignant, avec cynisme, qu'un Canada bilingue ne verra jamais le jour dans les conditions actuelles, et que les Franco-Ontariens ont dû mener de longues batailles, dont les résultats sont souvent restés mitigés. La position précaire des Franco-ontariens, selon eux, justifie la victoire du OUI au référendum puisqu'il donnerait au Québécois le pouvoir de négocier avec le Canada-Anglais sur une base égale (Héroux & Trottier, 1980).

Outre ces organismes qui soutiennent le camp du OUI, on voit que certains individus franco-ontariens, sans positions ou postes politiques prédéfinis, vont écrire des textes dans des journaux afin de supporter le OUI. C'est le cas entre autres de Paul de Bellefeuille, résident d'Ottawa, qui va écrire un texte dans le journal *Le Droit*, invitant les Québécois à voter pour l'indépendance et rejette « [les] “peurs” qu'on nous raconte » en faisant référence à ceux qui annoncent la mort des francophones Hors-Québec avec la Souveraineté-Association (De Bellefeuille, 1980, p. 6).

Parmi les plus grands partisans du OUI franco-ontarien, on observe Claude-P. Vigeant, résidant de London, en Ontario, qui écrit au moins 3 textes dans différents journaux invitant les Québécois à voter pour le OUI. Ces textes sont à peu près tous pareils et sont publiés en avril 1980, il commence en félicitant des personnalités publiques pour leur support du OUI. Il évoque ensuite le soutien des associations provinciales francophones qui encouragent les Québécois à voter OUI, expliquant que, selon lui, la victoire du OUI est cruciale pour empêcher les gouvernements provinciaux de revenir à leur indifférence envers le français. Il considère cela comme une victoire importante contre les « centralisateurs », nombreux au sein du Parti libéral fédéral, qui souhaitent « unifier » le pays autour d'une seule langue (Vigeant, 1980, p. B2). Il finit son texte en justifiant que les vrais partisans d'un régime fédéral devraient supporter le OUI, afin de protéger l'autonomie du Québec et des francophones (Vigeant, 1980) Si ces lettres et témoins ne sont pas nécessairement représentatif de la population franco-ontarienne au complet, ils permettent tout de même un regard intéressant sur la situation.

### **Conclusion : après le référendum, la bataille continue**

Après le référendum, la bataille des Franco-ontariens continue. Après la défaite du OUI au référendum le 20 mai, les réactions de la communauté ontarienne se font vites. Du 21 au 23 mai, on peut trouver au moins trois articles qui détaillent des réactions de la part de la communauté franco-ontarienne. Les représentants de l'ACFO semblent tous indifférents face au résultat référendaire, et annoncent tous que la bataille devra se poursuivre, car ils sont toujours autant menacé qu'avant (Dion, 1980). Jean-Robert Gauthier, député libéral d'Ottawa-Vanier et partisan du NON, déclare qu'il sera satisfait si les Canadiens

anglais ont bien compris le message (Vastel, 1980).

Dans ce travail, nous avons exploré la relation des Franco-Ontariens avec le référendum à travers les journaux de l'époque. Nous avons également observé comment les Franco-Ontariens sont liés au référendum à travers la représentation de leurs enjeux dans les médias québécois, notamment à travers la crise de Penetanguishene, les interventions de Bill Davis au Québec, l'action de l'ACFO, et le manque de volonté politique provinciale à résoudre les problèmes des Franco-Ontariens. Comme l'ACFO le talonne, il semble y avoir un consensus général (outre quelques fédéralistes) qui

postule que l'image de Davis et de l'Ontario vis-à-vis sa minorité franco-ontarienne nuit à la crédibilité du camp du NON, surtout avec la manière dont le gouvernement a géré la crise de Penetanguishene. Nous avons également analysé les interventions des Franco-Ontariens dans le référendum, tant pour le camp du OUI que pour celui du NON, ce qui révèle une division marquée au sein de la population franco-ontarienne sur la question de la souveraineté-association du Québec. Et si cet article montre que les Franco-ontariens sont divisés entre le camp du OUI et du NON lors de la campagne référendaire de 1980, une chose est claire : quel que soit le résultat, les Franco-ontariens auraient été forcés de continuer leur lutte.

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Policy and Political Theory

# The Final Act Is Conquest: Tech Billionaires, Political Mythmaking, and The Hero's Journey from New Money to Absolute Power

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## Abstract

Silicon Valley billionaires, particularly figures like Elon Musk and Peter Thiel, have ascended beyond their roles as entrepreneurs to become political actors and architects of new power structures. This paper explores how the cultural mythologies of New Money—marked by individualism, conquest, and a rejection of democratic constraints—frame these figures as protagonists in self-mythologized hero's journeys. Using Roland Barthes' theory of ideological myth and Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model of self-presentation, the paper examines how billionaires cultivate influence through media spectacle, personal branding, and narrative control. Through the cases of Musk, Thiel, and former President Donald Trump, it traces how Silicon Valley's political ethos has evolved from behind-the-scenes lobbying to overt attempts at authoritarian governance. Drawing on investigative reporting and theoretical frameworks, it argues that these figures operate not as a unified political movement but as rival protagonists competing within overlapping myths. Ultimately, the paper contends that understanding these performances is crucial to resisting their consolidation of power—and that exposing the narrative is the first step to reclaiming reality.

## Key Words

Silicon Valley, new money, cultural myths, authoritarianism, democracy

## Introduction

The Silicon Valley tech establishment has long sold itself as a land of meritocracy, genius, and innovation—the ultimate realization of the American dream. Its key players are mythologized in Americana as lone visionaries who, by 'moving fast and breaking things', usher humanity into a utopian future. Cultural myths are not merely fairy tales; they are ideological tools that frame man-made power structures as natural (Barthes, 1957). By casting themselves in the roles of the hero in our modern cultural myths, entrepreneurs have

long positioned their innovative visions as a journey, the products they invent as tools to save mankind, and government regulations as obstacles in the way of their destiny. This 'founders-as-gods' world-

view has been present in the words and actions of billionaires across the political spectrum for decades. In 2013, Google's then-CEO Eric Schmidt—a prominent Democrat—visited Myanmar, a country just emerging from military dictatorship. With the dramatic, sincere confidence of a science-fiction hero back from the future, he

declared, “the Internet will make it impossible to go back,” and advised the government to “try to keep the government out of regulating the Internet” (Reuters, 2013). Schmidt’s vision, a common one across Silicon Valley, was that technological products and internet telecommunications would not only modernize Myanmar, but would civilize its people—and conveniently make Google shareholders very happy. This techno-deterministic assumption, that founders are benevolent heroes bringing their special tools to a community in order to save them, has long shaped Silicon Valley’s ambitions, reinforcing its leaders’ pursuit of unregulated influence.

More recently, this mythology has taken a darker turn. Silicon Valley CEOs, venture capitalists, and billionaire inventors have begun openly sharing authoritarian views and donating millions of dollars to political campaigns, including that of the re-elected President Donald Trump (Hernandes et al., 2024). Elon Musk has, for example, amplified beliefs on X (formerly known as Twitter) that only “alpha males” should have the right to vote (Laws, 2024), while billionaire Peter Thiel has openly stated that “[he] no longer believe[s] that freedom and democracy are compatible” (Thiel, 2009, para. 2). This paper examines the actions of these three billionaires who have moved from boardrooms to war rooms: Musk, Thiel, and Trump. Their ascent is framed as a performance—an epic play in which Barthes’ (1957) theory of ideological myth reveals the narrative scaffolding, Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical model exposes the personas they perform, and the ethos of New Money provides the script. These three self-styled protagonists—whose rivalry and mutual disdain are well-documented—have nonetheless found themselves united by a shared antagonist: democracy. In a world where the stagecraft is the statecraft, this paper concludes by tracing the logic of

unregulated influence to its final act: conquest. By connecting cultural mythology, political performance, and authoritarian ambition, it offers a framework for understanding the consequences of elite narrative control for public policy, democratic resilience, and international order.

### **The Script**

Humans are natural storytellers. This is the way that we have shared knowledge, history, and culture with each other since we first gained speech (Goody, 2006). Of all the stories we have told across civilizations and time, one of the most deeply resonant, and thus most enduring has been that of the hero’s journey. It is an archetypal template that begins with a main character who is a little different, and thus misunderstood by their community. A moment happens when they leave their home behind to cross the threshold from the ordinary world into a new, special one. Along their journey, they overcome obstacles, acquire special tools, and ultimately learn that the things that made them different are the gifts that make them special. Many times, the story arc ends with the hero returning to their community and saving the day. Crews et al. (2022) describe the hero’s journey as being “about survival, and it starts with the survival of the human race itself” (2022, p. 46). This narrative is so simple and feels so natural, that it is interwoven with our culture to the point of myth.

Mythologies, as Barthes (1957) argued, do not simply tell stories; they naturalize ideology. They make power appear self-evident, unquestionable, bypassing the need for justification and instead presenting dominance as fact. Silicon Valley’s cultural myth, rooted in the broader ethos of American entrepreneurialism, is that of the misunderstood visionary: a founder who, by sheer intellect and willpower, proves the

doubters wrong by ascending from rags to riches. It is a myth that reinforces the worldview that success comes from breaking rules, the ‘move fast and break things’ operational style. Many successful entrepreneurs tell childhood stories of early rule-breaking as a way to illustrate how they were always ahead of their time. For instance, “[o]f the six people who started PayPal, four had built bombs in high school” (Thiel, 2014, p. 128) —rarely do these heroes stop moving long enough to look back at what or who may have broken. In this New Money worldview, business success becomes proof of inherent superiority (Chafkin & Fisher, 2024). These self-made men see themselves not merely as industry leaders, but as prophetic figures—whose innovations justify their authority, and whose critics only affirm their brilliance. Thiel (2009) captured this mythos when he wrote: “[t]he fate of our world may depend on the effort of a single person who builds or propagates the machinery of freedom that makes the world safe for capitalism” (para. 13). In this narrative, a founder’s triumph in the marketplace is framed not merely as economic success but as validation of personal brilliance and ideological authority. Once capitalist success is accepted as evidence of superior judgment, the leap from influencing markets to shaping political systems begins to appear not only natural, but necessary.

Wealth that once exerted influence through campaign donations and lobbying has become a direct pipeline to power. United States Vice President JD Vance exemplifies this trajectory: a protégé of Thiel, hand-selected out of Yale Law School, mentored as a venture capitalist, before being funded by Silicon Valley to transition into politics, ultimately culminating in his crowning as Trump’s vice president. Vance’s New Money origin story illustrates how the more destructive sides of Silicon Valley’s

political ethos have migrated from boardrooms to war rooms. Using “technologies built in Silicon Valley and public relations tactics invented on Madison Avenue long ago meshed with dictatorial behavior” (Applebaum, 2024, p. 146), Vance’s ascent reveals a new innovation: tech founders no longer just bankroll candidates—they can engineer them. And in order to get their money’s worth, they need “people like Elon Musk in charge of a federal government who are responsive to people like Elon Musk” (Klein & Swisher, 2025, 42:55).

### **The Actors**

The cultural myths of Silicon Valley have long conditioned the public to tolerate, even romanticize, the eccentricities of lone genius inventors in exchange for reaping the rewards of their business success. As Elon Musk once described himself on *Saturday Night Live*: “Look, I know I sometimes say or post strange things, but that’s just how my brain works! To anyone I’ve offended, I just want to say: I reinvented electric cars and I’m sending people to Mars in a rocket ship. Did you think I was going to be a chill, normal dude?” (2021, 1:54). Kara Swisher, a tech journalist who has covered Silicon Valley since the 90s, both describes Musk as archetypal: “Silicon Valley has a million people like him. He was very typical,” and as someone who always needed to be at the centre of the drama. “Someone described him to me as Ready Player One and everyone else is an NPC, which is a non-player character. He always has to be the hero, or the person who matters the most.” (Klein & Swisher, 2025, 4:00).

Goffman (1956) theorized that all human social interactions are fundamentally performative. His dramaturgical model, outlined in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, argues that individuals construct a curated ‘onstage’ persona for

public view while concealing contradictions and vulnerabilities in the ‘backstage’. As Haugerud (2012) notes, the political effectiveness and media appeal of billionaires increasingly hinge on their ability to maintain this public performance. While not a tech founder himself, Donald Trump remains the most vivid contemporary example of Goffman’s dramaturgical model in action. As a New Money real estate developer who long resented his family’s exclusion from Old Money New York society, Trump instinctively understood the mechanics of the attention economy, where media spectacle substitutes for substance and cultural visibility functions as currency. His business ventures often blurred the line between branding and governance, but it was his 2016 presidential campaign—initially launched as a publicity stunt—that broke the fourth wall of democracy, permanently turning stagecraft into statecraft.

While historian Timothy Snyder does not explicitly reference Goffman, his remarks on Trump align closely with the dramaturgical model of self-presentation. Snyder (2024) observes:

The first thing to understand about Mr. Trump is that he does inhabit a completely different mental world, and he inhabits it naturally and he inhabits it gracefully. He lives in a world of fiction. [...] He’s never been a successful businessman, but he has played a successful businessman on television. He understands not the rules of reality, but the rules of fiction. So for him, there’s no such thing as lying because there’s no such thing as the truth. We’re all just in this story together (0:01).

Snyder’s (2024) description of Trump as a character who thrives in fiction rather than reality closely reflects Goffman’s (1956)

distinction between ‘onstage’ and ‘backstage’ behavior. Trump does not operate within the constraints of governance or verifiable truth, but within the arc of a story. Each of the men profiled in this paper sees himself as the protagonist of a grand narrative. Trump’s story stars Trump; Musk’s stars Musk; Thiel’s stars Thiel. In these overlapping hero’s journeys, others appear not as collaborators but as background characters, useful tools, or obstacles in the way. What emerges is not a unified political movement but a series of crossover episodes—each with its own character motivations, its own plotline, and its own endgame.

Silicon Valley billionaires operate within a parallel performative paradigm. Just as Trump leveraged media spectacle into political capital, tech founders now use digital platforms to extend their influence beyond the bounds of traditional democratic systems. Within this narrative framework, the audience gets pulled into the story whether they want to or not—as irrelevant extras at best, or as antagonists at worst. “They don’t care. They don’t care for you. They don’t think about you. You are nothing” (Klein & Swisher, 2025, 46:00). When every move can be justified as ‘for the plot,’ the performative nature of power begins to erode the institutional safeguards of democratic governance. Cultural myths become not just a means of communication, but a buffer against consequence.

New Money culture holds that art is the domain of the political left, and politics the domain of the political right. In other words, if Steve Jobs treated business as an expression of art, Peter Thiel treats business as a form of activism (Chafkin, 2021). These contrasting philosophies reflect a broader shift in how power is framed and pursued, particularly when performance itself becomes ideology. Goffman’s (1956) dramaturgical model anticipates this

slippage. He cautions that the deeper an individual commits to performance, the more tenuous the distinction between stage and self becomes: “To the degree that the individual maintains a show before others that he himself does not believe, he can come to experience a special kind of alienation from self and a special kind of wariness of others” (Goffman, 1956, p. 214). Even Thiel (2014), in reflecting on the trajectories of founders, notes that “the cycle usually starts with unusual people and ends with them acting and seeming even more unusual” (p. 131). This observation, taken in context, suggests how performance and identity may converge to the point of indistinguishability. As mythmaking accelerates and self-image becomes entwined with public narrative, the persona risks eclipsing the person, until the act becomes the only thing left standing.

### **The Playbook**

New Money culture is built on one-upmanship. Among billionaires, status is not measured by wealth alone, but by visibility, influence, and ideological reach. Increasingly, billionaires turned celebrities have come to see ideology as both a branding strategy and an investment vehicle—“understanding that ideology can be a valuable way to make money, and money can advance an ideology” (Chafkin & Fisher, 2024, 19:50). Historically, purchasing a struggling newspaper was a way for tycoons to project sophistication and cultural capital (Grossman et al., 2022). Today, however, the stakes are far higher. By extending their control to social media platforms, as Elon Musk has done with X, these individuals wield unprecedented influence over public discourse (Chafkin. & Fisher, 2024), with profound consequences.

Thiel made his bets early—moving into Trump Tower after the 2016 election to

assist in selecting members of the incoming administration—but it is Musk who has most fully embraced the performative potential of power. Though the two men reportedly cannot stand each other, both viewed Trump as a useful vehicle for their own ambitions (Klein & Swisher, 2025). Their mutual disdain only underscores the competitive nature of New Money mythmaking, where even the heroes are rivals. By merging the roles of celebrity, executive, and shadow statesman, Musk represents a new convergence of media spectacle and political ambition—with few precedents and even fewer constraints. These New Money media moguls have now become part of what Applebaum (2024) describes as “Autocracy, Inc.” — a global constellation of political actors who use wealth, narrative control, and digital infrastructure to undermine democratic norms. When Musk purchased Twitter, fellow billionaire Mark Cuban explained the logic through the lens of New Money ambition: Owning a global communication platform gave Musk more influence than heading any traditional corporation. This was not just a U.S. move — it was a power play on the world stage (Klein & Swisher, 2025, 52:30). These figures are not merely amplifying their voices; they are rewriting the infrastructure of political debate. They determine what ideas surface, which voices are heard, and which are silenced by algorithms. As Snyder (2024) warns, Trump’s strategy was never about truth, but about flooding the public sphere with so much fiction that all narratives collapse into noise. Once people distrust every institution, power belongs to whoever holds the loudest megaphone. Thiel’s “in-house philosopher” Curtis Yarvin envisions a future in which Trump returns to the presidency not as a governing leader but as a ceremonial figurehead — a chairman of the board — while real power is transferred to an unelected executive behind the scenes. The

swearing-in, Yarvin (2022) writes, “obviously has to be televised,” signaling the start of a new regime (para. 22). Yet even amid this accumulation of power, one fear remains constant. For all their money, followers, and narrative control, these men cannot escape the final constraint: death. Like millennia of emperors, kings, and strongmen before them, they chase legacy through accumulation, spectacle, and reinvention.

### Offstage

The hero’s tragedy for New Money is that the character compulsions that take someone to the top—ambition, energy, workaholicism—are the same ones that make it difficult, if not impossible, to relax when they get there. There is always more to do, more to earn, and more to be. They will never be satisfied, to the point where they have lost all sense of proportion (Hedges & Sacco, 2012). The last founder’s paradox is that all the money in the world cannot buy them more time. This is why they are so afraid of death (Heffernan, 2021). “Although we humans have not conquered death, we have invented an immortal creature: the corporation” (Bostrom & Schneider, 2016, p. 255). However successful these billionaires may be at circumventing taxes, death remains the one inevitability they cannot outmaneuver. This fear drives their need for legacy—whether through building business empires, colonial empires, putting men on Mars, or the literal pursuit of immortality through artificial intelligence and biotech investments, of which they believe that “providing this gift to humanity will provide glory to those who deliver it,” described BBC technology reporter and psychologist Aleks Krotoski (Richardson, 2023, para. 9).

Thiel (2009) argues that genuine freedom can no longer be attained through political means alone, but must be pursued beyond

existing systems—through an untested process of departure toward uncharted territory, a kind of undiscovered country where a new order might be established (para. 8). It is as if they can feel the walls of their own mythology are closing in, and they must escape.

To them, attaining political power is not the happy ending to their story, but their desperate effort to escape it to save themselves. Perhaps they believe that if they move fast enough and break enough things, the cycle of “creative destruction” (Thiel, 2009, para. 6) will grant them the chance to build something new and glorious from the wreckage. This marks a stark departure from democratic governance, replacing systems of collective accountability with unregulated corporate rule where wealth alone justifies authority. It reflects a worldview long embraced by autocratic strongmen, now repurposed for Silicon Valley’s mythmakers. What today’s strongmen have, in turn, appropriated from today’s showmen, is their lack of shame. Whereas twentieth century dictators could be incentivised to behave themselves according to democratic norms through foreign pressure campaigns, “[t]oday, the members of Autocracy, Inc., no longer care if they or their countries are criticized or by whom. Some, like the leaders of Myanmar and Zimbabwe, don’t stand for anything beyond self-enrichment and the desire to remain in power, and so can’t be embarrassed” (Applebaum, 2024, p. 6).

This is where the billionaire class—once content to manipulate politics from the sidelines—has fully converged with authoritarian rulers. Both groups have learned that to wield ultimate power, one must abandon the trappings of respectability, shed any remaining restraint around greed, and embrace the possibility of being deeply, publicly hated (Klein & Swisher, 2025,

37:00). As Heffernan (2021) wrote in her review of *The Contrarian*, “scared people are scary,” and Chafkin’s portrait of Thiel’s “galactic fear — of liberals, of the U.S. government, of death — turns Thiel himself into a threat” (para. 28). “I used to tell myself that Thiel is just another rapacious solipsist,” she continues, “but I used to tell myself that about another rapacious solipsist, and he became president” (Heffernan, 2021, para. 28). Little do they care to heed the prophecy of New Money, that the gifts that made them will be the same gifts that destroy them; it is that those who seek immortality through conquest often leave behind only ruins (Hedges & Sacco, 2012).

### **Conclusion: The Grand Finale**

Polanyi (1944), in *The Great Transformation*, argued that unfettered markets inevitably lead to social and political catastrophe. When deregulated capitalism exhausts resources, exploits workers, and creates mass instability, elites historically do not respond with reform—they respond with conquest. Writing about fascism, Paxton (1998) posited that “the circumstances of war, and particularly of victorious wars of conquest, give it the fullest means of expression” (p. 21).

Though they stop short of explicitly embracing authoritarian labels, the actions of the kleptocrats of Silicon Valley appear to be willing to follow in their footsteps if it means getting what they want, “just carrying to its logical end point a viewpoint which has been pretty common in Silicon Valley since at least the early 90s” (Chafkin & Fisher, 2024, 24:56). Every law, ethical principle, and democratic norm is merely an obstacle to overcome in their self-mythologized hero’s journey. This endless accumulation is not just economic but political, as elites pivot from market

control to inner circle political influence, solidifying a system where the public will is rendered irrelevant. “The corporate state knows only one word: *more*.” (Hedges & Sacco, 2012, p. xii). If they crash the economy, start wars, or dismantle democracy, they will never be the ones to suffer the consequences; only the unimportant non-player characters will.

As Trump, one fictional hero, surrounded by members of Silicon Valley New Money, who each also believe themselves to be fictional heroes, openly discusses invading Canada, Greenland, and Panama (Davies & Wendling, 2025), we are watching this process unfold in real time. But what happens when there is nothing left to conquer? Czech writer and former president Václav Havel once compared authoritarians’ blind pursuit of power to the Spanish conquistadors’ doomed quest for El Dorado, warning that a life of materialistic obsession without responsibility ultimately leads to nothing but hollowed immortality (Bostrom & Schneider, 2016). These billionaires are not the visionaries of a futurist utopia for the human race; they are the last stage of corporate conquest, racing against time to consolidate as much power as possible before the collapse they helped engineer arrives.

If the myths are designed to make power structures seem inevitable and natural (Barthes, 1957), what happens when there is a plot twist—brought about by underestimated individuals, long dismissed as background characters, who refuse to keep playing along? “If nothing else, the [Ukrainians fighting back against the Russian full-scale invasion] showed us that nations are not pieces in a game of risk” (Applebaum, 2024, p. 175). Myths only have power as long as people believe them. The story of the heroic New Money geniuses of Silicon Valley can be

interrupted. In an era where public relations, brand strategy, and media influence determine political power, we must recognize that these elites are not just business figures—they are strategic mythmakers, constructing narratives that

justify their dominance. If Barthes and Goffman offer one spoiler, it is this: exposing the act is the first step towards breaking the fourth wall and reclaiming reality.

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Policy and Political Theory

# For an Assemblage-Based Conception of Climate Change

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## Abstract

This paper argues that dominant international relations (IR) paradigms, tending to pit broad dichotomous categories of actants against one another (i.e., states and non-states and humans and non-humans) are inappropriate for the analysis of climate change as an IR phenomenon. Instead, it proposes an ontology of climate change derived from assemblage theory as laid out by Bennett (2005). After a brief introduction and definition of terms, the paper demonstrates the inadequacies of the dominant IR approaches for analyzing climate change, followed by a demonstration of the pertinence of assemblage theory as an alternative approach. It ultimately finds that assemblage theory is a valuable approach that could complement or potentially replace further elements of IR scholarship.

## Key Words

Climate change, assemblage theory, international relations

## Introduction

Climate change is among the most important international issues of contemporary politics. The evidence of its significance is compelling; the global surface temperature in 2011-2020 was 1.1°C above where it was in 1850-1900, and the trend continues to have intensifying consequences (IPCC, 2023). Climate change is highly complex; it arises from various activities from around the world, it has disparate impacts on different groups regardless of their role in contributing to greenhouse gas emissions, and the solutions require collective action at the international level. This tests the limits of the central premises of classical international relations (IR) scholarship. Specifically, statism and anthropocentrism are challenged, as more-than-human ontologies are showing themselves to be more comprehensive manners of viewing climate change (Fox, 2023).

This paper aims to answer the following question: what approach to conceptualizing climate change is most ontologically appropriate for IR scholarship? The dominant approach is that of anthropocentrism, the tendency of IR scholars to make humanity the focal point of analysis when considering the causes and consequences of the phenomenon. However, anthropocentrism is flawed in that it constructs a categorical distinction between humans and the natural.

Humans are seen as rational, free, agentive beings, in contrast to the inert natural world whose subjugation to the human is therefore justified (Tokay, 2023). Taylor (1981) argues that “humans are claiming human superiority from a strictly human point of view, that is, from a point of view in which the good of humans is taken as the standard

of judgement” (p. 212). The human-centric approach is discursively counterproductive because, “instead of recognizing that human interests are tied up with and depend on nature’s interests, [it] pits them against each other” (Tokay, 2023, p. 365). Alternative approaches have been proposed as a result. For example, biocentrism holds that all organisms have intrinsic moral value because they are alive (Taylor, 1981). Ecocentrism argues that moral value can be attributed to whole ecological systems (Tokay, 2023). In the case of climate change, where causes, consequences, and actants are complex and diverse, these approaches do well to expand the scope of their analysis beyond humans.

In this paper, it will be argued that an assemblage-based approach presents a more ontologically appropriate manner of conceptualizing climate change for IR scholarship than the dominant approaches. Bennett (2005) defines an assemblage as follows:

An assemblage is, first, an ad hoc grouping, a collectivity whose origins are historical and circumstantial, though its contingent status says nothing about its efficacy, which can be quite strong. An assemblage is, second, a living, throbbing grouping whose coherence coexists with energies and countercultures that exceed and confound it. An assemblage is, third, a web with an uneven topography: some of the points at which the trajectories of actants cross each other are more heavily trafficked than others, and thus power is not equally distributed across the assemblage. An assemblage is, fourth, not governed by a central power: no one member has sufficient competence to fully determine the consequences of the activities of the assemblage. An assemblage, finally, is made up of many types of actants: humans and nonhumans;

animals, vegetables, and minerals; nature, culture, and technology. (p. 445)

This approach differs from alternatives in that it attributes agency, the power to create and change conditions, both to its actants and to the networks of actants itself. To prove the thesis, two central dualities in IR scholarship will be analyzed: (i) states and non-states and (ii) humans and non-humans. The characteristics of assemblages laid out by Bennett (2005) will be applied to demonstrate the relevance and value of the chosen theoretical framework. This paper will take the final element of Bennett’s definition, the diversity of actants, as given due to the breadth of the categories under study. It will focus instead on the first four elements of her definition in the coming analysis.

## **States and Non-States**

### **States**

States are often seen as the primary unit of analysis in IR scholarship (Raustiala, 2001). Teschke (2002) argues that modern states emerged with the foundation of the first capitalist economic system, embedding into international relations a pursuit of the optimization of economic interests. States and the tools they employ therefore play an important role in shaping the behaviour of other actants. For instance, Geloso (2022) highlights that subsidies are often directed at fossil fuel producers in ways that “encourage wasteful consumption, undermine the competitiveness of renewables and new energy technologies” (p. 353). Public policy is found to have quantifiable impacts on how firms and individuals make their choices. In this sense, viewing climate change as anthropogenic is a simplification that overlooks structural and institutional (i.e., state-driven) factors (Geloso, 2022).

In terms of responses to global warming, Mitchell (2001) highlights the importance of the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) in shaping what he refers to as the “climate change regime” (p. 227). As the direct result of state-level negotiation and cooperation, it establishes guidelines for climate change mitigation efforts and delineates differences in commitments toward climate change action in different regions. Clearly, states are significant actants in the realm of climate change. Yet, states bear anthropomorphic qualities (Mitzen, 2006). Thus, state-centrism faces many of the same pitfalls as anthropocentric views of climate change. If one is to avoid the pitfalls of anthropocentrism, the scope of one’s analysis must be expanded beyond the anthropomorphic to include other actants.

### **Non-States**

The state-centric approach limits the acknowledgment of the importance of non-state actors. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), for instance, have a role in setting the international agenda, raising climate awareness, advising policymakers, applying political pressure, holding governments accountable, and assisting in the implementation of policy (Raustiala, 2001).

The United Nations (UN) is a non-state actor of great importance in climate policy. Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are key embodiments of this fact. Through the Paris Agreement, member states are subject to a variety of reporting mechanisms and the establishment of emissions reduction targets every five years, all of which are managed by the UN. This extends beyond mere diplomacy; for many, these NDCs are translated into legally binding domestic targets. The lens of state-centrism is ill-fittingly rigid as a means of understanding climate change due to the importance of non-states. As a result,

scholarly understandings of climate change must be able to reconcile the simultaneous and interrelated roles of states and non-states.

### **Assemblage of state and non-state actants**

States and non-states both provide valuable yet incomplete accounts of climate change phenomena. Thus, it is logical to turn to an assemblage-based view that combines elements of each. The definition of an assemblage is highly suitable to framework. Firstly, states and non-states can be imagined as an ad hoc grouping. The nuances of this particular network of actants arose because of an existential threat to life on Earth. One can hardly imagine the establishment of the UNFCCC or the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), two actants with substantial influence on state behaviour, outside of these historical circumstances. The existence of strong energies and countercultures is present here as well; humans and non-humans, sovereignty, discourse, and other phenomena exist beyond the scope of states and fore demands a more holistic ontology.

definition of an assemblage is the presence of an uneven topography and distribution of power. This idea evokes the United States (U.S.), a country among the world’s heaviest emitters of greenhouse gas emissions and one of the largest producers and consumers of oil (U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), 2022). Many systems rely on the US, whether economic, social, political or otherwise, that if they were to dramatically change either their production or consumption of emission-heavy goods, the impact would be global. Among non-state actants there is an analogous phenomenon; not all independent advisory boards are as influential as the IPCC, for instance. Political decision-making and its

outcomes are affected by various structural power inequalities.

The final element of the definition, the fact of not being governed by a central power, is also informative. While the role of the UN is non-negligible and has grown as climate change politics has evolved, it does not always quite govern states and non-states in a strong sense. Whereas the Kyoto Protocol was a top-down ‘hard laws’ with modest success, “the Paris Agreement is ‘soft’ in terms of voluntary commitments, but ‘hard’ in terms of legally binding open-ended phase-out goals” (Popovski, 2018, p. 41). When one considers the importance of external non-state actors, the place of the United Nations as a central governing agent is further debilitated. Overall, while conceptualizing climate change through the lens of state or non-states in isolation has some merit, applying the core qualities of assemblages to the same phenomenon elucidates the entanglements at the heart of the issue.

## **Humans and Non-Humans**

### **Humans**

Anthropocentrism in climate change literature is a logical framework given their role in generating emissions. Kiciński and Chaja (2021) write that “many fields of human activity, especially including the world energy stands before the necessity of an immediate revision of previous, and traditional ways of development and reassessment of priorities” (p. 5), highlighting their importance in shaping climate change. Furthermore, not only do humans cause these phenomena, but they also feel their effects. This is true of weather events and droughts, as well as air quality-related concerns. Lelieveld et al. (2019) suggest that “major reductions of anthropogenic sources [of emissions] are needed to save millions of lives” (p. 7192).

Human influences are also visible in policy responses. State leaders, negotiators, and policymakers are largely responsible for how human collectives respond to climate change, and therefore for the trajectory of emissions over the coming decades. While looking at carbon pricing through the lens of states is a viable approach, it can also be seen as price-based economic policy aimed at changing how humans consume emissions-intensive goods. From a bottom-up perspective, one can also look to climate activists and social movements as humans influencing the path of public policy.

### **Non-humans**

As has been argued, a strictly human conception of climate change is necessarily incomplete; non-humans have undeniable roles to play. For instance, greenhouse gases, industry, capitalism, and other such non-human and structural actants are primary causes of climate change. Likewise, the global nature of climate change is such that its impacts are felt by all, whether human, animal, or non-human beings without consciousness (Pereira & Saramago, 2020).

Even without consciousness, non-humans can reject human knowledge systems. Callon’s (1984) Actor-Network Theory demonstrates that while humans may attempt to “translate” the world of humans and non-humans into strictly human terms through language and ill-fitting definitions, subjects can reject the definitions imposed on them, which are often misrepresentative. In the context of climate change, it becomes clear that a lens that strongly favours humans in scholarly portrayals of the non-human world is necessarily incomplete. The human inability to effectively mitigate climate change and counteract the negative effects of capitalism and industrialism are evidence of this.

### **Assemblage of human and non-human actants**

Epistemologically and ontologically, the relationship between human and non-human is different from that between states and non-states due to the difficulties of conceptualizing the non-human world in human terms. The complexity of these interactions renders this dichotomy all the more conducive to an assemblage-based conceptual framework, and the following paragraphs will demonstrate the applicability of the first four elements of Bennett's definition of an assemblage.

When considering climate change, the fact of sharing the planet demonstrates the circumstantial drive behind the relationship. From here the ad hoc nature of the associations between humans and non-humans becomes clear. Earlier analysis elaborated on the constructed nature of humanity's dominance over the non-human. Strong energies and countercultures are present here as well, systemic entities whose origins are beyond the realms of the strictly human and non-human, and yet which have profound impacts on how the two realms interact. Further pertinent examples of this are economic superstructures such as capitalism that define modern human activity and have shaped how humans have imposed themselves on the non-human, while not being elements of the strictly human or non-human world.

The uneven distribution of power is a cardinal characteristic of human/non-human dynamics. Among humans, income inequality and vulnerability to climate change vary across social groups. Additionally, humans typically subjugate and instrumentalize the non-human. For instance, agricultural practices are significant sources of greenhouse gas emissions, and they rely on humans dominating plants, animals, and technology. Similarly, the absence of a central power is

present in this assemblage, in spite of humanity's attempts to establish itself as the dominant force. Actor-network theory proves that humans and non-humans alike can reject the definitions and relationships imposed on them by human knowledge systems.

On the whole, among the main novelties of the assemblage approach to this particular IR dichotomy is the attribution of agency to not only non-human actants, but to assemblages of humans and non-humans. It is important to keep in mind that non-human agency does not imply human innocence. Bennett's (2005) distributive theory of agency takes the focus of analysis away from blame, rather putting emphasis on how actants and their agencies interact (p. 464). Given the entangled nature of climate change, such a holistic understanding is crucial.

### **Conclusion**

The preceding analysis of two central bifurcations in IR scholarship, (i) states and non-states and (ii) humans and non-humans, demonstrates that an assemblage-based approach presents a more ontologically appropriate manner of conceptualizing climate change for IR scholarship than the dominant approaches. To view climate change from the lens of either of the two sides of these dichotomies in isolation will necessarily have incomplete ontological understandings of climate change. Furthermore, a bridging of these two sides forms an assemblage that conforms well to Bennett's definition. An assemblage-based conception of climate change is both possible and more ontologically appropriate than the dominant alternatives. It enriches the question of agency in ways that biocentrism and ecocentrism do not, allowing actants and their assemblages alike to have distinct agencies.

The work of this paper could be expanded; the scope was limited to two IR dichotomies for the sake of brevity, but further applications of assemblage theory could be fruitful. For instance, a more holistic approach seems possible under assemblage theory. If bridging the gaps between the two sides of the dichotomies studied here creates an enriched understanding of climate

change, forgoing these dichotomies altogether could be fruitful. Similarly, one could apply the logic of assemblages to other complex phenomena such as world governance and international human rights. If IR is to properly conceptualize global politics in all its complexity, it must necessarily take a holistic approach.

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