



YOUNG DIPLOMATS SOCIETY PRESENTS:

# YEAR IN REVIEW

2019







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An aerial photograph of the Suez Canal, showing the waterway cutting through a desert landscape with urban areas and industrial facilities along its banks.

# MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

HOLLY-ROSE HARWIG

## SHIFTING POWER DYNAMICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

This past year has seen dramatic changes in the power dynamics of the Middle East. Changes in leadership both regionally and globally have given rise to a new era of key players. The powers and relationships in the region have been shifting and evolving for decades with regional players such as Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Turkey competing to maximise their power against international powers such as the UK, US, Russia and China. On examination, it is clear that Turkey, Russia and China are the key players who are increasingly gaining power within the region, while US influence appears to be on the decline.

## THE US STEPS BACK

Trump has criticised past US foreign policy towards the Middle East, and his administration has adopted a new approach. Last month, Trump's new Syria strategy resulted in the withdrawal of US troops from Northern Syria where they had been backing Kurdish forces as part of a mission previously focused on fighting IS and now instead focusing on containing Iran. The US has maintained a focus on Iran; however, when it comes to diplomatic leadership in the peace process and conflict management in the region it has stepped back. While US troops still have a significant presence within the region, a lack of support in the US domestically has resulted in limited military engagement. The US strategy towards the Middle East is confused: a strategy of diplomatic engagement that tries to pursue

regional military and economic frameworks to limit Iran's influence may still provide results, but for it to be successful the US would need to persuade regional partners that they have staying power.

## SHIFTING ALIGNMENTS: TURKEY AND RUSSIA COOPERATE IN SYRIA

The decision by the US to withdraw from Syria has led to new alignments and agreements between key players. On October 22, the Turkish-Russian Memorandum of Understanding was signed. This agreement granted Turkey what is essentially control over a large portion of north-east Syria.

The Turkish incursion into Syria will undoubtedly continue to impact regional political dynamics and may possibly lead to a land swap agreement between Russia and Turkey. This is a trend whereby Russia and Turkey are each granting the other permission to control an area or facilitating offensives in different parts of Syria. Practically speaking, this exchange furthers their geopolitical ambitions. Nearly all major Turkish military operations since late 2016 have been "paired" with a major Russian-backed Government of Syria offensive. For example: Operation Euphrates Shield, the military operation that led to the Turkish occupation of northern Syria, began weeks before the escalation of the government siege in Aleppo; the fall of eastern Aleppo was shortly followed by the Turkish operation in Al-Bab; and the Government of Syria offensive on Eastern Ghouta occurred concurrently with the Turkish-backed operation Olive Branch in Afrin.



This trend has been recognised by Syrian analysts as land swapping, and a component of the Russian–Turkish relationship within Syria. While it is unclear, following trends between the two states, whether a similar dynamic will occur with the current Syrian climate, it is possible. If such an agreement does occur, it will cause mass displacement in north-west Syria that will require a development and humanitarian response.



Aleppo – Stijn Hüwels (flickr.com)

After the Cold War, the US was the dominant external player within the Middle East; however, Russia returned to the Middle East in 2015, intervening in the Syrian civil war. The aim of Russian engagement is to re-establish themselves as a key global power at a time when US influence is declining in the region.

Before deploying militarily in Syria, Russia had already begun taking action in the region. Putin's strategy focuses heavily on relationships with the states in the region: he has invested a large amount of time visiting states such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Israel, Jordan, Qatar, Iran and Turkey. To help strengthen these relationships, Russia promotes its belief in state sovereignty and its opposition to external interference and internal popular uprisings. In doing so, they present themselves as a contrast to the US: a state that will not criticise other states on human rights abuses or societal freedoms, but focus on trade, energy diplomacy and investment. Russia and the Middle East combined hold more than 60 per cent of the world's gas and proven oil reserves, producing 50 per cent of the world's oil and 40 per cent of its natural gas.

This yields a large amount of power: when Russia and the Middle East pursue common interests and cooperate, it has a significant impact on the gas and oil markets across the globe. Russia's relationships in the region and energy diplomacy have allowed them not only to generate influence in the region, but also to increase oil prices in OPEC countries and offset Western sanctions. In turn, Russia has helped Middle Eastern countries by generating revenue, some of which has been used to conduct major weapons purchases from Russia and to invest in Russian bodies such as the Russian Direct Investment Fund. However, while Russian influence in the MENA region has been on the incline these past few years, in the future, the heavy dependence on oil and gas revenue will be challenged by shifts in the energy market, such as climate change policies aimed at reducing, if not eliminating, fossil fuel use.

Russia also exports significant nuclear technology to the Middle East, and has deals with Iran, Egypt and Jordan to build nuclear power plants. Discussions are also underway with Saudi Arabia to build 16 nuclear reactors by 2032. Russia sells 50 per cent of their arms to the Middle East in 2019, up from 36 per cent back in 2015. Additionally, their military involvement in Syria has enabled Russia to field test new weapons and delivery systems, while simultaneously advertising Russian equipment in action. While the US military arsenal is still seen as the best in the region, the foreign policy attachments involved in purchasing from the US, the requirement to protect Israel's qualitative military edge, and the slow process with the US sales have many Middle Eastern states frustrated. Given such frustrations, Russia is seen by Middle Eastern leaders as a viable alternative for armaments.

## THE ROLE OF CHINA

China's role in the Middle East is more economic than military; unlike Russia and the US, China does not direct regional affairs, but builds diplomatic and economic ties to place them in a position that will be more influential in the future. To China, the Middle East is one of the most important regions of the world outside the Asia-Pacific, as it connects China, through the Suez



Canal, to the Mediterranean and Europe. In addition, it is a source of much needed energy resources. As such, China has set up a military base in Djibouti on an important fishing lane in the Horn of Africa. Outside of this, China's military involvement has been minimal; it even refused to join counter-IS coalitions both financially and militarily.



Xi Jinping – Global Panorama (flickr.com)

China's relationships in the Middle East are driven by a pursuit of reliable access to the region's energy resources, which they need to fuel their domestic growth. The need for energy and access to economic markets globally has led China to source half of their oil needs from North Africa and the Middle East, and they have become the top oil buyer from Saudi Arabia and Iran. The International Atomic Energy Agency expects China to double its imports from the region by 2035. China is able to remain disentangled from the region's conflicts by free riding on US efforts to ensure the region's security, allowing them to expand their economic engagement. While China is currently approaching relations with a strategy to avoid the various regional conflicts, as their economic presence expands, so too will the need for more political involvement, and their growing economic involvement will bring security responsibilities.

## CONCLUSION

Economic and military developments within the Middle East have led to an increase in Turkish, Russian and Chinese power within the MENA region over the past few years. In comparison, the decision by the US to withdraw their troops from

Syria has demonstrated a decline in US influence in the region. That is not to say that they have no presence or power, only that they are being challenged and that other players such as Russia and China are potentially gaining influence.

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In addition to her full-time study, Holly now works part-time as a receptionist and runs two Airbnbs. She has been the Middle East and North Africa content writer since September 2019.



# SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

ANET MCCLINTOCK

## SUDAN: A YEAR OF PROTEST

Sudan had one of the most brutal government reactions to a popular protest in the world in 2019. In April, pro-democracy and pro-military supporters took to the streets, in a mass protest of Omar al-Bashir's authoritarian government.

Tensions started in December 2018, when President al-Bashir introduced strong austerity measures in order to stave off economic collapse. The measures included cuts to fuel and food subsidies, sparking anger over Sudan's low living standards.

Although the protests initially started in Sudan's east, the movement spread to the country's capital, Khartoum. What were originally protests over low living standards quickly grew into calls for the resignation of al-Bashir, who had governed Sudan for more than thirty years.

On April 6, protesters occupied the square in front of Sudan's military headquarters, calling for the military to remove the president from office. The date is symbolic, being the anniversary of the non-violent protests which removed dictator Jaafar Nimeiri in 1985.

Although the protests began with Sudanese from all parts of life, the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), a group of doctors, health workers, and lawyers, led the movement. Women also played a large role, making up as much as 70 per cent of the protesters, and using the opportunity to also protest sexist attitudes in Sudan. The movement was also overwhelmingly

young, reflective of Sudan's demographics.

On April 11, Sudan's seven-member Transitional Military Council (TMC), headed by Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman Burhan, took control of the country. Sudan's military was not a unified force however, comprising several splinter groups and militias. The TMC was also largely composed of military officials who were close to President Al-Bashir, and criticism of the TMC quickly arose.



March in solidarity with the Sudanese revolution in Berlin [cropped] – Hossam el-Hamalawy (flickr.com)

The SPA called for a peaceful sit-in outside Sudan's military headquarters in Khartoum, in defiance of a curfew imposed by the TMC. The protesters wanted power transferred to a civilian government.

On June 3 the TMC reacted against the protesters, killing 7 and wounding at least 200 during a brutal crackdown. Roads and bridges were closed following calls from the SPA for protesters to head to the presidential palace. A month later, at least five school-aged children were shot by the military council's security forces.



After weeks of stalled talks, on July 17 the TMC and the democratic protesters signed a power-sharing accord, and a new constitution is being drawn up for Sudan. A new transitional body, comprising five military leaders and six civilian leaders, will govern Sudan until elections can be held.

The trial of Omar al-Bashir began in August this year. The president is standing trial in Sudan's highest court on corruption charges, though many Sudanese are angered that he is not facing more serious charges. The Sudanese authorities have also failed to turn over al-Bashir to the International Criminal Court in the Hague, where he is wanted to stand trial for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

## ETHIOPIAN PM WINS NOBEL PRIZE

Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was awarded the revered Nobel Peace Prize in December. Mr Abiy, in his early forties, received the prize for breaking through decades of deadlocked conflicts with Ethiopia's small neighbour, Eritrea, and setting the country on a course for peace.

Despite sharing many cultural and ethnic ties, the two countries' disputes go as far back as World War II. The most recent conflict began in May 1998, when approximately 75,000 Eritreans were deported from Ethiopia. A two-year border dispute followed, which led to the deaths of 80,000 people. Since then, Ethiopia and Eritrea had been in a protracted conflict that saw both countries in a state of neither peace nor war.

When Mr Abiy assumed leadership of Ethiopia in 2018, he immediately pursued talks with Eritrea in an attempt to break the deadlocked conflict that has led to political oppression and economic breakdown in both countries. As part of these talks, Mr Abiy has lifted Ethiopia's state of emergency, granted amnesty to hundreds of political prisoners, dismissed corrupt political and military leaders, and weakened media censorship.

Diplomatic relations between the two countries have resumed.

Many Ethiopians and Eritreans have rejoiced over the prospect of peace. The border conflict resulted in thousands of families being separated and unable to gain contact. The peace talks have restored telecommunications lines over the border, and many families and friends have been reunited.

Despite the successes of the talks, many are still sceptical. Not least the citizens of Eritrea, who are still living under the authoritarian leadership of rebel-turned-dictator, President Isaias Afwerki. Mr Isaias has used the peace deals as a justification for suspending the constitution, and instating an indefinite state of emergency in Eritrea.



Abiy Ahmed, left – Statsministerens kontor (flickr.com)

## HOPE AND DISAPPOINTMENT IN ZIMBABWE

For Zimbabwe, the year started with hope. In 2018 the country held its first elections without former dictator Robert Mugabe on the ballot. Emmerson Mnangagwa, Mr Mugabe's deputy, was elected to the country's top position.

Mr Mnangagwa, his government, and many other high-level government officials promised to reform Zimbabwe, after decades of economic mismanagement and government corruption. Many Zimbabwean residents were hopeful that reform would improve their living standards and economic fortunes. Mr Mnangagwa debuted his



“Zim is open for business” mantra, aiming to entice investors and attract foreign capital to the country.



Emmerson Mnangagwa – World Economic Forum (flickr.com)

Unfortunately the atmosphere of hope was short-lived. In January, hundreds of Zimbabweans took to the streets to protest a 150 per cent increase in fuel prices. The demonstrations quickly escalated in protest of declining living standards in the country. Protesters barricaded the main roads with burning tires, tree branches, and blocks of stone. Mr Mnangagwa’s government responded with a violent crackdown that resulted in the deaths of at least five people.

The Zimbabwean dollar also continued to fall throughout the year, and inflation soared. In February, for the first time in a decade, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe reintroduced the Zimbabwean dollar. In June, the government banned US dollars and other foreign currencies, which had dominated the Zimbabwean economy since 2009. Unfortunately, these measures failed to curb skyrocketing inflation. In August, the inflation rate was calculated at 300 per cent by the International Monetary Fund. Many economists were sceptical of the new currency, saying it was merely a new currency masking old problems.

On September 6, Mr Mugabe, Zimbabwe’s dictator of 37 years, passed away. His death led many Zimbabweans to question whether life had improved since the coup against the authoritarian in 2017. Unfortunately, many Zimbabwean citizens felt that Mr Mnangagwa’s government had let

them down. Despite the promises of the new government, living standards continue to decrease, and the cost of living is putting a strain on families. The cost of bread has increased seven-fold since the start of the year. Essential medicines are becoming scarce, and there’s a shortage of cash, fuel and household items. Power outages mean that some residents are left without power for as long as 18 hours per day. Zimbabwe’s health system has collapsed, along with other state infrastructure, amid the worst economic crisis in more than a decade.

This increased strain led to another series of protests at the start of November. Furthermore, in September, hundreds of state-employed doctors went on strike to protest low wages, poor treatment and job insecurity. These protests were followed by hundreds of other public sector workers demanding their jobs be indexed to the US dollar. Nelson Chamisa, leader of the opposing Movement for Democratic Change party, capitalised on these protests, accusing Mr Mnangagwa of using the same heavy-handed tactics as Mr Mugabe.

The government responded to the protests by using tear gas, batons, and water cannons to disperse dissenting crowds. Recent marches to protest Mr Mnangagwa’s government, led by human rights and opposition groups, have been met by a strong police resistance. Mr Mnangagwa has asked the Zimbabwean public to allow for more time for his austerity measures to become effective.

## RAMAPHOSA NARROWLY WINS SOUTH AFRICAN ELECTION

In May South Africa held its sixth election since the end of apartheid in 1994. The African National Congress (ANC), party of the late Nelson Mandela, retained its position as the country’s governing party. Cyril Ramaphosa has been re-elected as president.

The ANC has won every election since 1994, but there are signs that confidence in the party is starting to dwindle. The ANC won 58 per cent of

the vote, an all-time low for the party.

Voters are worried about corruption and economic mismanagement. These worries are compounded by high unemployment rates. The party is also plagued by the legacy of Jacob Zuma, who was forced to resign early last year due to allegations of rampant corruption for which he is standing trial next year. Mr Ramaphosa promised to address incompetence and corruption within the party.

Another reason for the lower support of the ANC: high unemployment rates. Currently, one in five South Africans is unemployed; of that number, more than half are under 30. Young people in South Africa are turning to the radical left Economic Freedom Fighters, led by Julius Malema. The EFF gained 11 per cent of the vote this year, making them the third largest party in the parliament.



Cyril Ramaphosa – GovernmentZA (flickr.com)

## SOUTH SUDAN STRUGGLES TO FOSTER PEACE

In November 2019, South Sudan was set to institute a transitional government that would lead the country to peace. South Sudan, the world's newest country, has been in a state of civil war since 2013. Only three years after South Sudan gained independence from Sudan, large-scale violence broke out when President Salva Kiir accused his vice-president Riek Machar of attempting to stage a coup. Machar is a former rebel leader for the South Sudan People's Liberation Army. Those loyal

to Machar took up arms against the forces of President Kiir.

In late 2018, Kiir, Machar and other leaders signed the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. The Agreement outlined the formation of a transitional government, which would lead the country to peace, with a deadline set for November 12, 2019.

Several key disagreements have led to delays in the implementation of a unified government. At the forefront is the stipulation that Machar has to be included in any government that Kiir forms. This will be a difficult feat, as Machar and Kiir have not cooperated with each other since 2013.

Another enormous task is the unification of not only the Sudan People's Liberation Army, but also several localised, fragmented militias. Despite pressure from the US and other international forces, South Sudan's instability, and shortage of resources and money meant that the November 12 deadline was not met. The creation of a unified government was pushed back another 100 days, although given the many issues that remain to be solved, it appears unlikely that the new government will be formed within the 100 days.

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# EUROPE

BRENDAN MCGING

Although Brexit dominated the European news cycle in 2019, the world kept turning beyond it. Other major developments occurred across Europe throughout the year:

## PROTESTS IN FRANCE

2019 in France was marked by mass protests. The “Gilets Jaunes” or “Yellow Vest” protests began in late 2018 and continued throughout 2019. Just as the movement began to lose steam towards the end of the year, proposed changes to France’s pension system sparked the largest general strike and protests the country has seen in decades.



Gilets Jaunes protesters – Jeanne Menjoulet (flickr.com)

## YELLOW VEST PROTESTS

Initially sparked by an increased fuel tax, the protests were eventually used to express anger at the cost of living and general dissatisfaction with the Macron government. Though the protests were at their largest in late 2018 – when more than a quarter of a million people took to the streets – they continued throughout 2019, and

became increasingly violent. In March, 32,000 demonstrators took to the streets, erecting barricades, setting fires and clashing with riot police. Protesters hurled cobblestones and other projectiles at the police officers, who responded with tear gas and rubber bullets.

Although numbers dwindled as 2019 wore on, protestors clashed with police following the Bastille Day parade on July 14, and again in mid-November to mark the one-year anniversary of the start of the protests.

The movement entered a new phase in December, when a general strike was declared and mass protests began in opposition to Macron’s attempts to reform the French pension system. The remaining Yellow Vest protesters joined with those opposing the pension reforms, bringing France into a new period of mass unrest.

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## NAME ORIGIN: THE “GILETS JAUNES”

The Yellow Vest protesters gained their name from the fluorescent yellow safety vests they wear while demonstrating. All French drivers are required to carry such a vest in their vehicle in case of an accident.

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## PENSION REFORM PROTESTS

Beginning on December 5, 2019, massive nationwide strikes and protests put pressure on Macron to abandon his radical pension reforms. France currently has 42 different pension systems, which are some of the most generous in the

world. Macron aims to replace these disparate systems with a single points-based system. Opposition has been fierce, with 800,000 turning out across France on the first day of protests. Mass strikes alongside the protests have wreaked havoc across the country, with transport services being the hardest hit. The protests continued throughout December and into January 2020.

French unions are uniformly opposed to the plan, which they see as taking away the benefits they worked so hard to achieve in decades past. Macron has indicated a willingness to compromise but remains determined to pass the reforms. An accord seems far-off given the gulf between the position of the French government and that of the protestors and unions.

## CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

2019 saw significant progress in the resolution of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. In 2014, Russian-backed separatists took control of parts of the eastern Donbas region in Ukraine, and the conflict has since claimed over 13,000 lives. Two ceasefire agreements between Russia and Ukraine signed in Minsk in 2014 and 2015 failed to halt the bloodshed, with little further diplomatic progress until 2019.

The landslide election win of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in April has been key. The former comedian swept to victory on a platform of bringing peace to eastern Ukraine. Zelenskyy swiftly took action to carry out his pledge, despite facing some internal opposition from despite facing some domestic opposition from both sections of the general public and members of his own party who saw his conciliatory efforts as surrendering to Russia.

A landmark prisoner swap took place between Ukraine and Russia on September 7. 35 Ukrainian prisoners were returned, 24 of whom were crewmembers of three Ukrainian Navy ships seized by Russia as they passed through the Kerch Strait (off the coast of the Russian-occupied Crimea peninsula) in November 2018.

In early October, Ukraine and the separatists

signed an agreement designed to lead to elections in the disputed region. The elections will only take place when no troops are in place, and will be monitored to ensure legitimacy by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Zelenskyy began moving Ukrainian troops back from their frontline positions in accordance with the requirements of the agreement the day after it was announced. Separatist forces also announced their withdrawal from several areas.

A December summit of the “Normandy Four” (Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany) leaders in Paris culminated in an agreement to implement a “full and comprehensive” ceasefire by the end of 2019. The ceasefire is yet to officially occur, although there have been no further outbreaks of violence. Ukraine and Russia also agreed to release all “conflict-related detainees” by the end of 2019. A second, much larger prisoner swap took place in late December, aimed to fulfil this agreement. 81 Ukrainian prisoners were released in exchange for 124 separatists. However, some prisoners held by Ukraine refused to be exchanged, and in return the separatists withheld an equal number of Ukrainian prisoners. Both parties have also pledged to withdraw troops from three more areas by March 2020. These areas remain undefined.



Volodymyr Zelenskyy – U.S. Embassy Kyiv Ukraine (flickr.com)

The diplomatic progress made during 2019 is encouraging, yet major roadblocks remain. It is unclear if the cease-fire agreement will hold, or if it will suffer the fate of the Minsk agreements of 2014 and 2015. There are still major items of disagreement between Ukraine and Russia, including the withdrawal of separatist forces from



disputed areas and the format of elections.

Zelenskyy also faces domestic barriers: central to the election agreement is the ability of the Donbas region to assume a form of autonomous government while remaining part of Ukraine. This requires an amendment to the Ukrainian Constitution, a highly difficult task on such a polarising issue. Many in Ukraine still see the agreements as surrendering to Russia.

Despite the remaining roadblocks, 2019 saw more progress in resolving the conflict than the previous four years combined.

## CONCLUSION

In the media, Brexit has overshadowed developments that may be legacy-defining for two maverick world leaders. President Macron of France and President Zelenskyy of Ukraine have each taken steps they see as necessary for the advancement of their nations. While their respective policies may be unpopular domestically, Macron and Zelenskyy are pushing forward with their agendas, for better or for worse.

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# EAST ASIA

CELINE LAU

## CHINA: HEADACHES, AS PREDICTED

Earlier in the year, Wang Yang, the Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, warned his colleagues that 2019 may bring unforeseen risks and challenges. He was right to be cautious. The past twelve months have seen China wrangling with a multitude of problems, chief among these being:

- China's slowing economic growth and its protracted trade war with the United States;
- International condemnation over its human rights record, especially its treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang; and
- An outbreak of the African swine fever virus, which has led to devastating shortages in pork supply.

China's rate of economic development hit a 27-year low in the third quarter of 2019. GDP expansion slowed to six per cent, the lowest rate since 1992, amid falling consumer demand and a 17-month-long trade war with the United States.

In 2019 alone, Washington imposed tariffs on over \$200 billion (AUD\$292 billion) of Chinese goods. Come December 15, \$156 billion dollars (AUD\$228 billion) worth of Chinese products will be subjected to a new round of tariffs – a move that effectively impacts all Chinese imports to the United States.

China has, of course, countered by placing 25 per cent tariffs on \$60 billion (AUD\$87 billion) of US

goods. But this retaliatory exchange is not sustainable in the long term. It weakens both countries' economies and increases the likelihood of a global recession.

The world's two largest economies have been striving all year to negotiate a deal that will de-escalate trade tensions, but to little avail. Both parties remain at loggerheads over the finer details of a deal. And with the Sino-American relationship fracturing over human rights issues, it is unlikely that the trade war will be resolved by the end of the year.

In 2019, the United States introduced a spate of legislation targeting China's human rights record. These bills aimed to compel China into safeguarding its citizens' civil and political rights. However, the newly-minted Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act<sup>1</sup> and the recent passage of the Uyghur Intervention and Global Humanitarian Unified Response Act<sup>2</sup> in the House of Representatives have likely only succeeded in vexing Beijing.

Shortly after President Trump signed the HKRDA into law, Beijing banned US military aircrafts and naval vessels from visiting Hong Kong. The Chinese government has also sanctioned several US-based non-governmental organisations such as Freedom House and Human Rights Watch, accusing them of fomenting public discord in the Asian financial hub.

If anything, congressional support for the Hong Kong pro-democracy movement and for Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang is expected to arouse Chinese



recalcitrance during trade talks. No doubt, Beijing will be wary of any US attempts to exact unfavourable trade concessions on the basis of human rights violations.

But beyond economic woes, heavy tariffs and accusations of human rights abuses, China was forced to confront what may be the most inauspicious challenge it could have faced in the year of the pig: an outbreak of African swine fever.

Harmless to humans yet deadly for pigs, the rapid spread of African swine fever in China has led to the mass culling of over a third of China's pig population (a figure numbering upwards of 200 million) and, subsequently, soaring pork prices. In October, the price of pork had more than doubled (increasing by 101 per cent) compared to the previous year.

The significance of depleted pork stocks should not be understated. China consumes almost half of the world's total supply of pork. The meat acts as the main dietary protein for 1.4 billion people. And when the price of pork increases, the prices of other meats do too, as vendors respond to the rising demand for pork substitutes.

A severe pork shortage poses a serious problem not only socially, but politically. Major increases to the cost of living threaten the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party, whose mandate to govern is based on its capacity to provide stability and prosperity to the Chinese people.



18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China – Dong Fang  
(Wikimedia Commons)

## HONG KONG: A YEAR OF DISCONTENT

In 2019, Hong Kong was engulfed in social and political turmoil to a degree hitherto unseen in the city. The Hong Kong government's proposed extradition bill has sparked months of consecutive weekend protests, many of which have culminated in violent clashes between protestors and riot police.

The proposed legislation aimed to amend Hong Kong's extradition laws to allow the city to transfer fugitives to jurisdictions it does not have formal extradition treaties with – Taiwan, Macau and mainland China.

The bill quickly incited fierce public opposition. It was widely feared that the bill would erode the legal firewall between Hong Kong and mainland China, putting Hong Kong residents at risk of extradition to a jurisdiction where fair trials, due process and humane treatment are not guaranteed.

If passed, the bill would also apply retroactively. This further cemented the belief in protestors' minds that the bill effectively extends the reach of Beijing's influence (in contravention of the 'One Country, Two Systems' arrangement) and facilitates the Chinese government's sweeping prosecution of dissidents.

Over time, the anti-extradition bill struggle has morphed into a broader pro-democracy movement agitating for democratic freedoms and increased police accountability. So, although the bill was officially withdrawn on September 4, public animosity towards the government has not abated and demonstrations continue to take place in Hong Kong today.

Much of the current anger is focused on the Hong Kong police's excessive use of force during protests. From tear gas (some of which was expired or deployed in poorly-ventilated spaces) to water cannons to live rounds and indiscriminate assault on protestors and bystanders alike, police conduct has resulted in

public attitudes towards them shifting for the worse.



2019.12.08 Hong Kong Protest – doctorho (flickr.com)

Yet the police's heavy-handed use of force has not relented in the face of criticism. On the contrary, Hong Kong police have justified their heavy-handed tactics on the basis that the protestors are "cockroaches" whose violent actions pose a dangerous threat to society.

The economic fallout of the protests has already begun to take effect. The city has been pushed into recession for the first time in a decade and Hong Kong's revenue is expected to drop 25 per cent in the last quarter of the financial year. Though protest violence has hit small business owners the hardest (e.g. street vendors and restaurant owners), banks and law firms are now re-evaluating their plans in the region over fears of losing business to companies in Singapore.

[Check out the YDS fact sheet on page 28 for more information about the protests, the extradition bill and a timeline of events.]

## JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA: THE SHADOW OF HISTORY

Relations between Japan and South Korea reached new lows in 2019. From trade disputes to the dissolution of a joint intelligence-sharing pact, the two East Asian neighbours have spent much of the year absorbed in a tit-for-tat exchange of diplomatic and economic blows.

Tensions between Tokyo and Seoul had been brewing for a while over unsettled historical grievances. On one hand, there is South Korea's lingering resentment over its maltreatment under Japanese colonial rule. On the other hand, Japan maintains that the 1965 Treaty on Basic Relations and the recompense delivered under it have conclusively addressed its wartime misconduct. Tokyo grows frustrated with Seoul's refusal to accept these contributions as sufficient reparations.

The first trade blow came in July when Japan restricted exports of key semi-conductor materials to South Korea – resists, fluorinated polyimide and hydrogen fluoride. These chemicals are integral to the production of chips, display panels and smartphones.

Tokyo justified this decision on the basis of declining trust between the two countries, a move widely believed to be retaliation for a 2018 South Korean court ruling that ordered Nippon Steel, a Japanese firm, to compensate South Korean persons who were victims of forced labour during Japan's wartime occupation of the Korean peninsula.

Later in the same month, Japan announced it would remove South Korea from its whitelist of trading partners, meaning that Seoul would no longer enjoy minimal trade restrictions. The Blue House immediately protested the decision, claiming that it would undermine Tokyo-Seoul economic relations and potentially disrupt global supply chains.

In August, it was Seoul who struck back, withdrawing from the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) – an intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan.<sup>3</sup> South Korea stated that it was no longer in its "national interest" to participate in the agreement, given the volatile security conditions wrought by Japan's increased export controls.

But by November, both Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and South Korean President Moon Jae-in had come to realise that their deteriorating relationship was neither tenable nor productive.





Shinzo Abe [cropped] – U.S. Secretary of Defense (flickr.com)

Moon Jae-in [cropped] – Republic of Korea (flickr.com)

They met for the first time in over a year on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in Bangkok. In the meeting, both leaders discussed how best to resolve their diplomatic and trade dispute. Moon suggested high-level dialogue, while Abe favoured using all available means at their disposal.

Needless to say, it will take a concerted effort from all stakeholders to pull Tokyo-Seoul relations out of their destructive spiral. The shadow of history still looms large. And while Moon and Abe have agreed to mend their ties, they will still face significant hurdles to success. Neither country will wish to lose face in the process – a genuine risk given both leaders' history of positioning their country as the wronged party.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The HKRDA requires the United States to conduct an annual review of Hong Kong's level of political autonomy and enact economic penalties against China should the review find that the city's freedoms have deteriorated.
- <sup>2</sup> The Uyghur Act instructs various agencies within the US government to monitor and report on the Chinese government's crackdown on Uyghur Muslims. The bill also urges the US President to sanction Xinjiang Community Party Secretary Chen Quanguo for his involvement in human rights violations in the region. The Act has so far received bipartisan support and is awaiting Senate approval.
- <sup>3</sup> The GSOMIA was set up in November 2016 to allow South Korea and Japan to bypass American channels and share sensitive security information, such as North Korean nuclear and missile threats, directly with each other.



# SOUTHEAST ASIA

NANTHINI SAMBANTHAN

## ON THE RELEVANCE OF ASEAN

Is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) still relevant in this time of changing global realities? Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the world has undergone a period of sustained global order based on the liberal values of the post-WWII era. However, this liberal world order seems to be crumbling, aided in large part by the countries that created this system in the first place.

This volatility in global politics has not left Southeast Asia untouched. In fact, ASEAN faces some of the gravest threats to its legitimacy and continued relevance in its 52-year history. 2019 was an especially eventful year with major elections in several ASEAN countries, the completion of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations, the Rakhine State crisis being thrust once again into the global spotlight, and the ever-present South China Sea issues.

## FORMATION

As some of these issues, particularly the negative ones, continue to dominate the press, the question of ASEAN's relevance persists. Part of the answer lies in the reason for ASEAN's formation in the first place. In 1967, at the height of the Cold War, ASEAN was founded by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. International interference was pervasive in the region, particularly with the conflict in then-Indochina. In addition, most of the founding countries were in some variation of conflict with

each other. ASEAN was created to prevent the "Balkanisation" of the region and continued external interference, thereby ensuring a stable and prosperous Southeast Asia.

However, sovereignty was a key national priority for the ASEAN countries at that time as most had just regained their independence. As a result, ASEAN was built on a system of voluntary agreements, rather than legally binding institutionalised agreements. The fundamental principles by which ASEAN conducts its activities are enshrined in the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation of Southeast Asia, which includes the "right of a state to lead its national existence free from external interference..." and "[n]on-interference in the internal affairs of one another". ASEAN's conduct as an organisation must be viewed in light of these factors.

The current debate surrounding ASEAN's relevance tends to intensify around two specific issues that go to the heart of the organisation: the territorial disputes over the South China Sea and the Rakhine State crisis in Myanmar.

## SOUTH CHINA SEA

China's continued insistence on the nine-dash line and its territorial claims exemplifies a lack of unity in the face of national vs regional trade-offs. Building internal trust has always been a key priority of ASEAN with measures such as consensus-based decision making and voluntary agreements. However, this also means that any lack of unity among members effectively paralyses decision-making.



A Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea was first drafted in 2018 with the leaders of China and ASEAN agreeing to finalise the COC by 2022. While the first reading of the text to negotiate the COC was completed ahead of schedule in July 2019, several hurdles remain.

ASEAN's weak bargaining power is of particular significance. China has consistently pushed against resolving the territorial issues in the South China Sea on a multilateral basis with a united ASEAN in order to maximize its bargaining power. While the COC is a multilateral declaration, it also lays bare the lack of consensus within the ASEAN member states in negotiating with China.

With some states more dependent on China than others, national interests conflict with regional interests. In this case, the very mechanism of consensus-based decision making that was meant to ensure unity and trust between the member states, is now undermining the notion of "ASEAN centrality" altogether. The organisation meant to prevent external interference in the region unfortunately seems to be hampered by its consensus-based, decision-making mechanisms, highlighting a lack of responsiveness to modern security realities.



Participants of the ASEAN Regional Forum Retreat – U.S. Department of State (Wikimedia Commons)

## RAKHINE STATE

The Rakhine State crisis in Myanmar is a long-running issue for ASEAN which has re-erupted in the last few years. Since Myanmar's entry into ASEAN, its persecution of the Rohingya people has been a constant issue for the organisation. There has been international condemnation of the

Myanmar government and military due to the scale of the ongoing crisis in Rakhine, the vast numbers of refugees and the reports and eyewitness accounts of widespread atrocities. Although international bodies have taken action (for example, the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar and the investigations by the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court) there is significant pressure on ASEAN to develop a regional response.

Unlike previous refusals by Myanmar to entertain this issue at the regional level, the "boat people" crisis in 2015 led Myanmar to respond to international pressure by calling an informal ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Yangon in December 2016. Perhaps due in part to the trust built up by ASEAN during their coordination of the foreign humanitarian activities during the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis in 2009, ASEAN was allowed humanitarian access to the Rakhine State via the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre).

However, ASEAN's actions are still very much constrained by its foundational principles of "non-intervention" and "non-interference" in the domestic affairs of member states. Any offers of assistance must be first accepted by Myanmar, and stay strictly within its remit in order to encourage further engagement with ASEAN. A leaked AHA Centre report was criticised for not using the word 'Rohingya' or mentioning reasons for the Rohingya exodus. However, any deviation from the AHA Centre's mandate might have resulted in Myanmar completely disengaging with ASEAN. As the only political organisation with legitimate though limited access to the region, any loss of trust in ASEAN may jeopardise what little progress has been made with regards to the Rakhine State crisis.

## RETURN TO GLOBAL UNCERTAINTY

The assertions that ASEAN may have reached the end of its relevance or effectiveness ignore the volatile global context in which the organisation was founded. The organisation was designed to enable its members to maintain a sense of

regional unity while holding onto their hard-won sovereignty and cultural diversity. The current global climate of great power rivalry and general volatility is a return to the circumstances which birthed ASEAN in the first place. As such, ASEAN's relevance should not only be viewed in terms of what *has* happened, but also what *has not* happened.

For over 50 years, ASEAN has kept peace among its members, a feat unmatched by almost every other region. The organisation has contributed to the stability of the region by developing a neutral forum for its members and others in the greater region to discuss controversial and sensitive issues. It has also helped the region develop economically, with several free-trade agreements and the recent completion of the RCEP. This is a significant step forward for the region, regardless of India's late withdrawal from the agreement.

While ASEAN may be at an impasse in certain issues, the organisation can still be seen moving forward in others. ASEAN must work to take advantage of its existing mechanisms and develop new strategies to deal with the complex, new security realities of the current time. It would be premature to simply dismiss the organisation as no longer relevant.

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Prior to joining RSIS, Nanthini was an intern at the Asia-Europe Foundation in Singapore. She has written for the Young Diplomats as their Regional Content Writer for Southeast Asia since 2018. Her research interests include human security in Southeast Asia, looking at the HADR landscape through a gendered lens and the role of multilateralism in the security architecture of the Asia-Pacific.



# SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA

ANNIE JIANG

## INDIA: THE FEAR OF HINDU NATIONALISM

In 2019, India saw growing concerns about the oppression and marginalisation of Muslims by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government. Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) were re-elected in May by a significant majority. Since then, Modi has taken multiple steps that appear to be aimed disenfranchising India's Muslim minority. While Modi himself has denied accusations that he is pursuing Hindu nationalist policies, other members of the BJP have been more vocal about their adherence to Hindutva, an ideology that views India as the Hindu homeland.

## MODI REVOKES KASHMIR STATEHOOD

In August 2019, Modi withdrew the statehood of Jammu and Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state. To do so, Modi's government revoked Articles 370 and 35A of the Constitution. Article 370 gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, allowing it special autonomy in terms of law-making, as well as land rights; Article 35A allowed Kashmir to define its own permanent residents and give them privileges. Modi deprived Jammu and Kashmir of its special status and then bifurcated it into two union territories: Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. No local leaders were consulted in the process.

In the lead up to Modi revoking the region's statehood, the government deployed troops and imposed a lockdown, which remains ongoing.

Thousands of Kashmiris, including more than 200 politicians, have been detained, though some have since been released. The government has also blocked phone networks and imposed an internet ban, severing almost all lines to the outside world.

Update: On January 10, 2020, the Supreme Court declared freedom of speech and expression through the internet a fundamental right under the Constitution of India, but the internet ban has yet to be lifted.



Narendra Modi [cropped] – Narendra Modi (flickr.com)

## THE CITIZENSHIP LAW PROTESTS

Mass protests have erupted in India since the passing of a new citizenship law in December 2019. The Citizenship Amendment Act provides a path to Indian citizenship for immigrants that illegally entered India by 2014 and are of certain religious minorities. It applies to those of the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian religious communities, but notably excludes Muslims.

Modi's party has claimed the law is intended to protect persecuted migrants from neighbouring countries by providing a path to naturalisation. However, critics see it as just another example of Modi's Hindu nationalist government policies.

The law will likely act in tandem with a national citizenship review that will require residents to produce documentation proving they are citizens – difficult in a country where many people do not have access to such records. It is argued this will result in Muslims in India being disenfranchised, though Modi has denied this allegation. The citizenship review has been trialled in India's Assam region, but a nationwide version has yet to be implemented.

The law has been criticised for shifting from India's founders' vision of a secular nation, and protesters claim it is discriminatory and unconstitutional. The protests began in the week the law was passed and have continued ever since. Modi and his government have taken measures to respond: internet bans, prohibitions on public gatherings, curfews, and arrests and detentions. So far, there have been 23 deaths, hundreds of injuries, and thousands have been detained.

## BANGLADESH: RELOCATING THE ROHINGYA REFUGEES

The UN refugee agency estimates that around 313,000 Rohingyas have fled from Myanmar's Rakhine state to Bangladesh since the latest round of violence in August 2019. This brings the total number of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh to around one million, with around 700,000 having arrived since the most recent and ongoing crackdown by the Myanmar military, which began in August 2017. Most of the refugees live in camps in Cox's Bazar peninsula, the world's largest refugee settlement.

In November, UNHCR was criticised for announcing it would help refugees visit Myanmar to consider returning to the Rakhine state. A few months prior, Myanmar officials visited Cox's Bazar in an attempt to persuade the refugees to

repatriate, despite ongoing attacks. While repatriation is a dangerous solution, the situation is complex: Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are living in sub-par conditions: flimsy shelters in large and over-crowded settlements, unable to work and often surviving off local generosity.



The refugee settlements at Cox's Bazar  
EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (flickr.com)

Bangladesh's own solution has been to repurpose a small island 60 kilometres off the coast. Bhasan Char ("floating island") covers 62 square kilometres and only emerged twenty years ago, formed by moving silt. The government aims to move 100,000 Rohingya refugees into recently erected housing structures. Families would be housed in a 3.6 metre by 1.2 metre concrete room with barred windows, sharing two kitchens and a toilet block with 16–25 other families. In total, 1,440 buildings and 120 cyclone shelters have been built on the island.

Human rights groups and NGOs have expressed concern about the ability of the infrastructure to withstand the flooding and storms that Bhasan Char is prone to. The island is only accessible by boat, and a trip from the mainland takes three hours. Human Rights Watch also flagged a likely limited access to education and health services. For the refugees, a local journalist said, "Bhashan[sic] Char will be like a prison."

Although there were plans to relocate refugees to Bhasan Char from April 2019, the plans were suspended in November after refugees expressed reluctance to move there, preferring to stay in Cox's Bazar and ultimately return to Myanmar if conditions improved. The government also said



that relocations would be voluntary.

Update: In January 2020, the government announced the island was ready to receive Rohingyas.

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# NORTH AMERICA

DECLAN CURTIN

## THE UNITED STATES: DIVISION AND UNCERTAINTY

It has been a politically fraught year in North America. Under the Trump administration, the United States has continued to pursue an erratic and consequential foreign policy strategy featuring the ongoing trade war with China, the spectacular military withdrawal in Syria and the failure to capitalise on dialogues with North Korea. These developments paint a picture of a great power in crisis, unwilling and perhaps unable to guide the international community as has been the standard for a generation.



Donald Trump, centre – quapan (flickr.com)

On the domestic front, political divisions are rife following the initiation of the Democrat-led impeachment proceedings against President Trump regarding his dealings with the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. This has ignited fervent debate across the political spectrum as the integrity of American democracy hangs in the balance.

As the nation nudges closer to a presidential election in November 2020, the field of contenders for the Democratic nomination is narrowing. With the US public facing an unprecedented onslaught of political news, revelations and debate, the events of this year will likely prove consequential, if not critical, for Trump's re-election bid.

## FOREIGN POLICY: THE TRADE WAR

This year saw the continuation of the trade war between two of the world's largest economies, the US and China. While the full effects are yet to be seen, it is increasingly evident that no true winner can emerge from the situation. Bloomberg reports that if the current tariff scenario continues, the outputs of China and the US would decrease by 0.5 and 0.2 per cent respectively. Furthermore, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimates a loss of \$USD 600 billion or 0.7% of global output growth by 2021.

Despite a slight easing of tensions in the latter half of 2019, the Trump administration remains adamant that the two nations do not conduct business on a level playing field and that it is the US's responsibility to address this, despite the impact that the policy is having on the US itself. Most notably, tariffs of near 25% on Chinese imported goods are forcing prices up for US consumers. Conversely, China serves as the biggest export market for products such as the Apple iPhone, and Boeing expects to export \$USD 1 trillion worth of planes to China in the next 20 years. In light of this, the US stance appears myopic. It appears that Trump wants to be seen



as taking a hard economic line on China in order to fulfil his election promise of returning jobs to the US. However, there is no indication that this can occur on the grand scale envisioned by his supporters. The time available to each leader also varies greatly: Trump's performance will be evaluated by US voters in 2020, while China's leadership is able to sustain and insulate itself for far longer, especially given President Xi's removal of presidential term limits in 2018.

Ultimately, the US will struggle to emerge from this battle unscathed. Continuing the policy will hurt the US economy while capitulation would be interpreted as a sign of weakness by China.



Xi Jinping, right – U.S. Secretary of Defense (flickr.com)

## FOREIGN POLICY: US LEADERSHIP

The effects of the Trump Presidency on American global leadership have been felt more keenly in 2019 than in any previous year. While Trump's foreign policy is a far cry from American isolationism, it is clear that the US is retreating from the position it once held in global affairs.

Notably, in October, Trump announced that US troops would begin withdrawing from positions in Northern Syria, exposing the US-allied Kurds to Turkish aggression. Trump characterised the move on Twitter as a means of pulling the US "out of these ridiculous Endless Wars". However, at home he encountered rare criticism from Republican leaders who saw the move as dangerous to American interests in the region. Three months on, their fears appear to have been realised as Syria, Turkey, Russia and Iran tighten

their hold on the region. The international community has also been critical of Trump's decision to abandon the US's Kurdish allies in the region.

In November, the US officially began the withdrawal process from the Paris Agreement. Berating the climate agreement as an attack on American jobs and productivity, the US is now the only country not a signatory of the deal (although a number of states are still yet to ratify it). The international community will endeavour to carry out the agreement without the US, sending a message that the world is prepared to leave it behind if need be.

The US did maintain an active diplomatic presence in Asia in 2019, as demonstrated by historic developments in the US-North Korean dialogue and a recent show of support for democracy in Hong Kong. In June, President Trump became the first sitting US president to step foot in North Korea. The two leaders met and spoke for over an hour, Trump even informally inviting North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un to the White House.

While the move has been championed as an important symbolic step, the lasting legacy of the dialogue seems tenuous at best. Amid reports in early December that North Korea is once again testing missiles, both nations have resumed their usual pattern of hurling abuse at one another, Trump describing Kim as "rocket man" and a senior member of the North Korean government describing Trump as a "dotard." The White House has signalled that such agitation could prove the end of this "special relationship." It therefore seems as if this administration has ended the year in much the same place as it started regarding its dealings with the petulant hermit nation. With little chance of a return to the good faith exhibited earlier this year, Trump's claim that his actions have prevented all-out war may, in fact, become the lasting legacy of this exchange.

Meanwhile, bipartisan legislation has emerged from the US which authorises sanctions on Chinese and Hong Kong officers responsible for human rights abuses in Hong Kong. The legislation, signed into effect by the President in

late November, signals support for the pro-democracy activists and significantly increases the tensions between Washington and Beijing. Both the central Chinese government and the pro-Beijing Hong Kong government have expressed their anger over the bill, which they view as direct US interference with internal political affairs. However, as Jessica Chen Weiss, a professor of government at Cornell University, told the New York Times, the move is unlikely to affect relationships with Beijing in the long run. Rather, once the exacerbated rhetoric cools, it will be at Trump's executive discretion whether to implement the laws' provisions.

## HOME FRONT: IMPEACHMENT AND THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE

It is exceedingly rare to witness the impeachment of a US president and it is entirely unprecedented for an impeachment to result in the removal of that president from office. Both Andrew Johnson and Bill Clinton were charged with articles of impeachment but acquitted by the Senate, while Richard Nixon resigned from office before charges could be laid.

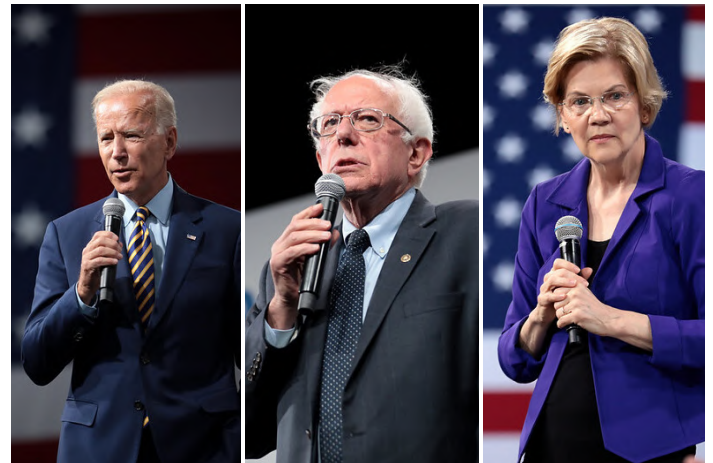
As 2019 draws to a close, it has been confirmed that following over a month of impeachment inquiries, the US House of Representatives will file impeachment charges against President Trump for alleged abuse of power. In a six-minute statement, US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said, "The facts are uncontested. The president abused his power for his own political benefit at the expense of our national security, by withholding military aid and a crucial Oval Office meeting in exchange for an announcement for an investigation into his political rival."

Democrats are confident that they have enough votes to secure a simple majority in the House of Representatives and hence impeach the president. However, if such a vote passes, it will then be up to the Republican-controlled Senate to hold a trial and decide whether to convict or acquit the president. Removing Trump from office would require at least a two-thirds majority of the Republican-controlled Senate voting in favour. However, as CNN reports, support for

impeachment now remains the same as it did in October, around 50%. This means that it is highly unlikely that the Senate will find Trump guilty and remove him from office. The most likely outcome is that Trump is impeached by the House but will remain President. This stain on his credibility will likely be ignored by his base.

## THE DEMOCRATIC NOMINATION

The impeachment proceedings have also failed to have the effect many believed they would on the fortunes of the Democratic race for the presidential nomination. Former Vice President Joe Biden (whose son Hunter was crucial in sparking the impeachment controversy) remains the Democratic frontrunner across the vast majority of polls, with other presidential hopefuls Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren trailing behind by a considerable margin.



Joe Biden [cropped] – Gage Skidmore (flickr.com)

Bernie Sanders [cropped] – Gage Skidmore (flickr.com)

Elizabeth Warren [cropped] – Gage Skidmore (flickr.com)

Debate among the Democratic candidates has been altogether unremarkable as each candidate carefully walks the line between attacking Trump's presidency and attempting not to alienate Trump voters who will be vital to any chance of success in 2020. Yet this election cycle's pool of Democratic candidates has been the largest and most diverse in US history. While this is a fact to celebrate, many have stressed the importance of projecting a clear and united voice among Democrats if they hope to win the White House in 2020. It may be for this reason that many are turning to the more moderate politics of Joe Biden



rather than the progressive stances of the other frontrunners. For those seeking a return to the status quo after the tumultuous politics of the past three years, Joe Biden's politics represent a return to normalcy.

With the first Democratic primary more than two months away, the political fortunes of any of the candidates are not assured. The eventual nominee will face an uphill battle as a booming economy and historically low unemployment will give many US voters reason to award President Trump a second term in office.

## CANADA: A PYRRHIC VICTORY FOR TRUDEAU

Canada went to the polls in October in a general election that saw the incumbent Liberal Party retain its hold on power, albeit in a position of minority government. The resurgence of the Conservative Party after their crushing defeat in 2015 indicated a disillusionment with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, whose image this year was mired by broken promises, political scandal and the revelation that he had on multiple occasions in his youth worn blackface at parties. Clearly Canada's unusually long four-year honeymoon with Trudeau has ended and the newly elected government must move forward on its promises to introduce a \$15 federal minimum wage, reduce cell phone bills by 25 per cent, improve health services and commit to net-zero emissions by 2050, with legally binding five-year milestones among many others.



Justin Trudeau – Dave Cournoyer (flickr.com)

One of the largest challenges facing the minority government will be securing support from smaller parties such as the NDP, whose platform includes addressing student debt, action on climate change and raising taxes on the wealthiest Canadians.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, it has been a fascinating year in North American politics. In the US, these developments have crystallised the positive and negative aspects of the American political system as much as the character of the president himself. Similarly, Trudeau's Liberal Party must take stock of their narrow victory and move forward with advancing their agenda through compromise.

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# LATIN AMERICA

KATIA LEIVA

## CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY: THE ROOTS OF DEMOCRATIC INSTABILITY

In 2019, many Latin American countries have struggled in their fight for democracy. The most significant issues facing Latin America today are economic instability, corruption and impunity. To demonstrate the challenges faced by the democracies of Latin America, we will examine the roots of democratic instability using country case studies, identifying common factors.

### ECONOMIC INSTABILITY

Economic instability has been an issue for many Latin American countries. Leaders have often enacted economic and social reforms to reduce state spending and halt recession and devaluation of currencies. This has sometimes led them to accept international loans, particularly those of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which require austerity and strict cuts to public spending. However, these reforms often came at a great cost to citizens.

### HONDURAS: PROPOSED REFORMS LEAD TO VIOLENCE

After numerous anti-government protests sparked throughout the country in May 2019, Honduran officials deployed the military to control the situation. The looting and destruction of government buildings in the capital, Tegucigalpa, caused President Juan Orlando Hernández to take

action against the violence. The National Party leader has been the target of many protests due to his conservative policies, particularly regarding education and healthcare. Opponents claim the proposed reforms are the first step towards privatisation of healthcare and education. The government has assured Hondurans that privatisation is not the ultimate goal, and argued that the \$300 million saved would be invested into primary education, the construction of two hospitals, and improvements to neonatal care. Despite these promises, Hondurans continued protesting throughout the week. President Hernández assured them that the military presence was to protect private property and keep roads open. Records show that at least seventeen people suffered bullet wounds, causing two deaths.

### ARGENTINA: GROWING CRISIS DUE TO IMF REFORMS

Earlier this year, trade unions called 24-hour national strikes in response to President Mauricio Macri's controversial decision to accept a \$57 billion IMF loan, the largest in IMF history, in the fall of 2018. This deal met significant opposition, particularly given the failure of a 2002 deal. Protests took place all throughout the capital, Buenos Aires, while several banks were attacked in protest.

After four years of neoliberal reform by President Mauricio Macri, the government of Argentina will return to the Justicialist Party's hands with President-elect Alberto Fernández. He will inherit a series of economic and political challenges, with



unemployment, poverty and inflation at all-time highs.

## ECUADOR: IMF POLICIES CAUSE WAVES OF PROTEST

In early fall, President Lenin Moreno terminated fuel subsidies that had an annual cost of \$1.3 billion. Moreno, who argues that the subsidies were harming the country, has stated that there is no chance that he will change his fuel policy, which is part of a broader plan for economic reform. In doing so, centrist President Moreno is hoping to reverse the leftist policies of previous governments. The goal is fiscal austerity in order to conform with IMF demands after a \$4.2 billion deal. The fuel policy and additional tax reforms are expected to bring \$2.27 billion for the Ecuadorian government. With gas prices already increasing, the fuel plan caused outrage and mass protests in several cities in Ecuador, including Quito and Guayaquil. Protests and traffic blockades are led by indigenous rights groups, students, unions, taxi drivers and public transport drivers. According to Reuters, the protests have resulted in at least 350 arrests and 28 injured police officers.

## CHILE: INCREASED METRO FARES LEAD TO COLLECTIVE ACTION

After an increase in metro fares in October, protests erupted in the Chilean capital of Santiago. The demonstrations quickly turned violent, with protesters attacking stations, setting fires, blocking traffic, and rioting. President Sebastián Piñera declared a state of emergency to ensure order and safety by restricting freedom of movement and the right to assemble. The metro fares increased due to increased energy costs and a weakened currency. These protests are emblematic of the deep inequalities that exist in Chile, one of the wealthiest countries in Latin America. Understandably, many citizens argue that important political decisions are not currently being made by the people or for the people. This has led many to demand that the constitution be rewritten with more provisions for civic participation.

## CORRUPTION AND IMPUNITY

Corruption and impunity are often a central subject when discussing Latin America. Weak judiciaries, widespread impunity, and corrupt politicians are often to blame for instability in the region. Often, corruption involves bribery, illegal campaign funding, drug smuggling, and election fraud.

## GUATEMALA: CORRUPTION IN POLITICS

Corruption and impunity run rampant. After centre-right presidential candidate, Mario Estrada's arrest in April on charges relating to conspiring to smuggle cocaine, corruption has been one of the main concerns for Guatemalan voters. Sandra Torres, long-serving politician and former first lady, was implicated in a case of illegal campaign financing in 2015, which also threatened her chances of running for president. Thelma Aldana, who led one of the largest investigations on corruption in Guatemala that ousted then president, Otto Pérez Molina, and raised hopes for ending corruption in politics, is now being investigated on her own corruption charges. Aldana, who was described as an anti-corruption crusader, is currently living in self-imposed exile in El Salvador for fears of retaliation from the many powerful people she prosecuted and the threat of arrest upon return. The constitutional court ruled that Aldana was ineligible to run for office because of the criminal allegations. This decision marked an unsettling turn for the anti-corruption movement in Guatemala, setting back the decade-long effort.



Sandra Torres, left – OEA – OAS (flickr.com)

President Jimmy Morales has also threatened anti-corruption efforts in Guatemala. Morales accused the UN-backed International Commission Against Impunity (CICIG) of being politically motivated and shut it down when its mandate expired in September. The Commission had worked closely with Guatemalan prosecutors – including Aldana – in ground-breaking investigations. The Commission had also attempted to investigate President Morales. With the commission being tossed out and the rejection of Aldana’s candidacy, fears of corruption continue to grow. This has prompted calls from the Guatemalan population for an end to corruption and an increase in the legitimacy of government officials.

## HONDURAS: DOCUMENTS OUTLINE SEVERE CORRUPTION

Following the release of documents from the United States outlining severe corruption in relation to Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, protesters took to the streets, inciting violent clashes with the police. Prosecutors in the US allege that President Hernández’s 2013 presidential campaign was financed by drug money. Pressure on President Hernández has been rising since November 2018, when his brother Juan Antonio “Tony” Hernández was arrested in the US and accused of conspiring to smuggle cocaine. Tony was found guilty of four separate charges. With the declassification of his brother’s case, President Hernández’s possible involvement in drug trafficking resurfaced.

One of the court documents alleges that a man identified as “co-conspirator 4” or CC-4 took part in a conspiracy to use \$1.5 million of drug money to finance his presidential campaign. CC-4 is referred to in the document as having been “elected president of Honduras in late 2013,” the year that President Hernández won his first term. Hernández rejects the accusations. However, the thousands of protesters in Tegucigalpa were not convinced by his plea of innocence, calling the president a “narco dictator” and demanding his resignation. Aside from his possible links to drug trafficking, President Hernández is highly criticised for widespread corruption and a fraudulent re-election.



Juan Orlando Hernández – Presidencia El Salvador (flickr.com)

## BRAZIL: ONGOING CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS POST-"OPERATION CARWASH"

Sérgio Cabral, former mayor of Rio de Janeiro, admitted his participation in a two million dollar bribe in 2009 that helped secure Rio de Janeiro’s spot as host of the 2016 Olympic Games, becoming the first South American city to host the event. Already serving a two hundred year sentence for several corruption cases and hoping for leniency in a plea deal, Cabral implicated several other officials and athletes. Cabral also declared that then-president of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was informed of the dealings afterwards. Lula’s legal team states that the information is not true.

## BOLIVIA: ELECTION FRAUD

The results of the October 20 election gave incumbent President Evo Morales a large enough margin over his opponent, Carlos Mesa, to win in the first round. Many were suspicious of fraud after the vote count was interrupted for 24 hours. Before the interruption, vote counts showed a close race between Morales and Mesa, but once the counting recommenced, Morales had a substantial lead. The Organization of American States (OAS) led an investigation by auditing the votes and found clear fraud. As a result, Morales lost military support and resigned the presidency, claiming a coup d’etat by the opposition and fleeing to Mexico for political asylum.



## MEXICO: OFFICIAL LINKED TO DRUG CARTELS

Genaro García Luna has been arrested in the United States, accused of taking bribes from Mexican drug cartels while serving as public security chief under President Felipe Calderon between 2006 and 2012. As public security chief, García Luna was the face of Mexico's federal police force. García Luna is accused of taking millions of dollars in bribes in exchange for allowing "El Chapo" Guzman's Sinaloa drug cartel to operate in Mexico. US prosecutors allege that García Luna abused his position in the government to protect drug cartels and enable them to operate with impunity during Mexico's US-backed "war on drugs". He is accused of personally aiding the cartels and giving them access to sensitive information.

## PERU: POLITICAL TURMOIL

Years of political unease led to a meltdown in Peruvian politics this fall. President Martín Vizcarra dismissed Peru's entire legislature and called for new elections. The President has accused the opposing political party, Fuerza Popular (Popular Force of "stonewalling" his anti-corruption efforts because of their involvement in ongoing corruption scandals. Vizcarra's call for the removal of the legislature promptly led to their decision to suspend Vizcarra from the presidency for a year, leaving Vice-President Mercedes Aráoz as interim leader. In its decision, the legislature condemned President Vizcarra for an "unconstitutional coup attempt" and for committing an "act of a dictator." About 24 hours

after the decision to suspend President Moreno, Vice-President Aráoz tweeted saying that she had declined the job of presidency, citing that "the constitutional order in Peru has broken down". Aráoz also stated that she was resigning the vice-presidency and called for immediate elections.

Corruption runs rampant in Peru, with several ex-Presidents accused of accepting illegal funds and being connected with the Brazilian bribery scandal involving construction company, Odebrecht. With four previous presidents and the opposition leader, Keiko Fujimori, under investigation, cleaning up Peru's political field is Vizcarra's main goal as President.

## ANALYSIS

With consistent challenges and an ongoing fight for democracy, many Latin American countries are struggling to stay afloat. Financial systems threaten economic stability, political parties cannot find common ground and corruption runs rampant. One phenomenon that can be found in almost every country is the will of civilians to enact change. Social movements are a driving force in bringing about regime change in Latin America. Just this year, we have seen massive protests erupt in Venezuela, Chile, Ecuador, and Honduras to name a few. By uniting into organisations and movements, local communities and groups are making themselves and their claims heard. Through community activism, social movements can generate internal pressure and influence government policy. This has been evident in countries such as Chile, where civilians have organised to pressure the government to write a new constitution.

These social movements inspire change and incite government action. The citizens of these countries must directly endure the consequences of their government's policies, which is a likely explanation for why they continue to mobilise. Despite a history of human rights abuses and fear of persecution, communities are making their demands heard both at home and abroad in an attempt to recover their countries' democracies. In order to establish a stable and representative



Martin Vizcarra - GovernmentZA (flickr.com)

government, social movements should continue to mobilise, demanding changes and inciting global support for their causes. By creating both internal and external pressure on governments, communities will force their governments to listen to their claims.

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# HONG KONG PROTESTS: THE 2019 EXTRADITION BILL SAGA

CELINE LAU

\*as of December 2019

## | BACKGROUND

In April 2019, the Hong Kong government introduced a series of amendments to the city's extradition laws. If passed by the Legislative Council (LegCo), the extradition bill would allow Hong Kong to surrender fugitives to jurisdictions it previously did not have extradition treaties with – namely, China, Macau and Taiwan.

The extradition bill quickly sparked intense backlash from wide swathes of society. From lawyers to cleaners to high-powered business executives, people feared that the bill would effectively expose Hong Kong residents to China's judicial system, which has a history of arbitrary detention and torture.

Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets to express their objections and by June, a mass protest movement against the bill had emerged. But by August, the anti-extradition bill struggle had morphed into a broader pro-democracy campaign calling urgently for universal suffrage and an independent inquiry into the excessive use of police force during protests.

## | WHO ARE THE PROTESTORS?

They are predominantly young and educated.

- According to a survey conducted in September by researchers at Lingnan University, half of those at rallies are between 20 and 30.
- Over 70 per cent of demonstrators polled since June 9 have accessed tertiary education or above.

## PROTESTORS' FIVE KEY DEMANDS:

- Complete withdrawal of the extradition bill
- Carrie Lam's resignation & universal suffrage
- Release and acquittal of arrested protestors
- Revocation of "riot" characterisation of June 12 protests
- Independent commission of inquiry into the excessive use of police force during protests

## WHY WAS THE BILL PROPOSED IN THE FIRST PLACE?

*The Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters (Amendment) Bill* was designed to close "legal loopholes" in the city's extradition laws.

These loopholes were supposedly revealed in the aftermath of a Taiwanese homicide case.

In 2018, 20-year-old Chan Tong-kai murdered his pregnant girlfriend, Poon Hiu-wing, in Taipei before fleeing back to Hong Kong.

But under the city's current extradition laws, Chan, a Hong Kong permanent resident, cannot be surrendered to Taipei, nor can he be prosecuted in Hong Kong for his crimes.

This case formed the rationale for the government's proposed legislation.



## I WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Eight months later, in December 2019, tensions on the ground are still running high. Although the bill has since been completely withdrawn, this move has widely been hailed as "too little, too late".

Perhaps the withdrawal would have been enough to satisfy the public back in June. But after countless cases of police brutality, ongoing government unresponsiveness to citizens' concerns and a recent landslide victory for pro-democracy candidates in local district elections, protestors are now agitating for increased political freedoms, justice for all those unduly harmed by the police and serious electoral reform.



## WHY IS THE PUBLIC ANGRY AT THE POLICE?

In the evening of July 21, a group of white-clad men wielding bamboo sticks indiscriminately assaulted passers-by at a Yuen Long subway station.

The police were heavily criticised for not arriving at the scene of the crime until 39 minutes later.

This moment marked the beginning of a tangible shift in public attitudes against the police.

In the months to come, the police's methods of crowd control (expired tear gas, water cannons, live ammunition) would face harsh condemnation for being excessive.

The police have also been accused of mistreating, even sexually assaulting, detainees.



## I KEY EVENTS & FLASH POINTS

### APRIL – AUGUST: ANGER OVER THE EXTRADITION BILL

April 3: The Hong Kong government introduces the *Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters (Amendment) Bill*.

April 28: Tens of thousands march to the Legislative Council (LegCo) to demand the immediate withdrawal of the extradition bill.

May 30: The government narrows the scope of extraditable offences in efforts to placate protestors – critics say the concessions are not enough.

June 9: An estimated **1 million people** attend an anti-extradition march in Hong Kong – the largest turnout since 500,000 people protested against national security legislation in 2003.

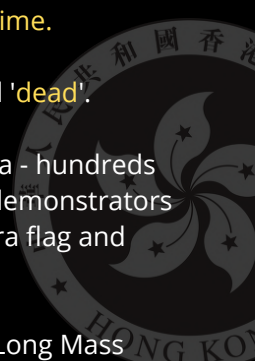
June 12: The bill is scheduled for a second reading in the LegCo. There is a sharp increase in violence as protestors and police clash outside the chambers. **Police fire tear gas and rubber bullets for the first time.**

June 15: Extradition bill is suspended indefinitely and declared '**dead**'.

July 1: The 22nd anniversary of Hong Kong's handover to China - hundreds of thousands of people attend the annual march. A group of demonstrators break into the LegCo, vandalise its interiors, erect a colonial-era flag and deface Hong Kong's regional emblem.

July 21: Triad-linked indiscriminate attack on civilians at Yuen Long Mass Transit Railway (MTR) station.

August 11: During city-wide protests, a woman is allegedly **shot in the eye** by Hong Kong police, becoming a symbol of the protest movement.





## I KEY EVENTS & FLASH POINTS

### AUGUST – PRESENT: ANGER OVER POLICE BRUTALITY

August 12: **Thousands** of protestors gather at Hong Kong international airport to demonstrate against police brutality, forcing hundreds of flights to be cancelled. Protestors forcibly restrain a suspected undercover cop. However, he is revealed to be a journalist from mainland China.

August 18: An estimated **1.7 million people** march against police brutality.

August 31: Riot police and members of the Special Tactical Squad storm MTR train cabins at Prince Edward station and Yau Ma Tei station, **violently assaulting both protestors and civilians indiscriminately** with batons and pepper spray. Online rumours allege that protestors were beaten to death.

September 4: Chief Executive **Carrie Lam formally withdraws the extradition bill**, conceding to one of the protestors' five key demands. However, Lam has said that the government will not satisfy the other four demands.

October 1: Police nearly kill an 18 year-old student protestor after shooting him in the chest with a **live round**.

October 4: In efforts to stabilise social unrest, the government announce that an **Anti-Mask Law** would take effect the next day. The law prohibits the use of facial coverings during demonstrations. Offenders could be sentenced to a year in jail and a fine of up to HK\$25,000.

November 3: 22 year-old university student Alex Chow is found unconscious and bleeding on the second floor of Sheung Tak Estate car park. He is suspected to have fallen from the third floor while running to avoid tear gas.

November 8: Alex Chow passes away from injuries sustained on the 3rd. His death sparks city-wide protests.

November 18: Hong Kong's high court rules the anti-mask law **unconstitutional**. The government is set to appeal this ruling.

November 24: Results of district elections on the weekend confirmed. **Landslide victory for pro-democracy candidates**, winning 389 out of 452 seats and gaining control of 17 out of 18 district councils.

November 28: Donald Trump signs the **Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act** into law. The Act commits the United States to review Hong Kong's level of political autonomy on a yearly basis and enact economic sanctions should the city's state of human rights be found wanting.



Photo: Tom Grundy/HKFP



Photo: May James/HKFP



Photo: Dan Garrett



Photo: May James/HKFP



Photo: Ring Yu/HK01 via AP



Photo: May James/HKFP



Photo: Dan Garrett



Photo: Dan Garrett/HKFP

# BREXIT: A TIMELINE

BRENDAN MCGING

## January 15

Brexit deal negotiated by PM Theresa May is rejected by the House of Commons 432-202, in the largest ever Commons defeat for a sitting UK government.

## January 29

MPs approve the "Irish Backstop" presented by PM Theresa May. The Backstop aimed to prevent a "hard" Irish Border by keeping the UK inside the EU customs union – potentially indefinitely – until a signature of a Border agreement.

## March 12

MPs reject May's Brexit deal a second time, 391-242.



Theresa May – Rand Mee (flickr.com)

## March 13

MPs vote to rule out a "no-deal" Brexit.

## March 21

The EU approves an extension of the Brexit deadline to 12 April.

## March 27

The House of Commons votes on eight indicative options for further action are defeated.



Brexit protest, March 23, 2019 – Puckpics (flickr.com)

## March 29

The initial date the UK was supposed to leave the EU.

## April 1

Commons votes on a further four indicative options. All are defeated.

## April 10

The EU approves a UK request to extend the Brexit deadline to October 31.

## May 21

May reveals a new Brexit deal, which is prompted rejected by MPs.



Theresa May at the European Parliament – European Parliament (flickr.com)





Theresa May's last Prime Minister's Questions – UK Parliament (flickr.com)

## May 24

May announces her resignation from the office of Prime Minister.

## July 24

Boris Johnson wins the Conservative Party leadership ballot and becomes the third Prime Minister to take office since the 2016 Brexit referendum.

## July 25–September 3

Both Houses of Parliament are in recess for the summer.

## August 28

Johnson announces his intention to prorogue Parliament within a week of its return from summer recess. This sparks furore as it appears to have been designed to prevent the passage of the Benn Act, which the opposition has sufficient numbers to pass.

## September 4

The Benn Act passes through Parliament 329-300, with 22 Conservatives voting against their own party. It requires the government to obtain parliamentary approval for a no-deal Brexit. It also forces the PM to write to the EU requesting a further extension of the exit date, should parliamentary approval (of either a Withdrawal Agreement or a no-deal Brexit) be withheld.



Theresa May's last Prime Minister's Questions – UK Parliament (flickr.com)



UK House of Lords is prorogued – UK Parliament (flickr.com)

## September 9

The Benn Act receives Royal Assent and becomes law. On the same day, Johnson controversially prorogues Parliament.

## September 24

The UK Supreme Court unanimously rules that Johnson's prorogation was unconstitutional, and therefore "null and of no effect". In its judgment, the Court refers to the unprecedented six-week length of the prorogation, the critical juncture at which the UK finds itself, and the government's lack of justification for the prorogation.

## September 25

Parliament returns.

## October 3

Johnson outlines a new exit deal in a speech to Parliament.

## October 19

Parliament sits on a Saturday for only the third time since the Second World War and the first since the 1982 Falklands War. Johnson's exit deal is rejected.



The Saturday sitting in the House of Commons – UK Parliament (flickr.com)





## October 19 (cont)

Johnson sends an unsigned letter to EU President Donald Tusk requesting a deadline extension, as mandated by the Benn Act. Johnson also sends a second, signed, letter from himself and the Conservative Party urging the EU not to grant the extension.

## October 28

The EU agrees to further extend the Brexit deadline to January 31, 2020.

Johnson's attempt to hold an early election fails to reach the two-thirds majority required by existing legislation for an out-of-cycle election and is rejected.



Donald Tusk – European People's Party (flickr.com)



Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn during the election campaign  
Jeremy Corbyn (flickr.com)

## October 30

A UK general election is announced for December 12. Johnson achieves this by passing a bill mandating an election be held on December 12, which only requires a simple majority.

## December 12

The Conservative Party wins the general election, securing a majority of 80 seats – the party's largest since 1987.

# ELECTIONS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Anet McClintock

## Guinea-Bissau, 24 November:

No candidate received more than 50 per cent of the vote in the November elections, and as such they went to a run-off on December 29. Preliminary results suggest Umaro Cissoko Embalo is headed for victory, with official results set to come through in early 2020.

## Senegal, 24 February:

57-year-old Macky Sall won a second five-year term on a mandate of job and infrastructure engagement. Observers marked no irregularities, noting that Senegal is a democratic example in West Africa, where elections are often marred by violence and fraud.<sup>2</sup>

## Mauritania, 22 June:

Mohamed Ould Ghazouani won the election with 52 per cent of the vote. Three opponents alleged election fraud and appealed the results, but Mauritania's constitutional council upheld them. This was the first election in which Mauritania's president was democratically elected.<sup>6</sup>

## Comoros, 24 March:

President Azali Assoumani was re-elected in the first round of voting. Three regional observation bodies have noted the election had many irregularities, and Mr Assoumani's opponent, Ahamada Mahamoudou, rejected the results as fraudulent.

## Benin, 28 April:

The elections hit the West African headlines when tough new laws outlawed every opposition party. Being the only eligible contender, President Patrice Talon was re-elected. Many human rights groups have warned that the election was demonstrative of the country's slide into authoritarianism.<sup>3</sup>

## Nigeria, 23 February:

Incumbent Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress party secured 56 per cent of the vote in the general election. His opponent, Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party, rejected the results, claiming fraud.<sup>1</sup>

## Madagascar, 27 May:

The coalition of current Madagascan president, Andry Rajoelina, won an absolute majority in the parliamentary elections. However, electoral irregularities and low voter turnout led many of Mr Rajoelina's opponents to challenge the results.<sup>5</sup>

## Mauritius, 7 November:

The current governing party, the Militant Socialist Movement, secured a majority of seats in parliament, affording Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth another five-year term. Jugnauth and his party hope to improve wealth disparity and inequality.<sup>7</sup>

## Mozambique, 15 October:

President Filipe Nyusi and his Frelimo party won the general election. Weeks of protests and violence followed the result, with the opposition party, Renamo, calling for the election results to be annulled.

## Malawi, 21 May:

President Peter Mutharika narrowly won a second term in office with 38.57 per cent of the vote.

## South Africa, 8 May:

One of the biggest elections of the year was South Africa's general election, with Cyril Ramaphosa from the African National Congress winning 58 per cent of the vote, the smallest margin since the end of apartheid. There was however a massive surge in votes for minority parties – most notably, the Economic Freedom Fighters. Mr Ramaphosa's cabinet was the first in South African history to have a 50/50 gender split, and marked only the third gender equal cabinet in Africa.<sup>4</sup>

## Namibia, 27 November:

Hage Geingob, leader of the Swapo party which has governed Namibia for almost three decades, has won re-election. Despite the current recession, which will enter into its third year, Mr Geingob won 56 per cent of the vote, a significant decrease from his previous supermajority of 87 per cent, but still well ahead of his nearest rival.

