

# GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS FALL 2017



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# Letter from the **Executives**

We are thrilled to launch the Fall 2017 Issue of Global Conversations (GC), a publication that stems out of the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto. We thrive on a diversity of voices that offer fresh and distinctive lenses on significant or underreported events. Our seasonal issues and digital platform, [munkgc.com](http://munkgc.com), aim to incite students and the wider community to discuss, share, and learn about key global issues.

This year, we strive to build on previous years' momentum to build the reach of GC. The expansion of our team means we are pleased to introduce an online Breaking News team of writers, editors, and podcasters who are rejuvenating our digital platform with timely and analytical content on a weekly basis. On our website, you will also find the winners of our recent 2017 International Photo Contest, as well as reflection pieces from Master of Global Affairs students on their global work experiences over the summer months.

In the Fall Issue, you will find articles covering India's proposed legislation on commercial surrogacy, China's efforts to combat air pollution with its new Forest City, and the role of bitcoin technology in managing both the Venezuelan and global refugee crises.

As a collaborative and student-driven publication, we are incredibly lucky to work with a talented team to bring this issue to life and add new dimensions to the publication. From the editors to our written contributors, this issue would not exist without their unwavering dedication, intellect, and enthusiasm. A heartfelt thank-you is extended to our dedicated and meticulous Associate Editors and Director of Written Content, as well as our Associate Producer and Director of Digital Design, who bring innovative zeal to the publication. Lastly, we would like to thank the Munk School of Global Affairs for their continuous support in the publication's growing endeavors.

We invite readers to join the conversation, by stimulating thought and debate on meaningful global events.

*Executive Producers,  
Siobhan Bradley & Cadhla Gray*

# Even Bitcoin is helping out in the global refugee crisis

BY AARON WYTZE WILSON



*Market place in the Azraq camp for Syrian refugees in northern Jordan*

**A**SIDE from sharing space in newspapers and periodicals, Bitcoin and the global refugee crisis don't have much in common. But new innovations in refugee aid assistance that use blockchain—the technology that backs Bitcoin—could mean that their destinies are far more entwined than once thought.

The United Nations, the government of Finland, and a handful of NGOs have all announced that they will be using blockchain in their new aid assistance programs for refugees. The move to experiment with the cryptocurrency technology comes in the wake of a growing need to provide immediate relief to displaced peoples from conflict areas in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Myanmar.

For the refugees affected by these crises, photo identifi-

cation and personal documents become lifelines to receiving food and aid, and open up doors to be resettled in safer countries. But leaving home with a birth certificate and passport is an afterthought for the thousands of families who fled in terror from ongoing conflict. Take the Syrian War as an example. Millions of dis-

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“Leaving home with a birth certificate and passport is an afterthought for the thousands of families who fled in terror.”

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SOURCE: CREATIVE COMMONS, UK DFID

placed people flooded into the EU's borders at the height of the conflict. European governments struggled to provide refugees with temporary IDs and documents, and the UN's World Food Programme toiled with distributing food and essential resources. With images of the crisis flooding TV news and social media, a number of blockchain entrepreneurs stepped forward with ideas to help refugees.

Blockchain is a way of distributing an app or digital tool across a wide range of computers and data servers. In the case of Bitcoin and Ethereum (another cryptocurrency), blockchain distributes a ledger among all clients who have downloaded the relevant software to host the cryptocurrencies. Because a cryptocurrency transaction is recorded on thousands (and perhaps millions) of computers, it is very difficult to hack, making it a very secure method to record information. Once a new piece of information goes on the blockchain, it will never

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“Blockchain is a way of distributing an app or digital tool across a wide range of computers and data servers.”

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come down.

In 2015, the advocacy group Bitnation built an identification system that records a person's ID onto a blockchain. It's called the Blockchain Emergency ID (or BEID), and it provides refugees with a basic form of identification that can be accessed anywhere. Bitnation also provides refugees with Bitcoin visa debit cards. For refugees without the proper identification to open a bank account in a new country, the Bitcoin cards offer a valuable stop gap. This July, Bitnation won the prestigious Netexplo Grand Prix, an innovation grant jointly awarded by UNESCO, for its pioneering work with the BEID.

Bitnation isn't the only group helping out during the Syrian refugee crisis. Startup firm Parity Technologies



is working with the WFP to combine biometric registration data with blockchain technology. At the Azraq refugee camp in Jordan, Parity and the WFP are testing a new system that allows refugees to authenticate food and supply transfers using a retina scan. Over 10,000 refugees at Azraq have registered with the system and there are plans to roll out the program to another 100,000 by the end of this year.

The government of Finland is implementing similar programs for resettled refugees. Finnish tech company MONI is equipping refugees with prepaid Mastercards connected to their IDs on blockchain. The cards act as a direct deposit account for displaced people looking to work in Finland.

But despite the increasing number of these types of partnerships, blockchain entrepreneurs are learning that refugee crises are not one-size-fits-all. Although dozens of blockchain projects were created during the Syrian refugee crisis, few of these projects were forked to handle the Rohingya refugee crisis in Myanmar. Aid agencies have had difficulty reaching Rohingya communities in isolated Rakhine, limiting potential cooperation with blockchain startups.



*Aaron has spent nearly a decade in East Asia, living in China for five years, and Taiwan for four. He's worked as a translator for Taiwan's APEC Task Force, a political officer for Global Affairs Canada, a primary school English teacher in China, and a consultant for the University of Toronto, and a freelance journalist. His work has been published in Foreign Policy, Roads and Kingdoms, the Civicist, and the Taipei Times. He speaks Mandarin Chinese.*



# Turkey takes flight - the country's strategic shift

BY TIM ROBINSON

**I**N the wake of the failed coup attempt last July, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has undertaken a massive purge of the nation's civil society and has successfully passed a controversial referendum to drastically increase the power of the presidency. These events have led to increasing tensions between Turkey and the other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). With these increasingly strained relations, Erdoğan has begun to look eastward for ways to strengthen his position, through relations with Russia and Iran. How this shift will affect the future of Middle Eastern geopolitics, the ongoing war in Syria and Iraq, and the future of NATO is uncertain, but it will certainly have major consequences for the region in the decades to come.

Turkey has been a vital ally in the Middle East for the West and was, until recently, touted as a model for secular democracy in the Islamic world. Turkey has been a member of NATO since the early 1950's, playing an

important strategic role during the Cold War, and has since participated in NATO missions in Afghanistan and Libya. Since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, however, Turkey has become more concerned with its own security issues in the region.

The complicated web of actors fighting on the ground and their global benefactors has resulted in a situation where the lines between allies and enemies are blurred. In the most recent phase of the conflict, Turkey's principal goal has not focused on defeating Daesh (also known as the "Islamic State") or on overthrowing Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, but rather on containing the spread of Kurdish militants in Northeastern Syria and Northern Iraq. This priority has been encroached on by the United States, who have been providing weapons and vehicles to these Kurdish militias, known as the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), in order to fight Daesh on the ground. Although technically distinct from the domestic Kurdish opposition group, the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), Erdoğan has criticized the U.S.' support for the YPG, creating a rift between

SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU



the two NATO member states.

Turkish-U.S. relations have been strained by other factors as well. Erdoğan has blamed last year's coup attempt on Fethullah Gülen, an important political and religious figure in Turkey, who has been living in exile in the United States. Erdoğan has called for Gülen's extradition, but the U.S. has refused to do so, citing a lack of evidence. This has fueled the belief that the coup attempt was orchestrated by the U.S., a view that is being promoted by pro-Erdoğan Turkish media outlets, such as *Yeni-Safak*. These factors have furthered the tensions between the two allies, despite U.S. President Donald Trump's recent claim that the two countries are "as close as we've ever been."

It isn't only the U.S. that has upset Turkish-NATO relations. In the run-up to the referendum to expand his presidential powers, Erdoğan launched a major campaign to win over Turkish voters living abroad. In a provocative statement, Erdoğan accused the German government of Nazi-like practices in the lead-up to the vote by blocking several pro-Erdoğan rallies. Germany also angered the government in Ankara last summer, by formally recognizing the Armenian genocide, a dark event in Turkish history that the government continues to deny to this day. Germany has also recently announced that it is suspending major arms sales to Turkey due to human rights concerns and the continued imprisonment of 11 German journalists. Turkey's decades-long bid to join the EU community has completely stalled, as Erdoğan appears to have turned his back on closer political integration with Europe.

Between the conflicting goals of the Syrian-Iraqi conflict, on the one hand, and Western condemnation of authoritarian policies, on the other, Turkey's relations with the West have hit a historic low. While still maintaining formal ties with NATO, Erdoğan has begun reaching out to other global actors in order to legitimize his new powers and find solutions to his problems with the Kurds.

Enter Russian President Vladimir Putin: another authoritarian leader with aspirations to expand Russian influence in the region. Following a turbulent period in 2015, when the Turkish military downed a Russian warplane, Turkish-Russian relations have since im-

proved dramatically. Putin voiced his strong support for Erdoğan following the coup attempt, while leaders of NATO countries looked on critically. Increasingly, Erdoğan and Putin have been working together to accomplish mutually beneficial goals in the Middle East. Last month, the *New York Times* reported that Turkey signed a multi-billion-dollar deal to purchase surface-to-air-missile systems from Russia, a clear sign of Turkey shifting away from NATO.

Erdoğan's newfound friendships with Russia and Iran come with their own issues and complexities. Turkey and Iran have been regional rivals for decades and their support for rival claimants in the Syrian and Yemeni conflicts is likely to restrict military cooperation on the Kurdish issue. Russia's investment in gas pipelines in the autonomous Kurdish regions of Iraq is also important, as it will limit Erdoğan's ability to act decisively against the perceived threat of an independent Kurdish state. It is likely that Turkey will cooperate with these nations in an informal relationship that corresponds to specific issues of mutual concern.

Turkey has demonstrated that it is less concerned with maintaining amicable relations with NATO than it is with pursuing its own domestic and regional security. Erdoğan's number one concern is dealing with the rise of Kurdish-independence movements in and around his borders. With the U.S. and other NATO countries displaying mixed attitudes towards the issue, Erdoğan has been happy to receive the support of nations that do not have problems with his authoritarian measures aimed at addressing the problem. If relations continue to worsen, NATO could lose its only member in the Middle East, which would significantly reduce its ability to influence the region.



*Tim Robinson is a first-year student in the Master of Global Affairs program. He completed his BA degree from Queen's University in 2016, majoring in African and Middle Eastern History. His areas of interest include the intersectionality of security, policy, and development in North Africa and the Middle East. He is also passionate about facilitating cultural dialogue understanding between Western and Islamic societies.*

# Can China's Liuzhou forest city save the world's smog-choked metropolises from themselves?

BY BRUCE CINNAMON



"Once completed, the new city will host 30,000 people, absorb almost 10,000 tons of CO2 and 57 tons of pollutants per year and produce approximately 900 tons of oxygen."

- Stefano Boeri Architeti, Liuzhou Forest City page

**T**HIS summer, Liuzhou Municipality Urban Planning in southern China broke ground on an ambitious project: a city where green space overwhelms grey concrete and trees outnumber people. Liuzhou Forest City is the vision of Stefano Boeri, an Italian architect who won several awards in 2014 for his Vertical Forest residential

towers in Milan. The Bosco Verticale complex includes 20km<sup>2</sup> of trees planted along the sides of terraced skyscrapers, which absorb CO<sub>2</sub> and particulate matter from the air. Liuzhou Forest City will have dozens of these buildings.

Boeri has great hopes that the Forest City will help save

SOURCE: CREATIVE COMMONS, АЛЕКСЕЙ М

China from its urban air pollution crisis, which has caused millions of deaths and lowered life expectancy by 5.5 years in northern regions of the country. His Forest City conceptual masterplan for Shijiazhuang, one of the most heavily polluted cities in China, is intended to serve as “the prototype of a new generation of small, compact and green cities.”

The evidence appears to be on Boeri’s side. Recent studies have demonstrated that expanding urban canopies is an effective strategy to increase health benefits for urban dwellers and reduce fiscal costs for governments. A 2016 study by the United States Forest Service found that every \$1 spent on planting trees delivers \$5.82 in social benefits. A 2017 report by The Nature Conservancy argues that the urban forest should be a key component of a city’s public health infrastructure—citing a 2013 study that found that trees remove enough particulate matter from the air to reduce healthcare spending by up to \$60 million in an average American city.

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## Trees offer important benefits

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In short, trees offer important benefits, and buildings like Bosco Verticale could help bring more of them to high-density cities that are starved for space. Indeed, Boeri’s firm is currently building similar towers in Lausanne, Utrecht, and Nanjing. Other firms are jumping on board the Vertical Forest bandwagon as well, with projects proposed in Mexico City, Singapore, Sydney, Melbourne, Taipei, Paris, Ho Chi Minh City, Sao Paulo, and Toronto.

However, most of these projects remain beautiful computer renderings of fantasy buildings that win architectural contests but are never built. This leads to an obvious question: will the Liuzhou Forest City spark a revolution in urban design and usher in a new era of sustainable city building? Or is the Forest City just another fad in the long history of utopian urban planning?

The notion that urban problems can be fixed with more greenery is not a new one. At the turn of the 20th century, faced with the horrendous sanitary conditions and massive air pollution brought on by the Industrial Revolution, British town planner Ebenezer Howard

published *Garden Cities of To-morrow*. This landmark text in the history of urban planning laid out the idyllic vision of the Garden City: a community that wed the health benefits of the countryside with the economic dynamism of the metropolis.

Under Howard’s leadership, Letchworth Garden City was built outside of London in 1904. The Garden City movement spread around the world inspiring similar communities in dozens of countries (including the Canadian township of Don Mills, now part of Toronto). But most of these communities simply became bedroom suburbs on the outskirts of large metropolises. Instead of disrupting the design of the sprawling city, they contributed to its growth.

The Garden City movement is just one example of utopian town planning that promised to save us from dirty, crowded, unhealthy cities. From Le Corbusier’s *Ville Radieuse* to Frank Lloyd Wright’s *Broadacre City*, visionary architects have been proposing grand designs of new urban forms for centuries. It’s possible that Liuzhou Forest City will simply serve as the latest installment in this long line of green fantasy cities. However, Liuzhou will actually be built, which means that we’ll be able to see it succeed or fail as a prototype for future urban renewal.

The majority of China’s 1.3 billion citizens will probably never get to live in a Forest City. However, even if Liuzhou becomes another Letchworth, it’s heartening to see Chinese municipal authorities investing in urban forestry. Expanding urban canopies by building fancy Vertical Forests or just by planting more trees on the ground will help China and other countries fight air pollution, bring down healthcare costs, and improve the quality of life for their growing urban populations.



*Bruce Cinnamon is a second-year MGA student. His academic interests include economic development, innovation policy, international trade, and relations between sub-national jurisdictions. In Fall 2017 he is on exchange to the Sciences Po Urban School in Paris, studying comparative policy in large metropolises around the world and how local governments are addressing global challenges.*

# Science literacy: decision-making in the digital age

BY HANNAH RUNDLE



**D**ECISION-MAKING in the digital age has become increasingly dependent on scientific understanding, yet recent surveys reveal that Canadians lack the necessary scientific literacy to make informed decisions on science-related policy issues. Data collected by the Canadian Council of Academies reveals that less than one half of Canadians can read and interpret a newspaper article detailing a scientific discovery.

There is growing concern that insufficient scientific knowledge hinders the development of informed policy and alters public perception on a wide variety of issues ranging from vaccinations to climate change to artificial intelligence. Jon Miller, director of the International Center for the Advancement of Scientific Literacy at

the University of Michigan, warns that scientific literacy is critical to the preservation of democratic societies where public discourse must be conducted in a language accessible to voters. Miller argues that if the language of science is incomprehensible to the public, citizens are unable to interpret scientific issues, and instead arrive at their scientific views via political partisanship. Scientific illiteracy increases the public's susceptibility to misinformation and manipulation by anti-science groups.

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“Insufficient scientific knowledge hinders the development of informed policy”

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SOURCE: CREATIVE COMMONS, JOHN ENGLART

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## CHALLENGES TO INFORMED DECISION MAKING

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In Canada, there is alarming distrust of science amongst the public, as 43 per cent of Canadians falsely believe that science is a matter of opinion. Of course, science is not a matter of opinion but rather, subject to a rigorous peer-reviewed process in which evidence is collected and validated by other scientists. Ideally, science would act as a powerful tool for the public to conduct their own critical analyses of scientific literature and reach their own conclusions about science-related policy issues. However, the general public's inability to access and comprehend credible scientific research acts as a substantial barrier.

Members of the public typically obtain news about scientific discoveries from the media. The intersection of journalism and science is complicated by a notable gap between the objectives of the two groups. The rise of social media is worsening this disconnect, as the public is bombarded with clickbait and sensationalist news. Dr. Jim Woodgett, scientific director of the Toronto-based Lunenfeld-Tanenbaum Research Institute, argues that the public struggles to differentiate between science and "fake science" which fuels doubt and skepticism about scientific findings. Those lacking appropriate scientific understanding may fall victim to articles presenting false information or may become confused by conflicting points of view.

Without an adequate knowledge base, the public is unable to critically interpret the credibility of a source to determine the validity of a scientific article. In addition to basic science literacy, the public must learn to critically evaluate the quality of scientific sources. It is important that the public know the core components of a scientifically valid study, including knowledge of the peer-review process, study designs, statistical testing, replicability, and consensus. Improving education about scientific validity puts the power in the hands of the public and allows citizens to think critically and verify sources of scientific news.

However, even those who are scientifically literate are hindered by the inaccessibility of scientific findings and literature. Most scientific literature is published in private, pay-for-access journals, physically out of reach for most people. Additionally, the public's ability to comprehend scientific writing is impeded due to its needless complexity, and persistent use of jargon and technical terms. Such inaccessibility puts peer-reviewed scientific literature out of reach to both policymakers and members of the public.

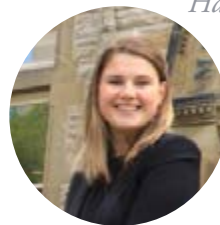
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## THE PATH TO A SCIENTIFICALLY LIBERATED PUBLIC

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Equipping citizens with a level of scientific literacy conducive to making informed decisions on science-related issues will be imperative to ensuring democratic participation on a growing number of issues pertaining to science. Consequently, practical science education should be mandatory at the secondary school level. Students must possess the level of scientific understanding required to read and critically interpret science as it appears in the media. In addition, citizens should be encouraged to think critically and evaluate the quality of sources so as to protect themselves from sensationalist news pieces. Finally, by improving overall access to scientific literature, both by making articles publically available and comprehensible, citizens will have improved access to science directly from the source.

In the age of environmental turmoil, artificial intelligence, and genetic modification, scientific literacy amongst voters and policy-makers is more important than ever. Citizens must be encouraged to trust science and think critically to guard against misinformation from anti-science groups.



*Hannah Rundle is a Master of Global Affairs candidate at the Munk School of Global Affairs. She holds a BSc in Biology from Queen's University and has conducted paleoecological research investigating the impact of climate change on freshwater algae. Hannah has a broad range of interests but she is particularly passionate about environmental issues in the global context.*

# Commercial surrogacy in India: an all-out ban or strict regulation?

BY NATASHA COMEAU



INDIA, the so-called “surrogacy hub” of the world, may soon be making the practice of commercial surrogacy illegal. Commercial surrogacy is the practice of hiring a surrogate woman to carry a child for a family for reasons such as combating infertility, avoiding pregnancy risks for the mother, or assisting same sex couples and single parent families.

New legislation in India, namely the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, was first introduced in 2016 and has since been a subject of debate in parliament. Some groups, in support of the bill, argue that banning the practice is the only way to protect surrogate women. These groups base their support on relevant health risks of the prac-

tice, economic exploitation of surrogate women, and the potential forced nature of surrogacy.

However, an argument has also been made for regulation of the practice rather than an all-encompassing ban. This argument is based in the assumption that a ban would only work to push the practice underground, forcing surrogate women to operate under increasingly vulnerable conditions. Under such conditions, women would risk their access to medical services and jeopardize the transparency of surrogate contracts, resulting in limited justice in instances of abuse under an illegal system.

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## THE HISTORY OF SURROGACY IN INDIA

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Commercial surrogacy has been legal in India since 2002 and has grown into a massive 2.3 billion dollar industry, with thousands of surrogacy clinics operating across the country. Internationally, commercial surrogacy is a highly regulated practice currently legal in very few countries, including Russia, Ukraine, and select US states. In most developed countries, including Canada, only altruistic surrogacy is legal. Due to these international regulations, many international couples and single parents have turned to Indian surrogates as a cheaper alternative to family planning options in the developed world.

Indian women are generally drawn to the practice as it provides substantial compensation and an alternative to other undesirable or low-paying professions (including sweatshop work and prostitution). Many women turn to surrogacy in times of dire economic turmoil, such as the loss of a spouse. Surrogates often use the money they receive to send children to school, pay off debts, purchase land or a house, and to escape abusive relationships.

The majority of surrogate services in India are facilitated through third-party clinics that match clients to surrogates, organize medical appointments, assign costs, and take a substantial proportion of the compensation received. These clinics also recruit uneducated, rural, poor women to be surrogates, and often manipulate women to work for low wages by framing surrogacy as a women's "reproductive duty to society." These women are often housed in the clinic in order to be supervised by doctors and staff at all times.

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### SUPPORT FOR AN ALL-ENCOMPASSING BAN

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The arguments for banning surrogacy in India are primarily women-centered and see surrogate clinics as "baby factories" for the rich. Horror stories have been



shared of surrogate women not being paid, being forced into C-sections, facing numerous pregnancy complications, and being victims of secretly induced abortions for which they are subsequently blamed. A ban would, in theory, stop these inhumane practices, lift women out of their controlling relationships with surrogate clinics, and restore the health and dignity of surrogate workers.

The proposed ban would allow only altruistic surrogacies to remain in India, exclusively for heterosexual couples, married for over five years with proven fertility issues. Such couples could hire a "close relative" to act as a surrogate for no compensation. This definition of altruistic surrogacy is hindering, however, as it excludes homosexual couples and single parent families, including widows.

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### AN ALTERNATIVE METHOD OF STRICT REGULATION

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By contrast, other groups argue that an all-encompassing ban is counterproductive to the goal of protecting women. The question posed by activists is: why limit a practice that offers an economically disenfranchised group the opportunity to earn an otherwise inaccessible income that can potentially lift them out of poverty? Banning surrogacy would, arguably, only force the practice underground creating further vulnerabilities for surrogate women's health, agency, and economic status.

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“What is needed...robust laws  
and a comprehensive monitoring  
system”

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What is needed, according to those pushing for legalization with regulation of surrogacy, are robust laws and a comprehensive monitoring system. Regulations would include a legal payment structure for surrogate women, transparent and fair contracts with surrogate clinics and clients, extensive health coverage, and a clear route to justice for victims of abuse in the system.

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## THE FUTURE OF SURROGACY IN INDIA

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While opinions on commercialized surrogacy are divided in India, attention must be paid to the interests of actual surrogate women. Since the introduction of the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill in 2016, there has been a sharp increase in women becoming surrogates in India before they no longer can (at least, for monetary compensation). This increase of surrogates sheds light on the economic necessity of this practice for many women in India. Furthermore, it signals that surrogacy is likely to persist under a ban, and that regulation of the practice may be a superior means to protecting surrogate women in India.



*Natasha is a first year Master of Global Affairs student and holds a BA Joint Honours degree in International Development and Political Science with a minor in Gender, Sexuality, Feminist and Social Justice Studies from McGill University. She is passionate about global health and gender equity, in particular reproductive healthcare, combatting gender-based violence, and human trafficking legislation. Recently Natasha wrote for the Montreal World Health Organization contributing four chapters for a reference guide, the chapters were on sexual violence, human trafficking, abortion, and compulsory sterilization. She hopes to pursue a career in the non-profit sector specializing in global health or the promotion of gender equity.*

# Internet censorship independence refer

BY BRIANA MACLEOD



**I**N the weeks leading up to the October 1 Catalan independence referendum, the Spanish authorities censored more than 140 websites and suspended close to thirty government apps to prevent Catalonians from receiving information about voting.

Catalonia is a region that existed for 250 years before joining Spain, and it maintains a culture unique from the rest of the country to this day. Spain's Constitutional Court decided on October 17 that the referendum was illegal according to the Spanish Constitution, which states that the country is indivisible. The country does not allow regional governments such as Catalonia's to hold referendums.

Nonetheless, the way the Spanish authorities are dealing



# ... during the Catalan referendum



with this issue – police violence and internet censorship – certainly treads on their citizens’ rights and suppresses freedom of expression. This is especially worrisome considering that the European Court of Human Rights deems political speech as deserving of a higher level of protection than other forms of speech.

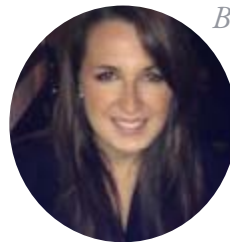
Beginning on September 13, the Spanish military police (Guardia Civil) seized the official referendum website, [www.referendum.cat](http://www.referendum.cat), pursuant to a warrant issued by the Judicial Authority. On September 20, the police proceeded to raid the offices of the .cat internet domain, which largely hosts websites belonging to the Catalan-speaking community. The authorities seized all of the computers in the office and arrested the registry’s IT manager.

As Internet Society’s Fredic Donck wrote in a statement on the matter, “The court’s ruling vis-à-vis [.cat] has a disproportionate chilling effect on free expression, and an unjust impact on the ability of Catalan-speaking persons to create, share, and access content on the internet.” In addition to taking down a number of websites, The Guardian reported that people were questioned over the development of web platforms related to the

vote. Moreover, alleged Spanish hackers have been summoned to appear in court. The Spanish government has demanded the collaboration of main internet service providers (ISPs) in the country (Telefonica, Vodafone, Orange) to monitor and block voting and referendum-related websites, as well as companies like Google to monitor and block specific applications. For instance, Catalonia’s High Court ordered Google to delete the “On Votar 1-Oct” app on the Google Play smartphone app store, which was said to be used by Catalonians to spread information about the vote.

Reuters reported on October 27, 2017 that Spain moved to impose direct rule over Catalonia while the Catalan government declared itself an independent nation. As tensions rise, the Catalan parliament has been dissolved, the government fired, and a new regional election will be held on December 21, 2017. Regardless of the political outcome, many Catalans have seen their human rights and fundamental freedoms abused both on and off-line, which may fuel the existing “us versus them” sentiments and prolong civil unrest.

*For those interested in understanding how to preserve your fundamental rights on the Internet and avoid censorship, visit Xnet. Additionally, Wikileaks founder Julian Assange suggests downloading applications Briar and FireChat, which enable mobile messaging without an internet connection or mobile data.*



*Briana MacLeod is a MGA Candidate (2018) with an undergraduate degree from Dalhousie University in Political Science and International Development Studies. She has a perpetual desire to travel and to discover the political, social, and cultural complexities embodied by each unique place. Most recently, she traveled to Geneva to participate in an internship with the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations, where she conducted research and analysis on a range of humanitarian affairs issues with a focus on refugees and international migration. Previously, she worked at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France, which gave her direct exposure to a broad range of governments and cultures at a time when Europe is undergoing fascinating challenges and evolution.*



# Will Lady Liberty be the only leading lady the United States will ever know?

BY HANNAH ROSEN

**F**ORTY THREE presidents strong and America continues its “no girls allowed” tradition by electing Donald Trump as the 44th president of the United States over Hillary Clinton. Meanwhile, Germany has elected Angela Merkel for her fourth term as Chancellor, the most powerful role in German politics. Two experienced women, two electoral systems, two opposing results.

Germany’s population is 50.7 per cent female, comparable to the 50.8 per cent in the U.S. Both nations are highly developed, industrialized, and forward thinking. What’s the difference?

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“What’s the difference?”

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For one, Germany has a parliamentary electoral system, while the U.S. has a presidential system. Initially, Merkel solidified her place in the parliamentary system by winning a legislative seat in 1990. In 2005, the Bundestag of Germany elected her as Chancellor after her party won the most seats, making her the first woman to hold the office in the country’s history. In Germany’s parliamentary system, people elect a party, and the entire legislature then elects the leader from that winning party.

SOURCE: CREATIVE COMMONS, JACKIE RAMIREZ

Contrastingly, in the U.S. presidential system, people vote for representatives in the Electoral College, who then elect the president. The president does not need to have a history of public service; however, they must be a natural born citizen, 35 years or older, and have lived in America for the past 14 years. After serving as a lawyer, First Lady, and a Senator, Clinton cracked the thick glass ceiling by becoming the first woman to top the presidential ticket of a major party in the U.S. Despite winning the popular vote, she still lost the race to Trump, an inexperienced politician and business tycoon.

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“Clinton cracked the thick glass ceiling”

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Although Presidents and Prime Ministers fulfill similar roles, they are vastly different. Presidents act more independently from the legislature and, according to some studies, are associated with generally masculine traits such as decisiveness and aggression. The U.S. president is also the Head of the Armed Forces — another role from which women are often dismissed.

In many ways, Clinton faced a national voting system that was stacked against her from the start, with voters favouring dominant male characteristics, complacency towards a history of male presidents, and females accounting for 25.9 per cent or less of any political body in the U.S. Clinton contended with sexism and stereotypes in order to gain an edge against her male counterparts and convince the general public a woman could handle to role of president. She challenged the direct association that the presidency has with masculinity and aligned her attitude and speaking style to those of her male counterparts – which was often met with criticism.

On top of gender-based public perceptions, the presidential campaign system does not make the rise to political power easy for women. U.S. presidential candidates do not have to work together post-election, and because of this, a competitive and demoralizing environment is created during the campaign. In the 2016 election, Trump frequently commented on Clinton’s use of the “woman card” in order to undermine her authority and

detract from her abilities.

In contrast, the executive and legislative bodies are coupled together in a parliamentary system, meaning traditionally feminine skills such as collaboration and negotiation are sought after in the roles of Prime Minister or Chancellor. Due to the parliamentary structure, Merkel did not have to take on a gendered lens or appeal to the masses to acquire or maintain her role as Chancellor. Rather, her ability to lead Germany was determined by the Bundestag, sidestepping the potentially gender-biased perceptions of the German public. She was not winning over a public that had long seen a history of male dominated politics, but instead proving to a group of experienced politicians within the Bundestag that she was a capable leader.

German elections are considered to be more civil than U.S. elections, as there is an allotted T.V. time for each political party, government funding rather than private funding, and most importantly, a need for leaders to collaborate post-election. Coalitions have been the result of past German elections, as there are too many parties to allow for one to win an overall majority. Therefore, German chancellor candidates want to appear as synergistic with their opponents as possible.

Overall, it appears that women in the U.S. are less inclined to run for office than men. Gendered barriers and preconceived notions of what a “Head of State” looks like prevent women from rising up in national political positions. In the grander scheme, when the nation that is perceived as the most powerful in the world appears institutionally designed to inhibit women from gaining the position of Head of State, it sets a lower standard for the rest of the world.



*Hannah is a first year Master of Global Affairs student at the Munk School of Global Affairs. She recently obtained her Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Political Studies with a minor in Global Development Studies. Her focus is predominantly concerned with the correlation between gender and the field of military and defense. Her goals are to conduct her own research in the field while obtaining her PhD.*

# President Duterte's drug war: is the world turning a blind-eye to the deadliest drug-war today?

BY MARY-ANNE LAGUNA MEERASABEER



**W**ITHIN days of winning the election, the Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte launched what is now one of the world's deadliest anti-narcotics campaigns. Over 12,500 Filipinos have been unlawfully killed with impunity by law enforcement, paramilitaries, and unidentified vigilantes. Another 38,000 have been jailed, driving a crisis in the nation's overpopulated prisons. Duterte continues to publicly rally vigilantes to join his proclaimed "war on drugs" and silences any opposition through imprisonment and

threats to abolish the constitutionally mandated Commission on Human Rights.

The Philippines government has sovereign authority to maintain law and order within its borders, including punishing those who consume or sell illegal drugs. However, it must do so under the International Human Rights Law. As of September 2017, the Global Responsibility to Protect has asserted that the Philippines government is failing to protect its people from crimes against humanity.



Is the international community responding to this crisis? Not really. At most, human rights advocates are fighting back. In September 2017, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zei Ra'ad Al Hussein called for an independent investigation into extrajudicial killings in the Philippines. UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health called for drug dependency to be treated as a public health issue and for the decriminalization of consumption. Still, it is clear that the silence of global powers with strong ties to the Philippines – such as the United States and China – are dictated by their domestic interests and geopolitical strategy in the Asia-Pacific region.

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## WHAT TRUMP THINKS

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According to the U.S. Department of State, U.S.-Philippines relations are based on a “shared commitment to democracy and human rights.” Ironically, U.S. President Donald Trump speaks admiringly of Duterte’s drug war and reassures him that he is handling the fight against drugs “the right way” in private phone calls. Trump’s support for Duterte directly stems from his own interest in defending America’s national security against illegal narcotics trade as part of his “America First” policy.

The White House is also reluctant to take action against Duterte for fear of jeopardizing their existing defense alliance, including the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement providing the U.S. forces greater access to Philippine bases. Faced with greater nuclear capabilities in North Korea and a more assertive China on territorial

claims in the East and South China Sea, it is critical for the U.S. to maintain stability and security in the region and protect its economic interests. With the combined motive of upholding America’s anti-narcotics campaign and safeguarding influence over economic stability and security in the Asia-Pacific region, Duterte’s drug war seems to be of the least priority for the Trump administration.

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## WHAT KIM THINKS

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Chinese Foreign Ministry spokespersons openly proclaim China’s support for Duterte’s vicious anti-drug campaign. At the Universal Periodic Review earlier this year, Beijing was the sole supporter of Manila, which was condemned by a majority of UN member states for extrajudicial killings.

Primarily, China’s own campaign against the trafficking of methamphetamine relies on cooperation with the Philippines. In fact, a recent cross-border drug trafficking case was resolved jointly by law enforcement of the two sides, resulting in 12 suspects arrested and over 600 kilograms of methamphetamine seized. Confronting Duterte on his anti-narcotics campaign for the mere purpose of diplomatic goodwill would be detrimental to China’s own national security. In the future, China aims to further cooperate with the Philippines in fields such as anti-drug information sharing, technical equipment, and drug rehabilitation programs.

Furthermore, China’s support for Duterte’s drug war is allowing a revival of ties with the Philippines lost over

disputed land features in the South China Sea in recent years. China may be eager to entice a long-standing U.S. ally through such support in order to gain greater regional influence and favor. This is logical, as China is its largest neighbor and makes an indispensable partner for national development.

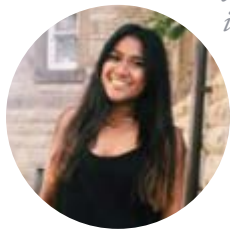
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## WHAT FILIPINOS THINK

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The most recent nationwide survey on presidential performance and trust ratings by Pulse Asia Research in September 2017, showed Duterte's approval rating to be as high as 86 per cent. Much of this is attributed to Filipinos' anticipation over the president-elect's future domestic and foreign policies. As the first president from southern Philippines, Duterte intends to end the decades-long wars with insurgents and communist militants in the south. He aims to dramatically decentralize power away from Manila by transforming the Philippines into a federal nation and, most notably, shift the national economy in a way that fosters growth and helps reduce the currently abysmal level of national income inequality.

Notwithstanding Duterte's presidential appeal in other policy areas, bolder action is needed to restore the rule of law and stop the widespread extrajudicial killings in the Philippines. The international community will have to decide how long great powers' strategic interests should take priority over effective action to end the inhumane and barbaric killings of Filipinos.



*Mary-Anne is a 23-year-old first-year MGA in collaboration with CESEAS. Her passion specifically lies in international trade policy, human rights protection, and sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region and has thus done extensive research on the region. In particular, she has written on Sino-African development cooperation, economic growth and corruption in South Korea, and Business Process Outsourcing and sustainable development in the Philippines. This summer, she conducted field research during in China about the growth of lacrosse in Shanghai. Mary-Anne is also an attack player on the UofT Varsity Blues Women's Lacrosse team.*

# Confronting the unc

BY GEORDIE JEAKINS

**M**ORE than 16 years on from the events of September 11, 2001, and the international community appears to be farther than ever from understanding, let alone confronting, terrorism. From almost any angle, the 'Global War on Terror' should be regarded as an abject failure.

Despite two incredibly costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and a multilateral effort to combat international terrorist networks, huge swaths of the Middle East, the Maghreb, and East and West Africa remain unstable or are on the brink of total collapse. Meanwhile, bombings, shootings, stabbings, and vehicular manslaughter continue to claim civilian lives in the West and abroad.

Most shocking of all has been the emergence of the so-called 'Islamic State of Iraq and Syria' from the ashes of al-Qaida to become a potent military force and a lightning-rod for jihadists around the world. Despite these developments, counter-terrorism appears to remain largely within the realm of military operations even though there is growing evidence that it fails to address the root causes of radicalization and, in many cases, only makes it worse.



# comfortable roots of terrorism



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“Terrorists are not a unique breed”

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Recent research shows, however, that the root cause of radicalization runs much deeper than religious fanaticism. Terrorists are not a unique breed; rather, their motivations for fighting are often surprisingly human. In her work interviewing Islamic State fighters in Iraq and Syria, Harvard fellow Vera Miranova has developed a profile for jihadists, whereby base emotions—be it greed, revenge, or mere survival—are the driving forces of radicalization.

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“The root cause of radicalization runs much deeper than religious fanaticism.”

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For many of these fighters, the chance for profit is a huge draw, as the Islamic State is well-known for providing a competitive salary and even a pension for its members. Others are motivated by a drive to avenge family, friends, and community members injured or killed by Coalition drones, government security forces, or Shia militias. Perhaps most surprising is that many hope to escape lives of political marginalization, economic stagnation, social dislocation, and, sometimes,

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## ALIENATION, NOT INDOCTRINATION

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Going back to at least the 9/11 attacks, Islamic terrorists are typically viewed through a religious and ideological prism, whereby jihadists are driven by fanatic zeal and a single-minded hatred of their ‘infidel’ enemies. This simplistic, two-dimensional profile of terrorists is integral to the West’s mindset and frames its counter-terrorism strategy. For example, the British government seeks to root out religious extremism because, as the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights 2016-2017 report on Counter-Extremism notes, “There is an escalator that starts with religious conservatism and ends with support for violent jihadism.”



emotional in nature, are not addressed by simply killing the current batch of fighters. In fact, air and drone strikes or special forces operations to kill terrorists often only serve to turn local populations against the West and towards those groups that promise a means to strike back. These results appear to be confirmed in a 2015-2016 Pentagon-funded study, where surveyed residents of Mosul placed coalition air strikes (46 per cent) higher than ISIS (38 per cent) as threats to themselves and their families.

boredom. To many would-be terrorists—be they local or foreign fighters—jihadism is a chance for a more exciting or fulfilling life.

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## A SELF-DEFEATING STRATEGY

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The traditional strategy for combatting terrorism relies on targeted military strikes against terror cells. By decapitating their leadership, military planners hope to erode terror cells' ability to organize local and foreign operations. However, the above findings are uncomfortable realities for decision-makers in the West, who anchor their thinking in the assumption that jihadists must be eradicated to eliminate the threat.

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“The underlying motivations that drive individuals to join these jihadist groups, be they economic, social, or emotional in nature, are not addressed by simply killing”

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The underlying motivations that drive individuals to join these jihadist groups, be they economic, social, or

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## DIGGING UP ROOTS

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The conundrum of solving the terrorism crisis appears intractable with the West's current paradigm. Defeating an enemy that can fluidly disappear into the countryside and amidst the population is unfeasible. A more nuanced tactic must be taken, particularly one that seeks to alleviate the grievances that give rise to terrorism in the first place. A single-minded focus on security is both insufficient and counterproductive for creating the conditions of long-term stability. Instead, the West must seek to address issues of governance, economic growth, and social welfare.

Building the capacity of local government institutions to meet their constituents' needs will be the primary means of undercutting the propaganda of terrorist organizations. In the end, this strategy will help dig up the fertile soil that allows radicalism to take root.



*Geordie is a first year Master of Global Affairs student at the Munk School of Global Affairs. He holds an Honours BA degree from the University of Toronto, where he specialized in History and International Relations. Although topics of security are a primary interest of his, Geordie also enjoys writing about issues of development, diplomacy, and trade.*



# Natural disaster, crippling debt, and stagnating political status: insights on Puerto Rico's crisis

BY ALEXANDRE LÉVESQUE



**R**ATHER than being a commander-in-chief, [Donald Trump] is like a hater-in-chief,” declared a visibly dismayed Carmen Yulín Cruz, the San Juan Mayor during a CNN interview, on October 13. The head of the Puerto Rican capital’s administration further insisted that “for some reason, [the president of the United States] is taking all of his anger out on Puerto Rico,” before recalling how the population of the Caribbean island paid their dues with their participation in every conflict the United States has engaged in since 1917.

Since Hurricane Maria wreaked havoc on the island, approximately a third of Puerto Ricans lack running wa-

ter, and some have even resorted to using contaminated sources out of despair. Over 80 per cent of the island still does not have electricity, and the material damage is set to be record-breaking. It is projected that at least \$30 billion will be required to rebuild infrastructure, a sum that represents nearly a third of Puerto Rico’s economy. Moreover, and most critically, the Puerto Rican government is unable to borrow money because it already carries a burdensome debt of \$73 billion.

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“[Donald Trump] is like a hater-in-chief”

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In the midst of Puerto Rico facing one of its most dreadful crises in modern history, it is important to question how and why the 30th most populous territory of the United States is facing such difficulties.

From an economic perspective, Puerto Ricans' situation was favorable until recently. The island's economy was rated as the most competitive economy in Latin America by the World Economic Forum in 2014, with the added title of a High Income economy by the World Bank. Its rapid industrialization during the 1950s and 1960s, courtesy of a spin-off of Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal," is in large part responsible for these encouraging ratings.

However, the current negative state of the Puerto Rican economy can be traced back to 2006. At the time, a series of negative cash flows and the expiration of a tax exemption policy for U.S. corporations based in Puerto Rico resulted in 11 consecutive years of economic depression. Factors such as an unemployment rate twice as large as that of the rest of the U.S. and the constant exodus of thousands of citizens seeking better opportunities continue to hinder Puerto Rico's economy.

This deteriorating state of the Puerto Rican economy was showcased in May when the government announced a \$73 billion debt load – the worst U.S. municipal bankruptcy of all time. President Donald Trump addressed the debt in a controversial tweet, affirming that "billions of dollars" are owed by Puerto Rico to "Wall Street and the banks." In reality, less than 25 per cent of the debt is owed to hedge funds, whereas most of the remainder is held by everyday investors.

A more political perspective also yields insights into the Puerto Rican crisis. It has been almost 120 years since the U.S. conquered the island as part of their broader strategy to become a naval superpower, thus ending four centuries of Spanish colonial government. Since the conquest, numerous independence movements have arisen, often expressed through violence, like the Utuado Massacre in 1950.

Currently, Puerto Rico is an unincorporated organized territory of the U.S. with a commonwealth constitution. Its inhabitants are by law natural-born citizens of the U.S. and they can circulate freely in the mainland. Giv-

en that Puerto Rico is not a state, its residents are not allowed to have a vote in the U.S. Congress, despite the fact that this institution governs the territory with full jurisdiction. This same restriction applies for presidential elections. Moreover, the island elects its own governor, who possesses relatively limited powers within the larger U.S governmental framework.

Therefore, Puerto Ricans tend to be stuck between two identities: their colonial Spanish cultural heritage mixed with different waves of settlers, slaves, and indigenous tribes on the one side, and the American identity on the other.

Since the current political status of the island does not seem to allow Puerto Ricans to fulfill their socio-economic needs and objectives, what is the best of the two alternatives between full sovereignty or statehood within the U.S.? The UN's Special Committee on Decolonization called upon the U.S. to expedite self-determination processes in 2016, while other actors like the Government Development Bank or Governor Rosselló strongly recommend U.S. statehood.

Given the failure of four referendums to find a consensus over a new political status for Puerto Rico, including the most recent vote in June 2017, it seems unclear whether the island's fight for justice can improve in the long run without the formation of a unified political movement.



*Currently undertaking his first year of the Master of Global Affairs program at the University of Toronto, Alexandre has a wide range of interests towards diversified topics related to national level politics, international relations, global and regional security, as well as European, East Asian and North American affairs. Prior to moving in Toronto, he obtained an International Studies bachelor degree at the Université de Montréal with a specialization in political science. Alexandre's relevant experiences include an internship for a Member of Parliament, various international organizations' models, numerous events he organized for his student association, and a student exchange in Prague. Having also previously written for an independent media and student journals, he is now eager to pursue his hobby with Global Conversations.*

# Nation to nation building

BY EMMA AMARAL



**L**EADING up to the 2015 Canadian federal election, the Liberal Party of Canada began to promote a “nation to nation” relationship with Indigenous peoples. It is unclear whether Trudeau is referring to a “nation to nation” approach in the literal sense or symbolically. Either option, however, carries enormous legal implications and contestations.

Issues of land rights and governance far predate Trudeau. The Two Row Wampum was one of the earliest treaties post-contact in 1613 between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch. The treaty established sharing of the land, respect, and friendship, as well as autonomy and self-determination. The two parallel rows of beads on the belt that originally recorded the agreement signify two canoes travelling side by side, demonstrating that neither group would try to steer the others’ vessel or influence their course.

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“Subsequent legalities moved away from the concept of land-sharing”

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Subsequent legalities moved away from the concept of land-sharing and towards controlling and defining almost all aspects of Indigenous life. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 documented the land rights of Aboriginal people in terms of a reserve system, the Indian Act of 1876 limited the autonomy and self-governance of First Nations people, and the 1982 Constitution Act enshrined Aboriginal and treaty rights.

The treaty negotiation process between the Canadian government and Indigenous communities is ongoing. The first modern land claim agreement and treaty was the 1975 James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA), which was expanded upon earlier this year to allow the Cree Nation to make laws that will no longer have to be submitted to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs. The largest self-governing arrangement addresses education and was negotiated this past August between 23 Indigenous communities in Ontario and the federal and provincial governments. The new Anishinabek-based curriculum from junior kindergarten to grade 12 is expected to roll out by next spring. Tracey O’Donnell, the Anishinaabe education negotiator, states that “the purpose of the self-governing education authority is to preserve the Anishinaabe culture, language, traditions, and history.”

Yet although Trudeau promotes a “nation to nation” relationship with Indigenous peoples, their rights to self-governance must operate within Canadian sovereignty and jurisprudence. This view is expressed by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) in the following statement: “The inherent right of self-government does not include a right of sovereignty in the international law sense, and will not result in sovereign independent Aboriginal nation states. On the contrary, implementation of self-government should enhance the participation of Aboriginal peoples in the Canadian federation, and ensure that Aboriginal peoples and their governments do not exist in isolation, separate and apart from the rest of Canadian society.”

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“Rights to self-governance must operate within Canadian sovereignty and jurisprudence”

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Notably, INAC lists as the first two steps of this self-governance process the submission of a proposal and an acceptance, though the terms on which proposals are accepted by the federal government are not made explicitly clear. There is, however, an extensive list of topics whereby federal and provincial laws will prevail in the event of a conflict with Aboriginal laws, such as environmental protection, assessment, and pollution prevention. Powers related to Canadian sovereignty, defense, and external relations are completely off limits to self-governance negotiations, in addition to other national interests such as the national economy and law and order.

In 2016, Indigenous Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett finally removed Canada’s objector status to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). “We are now a full supporter of the declaration, without qualification,” she began. She then qualified this, saying that “we intend nothing less than to adopt and implement the declaration *in accordance with the Canadian Constitution.*”

This presents a legal conundrum, as UNDRIP asserts

that Indigenous peoples have a right to self-determination and can maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social, and cultural institutions while retaining the right to participate fully with those of the state. The Trudeau government has also committed to enacting the 94 “Calls to Action” of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2015, including the call for full implementation of UNDRIP. “Call to Action” number 47 of the report calls for all levels of Canadian government to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and lands, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius* and to reform laws, policies, and litigation strategies that rely on said concepts.

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“Canada must legally grapple with the vestiges of colonial laws that are incompatible with its stated mandate.”

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As Canada engages in reconciliation, it must legally grapple with the vestiges of colonial laws that are incompatible with its stated mandate. Although the TRC’s Calls to Action and UNDRIP are not legally binding, they represent changing norms that will affect Canada’s stated commitment to move toward a “nation to nation” relationship with Indigenous peoples. Currently, this dynamic remains better-defined as “semi-autonomous regions operating within a nation.”



*Emma Amaral is a first year student at the Munk School of Global Affairs. Emma graduated with an Honours Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Toronto, where she majored in psychology and minored in biology and Portuguese. After graduating, Emma did social work for a non-profit organization in the field of mental health and housing, where she continues to volunteer. She also conducted psychological research on racial bias, fraud, and mental illness. Emma looks forward to expanding my perspective from the local (I have lived in downtown Toronto all my life) to the global.*

# The cry of the Rohingya: where is the world's response?

BY SARAH COOPER



**A**S fire rages through the village, homes turn to ash, smoke burns lungs, and gunfire rings out. Soldiers round up anyone they can get their hands on and indiscriminately shoot at the rest. This is the story of the Rohingya people, who have survived to recount the story of what they have endured.

The Rohingya are a Muslim-majority ethnic group who has lived in the Rakhine state of Myanmar for centuries. There are approximately 1.1 million Rohingya who live in the Southeast-Asian country and nearly 1 million in neighboring countries.

The Rohingya people, commonly cited as the world's most persecuted minority, have faced a persistent legacy of violence and discrimination. Under Myanmar's Buddhist majority, they have endured decades of demonization and oppression, denial of citizenship rendering them stateless, and subjection to extrajudicial killings, torture, and mass rape. The recent installment of a ruthless security regime, resulting in the targeted ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya people, has forced many to flee their homes in the Rakhine state of Myanmar.

The escalation of violence and a major military operation targeted at the Rohingya people comes after an attack on a police post carried out by the Arakan

Rohingya Solidarity Army (ARSA) on August 25, 2017. Since then, “clearance operations” have been carried out by the Myanmar military and local Buddhist vigilante groups. These operations have resulted in a systematic attack on Rohingya villages, leading to the genocide of Rohingya people.



Humanitarian aid and human rights organizations have been documenting the stories of those who have survived the horrendous ordeal. There have been numerous reports from survivors on the burning of entire villages and the methodical slaughter of unarmed civilians, including the rounding-up of male villagers for execution, gang-rape of women and young girls, and the beheading of babies and small children. Those who managed to survive the massacre in their village then risked their lives crossing the border into Bangladesh.

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“The military likely engaged in serious human rights abuses, potentially amounting to war crimes. The Myanmar government denies these allegations”

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Due to the overwhelming and damning reports, the United Nations (UN) has said that the military likely engaged in serious human rights abuses, potentially

amounting to war crimes. The Myanmar government denies these allegations and claims that they have only targeted the insurgents responsible for the attacks on August 25, 2017. Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar’s de facto head of state and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, has failed to condemn the treatment of the Rohingya people and stand up for their rights. Her complacency has been met with criticism from the international community, though they themselves have done little to denounce the ongoing violence and historical dehumanization of the Rohingya people.

Bangladesh has responded, as they now seek to address the dramatic influx of Rohingya refugees at their border. Prominent government leaders have criticised the Myanmar government’s treatment of the Rohingya people, including the security forces’ more recent arson attacks, calling these acts “a genocide.” Bangladesh’s National Commission for Human Rights has also suggested that those responsible in Myanmar face trial at an international tribunal and has urged the international community to pledge their support.

Despite the continued denial by the Myanmar government, the evidence is mounting. Using satellite imagery, Human Rights Watch has counted over 200 villages that have been burnt to the ground. According to UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, more than 500,000 Rohingya have fled Myanmar since August 25, 2017, to seek refuge in camps along the Bangladesh border. As these refugee camps spill over with stateless Rohingya people, they wait to hear the world’s response for what lies ahead.



*Sarah is a Master of Global Affairs candidate with diverse interests, often focusing their studies on the intersection of identity politics and human rights, with a growing interest in the policy challenges created by emerging technology. Sarah has held multiple positions in various not-for-profit organizations, has worked as a policy analyst for the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission and most recently as a consultant for Youth LEAD in Bangkok, Thailand. They hold a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and Human Rights from Carleton University.*

# Hungry for peace

BY MIA FORTINO



**T**HE Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) cautions that the recent global increase in chronically undernourished people may be driven by conflict.

As the FAO's 2017 report explains, 2016 marked a departure from years of declining hunger figures. The report also notes that the number of conflicts has been on the rise as well. In total, 485 of the 815 million undernourished people are currently living in conflict-affected areas. Additionally, climate-related stressors intensify the food security and nutrition challenges that are present in conflict-ridden areas.

The relationship between conflict and food and nutrition insecurity is vigorously explored by both international organizations and academics. Conflict reduces the availability of food in a given area by disrupting food production and distribution processes. Food can also be actively utilized as a weapon of oppression in conditions of armed conflict, through the deliberate destruction of food supplies or the diversion of food aid from its intended recipients.

Moreover, conflict inhibits access to food by destroying the economies and livelihoods that allow people to purchase it. Food trade flows are disrupted, government

coffers for social protection are eroded, and citizens engage in coping strategies that endanger future livelihoods. Conflict also forces the migration of people, which could lead to limited food access during travel and upon arrival.

Some claim that this relationship is two-sided, and that food insecurity can, in turn, feed conflict. Food and nutrition insecurity is believed, for example, to heighten the risk of democratic breakdown and communal conflict. The food riots that broke out in 48 countries in the wake of the 2008-2009 financial crisis are an often cited testament to this.

If food insecurity is both “a cause and a consequence” of conflict, then this relationship is further complicated by climate change. Climate change, and the increasing likelihood of extreme weather, is expected to provoke the prevalence of “complex emergencies.” This describes a situation where food and nutrition insecurity is amplified by additional shocks that occur in conjunction with conflict, such as droughts.

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“Climate change... is expected to provoke the prevalence of “complex emergencies.”

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While there appears to be a food and nutrition security – conflict matrix, both issues are caused by weak institutions. Conflict leads to food and nutrition insecurity when a nation lacks the institutional robustness to allow for coping, and vice versa. It is therefore useful to focus on a nation’s capacity for recovery or resilience when thinking of solutions.

Resilience, in the context of conflicts, is defined as “helping countries and households to prevent, anticipate, prepare for, cope with, and recover from conflicts, and not only bounce back to where they were before the conflicts occurred but become even better off.” Food security interventions may critically enable nations to ‘bounce back better off’ in this way. They could reduce the motives that lead to conflict and provide greater sta-



bility to mitigate the impacts of conflict. Further, food security interventions can target the dominant population of current conflict-affected areas – smallholder farmers – through a focus on productive agricultural activities.

The FAO’s 2017 report highlights what such an intervention might look like. It could involve any combination of livelihood support, community engagement, and institution-building. It might also encourage the dedication of official development assistance to agriculture productivity in conflict zones, which is an area that typically receives lower than average funding.

The difficulty with resilience strategies is that they require immediate crises to be conceptualized in the long-term. A conflict has to be examined not only in terms of what it is today, but also what its resolution, and all challenges to that, will look like. Resilience-building requires systemic change that seems incomprehensible when a nation is in crisis mode, but it may be the key to addressing the food crises of the future.



*Mia is a 2018 Master of Global Affairs candidate, with a Honours Bachelor’s Degree in Political Science. She has experience editing an academic journal and creating government documents at the municipal and federal levels. She is interested in international development, especially as it relates to health, food security, and sustainability. Mia believes that access to delicious and nutritious food is a universal right and is interested in investigating related policies and practices.*





# Why you should be skeptical of Saudi driving laws

BY GITA GOOLSARRAN

ON September 26, 2017, Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud issued a royal decree allowing Saudi women to obtain driver's licenses, contravening the conventions under which state officials have long operated.

For years women in Saudi Arabia have required chauffeurs to *legally* perform a vast range of tasks that women elsewhere consider "normal." Now, as newly-minted crown prince Mohammed bin Salman further consolidates power, Saudi Arabia presents its "progressive" *Vision 2030* post-oil plan and, as an added bonus, seemingly legislates against gender discrimination in the issuance of driver's licences.

In recent years, there has been overwhelming push-back on the unofficial driving ban from Saudi women themselves, including large driving campaigns in protest. Numerous activists have also been arrested for posting videos of themselves driving, garnering considerable international attention.

The new changes are to take full effect in June 2018, while in the meantime, a committee has been formed to oversee the process of implementation. By far the most glaring caveat is that the decree allows women to drive "in accordance with Islamic law." Unsurprisingly, this leaves a lot of political wiggle room for what the next year might look like.



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“But why now? The Saudi state has gradually been pushing for more modern, or moderate, reforms.”

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But why now? The Saudi state has gradually been pushing for more modern, or moderate, reforms. These include having female appointees to the Shura Council, and expanding the enfranchisement of women. In a striking statement preceding the driving decree, Saudi women were allowed entrance into a sports stadium to participate in Saudi National Day celebrations alongside their male counterparts.

Optimists praise the state's recognition that this new-found freedom will encourage more female participation in the workforce, and will eliminate the large financial strain of chauffeurs. In this sense, the new policy is expected to uplift the Saudi economy at this critical point in time, as the country grapples with its “after oil” outlook.

The skeptics' critiques center around Saudi Arabia's geopolitical aspirations and interests. Despite the recent blockade, the country cannot compete with Qatar as a bastion of Middle Eastern progress, and has devised a crafty method, high in shock-value, to readjust their global brand. Playing to a similar logic of distraction, other critics point to human rights concerns centered

around Saudi Arabia's actions in Yemen and the detention of numerous individuals.

The decree issued by King Salman follows closely on the heels of Saudi religious scholar Sheikh Saad al-Hajari's claims that women possess a fraction of the intellect of their male counterparts, especially when at the market, and thus shouldn't be issued licences. Whether such opinions operate as an imperative of society or of religion is still up for debate.

The highly conservative brand of Islam propounded by such clerics stands in stark contrast to the rising tide of Muslim feminists who have been pushing for women's rights in a holistic capacity. This includes both driving rights and a reconstruction of Islam centered on living Muslims and their experiences, rather than the strictly textual and highly selective interpretations promoted by the Wahhabi state.

Despite the new decree, there are a host of restrictions still in place on women's freedom in Saudi Arabia. The greatest challenge now faced by Saudi activists is to overturn the guardianship system that restricts women's access and mobility in the public sphere. This includes applying for that driver's licence without the permission of an official male guardian, or *wali*. This fundamentally illustrates the need for Muslim feminism as a solution bypassing obvious band-aid propositions.

Ultimately, it remains to be seen whether, or to what extent, the guardian system might serve to curtail these new driving laws as they operate “in accordance with Islamic laws.”



*Gita is a first year MGA student, and recent graduate of the University of Toronto. She obtained her Honours Bachelor of Arts degree specializing in Political Science, with a minor in History. She has strong interests in issues of the Global South, including the politics of religion and indigeneity, innovation policy, and the regional dynamics of economic development. Her long-term goals are to pursue these intellectual interests through a career in global policy. She is an avid reader and her passions include learning about the world through books and travel.*



# Kenya implements toughest ban on plastic bags

BY VANESSA HAYFORD

**T**HIS past August the Kenyan government implemented a strict ban on plastic bags. Kenya's ban, which is one of the world's harshest, includes severe penalties for the use, manufacturing, and importing of plastic bags. Violators can face a fine of up to \$40,000 or a four-year jail sentence.

Prior to the ban, Kenyans were estimated to have used 100 million plastic bags annually. The ban was implemented in an effort to combat this widespread use, which has contributed to crowded landfills and extensive pollution across the country. Pollution has especially affected livestock, with slaughterhouses reporting that cows have been found with up to 20 plastic bags in their stomachs.

In the past, the Kenyan government has tried on three separate occasions to pass a ban on plastic bags. Their plans were met with resistance from industry and legislators, which led to their ultimate failure. Businesses in the country were also concerned about losses in profits. As a major exporter of plastic bags to the East African region, Kenya's manufacturing industry expected to lose over 60,000 jobs and 176 manufacturers.

Business owners and consumers alike have had to adapt to life without plastic bags since the implementation of the ban. The government has advised the use of reusable alternatives, such as cloth and paper bags, and residents have been following suit with other innovative ways to transport their goods.

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## WHAT DOES THE BAN MEAN?

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Kenya's plastic bag ban represents a major step forward in environmental policy. The East African nation joins nearly 40 countries worldwide that have prohibited or taxed the use of plastic bags.

Policies restricting or prohibiting the use of plastic bags in other countries have been proven to have significant effects. After introducing a five-pence charge on plastic bags, the United Kingdom saw a drop in the use of such bags by 83 per cent. Such a strict ban, if successful in the long-term, could motivate other nations to follow suit and implement policies that limit the use of plastic bags and address their negative environmental implications.

The swift implementation of Kenya's policy, however,

poses problems of its own. The Kenyan government allowed for a six-month grace period to adapt to the ban, which ended in August. Authorities have since conducted several arrests and have mobilized officers across the country to ensure compliance. Despite these reported achievements in enforcement, some opposing groups have expressed concern that the ban has created more opportunities for extortion by police officers.



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## STEPPING STONE TO COMBATTING POLLUTION

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The ban may also stand as a limited, primary step towards an all-encompassing environmental policy; Kenya will continue to face issues of pollution, despite this preventative effort. Stronger environmental policies to address other sources of environmental contamination and clean up would complement the new policy.

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“Banning these bags will force residents to find other methods to deal with waste, which could be even more detrimental to the environment.”

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Kenya’s ban could also negatively affect the country’s poorest citizens. Plastic bags are a staple means of transporting goods for market sellers, and many residents use the bags as “flying toilets” in the absence of public facilities. Banning these bags will force residents to find other methods to deal with waste, which could be even more detrimental to the environment. In order to efficiently maximize the potential of the new legislation, Kenya must first address other infrastructural matters that relate to proper sanitation.

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“Kenya’s newest environmental policy is promising. Inspired by Kenya’s hard line on the issue, the wider East African region has considered a regional ban.”

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Regardless of the challenges that lie ahead, Kenya’s newest environmental policy is promising. Inspired by Kenya’s hard line on the issue, the wider East African region has considered a regional ban. With roughly 12 countries in Africa enacting a partial ban or tax penalties on plastic bags, Kenya’s policy suggests a growing interest by African countries to implement policies that will address the continent’s environmental issues.



*Vanessa is a first year student in the Master of Global Affairs program with the Munk School of Global Affairs. Prior to pursuing her Master’s degree, Vanessa worked as a constituency assistant for Member of Parliament Julie Dzerowicz, with a focus on immigration casework, and as an equity assistant for Scotiabank Global Banking and Markets. As an avid writer, Vanessa served as a Junior Research Fellow for the NATO Council of Canada, and is currently a casual writer for a local Afro-Caribbean food blog. Her key topics of interest are immigration, humanitarian intervention, and international development.*

# Venezuela's secret economy: the rise of Bitcoin

BY TANVI SHETTY



**B**UYING a basket of groceries in Venezuela in March 2017 would have cost approximately 772,614 Bolívares, but with the minimum monthly wage being less than one-third of this amount (200,021 Bolívar), it is easy to see why the majority of Venezuelans have struggled to make ends meet.

The economic crisis in Venezuela has intensified since March 2017, and is likely to worsen according to a recent report published by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which predicts that inflation rates in Venezuela will rise to 2,349 per cent by 2018. The Venezuelan government has not released any official economic data since 2014, making it difficult to pinpoint the triggers that have led to this economic crisis. Whilst the causes of hyperinflation in Venezuela may not be clear,

the effects certainly are: rising unemployment, food scarcity, and political unrest. The rapid demise of the local currency, the Bolívar, has forced locals to turn to other mediums as means of purchasing goods and services. Of these, the bitcoin is gaining popularity. Since its inception in 2009, bitcoin has become the world's most widely used cryptocurrency. The Bitcoin network relies on blockchain technology, a decentralised, peer-to-peer digital ledger that is used to record all transactions that occur in a network.

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“Bitcoin has become the world's most widely used cryptocurrency.”

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Three features in particular make the technology unique and disruptive in nature: one, the digital ledger can only be updated through consensus amongst all participants in the system, two, there is no central authority that regulates the network, and three, members can engage in transactions anonymously.

To earn bitcoins, locals engage in an activity known as “Bitcoin mining.” “Miners” use specialised computer hardware to create new links in the Bitcoin blockchain, and in return, earn bitcoins. The process is extremely energy-intensive, so much so that in many countries the cost of Bitcoin mining can be as high as the value of the Bitcoin itself. In Venezuela however, electricity is so heavily subsidised that it is practically free, thereby allowing locals to mine bitcoins at very low costs. It appears, therefore, that economic circumstances have given a country with the largest oil reserves in the world a competitive advantage not in oil production, but in mining bitcoins.

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“The increasing popularity of the bitcoin is part of a broader trend that marks a shift towards e-commerce services amidst food scarcity problems”

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According to Localbitcoins.com, an online Bitcoin market, the bitcoin trading volume in Venezuela during the week of October 7, 2017 was nearly 41 billion Bolívar,

which is more than double the trading volumes from the previous two months. The increasing popularity of the bitcoin is part of a broader trend that marks a shift towards e-commerce services amidst food scarcity problems, as locals look to online platforms for a stable supply of goods. Additionally, trading in bitcoin allows locals to purchase goods using a currency that is less volatile, and holds more purchasing power than the local Bolívar.

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“Bitcoin mining is not outlawed”

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Although Bitcoin mining is not outlawed in Venezuela, the federal government has initiated a crackdown on Bitcoin operations. In January, the federal police arrested four bitcoin miners in Charallave, a city in northern Venezuela, and charged them with internet fraud and electricity theft. According to the director of the federal police agency, the miners were endangering the stability of the town’s electrical supply. Similar arrests have taken place over the past year, prompting Bitcoin miners to take extra precautions, like spreading their operations across several outposts in order to avoid detection of unusual amounts of energy usage.

Whilst Bitcoin mining poses credible risks to the Venezuelans who engage in it, the government’s failing economic policies leave little alternatives for locals who are in desperate need of money to buy food and basic amenities. Venezuela’s deteriorating economic state and mounting political crisis leaves one to wonder whether the failing state may indeed become the first country in the world to adopt bitcoin as an official currency.



*Tanvi is a first year Master of Global Affairs candidate at the Munk School. She moved to Canada from Malaysia in 2009 to pursue a Bachelor’s degree at Rotman. She completed her studies with a specialist in Finance and Economics, and proceeded to work within the capital markets division of RBC. She is aiming to pivot into policy analysis to pursue her research interests in developmental economics, focusing particularly in the region of South Asia.*



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