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EDITOR'S PICKS:

VARMA: POLICE, POLITICS, AND POVERTY: STRUCTURAL DETERMINANTS OF VIOLENCE AND ABUSE TOWARDS NATIVE AMERICAN AND ALASKA NATIVE WOMEN

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The Rice Journal of Public Policy would not have been possible without the support of the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy. Thank you to all the writers, editing team, and design team for working to publish our eighth edition, and special thanks to all our colleagues at the Baker Institute Student Forum for their assistance. As always, we hope to continue working with our peers at Rice University to bring your future editions of the RJPP.

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR OF SHORT-FORM

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Federalism at Stake:

The National Guard in Chicago

Written by Cory Voskanian
Edited By Sophia Cho

In early October, the Trump administration authorized the deployment of 500 National Guard members to Chicago amidst protests against immigration enforcement efforts.

This decision was met with resistance by Illinois Governor JB Pritzker, who immediately deemed the actions illegal. Additionally, suggestions of unconstitutionality were further bolstered by the fact that 200 of those National Guard members were originally from the state of Texas. This violation of federalism called for the involvement of a federal judge, who placed a restraining order on the National Guard and determined that there was no credible evidence of a rebellion in the state of Illinois (Smith et al., 2025). While tensions in Chicago have seemingly been temporarily quelled, this episode has revealed a dangerous precedent: partisan interests can disrupt the balance of power designed to protect states and citizens. Reaffirming these boundaries is of utmost importance as it secures the very values upon which the United States functions. One policy recommendation that could reaffirm federal limits over interstate guard deployment is a prior written authorization requirement between states validating the presence of National Guard personnel. To build on this recommendation further, the establishment of a federal-state oversight commission could be utilized to review, monitor, and report on any interstate actions by the National Guard.

To begin, conversations surrounding unconstitutionality could be mitigated if legislation were passed that required a written agreement between states before confirming the use of the National Guard in another state's territory. Clarifying the constitutional basis of these deployments is necessary because such uncertainty creates hesitation amongst state officials, ultimately hampering long-term state cooperation in moments of urgent need. In the case of Chicago, Governor Pritzker confirmed that "no officials from the federal government called [him] directly to discuss or coordinate" the deployment of the National Guard in Illinois (Bizzle & Machi, 2025). If legislation existed that required communication about National Guard deployment, the-

mobilization would likely not have occurred in the first place, as this required exchange of information would have introduced procedural friction and interstate dialogue that could have delayed unilateral action. Moreover, if it had, it would have support from the leader of the jurisdiction. Pritzker further commented on the breach in federalism when he stated that "there is no reason a president should send military troops into a sovereign state without their knowledge, consent, or cooperation." (Bizzle & Machi, 2025). These statements by Pritzker show a clear breach of federalism, with national and other state governments dominating the government of another state completely arbitrarily. If an agreement had existed previously that allowed for the entry of the National Guard, then the constitutionality of the action would not be under question. The deployment ultimately suggests an uneven distribution of political power among the states, with those aligned with the executive branch appearing to hold greater influence than those that are not. In addition to his actions surrounding the deployment of the National Guard, Donald Trump has also called for the arrests of multiple Democratic leaders, including Governor Pritzker, for "failing to protect immigration officers." Pritzker dismissed the accusation, warning that "Trump is now calling for the arrest of elected representatives checking his power. What else is left on the path to full-blown authoritarianism?" (Schmall et al., 2025). While the deployment of the National Guard had already demonstrated a large overreach in federal power, demands to arrest those who disagree ideologically suggest an even broader breach of the American values designated by the First Amendment. It is clear that without an open line of communication established through legislation, this issue has spiraled out of control and violated multiple principles on which the United States was founded.

However, this safeguard alone is not enough to prevent further misuse of the National Guard; a commission that brings voices from both federal and state governments to discuss interstate deployments would be helpful in discerning the constitutionality of guard presence in other states. While a-

federal appeals court has now ruled that the actions of the Trump administration were not substantiated by evidence of a "rebellion," there is still a larger conversation that must be had about the circumstances that allowed the initial deployment of the National Guard (Kanu, 2025). Through a bipartisan commission that includes members from the Department of Homeland Security, state legislators, and civil rights leaders, a comprehensive review could be conducted to ensure the justified use of the National Guard in the future. This commission would evaluate constitutional and civil rights compliance to ensure that the deployment meets a legitimate emergency threshold, that the receiving state's governor grants written consent, and that the mission does not disproportionately impact any racial group. The commission would only further contribute to transparency between the national government, state governments, and the public if information is communicated in advance and justified within reason.

Although these proposals suggest strong steps towards a future of accountability, loose interpretations of the Constitution may still leave room for ambiguity in future scenarios. Originally, Trump justified his use of the National Guard in Chicago in order to "prevent ongoing and intolerable risks to the lives and safety" of immigration officers (Lonsdorf & Archie, 2025). This decision was backed by the provision within the Constitution that designates him the Commander-in-Chief of the American militia (U.S. Constitution, Article II). While the Trump administration's choice to deploy the National Guard rests on claims of maintaining national security, invoking the powers defined within Article II oversteps the role of the states to maintain public safety in their territory as defined by the Tenth Amendment. Given the fact that Governor Pritzker was never notified of the National Guard entering Illinois and did not ever request the presence of the troops, there was no reason that local governance should have been displaced (Bizzle & Machi, 2025). The unilateral decision by the Trump administration to intervene constitutes a direct violation of state sovereignty and undermines the cooperative federalist-

system the U.S. depends upon.

Overall, the deployment of the National Guard in Chicago by the Trump administration poses an obvious breach of federalism that requires immediate redress. Two policy suggestions that could be used to tackle recent events include the creation of legislation that formally allows for interstate National Guard deployment and the creation of a commission that could assess the constitutionality of future interstate guard mobilizations. Together, these measures would restore accountability and balance to federal-state relations, ensuring that future deployments uphold constitutional norms rather than undermine them.

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The Question of Statehood:

Will Trump's Gaza Plan Finally Pave The Way for Palestinian Self-Governance?

Written by Poema Sumrow
Edited By Ethan Schott

On September 29th, 2025, President Trump unveiled a 20-point peace plan known as the Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict that, if adhered to by both Israel and Palestine, could possibly end the Israel-Palestine war.

The first stages of the plan aim to return all Israeli and Palestinian hostages to their respective countries. While the living hostages have been exchanged, Gazan officials have struggled to recover and repatriate the bodies of Israeli hostages, citing the sheer difficulty of locating remains beneath the devastation left by Israel's military offensive in Gaza (Stack and Boxerman 2025). The government of Israel views this as non-compliance with the stipulations, despite the fact that thousands of Palestinians have been held prisoner without trial since long before the October 7th attack. Palestinian authorities have returned dozens of captives held in Gaza and while Israel has released some Palestinians, thousands remain behind bars (Amr et al. 2025).

Palestine has a long history of being colonized, subjugated, and oppressed by economically dominant global powers. In a land mass the size of New Jersey, Palestinians are 20 times more likely than their Israeli counterparts to be poor in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) (Amr et al. 2025). A peace agreement could not be more necessary, both for peace within Palestine and within the greater region. However, despite its presentation as a peace initiative, Trump's Gaza plan does not center peace in the region around Palestinian statehood because it fails to address the core question of Palestinian self-determination. Moreover, the plan risks perpetuating the same diplomatic shortcomings that have long been synonymous with American diplomacy in the region. By placing Palestinian autonomy under conditional and externally monitored control, the plan frames peace as a reward for compliance rather than a right grounded in national sovereignty.

The Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict, divided into twenty parts, details the gradual demilitarization of Gaza. Point nine on the plan describes that Gaza will be ruled by an apolitical committee composed of-

"qualified Palestinians and international experts" who will be responsible for facilitating the demilitarization, securitization and governance of Palestine (White House 2025). The peace plan dictates that the committee, also called the Gaza International Transitional Authority (GITA), will transition power to a "reformed" Palestinian Authority once Hamas has successfully been disabled within Palestine. However, as was the case with previous regional peace agreements, such as the Oslo Accords of the 1990s, this "readiness" is highly subjective and the plan does not indicate at what point the Palestinian Authority will be adequately "reformed" to meet the conditions of the agreement.

The committee will be chaired by President Trump himself, and while the other members have not yet been disclosed, Tony Blair has been named the de facto governor-general (Motamedi 2025). Trump has maintained a close relationship with Netanyahu since his first term and Blair, who largely supported George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq, has been called a "war criminal" by many in the Arab world (Bowen 2025). Given their past political leanings, the appointments underscore the likelihood that priorities lie not with Palestine's pursuit of self-determination but with Israel's political interests, suggesting delayed facilitation of Palestinian self-governance is part of a longer-term plan. Furthermore, the structure of the committee threatens to prioritize external control and political interests over genuine Palestinian self-governance upon the plan's implementation. In September 2025, Netanyahu signed the E1 plan which would see an Israeli settlement built in East Jerusalem to provide 3,400 homes to Israeli settlers and ultimately render future Palestinian statehood impossible (Al Jazeera 2025). Netanhayu's engagement with a plan eliminating Palestinian statehood and, a month later, declaring that Israel is "giving peace a chance," reeks of double standard and makes delays in implementing the plan seem purposeful (Reals 2025).

Similar to the Gaza Peace Plan, the Oslo Accords, negotiated by Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat in 1993, intended for the transition of power to Palestinian authorities to happen over three distinct phases. In the early stages, Palestinian self rule was to be extremely limited as involved parties were focusing on the functions of the two party state. In 1995, when the second phase was initiated, Palestinian self-rule was only guaranteed for 18% of Palestinian territory, while 60% of the land was to be handed over to full Israeli rule (Oslo I 1993). The Oslo Accords were ultimately unsuccessful because Israel maintained military rule over the entire region, making it impossible to adhere to the stipulations of the accords (Oslo II 1997). The Gaza Peace Plan, which does not immediately put Palestinian statehood at the forefront of the peace agreement and has been facilitated by yet another American president, strikes many alarming parallels with the failed peace deals of the 1990s (Najjar 2025).

Since winning his second term, Donald Trump has made it clear that he intends to win the Nobel Peace Prize, citing his self-proclaimed role in "ending eight wars" around the globe (Shankar 2025). On his visit to Israel and Egypt in October, he was quick to receive the celebration for the Gaza Peace Plan (Katulis 2025). These actions indicate that a peace deal between Palestine and Israel is viewed by the United States as a convenient opportunity for Trump to turn a decades-long struggle for peace into a means of gaining crowd support.

Despite the American public's polarized views towards his administration, Trump's policy holds significant sway in Israel. The actions of President Trump have captured a large portion of the Israeli public's attention, 69% of whom highly rate the US president. It reasons that most measures he supports in regards to peace agreements will find support among the Israeli public (Wike et. al. 2025). If Trump's goals are to achieve peace in the Middle East, he should not be using meetings with leaders of the nations in question as opportunities for his own publicity. It is imperative that any agreements that the United States helps to facilitate frame Palestinian statehood at the-

forefront of the agreement and do not serve to prop up the political career of a U.S. politician.

On November 17th, the UN Security Council voted to adopt the Gaza Plan, attaching to it a "scaffolding" of international legitimacy; however, the longer term implications of the deal remain to be seen (Halbfinger 2025). As of now, there has been no motion to formalize Palestinian involvement in the restabilization campaign, as Netanyahu has refused to invite the Palestinian Authority to be involved in the International Stabilization Force for Gaza (Halbfinger 2025). While Trump has stated he will not allow Netanyahu to invade the West Bank (Rasgon et al. 2025), Netanyahu has remained firm in his opposition to Palestinian statehood even after the UN vote (Halbfinger 2025). As Hady Amr of the Brookings Institute reminds us, it is imperative to remember that "peace without equality is an illusion" (Amr et. al. 2025). Palestinian equality and statehood, one that allows for security, freedom, and economic prosperity, must be recognized in full if peace in the Middle East is finally to be established again.

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Police, Poverty, and Politics:

Structural Determinants of Violence and Abuse towards Native American and Alaska Native Women

Written by Antara Varma
Edited By Nikki Stancik

In the United States, Native American and Alaska Native (NA/AN) women are subject to staggering rates of violence and victimization.

More than 84 percent of Native American and Alaska Native girls and women experiencing some form of violence in their lifetime, nearly 60 percent experiencing rape or sexually assault, and a homicide rate ten times that of the rest of the United States (Parker et al., 2024; Key Statistics | NCAI, 2021; Rosay and National Institute of Justice, 2016; Graham et al., 2021) Though these rates of gendered violence are often characterized as solely interpersonal problems—a product of drug use and alcoholism in Indigenous men—such framing disregards the multitude of institutional barriers also contributing to and enabling violence against NA/AN women. In reality, the prevalence of abuse and violence against Native American and Alaska Native women indicates the presence of numerous institutional and structural barriers, including a lack of tribal law enforcement, prosecution power, and federal funding.

In the 1978 Supreme Court case Oliphant vs Suqamish Indian Tribe, it was determined that NA/AN tribes do not have the authority to try and punish non-Native Americans in criminal cases without express Congressional authorization. This is especially harmful considering that over 90% of female Native victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) attribute their assault to a non-Native offender (Rosay and National Institute of Justice, 2016). One woman, for instance, noted that because her assault took place on Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate land by her non-Native husband, all tribal police could do was hold him long enough to "try and give her a head start" (Sidorsky and Schiller, 2023).

Though this lack of tribal power was partially remediated with the 2013 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)—which extended tribal criminal jurisdiction to include non-Native American offenders for cases of domestic, dating, and sexual violence against Native victims on tribal soil—only 31-

of 574 tribes actually exercise this expanded jurisdiction, and in most cases still "do not have [meaningful] jurisdiction over non-Indian offenders, even if the victim is a tribal member," (Congressional Research Service and James, 2023). This is often because for a non-Native to be prosecuted for a VAWA-authorized crime by a tribal court, they must be proven to have "sufficient ties," to the tribal community. This may include living in the territory, being employed by the tribe, or being the "spouse, intimate partner, or dating partner," of the prosecuting tribe or another tribe within the territory. Thus, in cases where NA/AN women are raped, assaulted, or otherwise victimized by strangers who enter Native territory, they are entirely at the mercy of state or federal intervention.

Furthermore, the costs of exercising this expanded jurisdiction presents a significant barrier to entry for many tribes. The VAWA mandates that tribes exercising their expanded jurisdiction must have a compliant court system including trained judges and guaranteed counsel, which can become "prohibitively expensive" for financially strained tribal nations that are also responsible for high costs associated with maintaining law enforcement and incarceration facilities (NCAI, 2018). One report notes that for tribal populations of 1,601-6,500 people, a basic law enforcement and full time court system would cost between 2.3 and 2.0 million dollars respectively (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2020). Thus, many tribes possess neither the jurisdiction to appropriately prosecute crime nor the financial support to gain such jurisdiction. This is unfortunate, considering that the outcomes of expanded tribal jurisdiction over sexual and domestic violence cases has been "positive," with "143 arrests, 74 convictions, and 24 pending cases," among the 18 tribal nations participating in a pilot program, a significant increase over past years (Sidorsky and Schiller, 2023).

In light of the limited prosecutorial power of tribes, it is crucial that state and federal governments are addressing tribal cases diligently which, despite strides in the last decade, is still often not the case. A 2017 survey by the U.S-

Government Accountability Office (GAO) of the anti-human trafficking efforts of 132 federal native law enforcement agencies, discovered that from 2014 to 2016, 75% of agencies had not initiated even one investigation and 5% did not "know if they had," (Congressional Research Service and James, 2023). Similarly, in 2021, GAO reported that the U.S. Attorney's office declined to prosecute 46% of referred assaults cases and 67% of sexual abuse and related matters in 2021, citing "insufficient evidence" (Congressional Research Service and James, 2023). Thus, the proportion of violent crimes resulting in prosecution is minimal compared to the extent of violent crimes occurring, especially considering that only 45% of Native victims of violence report their experiences to their police (Pember and ICT, 2025).

Though the expanded jurisdiction provided by VAWA in 2013 has rendered some progress, it must be matched with adequate funding. At the tribal level, increased federal funding can help address gendered violence by supporting the creation of VAWA-eligible justice systems, increasing law enforcement capabilities, and expanding resources like shelters, rape, kits, and post-incident healthcare for survivors. Currently, most tribes only have 1.9 officers per thousand people and only 55 NA/AN-led domestic violence shelters exist throughout 574 tribes (Congressional Research Service and James, 2023; Malcoe et al., 2004) Increased funding could help resolve these gaps.

Furthermore, a survey of 312 Native American women demonstrated that intimate partner violence (IPV) is "strongly associated with socioeconomic disadvantage," with women experiencing low socioeconomic conditions being four times more likely to have experienced IPV (Malcoe et al., 2004). Thus, increased federal funding in the form of SNAP, TANF, and federal healthcare, are also key to alleviating poverty and reducing gendered violence.

Changing the type of grant could help as well. Currently, tribes receive funding through competitive grants, for which they must apply for repeatedly. This prioritizes tribes that can afford grant writers and is highly subject to-

changes in federal priorities, making it unreliable and difficult to use effectively and strategically. Switching to a formula grant, a non-competitive award that awards a fixed amount based on the tribe's population, size, financial and violence rates would increase tribal security and give leaders more flexibility and control over how they implement their funds. While switching to a formula grant may seem like a small change, it could greatly increase the accessibility and functionality of expanded jurisdiction.

The epidemic of sexual and physical violence against Native American and Alaskan Indian women is morally, ethically, and politically unacceptable. For decades, they have been isolated from resources, abandoned by underfunded institutional legal and judiciary structures, and abandoned by state and federal agencies. The rights, dignity, and safety of Native American and Native Alaskan women should not be another bullet point on the Congressional agenda: it is a crisis that demands sufficient funding, institutional support, and policies that empower tribal communities in their pursuit for justice. Behind each statistic lies thousands of women who had dreams, hopes, and wishes, and are remembered everyday by the people who love them. We cannot let them rest in vain.

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The Case for a Revised African Growth and Opportunity Act

Written by Jenna Perrone
Edited By Anjali Matthews

On Sept. 30, 2025, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) expired, raising questions about what the future holds for U.S. trade relations with sub-Saharan African nations.

First passed in 2000, AGOA was part of President Bill Clinton's broader campaign to improve American economic ties with Africa. As of 2024, AGOA provided preferential trade access to 32 African nations, allowing them to export almost 7,000 types of goods, such as crude oil, clothing, and cars, to the U.S. duty-free. The Act also increased American agriculture and HIV prevention assistance to sub-Saharan Africa, and in the words of the Office of the United States Trade Representative, it is "at the core of U.S. economic policy and commercial engagement with Africa" (Ferragamo et al. 2025; "African Growth"). Despite its imperfections, the expiration of AGOA represents a significant strategic misstep. A revised Act is essential to supporting sub-Saharan African development and protecting American geopolitical and economic interests.

Originally set to expire in 2008, AGOA has been renewed four times, the most recent being in 2015, before expiring this past September. One day prior to AGOA's expiration, White House officials announced President Donald Trump's support for a one-year extension of the Act, but with a government shutdown also looming large in Washington at the time, AGOA was instead pushed to the back burner ("Trump Administration" 2025). According to the United Nations, the expiration of AGOA could severely impact African apparel, agriculture, and food exports, ultimately limiting opportunities for economic diversification in sub-Saharan Africa. In particular, nine African countries will now face average tariff rates of 15% or higher on trade with the U.S., including already small exporters like Lesotho, Kenya, and Madagascar ("AGOA Expiry" 2025). Kenya alone exported 470 million dollars worth of apparel to the U.S. in 2024, directly supporting over 60,000 jobs, the majority of which were filled by women (Wandera 2025). The expiration of AGOA, then, not only threatens the economies of entire nations in sub-Saharan Africa,-

but also the income stability of women and families in these countries.

AGOA also has significant economic and strategic advantages for the United States. In a letter to Congress dated Sept. 11, 2025, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce enumerated these benefits: AGOA benefits "thousands of American companies" through commercial partnerships; "supports U.S. interests and values" through strict eligibility requirements that mandate commitment to human rights law and eliminating corruption, among other policies; and helps to "incentivize investment decisions to deconcentrate and diversify supply chains away from China" (Murphy 2025). Reducing reliance on China has proven particularly poignant as China is on track to export over 200 billion dollars worth of goods to Africa for the first time this year (Ferragamo et al. 2025). In the face of these threats to U.S. interests, as well as more altruistic concerns for the welfare of African states, it is clear that allowing AGOA to expire without replacement is not a feasible option.

This Act is not without its controversies, though. According to U.S. policymakers, despite initially increasing, U.S.-Africa trade began to stagnate or even decline after the first decade of AGOA. According to experts at the Brookings Institution and the Council on Foreign Relations, however, this underperformance can be boiled down to issues of utilization. Only 18 beneficiaries of the program implemented country-wide utilization strategies, and other issues like corruption or a lack of infrastructure have hindered AGOA's efficacy (Ferragamo et al. 2025; Schneidman et al. 2021).

Moreover, the rigid eligibility requirements of the program are thought to create barriers to its effectiveness. In order to qualify for AGOA benefits, sub-Saharan African nations must demonstrate progress toward building market-based economies, fostering political diversity, upholding human rights, and removing barriers to U.S. trade ("African Growth"). Countries are reviewed annually for adherence to these requirements and can have their eligibility terminated at the discretion of the U.S. President. In the past, the Central African Republic and Uganda have had their AGOA benefits suspended for-

human rights violations, while Gabon and Niger faced similar consequences for ongoing coups (Ferragamo et al. 2025). While such standards were originally designed to further U.S. interests and provide security for investors, they create uncertainty among African governments and firms, who must wait yearly to see if they will still receive benefits the following year (Darnal et al. 2024). Contrary to the guidelines' purpose of holding sub-Saharan African governments accountable for human rights abuses and other similar issues, AGOA suspensions often end up unduly burdening innocent civilians by chasing jobs from the country (Kiriungi 2023). A reimagining of the Act's implementation is evidently necessary.

In the face of legitimate concerns over AGOA's value, I propose a renewal of the Act but with a revised implementation strategy. For the purposes of U.S. trade interests, renewing AGOA as soon as possible is necessary to limit increased reliance of African nations on Chinese trade. For African countries, a speedy renewal is also imperative to limiting the economic repercussions of its expiration. Maintaining the Act as it stands after its last renewal in 2015, however, would be doing a disservice to all parties involved. African nations have not previously been given the support needed to take full advantage of AGOA's terms, and if the Act cannot prove its utility through increased utilization, the issue of expiration is likely to repeat itself in the near future.

I therefore propose two major changes to the application of AGOA: a modification of the annual review process and the appointment of officials to provide guidance on compliance and usage strategy to beneficiaries. The annual review process for eligibility is useful for upholding certain international laws, but it creates too much of a disruption. African nations cannot be expected to make full use of AGOA's benefits if they must worry yearly about them being revoked. In light of this, I recommend that the review process be carried out every three years rather than annually. This revision will allow the U.S. to continue to encourage adherence to its previously designed standards but will also allow a greater degree of continuity, ultimately-

benefiting African countries formerly worried about reliance on such an unreliable program.

Additionally, the appointment of officials like policy experts and economists to aid AGOA users in drafting usage strategies will benefit all countries involved. In the past, African nations have expressed uncertainty about American compliance standards, making it difficult for these governments to take complete advantage of AGOA's terms (Darnal et al. 2024). By helping these countries to draft national usage strategies that fit their needs and economies, the program will better serve its purpose to "[promote] economic and political reform" in the region ("African Growth"). African governments will receive resources and guidance on creating sweeping economic policies and guidelines, ultimately helping to further their development.

In short, AGOA has had countless benefits for both the United States and the sub-Saharan African countries it was designed to assist. Allowing this Act to expire was a failure on the part of the U.S. government, but one that can be remedied with the swift renewal of the program alongside a revised set of guidelines that encourage more thoughtful and complete usage of AGOA's many benefits.

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Pakistan's Deportations of Afghan Refugees:

A Test of International Refugee Protections

Written by Karma Elbadawy
Edited By Chloe Pesqueira

Since late 2023, Pakistan has launched a sweeping campaign to expel Afghans labeled as "illegal foreigners."

What began as a crackdown on undocumented residents has expanded to mass deportations of long-settled and registered refugees. In August 2025, Reuters reported that Pakistani authorities began deporting Afghans with Proof of Registration (PoR) cards—the primary identification document recognizing registered refugees in Pakistan—despite earlier assurances that only unregistered migrants would be removed (Reuters, 2025). Additionally, the government revoked the legal status of several refugee villages, displacing thousands. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and UN human rights experts have condemned these measures as violations of international law, warning that returnees face persecution and poverty under Taliban rule (UNHCR, De-Notification Statement, 2025; OHCHR, 2025). These mass deportations represent more than a domestic policy change; they signal an erosion of international refugee protections. By collapsing distinctions between refugees, long-settled residents, and undocumented migrants, Pakistan's actions undermine the principle of non-refoulement and signal a broader shift away from the norms that have governed regional humanitarian cooperation.

Pakistan's 2023 Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP) established a series of deadlines for "voluntary" departures, backed by the threat of police raids and detention. Since late 2023, around 1.4 million Afghans have returned from Pakistan under the IFRP, including tens of thousands who were deported rather than leaving voluntarily (UNHCR, Emergency Response Update, 2025). UNHCR data show that large numbers have crossed back through Balochistan's border points, many on foot with their families and belongings (UNHCR, Emergency Response Update, 2025). At the same time, Pakistan has announced the closure of 16 refugee camps across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and Punjab, which together host around 13,000 families, more than 90,000 refugees (Dawn, 2025). Many of these families had lived in-

Pakistan for decades, with their children attending Pakistani schools and speaking Urdu as a first language. The camp closures and mass expulsions disrupted established livelihoods and displaced long-settled families from communities where they had lived for decades.

Pakistan's government defends the IFRP as a national security measure, arguing that cross-border militancy, undocumented migration, and economic pressures have strained state resources and public services. These challenges are real, and states retain authority to regulate migration and address security threats. However, such pressures do not override Pakistan's international obligation to prevent refoulement. Although Pakistan is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, it is still bound by the customary prohibition on returning individuals to situations of harm. UN human rights guidance stresses that these protections apply to all persons, regardless of their formal refugee status (OHCHR, 2025). UN special-procedure mandate-holders echoed this in 2025, warning that large-scale removals to Afghanistan amid ongoing rights restrictions and insecurity would breach these obligations (OHCHR, 2025).

The current deportation drive marks a sharp break from Pakistan's historical cooperation with UNHCR. Since 2002, UNHCR has facilitated the voluntary repatriation of millions of Afghan refugees from Pakistan (UNHCR, Pakistan Country Page, 2025). Starting in 2012, these efforts have been guided by the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), agreed by Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran in 2012, which tied repatriation to specific conditions of safety, dignity, and sustainability (UNHCR, SSAR Framework, 2012). Participants received small cash grants, logistical support, and monitoring to ensure that their return was genuinely voluntary.

To understand why Pakistan's current deportations violate core international protections, it is important to consider the standards that govern lawful refugee return. The hallmark of lawful return is that it must be voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable, standards reflected in UNHCR's global policy and decades of practice.-

When returns are driven by deadlines, arrests, evictions, and lapses in documentation, the "voluntary" element is compromised (UNHCR, Voluntary Repatriation Evaluation, 2022). UNHCR's 2015–2021 global evaluation of voluntary-repatriation programs concluded that successful returns depend on genuine choice, adequate reintegration funding, and coordination among host and origin states (UNHCR, Voluntary Repatriation Evaluation, 2022). Evaluations of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) by UNHCR and partners found that where returns were supported by reintegration assistance and improved security, particularly in early 2002–2005 operations, many Afghans remained in Afghanistan. Today's forced returns ignore these lessons entirely: deportations are neither voluntary nor supported by reintegration resources in Afghanistan, where infrastructure and employment opportunities remain limited.

Beyond the shortcomings of the SSAR's later years, domestic political dynamics have also driven Pakistan's shift toward coercive policies. The country is facing a severe economic downturn and rising populist pressure to prioritize citizens over refugees. Since 2021, Pakistan's tightening economy and cross-border security incidents have amplified domestic calls for expulsion. Analysts note that political leaders have framed deportations as both a show of authority and a diversion from governance and inflation crises (Al Jazeera, 2025). Yet targeting refugees undermines Pakistan's international standing and risks new instability (Reuters, 2025).

The UN Human Rights Office has reminded Islamabad that the principle of non-refoulement applies irrespective of formal refugee status (OHCHR, 2025). In practice, Pakistan's mass deportations collapse distinctions between refugees, migrants, and long-term residents, erasing decades of administrative documentation. The de-notification of refugee villages, many of which were established with UN support, has eliminated local service networks and humanitarian access (UNHCR, De-Notification Statement, 2025). The closure of these villages without relocation plans risks violating minimum-

international standards for eviction and return.

Beyond legality, the humanitarian impact is severe. Families separated at the border, loss of property and education, and renewed cycles of displacement in Afghanistan all illustrate how coerced return perpetuates instability rather than resolving it (UNHCR, Forced to Return, 2025; UNHCR, Emergency Response Update, 2025). In effect, Pakistan's policy replaces a managed, internationally supported framework with unilateral enforcement that neither deters future displacement nor supports durable solutions.

Policy Recommendations:

Pakistan does not face an impossible dilemma: there are policy options that uphold sovereignty while aligning with international norms. Drawing on prior SSAR experience and UNHCR guidance, three measures stand out:

1. Renew PoR and Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) validity for at least one year while establishing joint screening centers with UNHCR to identify individuals eligible for protection.
2. Suspend the closure of refugee villages until independent humanitarian assessments determine safe relocation or return options.
3. Re-activate the SSAR through a new agreement, sometimes dubbed SSAR II, that ties repatriation to verifiable benchmarks: security, freedom of movement, women's education, and livelihood access in Afghanistan.

These steps should be paired with donor-funded Reintegration and Inclusion Compacts, as well as investment packages for Afghan provinces receiving returnees and Pakistani host cities bearing a disproportionate strain. Such compacts, backed by multilateral development banks, could rebuild infrastructure, support job creation, and reduce the populist resentment that fuels coercive policies.

Pakistan's current deportations test not only its humanitarian credibility but also the resilience of international refugee protection. The country once hosted one of the world's largest refugee populations with international support and relative tolerance. By dismantling that legacy, Islamabad risks replacing decades of cooperation with a cycle of displacement and insecurity. Reinstating documentation, halting forced returns, and reviving multilateral frameworks would restore Pakistan's reputation as a responsible regional actor and reaffirm a basic principle of international law: that no one should be forced back into danger.

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The Depths of Globalization:

Inside the Ripple Effects of the U.S. Trade War

Written by Ridhi Dondeti
Edited By Ingrid Sizer

On February 1st, 2025, President Trump issued new tariffs on Canada, Mexico, and China.

This added an additional 25% tariff on Canadian and Mexican imports and a 10% tariff on Chinese imports (Bown, 2025). In the eyes of the Trump administration, the tariffs were an attempt to suppress illegal immigration and harmful drugs such as fentanyl from entering the country (Brown, 2025). What ultimately led to the tariffs escalating to a trade war between the U.S. and countries such as China, Canada, and Mexico; however, was the aggressive escalation and retaliation by the Trump administration after the affected countries responded. The U.S.-China trade war is not unfamiliar, with its origins dating back to the first Trump administration and some of those tariffs being kept during the Biden administration (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025). However, the tariff escalation has led to ramifications across the world, specifically developing countries seeing increased costs to export and the need to quickly change trade routes (Raihan & Sen, 2025).

While some developing countries, such as Cambodia and Indonesia, have diversified their trade and reduced labor costs, only a few have fully done so due to limited resources, a small labor supply, and higher transportation costs (Cotterill & Fleming, 2025). This lack of resources lead to broken supply chains because developing countries would only be able to produce at a level of output lower than its optimal level of output, causing developing countries to quickly find other countries to export to. Take, for instance, Pakistan, which has historically aligned itself with China more than the U.S. Retaliatory tariffs on China raise costs for imported products and thus change trade flows to other markets (Harvard Kennedy School, 2025). While larger, more developed countries can quickly adapt and diversify their trade in response to tariffs, developing countries often struggle to do so. Developing countries are unique to global supply chains and the global economy because of their ability to trade and export natural resources, agricultural products, manufactured goods,-

and more. This makes them the backbone of the supply chain and uniquely vulnerable during a trade war. Countries such as Nepal, Pakistan, and the Philippines have seen their exports decrease by upwards of five percent, which in turn decreases the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and leads to negative economic growth; this negative growth can also be seen in the cases of Thailand, Malaysia, Brazil, and Vietnam (Cotterill & Fleming, 2025).

As developing economies see the impacts of the trade war, international organizations have found a growing need to support developing countries. In a report by the World Bank, the organization has warned of a potentially global economic fallout due to the magnitude of the trade war. This was demonstrated through their adjusted global growth forecast for 2025, in which the predicted growth rate decreased by 0.4%, citing high tariffs and global uncertainty as the main reasons. The report also found that by 2027, the GDP per capita for developing countries would be six percent less than pre-COVID-19 levels, costing roughly 20 years of economic recovery (Shalal, 2025). Moreover, global growth, and especially growth among developing countries, is predicted to be at its slowest compared to the 2008 global economic crisis (Cotterill & Fleming, 2025). This presents an even greater need for global economic policy reform to ensure that developing countries can continue to grow amid international trade turmoil.

To alleviate the repercussions of recent U.S. tariff policies that small developing countries face, the World Bank should work with developing countries through multinational organizations such as the African Union (AU), the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), and others to establish policies that develop a series of trade chains that allow all developing countries to rely on each other with low trade barriers, such as tariffs. This could also be achieved by developing countries establishing their own multinational organization. While this may lead to issues with trade dependence among other developing countries, it can be argued that this would alternatively lead to more trade diversification because thai form of trade would reduce external-

shocks from predominantly trading with developed countries and lead to more stable economies with the consistent sharing of technology and skills, addressing issues that developing countries have been attempting to avoid. By further reinforcing this specific trade system, developing countries would not only engage in fruitful trading with low tariffs among other developing countries, but also among other developed countries, such as those in the EU, that consistently trade with developing countries because these developing countries would have more stable economies that are easier for developed countries to rely on for trade (Kaskina, 2025).

Ultimately, the U.S.-China trade war extends beyond the relationship between the two countries: it is a global phenomenon that even affects the low and middle classes throughout developing countries due to price changes. Developing countries can engage in trade with other developed countries, such as those involved in the EU. However, encouraging a system of trade among developing countries would allow for further trade diversification: a system that can be relied upon as trade wars, especially those between the U.S. and China, escalate.

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Criminalizing Care:

The Case Against HB 7

Written by Georgia Jensen
Edited By Ruby McNeil

On September 17, 2025, Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed House Bill 7 into law, targeting access to medication abortion.

HB 7 deploys civil enforcement to cut off access to medication abortion, which is unlikely to reduce abortions overall while worsening health outcomes for women at risk. This legislation joins several existing Texas abortion bans, which are considered the most extreme in the nation, and hopes to inspire similar legislation across the country.

Medication abortion consists of two drugs—mifepristone and misoprostol—taken consecutively to end a pregnancy. Despite claims made by Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., medication abortion is considered highly safe and effective by both the FDA and clinical studies. It also accounts for 63% of abortions as of 2023 and is the primary method through which individuals living in abortion-hostile states access abortion care—one that HB 7 aims to cut off.

Losing access to these pills may have especially harmful consequences. Unlike surgical abortion, which, for those in Texas, requires traveling out of state to a clinic, medication abortion can be taken at home, offering privacy, affordability, and timeliness. Without this option, people face longer delays in arranging appointments or travel, increasing medical risks as the pregnancy progresses.

While HB 7 does not criminalize those seeking abortions directly, it permits private citizens to sue a broad array of individuals involved in supplying abortion pills in Texas. Those connected to the pregnant person, such as a family member, can file suit against the offender for $100,000, but anyone can sue for $10,000, with the remainder going to charity. HB 7 is modeled after Texas Senate Bill 8, which passed in 2021 and bans abortion once a fetal heartbeat can be detected. SB 8 also relied on private enforcement, allowing citizens to sue anyone who “aids or abets” abortion.

Historically, efforts to restrict abortion do not achieve their intended goal. A Guttmacher Institute study shows that, after the Dobbs decision overturned the constitutional right to the procedure, incidence reached a decade-high despite bans and heavy restrictions in numerous states. Historically, efforts to restrict abortion usually don't accomplish the intended reduction. A Guttmacher Institute study shows that, after the Dobbs decision overturned the right to abortion, abortion incidence reached a decade-high incidence, despite abortion bans and heavy restrictions in numerous states. In 2023, 171,000 people traveled out of abortion-hostile states to get abortion care. The rates of self-managed abortion are rising as well. In other states, telemedicine practices and shield laws, which protect providers, patients, and others from legal repercussions, have allowed those seeking abortion to receive the pills via mail, evading their state's bans.

However, in cases where abortion is medically necessary, these steep penalties have created ambiguity that discourages timely intervention, compromising reproductive and maternal safety. Together, SB 8 and Texas's near-total abortion ban allow abortion care only to save the life of the mother. In these cases, however, physicians are afraid to provide medically necessary abortion care, impeding their ability to provide quality care in often-fatal pregnancies. This has significantly worsened women's health in Texas, which now ranks second-last in the nation. Maternal mortality has risen 56% and infant mortality has increased 12.8% since SB 8 took effect in 2021, underscoring a trend of increased morbidity that conflicts with the bill's intent of 'protecting life.'

Once it takes effect on December 4, HB 7 will further criminalize abortion, making the process even more dangerous for those who depend on it. It also provides a heavy financial incentive to sue those involved in the distribution of pills, further isolating those seeking abortions. It will likely result in a decrease in providers willing to send abortion medication to Texas. It reaches across state lines to criminalize the behavior of individuals in other-

states, despite shield laws. Perhaps most critically, it can serve as a model for other abortion-hostile states. Texas has led the way in extreme abortion legislation, but other states have historically been quick to follow suit. HB 7 not only intensifies the reproductive health crisis in Texas, but also has the potential to export that crisis nationwide.

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Re-calibrating the Race:

A Policy Solution to the Social Cost of First-Mover Advantage in Drug Development

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In the pharmaceutical industry, speed to market is often equated with success.

Companies race to advance therapies into human testing to capture the enormous commercial advantages of being first. Analysts estimate that every six-month delay in launch costs a drug about 1.8 percent of its market share, and second entrants achieve only one-third of the first mover's peak share, even when spending equally on promotion (Régnier and Ridley 2015). McKinsey's review of global launches similarly finds that first movers retain a 6 percent market share advantage even a decade after release (Cha and Yu 2014). These incentives encourage firms to rush from discovery to clinical trials, often before the mechanism of action is thoroughly validated. This "first-mover premium" rewards speed over certainty, particularly in fast-moving fields like oncology and immunotherapy. I propose a regulatory incentive that rewards preclinical validation to address this misalignment with commercial and scientific goals.

Checkpoint inhibitors, a novel cancer therapy that earned the 2018 Nobel Prize, are among the fastest-growing areas in biopharma, with multiple firms racing to begin trials on similar targets (Pan and Chen 2017). However, this haste carries a cost, as clinical success rates for oncology remain low The Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO) reports that fewer than 8 percent of cancer drugs entering clinical trials ever reach approval, with most failures occurring in late-stage development (BIO 2021).

A systematic review by Jardim et al. (2017) identifies inadequate mechanistic understanding as a leading factor in failed oncology trials, especially when targets lacked validated biomarkers or clear pharmacodynamic endpoints. Similarly, Jentzsch et al. (2023) reports that entire drug classes, such as IGF-1 receptor inhibitors, incurred billions in development costs without approved therapies, largely due to weak preclinical validation.-

These failures represent more than corporate losses: they also delay promising treatments, strain clinical trial capacity, and misallocate public and private investment. Jain et al. (2019) support this view, stating that late-stage attrition often stems not from luck but from "mechanistic misalignment" between biological promise and clinical reality.

The situation can be understood as a collective-action dilemma. Each company must choose between investing time in rigorous preclinical mechanistic validation or moving rapidly to capture first-mover advantages. While all firms would benefit from a standard practice of rigorous validation, the dominant individual strategy is to race ahead. The troubling aspect is that the companies involved are fully aware of its downsides. Firms recognize that rushing increases the risk of costly trial failures and undermines the credibility of the field, yet competitive pressure leaves them unable to slow down without jeopardizing their position. This dynamic mirrors a Prisoner's Dilemma, where rational self-interest produces a collectively suboptimal outcome. Empirical evidence supports this framing, with oncology attrition alone consuming billions annually in sunk costs (Jentzsch et al. 2023). From a welfare standpoint, society bears the burden of this inefficiency because resources that could fund diverse, well-validated research programs are instead tied up in duplicative or premature trials, delaying the arrival of genuinely effective therapies and limiting patient access to innovation.

To address this inefficiency, a Mechanistic Validation Voucher (MVV) program within the U.S. Food and Drug Administration could help correct this structural misalignment. Under this program, developers who publicly share rigorous preclinical validation—such as replication across independent models, mechanistic biomarker evidence, or human genetic support—before initiating human clinical testing (Phase I trials) would qualify for six additional months of regulatory exclusivity upon final drug approval. The MVV, modeled on the FDA's existing Priority Review Voucher program, would reward transparency and rigor by linking early, high-quality validation to tangible market benefits.-

Because each company could independently earn the voucher, the system would reduce premature competition and align market incentives with scientific reliability rather than speed.

This proposed mechanism builds on successful precedent. The Priority Review Voucher (PRV) program, which accelerates review for drugs targeting neglected diseases, has demonstrably influenced research and development behavior (Aerts et al. 2022). PRVs trade modest extensions of exclusivity for major shifts in portfolio allocation, suggesting that well-calibrated regulatory rewards can alter investment strategy. The MVV would adapt this model, tying the reward not to the therapeutic area but to scientific rigor.

The logic is straightforward. A small, predictable extension of exclusivity increases expected net present value (NPV), or projected financial return, enough to offset the cost of slower entry. In the new payoff matrix, the validate option becomes both privately rational and socially optimal. Minikel et al. (2024) found that drugs supported by human genetic evidence were about twice as likely to succeed clinically as those without such evidence. By rewarding this kind of preclinical diligence, the MVV aligns scientific merit with commercial viability.

Implementing MVVs requires a clear definition of "rigorous validation." Cobey et al. (2023) document persistent reproducibility gaps in translational science, while Samsa et al. (2018) outline specific practices—such as blinded replication, statistical pre-registration, and use of multiple model systems—that correlate with later clinical success. The FDA could operationalize these standards by issuing guidance similar to those used in the Biomarker Qualification Program.

Concerns about longer development timelines are valid. However, empirical data suggest that stronger validation substantially reduces downstream failure costs. Each late-stage trial failure can cost $50–100 million and delay other candidates' development by years (Jentzsch et al. 2023). Even modest reductions in attrition would offset the societal cost of granting six-

additional months of exclusivity. Pilot programs could begin in high-risk, high-attrition areas such as oncology or neurodegeneration, where mechanistic rigor is most limited.

Pharmaceutical competition currently rewards speed over certainty, producing a landscape of redundant trials, wasted investment, and delayed access to more effective therapies. A Mechanistic Validation Voucher would rebalance the incentive structure, favoring evidence-based timing over reckless haste. Rather than stifling competition, the MVV would channel it toward a more productive frontier—one where the race to be first becomes a race to be right.

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