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DIGNITY

AN UNDERGRADUATE
HUMAN RIGHTS JOURNAL

Artist Statement for Dignity Journal (visual media submission): Robert Watkins – *Protesting Loudly*, 2025. Photograph.

This photograph was taken during the Saturday, October 18 “No Kings 2.0” protest against the actions of Donald Trump and his administration. Organizers of the event claim that more than 2,700 protests occurred in towns and cities across all 50 states. The BBC reports that solidarity protests were held in London, Berlin, Rome, and Madrid.

Per the Asheville Citizen-Times, between 7,000 and 8,000 people gathered in downtown for Asheville’s No Kings Day. Protestors wore outfits ranging from simple, everyday clothes to inflatable animal costumes. Their signs had slogans of all varieties, calling out the current administration’s attacks on diversity, immigration, and more. The inflatable costumes and bright colors were brought out to counter the claims made by Karoline Leavitt, the White House Press Secretary, that many Democrats are “terrorists, criminals,” and illegal immigrants. Across the over 2,000 protests that happened on October 18, NPR says there were “no major incidents of violence reported.” The NYPD estimates a turnout of 100,000 people with no related arrests.

The full image can be found at <https://dignityjournal.com>. Copyright 2025 Robert Watkins; used with permission.

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Note from the Editorial Board

This issue of *Dignity* marks our first Fall publication. This fall in Asheville has been marked by the ever-present reminders of Hurricane Helene's destruction last year. In September, we observed the storm's first anniversary, and with it, a recognition of the ways the city has come together in the wake of this disaster. This demonstrated the reality that people are stronger together and the importance of taking care of our neighbors. Although the city experienced immense pain and grief in the wake of Hurricane Helene, individuals from all walks of life banded together to rebuild and recover. From neighborhoods holding potlucks to Asheville's local businesses handing out free food to help citizens who were struggling, the true power of community and endurance was shown through the people who call this city home.

The numerous drastic decisions the United States federal government has made concerning social welfare, diversity and equal access initiatives, immigration and asylum, and LGBTQ+ rights have characterized the past several months as tens of millions of Americans continue to lose access to the resources they need to live. In light of the proposed cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), *Hungry for Justice: Applying a BPE Lens to Decompose Nutritional Inequality* is a piece that highlights the racial disparities in nutrition, in a time when there is an active threat to the programs that work to bridge gaps caused by institutional factors. It displays how much these policy decisions matter on the ground.

In the face of the effective and pending legislation, executive orders, and court decisions that undermine civil rights and liberties, while powerful and influential political figures appeal to marginalized groups through empty promises and misleading claims, the importance of governmental criticism shines through. *The Reality of State Apologies* argues that apologies issued by leaders for human rights violations are merely a tool to garner political support. *UNITED WE STAND* is a collage featuring a variety of signs that protestors in Western North Carolina waved during the nationwide No Kings protests of 2025, representing the voices of activists today: frustrated, uncensored, and galvanized. The cover image for this issue, *Protesting Loudly*, is a photograph taken at one of these protests that showcases the need for change in a form that is most authentic to our democracy: peaceful protest, even in the midst of the National Guard being deployed to American cities in response to protestors. *Firsthand Testimony of Survivors and Frontline Workers – A Qualitative Examination of Labor Trafficking in the United States* uses case studies to highlight the legislative and societal changes that need to be made to prevent labor trafficking and to make it easier for survivors and those most vulnerable to obtain access to the resources they need.

Despite the focus on policy, it is crucial to address the experiences of the people who are impacted by the aforementioned legislative and societal circumstances. *20 or 200 Years* is a poem that encapsulates the weight one's lineage and ancestral legacy can have on them, reminding us that the struggles and experiences of the present do not exist in a vacuum.

Finally, we extend our sincere gratitude to our Faculty Advisory Board for offering up their time and attention in offering their combined breadth of knowledge to inform our editorial decisions for this publication. We give special thanks to Dr. Eric Roubinek, who, as our faculty advisor, provides continuous dedication and mentorship to our student-run undergraduate journal. We also thank Dr. Peter Haschke for his assistance in the production process of this issue.

Sincerely,

Micah Aamon and Amelia Benjamin
On behalf of the Editorial Board, Fall '25

Hungry for Justice: Applying a BPE Lens to Decompose Nutritional Inequality

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Abstract

This paper argues that discrimination is the key mechanism for sustaining dietary variation between Black and White populations, thereby reinforcing broader patterns of racial inequality. We define inequality as a difference in attainment between two groups, and when based solely on exogenous characteristics, this phenomenon becomes discrimination. Using a Blinder-Oaxaca linear decomposition — a method traditionally applied in labor economics — we examine data from NHANES to analyze racial disparities in common nutrients essential for human development. Through linear decomposition, this paper aims to discuss the implications of seemingly unexplained differences between the nutrient attainment of Black and White racial groups. Decomposition reveals a residual error term, which we attribute to exogenously determined dietary marketplace factors. In addition, by examining several key determinants of the nutritional gap, including education, income, and age, this paper underscores how these structural factors unequally burden Black households. The findings underscore the propensity for policy interventions that address the effects of educational and economic inequalities on nutritional outcomes, potentially reducing the impact of systemic factors like poverty on dietary access and health.

Introduction

THE Black Panther Party, founded in 1966, is most famously recognized for its efforts in the fight for civil and racial equity. However, the Party's influence on improving the nutrition of low-income communities is less popular (Lateef and Androff 2017). In Oakland, where the Panthers reside, due to insufficient nutrition, many children suffered from the side effects of a poor diet, including drowsiness and stomach cramps (Lateef and Androff 2017). Aptly, three years after its founding, the Party launched the Free Breakfast for Children Program. Although feeding children appears uncorrelated to their mission of protecting communities

from discriminatory policing practices, in reality, it does not differ from the Panthers' mission of minimizing injustice. The Panthers' efforts would eventually lead to policy change—the establishment of a federal free breakfast program.

Nutritional inequality remains a systemic issue, with current estimates showing that approximately 17.4 million children in the U.S. live in food-insecure homes (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2015). More specifically, the USDA reports that Black children are almost three times more likely to experience hunger than White children, with 22 percent of Black children living in food-insecure households (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2015). Persistent disparity highlights the central issue for the Panthers, addressing nutritional inequality and legitimizing an epidemic that had been largely ignored by federal and state policymakers (Lateef and Androff 2017).

We intend to use the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition to analyze whether there exists a nutritional bifurcation between White and Black Americans. Our rationale is that if a statistically significant unexplained difference in attainment persists, the decomposition mechanism attributes this phantom coefficient to discrimination. The Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition will include factors such as income, education, gender, and nativity to aid the calculation of the Black-White nutrition gap (Rabbitt et al. 2023).

Our hypothesis suggests that racial inequities, particularly those linked to income, education, and gender, significantly contribute to the nutritional bifurcation between Black and White communities. Eliminating these factors should equalize the nutrition gap, with any remaining difference attributable to discrimination. To better understand the intersection of discrimination dynamics, it is essential to examine the policy structures and systemic conditions that shape access to food and nutrition across racial groups.

Background

To examine the factors contributing to the difference in outcomes between Black and White racial groups, we consult a prominent perspective in the literature that discriminatory policies can lead to the creation of food deserts, which are key contributors to nutritional inequality. While food deserts are not measured in this study, it is important to note that in certain communities, healthy foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, dairy, peas, beans, meat, and fish are either prohibitively expensive or completely unobtainable for some families. What is central to this study are the policies that exacerbate these discrepancies and limit access to nutritious foods in these communities (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2015).

According to neoclassical labor economics, in theory, discrimination is not Pareto efficient (better in every possible way), and bigotry is an irrational preference. Bigotry is viewed as an irrational preference because it is exogenously driven and continues only at a prohibitive cost to employers, employees, and consumers. In a truly competitive market, nondiscriminatory business owners will prioritize profits over discriminatory practices. Therefore, organi-

zations that are discriminatory should either be forced out of business or adjust their behavior to remain competitive (Stewart and Coleman 2005). This postulates a unique query: If businesses aim to maximize profit, why do they not have the propensity to close fragmentations in markets where inequities persist, such as in nutrition? This paper proposes that such behavior goes against economic theory and represents a market failure. Theory suggests that in a free market, unfair practices will be weeded out, and discriminating owners will fail, as they have the propensity to charge higher prices or pay lower wages to make up for their discriminatory practices (Stewart and Coleman 2005).

This concept is further explored by Coleman and Stewart, who examine whether the persistence of discrimination implies that markets are not competitive enough to achieve predicted outcomes. They balkanize this issue into three key questions that will guide this paper's framework:

1. If noncompetitive markets are the norm in the United States, have discriminatory agents adapted their institutions to minimize efficiency losses from these preferences?
2. Have discriminatory agents shifted the burden of economic losses caused by discrimination onto the victims?
3. If such structural adaptations exist that allow discrimination to persist without major economic cost to the discriminators, do dominant groups have any incentive to mitigate the social costs of discrimination or racial stratification?

These questions alter our understanding of discrimination within the marketplace and will be explored throughout this study. The goal of this research is to identify the primary factors contributing to nutritional inequality between Black and White Americans and determine the highest variable contribution to nutritional inequality between Black and White Americans. By uncovering how structural factors influence dietary differences, our research aims to shed light on why discriminatory practices continue in the marketplace. We posit that there exists a possibility of significant gains to revenue, given that economic firms properly address inequality. However, the oversight of firms to minimize disparities presents an opportunity cost. Firms suffer monetary losses in the form of profits, from the disregard of Black communities. This study aims to investigate why inequities continue to exist, seemingly contradictory to fundamental economic logic, and how inequities contribute to nutritional gaps between racial groups.

Literature Review

Economists play a crucial role in shaping policies that directly influence the marketplace. Whether positive or negative, policy manifests various economic outcomes, including those related to nutritional inequality (Spriggs 2020). Discrimination in the food market presents itself in a multitude of ways. Naa Oyo A. Kwate, a Professor in the Department of Africana Studies and the Department of Human Ecology, points to fast food racism. Intersected with urban renewal, White flight to the suburbs, and the defunding of Black urban neighborhoods has had major contributions to inequity (Kwate 2023). Our research focuses on understanding the policy outputs and their effects on nutritional inequality. If policies do not ensure the efficient allocation of resources, market failures can occur, leading to disparities in the distribution of goods. While exploring this issue, it is essential to consider William Spriggs' assertion that the field of economics has historical ties to racial inequality. Spriggs, a Black economist, notes that early leaders in the American Economic Association supported eugenicist theories that promoted the racial superiority of White, Anglo-Saxon Protestants (Spriggs 2020). He explains that this racial framework in economics may have contributed to an ongoing equity-efficiency tradeoff, where policies favor economic efficiency over racial equality, thereby reinforcing discriminatory structures.

This connection between race and economics highlights the role of intergroup competition in the persistence of inequality, according to John Whitehead, professor of economics and African American studies, who has written extensively on racial economic inequality and community economic development. Whitehead (2005) explains that individuals within similar racial groups, with shared cultural production functions, may engage in collective behavior to reduce the negative externalities caused by other racial groups' actions. This competition can contribute to tensions, even in the absence of direct competition for resources. The maldistribution of goods is evident in statistics such as the fact that Black families are disproportionately affected by poverty. While the U.S. has an overall poverty rate of 11.5%, the rate within the Black community is much higher at 17.1% (Shrider and Creamer 2023). This phenomenon is what many economists describe as the Black Political Economy. The Black Political Economy differs from standard economic theory via the mechanism of low standards of living and rampant discrimination (Haynes 2010). This theory suggests that if resources were distributed equally, poverty rates might be more aligned across racial groups.

In the literature, contrary to our claim, conservative economists are quite critical of government programs designed to aid Black individuals and other minorities. Popularized by Milton Friedman, free market (*laissez-faire*) capitalism implies that economic firms have no social responsibility to the public or society, with their only responsibility being to their shareholders. This perspective is founded on the idea that competitive market forces are sufficient in discouraging discriminatory hiring practices. According to Friedman, competitive profit-

maximizing economic firms will not discriminate in order to generate revenue and appease stakeholders (Friedman 1996). Further, they argue that in a competitive market, there exists no need for government intervention to improve the status of racial minorities, and government intervention limits individual freedom and disrupts the efficient allocation of scarce resources (Whitehead 2005).

Neighborhood dynamics provide another important lens through which to examine nutritional inequality. Research indicates that neighborhoods with higher concentrations of Black residents are often more impoverished, leading to worse nutritional outcomes. For example, 76% of neighborhoods with a high proportion of Black residents are also among the most impoverished, resulting in nutrient deficiencies in these areas (Zenk et al. 2005). This research will incorporate the income-to-poverty ratio as a variable in the decomposition model to assess how income correlates with nutritional access and outcomes.

Education plays a key role in understanding these disparities. Studies ascertain that education alone cannot resolve food insecurity due to income inequality persisting despite similar educational attainments. For example, Black males with a bachelor's degree earn only 78% of what White males earn with the same educational threshold, and Black high school graduates earn just 79% of their White counterparts' wages (Whitehead 2005). These wage disparities suggest that education, while important, cannot fully account for the racial nutritional gap. Given, income-related preference differences in nutrition are explained by education (20%) and nutrition knowledge (14%) (Allcott et al. 2018). Thus, educational attainment is a necessary variable to understand the nutritional disparities between Black and White Americans.

By examining gender, marriage, education, and income-to-poverty, this research seeks to clarify the socioeconomic causes of nutritional inequality. The conservative economic perspective, which focuses on cultural choices and individual behavior, overlooks the structural inequalities that drive these disparities. In the BPE, there exists a focus on the structural aspect of racism and power. The lack of collectivism and individualistic mindset generated by the material conditions of capitalism has allowed inequities to spread and permeate the community. Our study will investigate how much these structural factors contribute to the nutritional gap to provide a deeper understanding of the persistent market failures and inequalities in American society.

Methodology

Our data is derived from NHANES (the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey) and includes coefficients designed to yield nationally representative estimates for the period covered by the pre-pandemic 2017-March 2020 files. We focused on pre-pandemic data to capture a representative sample with minimal external variation. In our decomposition analysis, we apply coefficients from a pooled regression to explain the nutrition gap between Black

and White families. These pooled regression coefficients serve as weights, allowing us to assess which aspects of nutritional access and intake contribute to this bifurcation. Racial identity is included as an indicator to capture any remaining, unexplained portion of the nutrition gap.

To quantify which variables contribute most to nutritional inequality, we apply the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition. Analogous to its application to the gender wage gap, we will decompose two groups whose outcomes should be the same, and any unexplained difference we attribute to discrimination in the market. This method enables us to attribute specific portions of the nutrition gap to differences in characteristics, while the unexplained portion can be interpreted as a measure of discrimination.

Using dietary supplements as an indicator of nutritional quality, our study explores Black-White nutritional disparities. Our hypothesis assumes that if all factors are fully accounted for, the total contribution of identified factors should add up to 100%, though omitted variable bias or market discrimination may prevent this total from being reached. The results will help pinpoint sources of nutritional inequality, with an emphasis on disparities in vitamin intake.

Since racial discrimination limits economic well-being and is not Pareto efficient, reducing discrimination may yield economic benefits. Adequate nutrition, which requires sufficient intake of the essential nutrients—carbohydrates, protein, fats, vitamins, minerals, and water—is closely tied to brain development and educational outcomes (Roberts et al. 2022). Thus, supporting community nutrition may not only improve quality of life for working families but could also drive economic gains and potentially maximize college attainment rates.

This study employs the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition to assess the NHANES data and demonstrate how Black-White nutritional inequality exists and persists in the market. Our analysis will also consider the literature that indicates dietary supplements correlate with better nutritional outcomes and existing nutritional deficiencies within the domestic Black community.

Current Study

The USDA estimates that around 12% of the U.S. population experiences food insecurity (Nord, Andrews and Carlson 2004). This study first applies the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition to assess how racial differences in environmental factors contribute to nutritional inequality by quantifying aggregate differences in nutritional outcomes. By measuring how demographic and socioeconomic variables affect this nutritional gap, the analysis identifies both explained and unexplained portions, the latter of which is often attributed to market discrimination. If discrimination exists, there may be economic benefits (or “rents”) that sustain it, driving the persistence of inequality.

This research assumes that NHANES data is unbiased and representative, and factors like marriage status, education, and income-to-poverty ratio will account for significant variations in nutritional outcomes. Unlike labor applications, where fringe benefits may skew the wage gap, fringe benefits could similarly affect nutrition among Black and White communities, and we include this consideration in our model. We argue that federal policy interventions or market incentives could help address this inequality by providing better access to nutritious foods in underserved communities.

Market failure in food distribution contributes to uneven fulfillment of dietary needs, often tied to residential segregation that isolates lower-income, racially diverse neighborhoods from wealthier, predominantly White areas. This study aims to identify the structural causes of this market failure, specifically why food markets do not align with the principles of profit maximization in economics. As racial discrimination disrupts economic rationality by hindering profit maximization, it is hypothesized that any residual coefficient from the decomposition could signal discrimination. Coleman's BPE (Black Political Economy) paradigm suggests that while the Civil Rights Movement triggered new policies to address disparities, these adjustments ultimately reinforced the existing racial order through the mechanism of individualism. The material conditions of Black Americans have reinforced individualistic determination rather than the social perspective seen in normative economic theory. As a result, stratification and discrimination have persisted, potentially contributing to ongoing market failures (Stewart and Coleman 2005).

Our study hypothesizes that decomposing the nutrition gap can reveal how factors like marriage status, education, nativity, gender, and income-to-poverty level shape nutritional inequality across racial lines. By addressing these market inefficiencies and discriminatory structures, we aim to demonstrate that eliminating such factors can reduce inequality and create a more equitable nutritional landscape.

Data and Methods

This study uses quantitative methods to analyze nutritional outcomes by using Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition, an equation originally formulated by labor economists to analyze wage differentials. This formula decomposes the average difference in attainment, attributing group differences to specific variables that influence the outcome.

The data used comes from individual respondents of the Black and White groups within the NHANES dataset, spanning from 2017 to March 2020 (pre-pandemic), and includes 15,560 respondents. The NHANES dietary supplement sub-section gathers personal interview data on the use of nutritional supplements over the 30 days prior to the survey. The Dietary Supplement Questionnaire was administered by trained interviewers using the Computer-Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) system. Respondents over 16 years of age provided their own an-

swers, while a proxy responded for participants under 16 or those unable to answer for themselves. Black and White respondents were randomly selected based on their income and educational background. The dependent variable in this analysis is the difference in nutritional outcomes between Black and White respondents, which was later pooled and logarithmically adjusted for skewness.

The explanatory variables in this study include gender, marital status, education, nativity, and income-to-poverty ratio. Gender is analyzed as male versus female respondents. Marital status was asked for persons 14 years and older, though data are only released for those 20 years of age or older, categorized into three groups.

- 1 = Married/Living with a partner
- 2 = Widowed/Divorced/Separated
- 3 = Never married

Nativity identifies whether a respondent was born in the United States. NHANES defines the education variable based on the highest grade or threshold of education completed by adults 20 years or older, with categories ranging from less than 9th grade to college graduate or higher. The income-to-poverty ratio is calculated by dividing family or individual income by the relevant poverty guidelines, as defined by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) for the survey year. These guidelines vary by family size and geographic location.

To conceptualize some of the more challenging variables, marital status was ranked on a scale from 1 to 3 to better understand household dynamics, as these play a significant role in food security. Single-parent households often procure food differently than two-parent households (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2015). Education was similarly measured to assess how educational attainment influences dietary habits, with categories representing high school, college, or postgraduate attendance. As poverty is often closely linked to nutritional inequality, this study focuses on the income-to-poverty ratio as an explanatory variable for decomposition. Additionally, ethnic background influences cultural dietary choices, which is reflected in the nativity variable.

For the decomposition, two separate regressions were run:

$$\begin{aligned}\ln(wages_{Ai}) &= X_{Ai}\beta_A + u_{Ai} \\ \ln(wages_{Bi}) &= X_{Ai}\beta_B + u_{Bi}\end{aligned}$$

where X represents descriptive variables such as education, experience, industry, and occupation. The vectors of coefficients, β_A and β_B , are estimated, with u representing the error term. In the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition, the difference in means between the two groups is expressed as:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{mean}(\ln(wages_A)) - \text{mean}(\ln(wages_B)) &= b_A \text{mean}(X_A) - b_B \text{mean}(X_B) = \\ &= b_A \text{mean}(X_A) - b_B \text{mean}(X_B) + b_B \text{mean}(X_b)(b_A - b_b) \end{aligned}$$

The first line of the equation reflects the difference between the two groups' averages, while the second line represents the unexplained difference, often attributed to discrimination (among other factors). It is important to note that although the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition originally focused on wage discrimination, in this study, the formula is applied to nutritional outcomes, with vitamins as the inputs (including potassium, calcium, dietary supplements, iodine, iron, fiber, and zinc), and the explanatory variables remaining the same: gender, marital status, education, nativity, and income-to-poverty ratio.

Thus, the formula for this study becomes:

$$\begin{aligned} \ln(vitamins_{Ai}) &= X_{Ai} \mathcal{B}_A + u_{Ai} \\ \ln(vitamins_{Bi}) &= X_{Ai} \mathcal{B}_B + u_{Bi} \end{aligned}$$

This approach allows the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition to estimate the contribution of various factors (including discrimination) to nutritional inequality, though the formula remains flexible in adapting to the specific explanatory variables used in this study.

Table 1 presents the measures of central tendency for the variables analyzed in the study. The results indicate that, for women, the nutrition gap is positively associated with the dependent variable, with a robust effect on the White population. For age, an inverse effect is observed, with Black respondents showing a more marginal impact. Specifically, the coefficient for age is -0.06 for Black respondents, indicating a higher decrease compared to White respondents. Both models indicate a negative effect to age. Marital status and age squared both had a positive effect on the dependent variable, though marriage showed a stronger effect in the White group, while age squared had a more compelling correlation in the Black group. Education and nativity showed little effect on the dependent variable for Black respondents, with nativity having a particularly negligible impact.

The variability in the samples is relatively consistent, though there exists notable variation in age squared and nativity, with nativity showing the most sufficient variability. Other variables are clustered more closely around the mean.

Table 1: Results

	Coefficient	Standard Error	z	$p > z $	95% CI lower bound	95% CI upper bound
b1						
Female	0.47	0.15	3.20	0.00	0.18	0.76
Age	-0.03	0.02	-1.46	0.14	-0.08	0.01
Age ²	0.00	0.00	1.61	0.11	0.00	0.00
Foreign Born	-0.21	0.28	-0.75	0.46	-0.77	0.34
Married	0.18	0.13	1.32	0.19	-0.09	0.44
Education	-0.20	0.08	-2.65	0.01	-0.35	-0.05
Socioeconomic Status	0.01	0.10	0.08	0.94	-0.19	0.21
Constant	3.00	0.61	4.88	0.00	1.80	4.21
b2						
Female	0.17	0.20	0.88	0.38	-0.22	0.57
Age	-0.06	0.03	-2.02	0.04	-0.12	0.00
Age ²	0.00	0.00	2.08	0.04	0.00	0.00
Foreign Born	-0.20	0.25	-0.81	0.42	-0.69	0.29
Married	0.11	0.17	0.64	0.52	-0.23	0.45
Education	0.00	0.10	-0.01	0.99	-0.19	0.19
Socioeconomic Status	-0.15	0.11	-1.32	0.19	-0.38	0.07
Constant	3.92	0.75	5.24	0.00	2.45	5.38
b reference						
Female	0.38	0.12	3.20	0.00	0.15	0.61
Age	-0.05	0.02	-2.53	0.01	-0.08	-0.01
Age ²	0.00	0.00	2.69	0.01	0.00	0.00
Foreign Born	-0.20	0.19	-1.09	0.28	-0.57	0.16
Married	0.15	0.10	1.46	0.14	-0.05	0.36
Education	-0.13	0.06	-2.20	0.03	-0.25	-0.01
Socioeconomic Status	-0.06	0.08	-0.74	0.46	-0.21	0.09
Constant	3.31	0.47	6.98	0.00	2.38	4.24

Shown are measures of central tendency for the variables used in the study.

Analysis and Results

After conducting a series of t-tests, it was found that many of the supplements did not show statistical significance at the 0.05 significance threshold. Interpreting these results, we observe that, prior to adjustments for age, gender had a negative correlation with the bifurcation between Black and White households, indicating that being female is associated with a more incremental nutritional inequality gap. Conversely, being male is positively correlated with a larger dietary inequality gap.

Table 2: Decomposition of Dietary Supplements

Dietary Supplements		ln transformed	
	Black	0.50	
	White	0.26	
	Difference	0.25	
Explained		Coefficients	Difference in black/white nutrition in percent
	female	0.00	-1.58
	age	0.00	-1.45
	age ²	0.06	24.90
	foreign born	0.00	-0.29
	married	0.00	0.07
	education	0.02	6.63
	SES	0.03	10.20
	Total	0.09	38.49
Unexplained	Total		61.51

Differences in age, income, and other factors contribute significantly to the overall nutritional gap. Specifically, 6% of the dietary supplement gap and 0.39% of the calcium supplement gap are explained by educational disparities between the two groups. If the educational inequality gap were eliminated, the nutritional inequality in dietary supplements would decrease by 6.6%. This suggests that educational disparities play a key role in the nutritional gap, highlighting the importance of education on dietary needs.

Socioeconomic status (SES) or income-to-poverty differences between the Black and White groups contribute 10% to the nutritional inequality gap. If income disparities were removed, the nutritional gap in dietary supplements would decrease by 10%. In terms of calcium supplements, the difference in age and age squared between the two groups accounts for 26.6% of the nutritional gap. As with dietary supplements, 3% of the calcium nutritional gap can be attributed to SES or income-to-poverty differences.

These findings align with existing literature on nutritional inequality and confirm that socioeconomic factors, especially education and income, are central to explaining disparities. However, a substantial portion of the decomposition remains unexplained. From a Black Political Economy perspective, some of this unexplained portion could indeed be attributed to market discrimination, which affects Black households more significantly in terms of access to resources, including nutritional supplements. Rather than attributing the unexplained variance solely to discrimination, we propose that other factors contribute to this bifurcation.

Table 3: Decomposition of Calcium Intake

Calcium	In transformed		
	Black	2.33	
	White	0.26	
	Difference	0.39	
Explained		Coefficients	Difference in black/white nutrition in percent
	female	-0.02	-4.47
	age	0.05	12.04
	age ²	0.06	14.60
	foreign born	-0.01	-2.69
	married	0.00	-0.03
	education	0.00	0.39
	SES	0.01	3.77
	Total	0.09	23.61
Unexplained	Total		76.39

This analysis underscores the importance of addressing both socioeconomic inequalities and potential discriminatory practices to effectively address the nutritional gap between Black and White households.

Conclusion

Through the decomposition, we observe the importance of marriage in closing the nutritional gap, which provides potential research topics into the policies implemented in the Jim Crow era. Many racist policies were created to split up the Black household, which could be tied to nutritional inequality studies. If considering an iterative approach to our research, food deserts, SNAP, and WIC would be potentially added, as well as the effect gentrification has on Black nutritional attainment. This study expresses the importance of policy changes that could truncate the effect education and poverty have on the nutrition gap. Decomposing many variable factors that affect nutritional inequality could also be operationalized to analyze the historical discriminatory policies that lead to these variables affecting the dietary gap presently. Future researchers could take our study further to analyze how firms are benefiting from discriminatory policies. Public policy is likely the most appropriate way to close the nutrient gap and further minimize the economic burden of racism in American society.

Avenues for future discussion include an expansive data set accompanied by increased variables to possibly reduce the unexplained coefficient. Another research opportunity is the effects that discriminatory elements like food deserts or SNAP have on the outcomes of nutritional inequality. Food deserts have accrued contention as economists and nutrition experts question the causal nature of food inequality, with lack of demand increasingly being seen as the issue. Many studies claim that even if low-income communities are provided with access to nutritious foods, the underlying issue is that the propensity for nutritious foods is simply not sufficient, such that eliminating food deserts would not directly eliminate food inequality.

Through the decomposition, we can observe that discrimination may be present, meaning that companies, corporations, and businesses are benefiting from discriminatory policies in some way. The research also points to a long-standing sore spot in the American political spectrum, which is the poor job Reconstruction-era and subsequent egalitarian policies have pragmatically translated towards Black citizens. There exists a palpable difference in outcomes between Black and White communities, indicative of the echoes of slavery and discriminatory policies that are present.

Decomposing many variable factors that affect nutritional inequality could also be operationalized to analyze the historical discriminatory policies which causally affect the variables in the dietary gap presently. Economists could take the conducted research further to analyze how exactly corporations and institutions are benefiting from discriminatory policies. Public policy is likely the most appropriate way to close the nutrient gap and further truncate the economic burden of racism in American society.

Amending the nutrient gap is very complex, but the first step would be to inform the general American public that there exists an issue in the first place. As shown in the decomposition, education is an important variable that contributes to the delay of resource attainment, such that maximizing the number of citizens who are aware that a bifurcation exists in the first place would make a sizable difference in attainment. With this information, we can propose policy interventions to eliminate bifurcation. Proposed solutions should aim to decrease and possibly eliminate nutritional inequality in low-income and racial minority communities. Ideally, the policy lens would be an effective way to address this inequality in American society. Policy advocating can go in the direction of government programs, but some academics criticize the help of government intervention. Contrasting this perspective, conservative economic theory argues that the dietary gap between Black and White Americans is primarily due to cultural choices rather than racial discrimination. Proponents of this view argue that Black Americans' decisions regarding investments in human capital—such as nutrition—can be tied to unproductive behaviors. However, this theory falters when considering that higher-income households, regardless of race, tend to invest in healthier diets, as evidenced by the Healthy Eating Index (Allcott et al. 2018). The “underclass culture” argument

claims that dysfunctional behaviors, such as living for immediate gratification and relying on welfare, hinder Black Americans' economic progress. However, we reject this view, proposing instead that the persistence of nutritional inequality is a result of a market failure fueled by socioeconomic disparities.

Contrarily, if we can identify sources of inequality, like in the decomposition, there exists a possibility that we can eliminate it through policy interventions, especially where policy could make a substantial difference, such as for education. The literature supports a similar outcome with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; the structural results predict that means-tested subsidies for healthy food could eliminate nutritional inequality at a fiscal cost of about 15 percent of the annual budget for the U.S. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Allcott et al. 2018).

Another possible avenue is to get the industries in question to invest resources into communities to become more profit-maximizing. Recalling previous labor economic theory, with a lower wage cost, non-discriminating firms can sell products at a lower cost and eventually drive the discriminating firm (industry) out of business. In theory, then, there exists robust incentives for firms not to discriminate, and thus this theory could be applied to dietary inequality (Whitehead 2005). Relevance to non-economists should stem from the harsh reality that low-income communities are present across the United States, and providing equality for these communities could lead to an increase in the educational, quality of life, and economic outcomes of the Black community.

Limitations of this study include the data set. While NHANES provided a myriad of heterogeneous variables, an insufficient number of respondents responded to certain questions, as mentioned in the empirical portion of my paper, leading to certain variables having to be taken out as they could not be determined to be statistically significant. Another limitation was the methodology of data collection. While the literature points in the direction of dietary supplements being a sufficient measuring stick for nutritional inequality, more data on diet would have been preferred to get a more robust perspective on the driving forces behind the nutrient gap. A caveat present in the study is the operationalization of decomposition as a measure of nutrient quality. As mentioned previously, this measure has been thoroughly tested in the field of labor economics. After in-depth research, this study is the first time Oaxaca decomposition has been applied in this manner. Importantly, it has not been as robustly tested as in the field of labor economics.

Addressing nutritional inequality, therefore, may require a shift from purely market-based or individual-level interventions toward community-centered, cooperative models of development rooted in the principles of economic democracy and collective self-determination. John Whitehead claims that the aspects of racism are intensely and tightly woven into every aspect of life (Whitehead 2005). Therefore, perhaps more than just policy change is needed to benefit the Black Political Economy and Black economic progress. These findings extend

beyond traditional economic reasoning and speak directly to the framework of Black Political Economy (BPE). While standard market theory, as advanced by Friedman, suggests that discrimination should diminish in competitive markets, the persistence of racial nutritional gaps—even after controlling for education and income—contradicts this assumption (Friedman 1996). Rather than reflecting isolated individual biases, these disparities reveal structural inequities embedded within the U.S. political economy. In this sense, the results support the BPE perspective articulated by Haynes: that the current system itself reproduces racial inequality by prioritizing individual accumulation over collective economic welfare (Haynes 2010).

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The Reality of State Apologies

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Abstract

There has been a spike in the volume of state apologies issued by state leaders within the past four decades. This trend of apologies has been studied by many scholars within the field of political science. Some scholars view this trend as a sign that the neoliberal order is buckling in the face of an increased demand for accountability and recognition of international human rights, while others take a more cautionary, negative viewpoint on the matter. I take a more cynical approach to the reality of state apologies. I argue that state apologies are an attempt to garner political support and to maintain cultural hegemony over society. What causes this need to garner political support and thus the need to issue state apologies, I argue, is the increase in political power of minority groups within governments. I used data from the Political Apologies Database created by Dr. Schaafsma and Dr. Zoodma and the Ethnic Power Relations Dataset created by ETH Zurich, observing exclusively European countries, to construct my own data set, all while accounting for control variables such as election years, former/current colonial powers, the difference between heads of state and heads of government, and the temporal trend itself. My findings indicate that there is a statistically significant positive effect that the political power of minority groups within countries has on the probability of a state apology to be issued. The implication of this is that there is some truth in the cynicism towards state apologies, and thus it warrants further inquiry into state apologies as an authentic attempt at demonstrating accountability for human rights violations committed in the past.

I Introduction

WHEN, the Chancellor of West Germany, Willy Brandt, while visiting the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial in Poland in 1970, went down on his knees to apologize for the crimes Germany committed during World War Two, it marked the beginning of a growing recognition of the violation of human rights as something for those in power to apologize for. Victims of human rights abuses seek accountability for wrongdoings committed in the past, and how

that starts is through the act of apology by the perpetrator of those wrongdoings. Apologies, on their own, are symbolic in nature, and therefore, the true intentions behind them can vary from being genuine to not genuine. Just like how words within language can have different meanings and intentions depending on context, so too can apologies, as they are composed of language. This fact is important to consider, as within the last few decades, there has been a large uptick in the rate of state apologies issued by leaders all around the world. To be more specific, this phenomenon started to occur roughly around the eve of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc in 1991, and thus the simultaneous rise in the neoliberal world order. This is very curious, as this timing no doubt at least warrants some skepticism towards the actual intentions behind state apologies. If state apologies were truly genuine acts of recognition for wrongdoings committed in the past, then why did the uptick of such occur alongside the collapse of a global superpower? It does not help that most of these state apologies are issued by leaders of Western/Western-aligned countries, who are, for the most part, staunch defenders of neoliberalism. All this poses the question: Why do some leaders feel more compelled to make state apologies than others?

I believe the reality of state apologies should be investigated because I think there is a distinct relationship between language and power. Since there can be a disconnect between what is symbolic and what is real when it comes to language, there is reason to contemplate the idea that said disconnect could be utilized to garner more power. In addition to this, if these state apologies are being issued without anything else to follow up after them, such as reparations or other reparative policy decisions, then those state apologies become more symbolic and fake than real, genuine acts of acknowledgment of wrongdoings. Leaders should not be lying through their teeth when they issue state apologies, but rather, they should act truthfully when issuing said apologies, and follow through with meaningful change to level the playing field between the perpetrators and the victims.

To answer my research question, I argue that the rise in power of minority ethnic groups within a country makes leaders of that country more likely to issue a state apology. The reason I posit this is because minority groups offer a counter hegemony that functions as a pushback against the hegemony the dominant group holds, which thus warrants a response from the dominant group to maintain their power. The results ultimately showed that minority power has a positive effect on the likelihood of a state apology being issued by a leader. To test this hypothesis, my research will first explore the scholarly literature surrounding state apologies and thus contextualize my stance within the present scholarship. Then I will follow up with an explanation of my theoretical argument based off previously established literature and its causal mechanism, as well as the hypotheses I will be testing in my regression analysis. After this, I will briefly cover the empirical descriptions of the variables in question, describe the

coding of said variables, and then interpret the results of the regression analysis. Finally, I will conclude with the implications of the findings, a discussion of the limitations of the research, and suggestions for future scholarship.

2 Literature Review

There has been a plethora of literature written on the so-called “age of apologies.” This phenomenon was recently empirically verified, and there is a database that shows there is a distinct increase in state apologies around that time (Zoodsma and Schaafsma 2021). Given its dawn at around the dusk of the Soviet Bloc, there is a significant portion of the given literature on the “age of apologies” that is hopeful at best and demonstrably critical at worst. Of course, the analysis in most literature given on the topic has acknowledged the ideological significance of the “age of apologies.”

2.1 The Question of the Genuine

A major aspect of this puzzle is trying to figure out whether state apologies are issued in a genuine manner or if they are purely a means to an end. This aspect is further amplified by the topic at hand being ideological in nature. Gibney and Roxstrom acknowledge the possibility of the non-genuine nature of state apologies, but they also see the potential of state apologies being more than just a way to boost personal reputation. They think that the fact that state apologies are being given in the first place is a sign that governments are growing accustomed to a developing humanitarian world. A major critique that both Gibney and Roxstrom give to state apologies that gives credit to the dismissal of their genuineness is that they mostly focus on the past rather than the future. To properly apologize for a wrongdoing, one must ultimately strive to repair the damage done and return the situation to one of equal footing for both parties. This, of course, involves one focusing on the future more than in the past (Gibney and Roxstrom 2001). To put more light on the ungenuine nature of state apologies, Lightfoot found that hardly any of the state apologies given by countries within the Anglosphere were “authentic” in her words. She classified state apologies as being authentic or genuine, to return to my own vocabulary, based off the issuer’s commitment to move beyond words: to mend the schism between wronged and wrongdoer through reparations and other forms of reparative policies. Lightfoot also views state apologies as a way forward for Western powers to reconcile with indigenous groups (Lightfoot 2015).

While Lightfoot, Gibney, and Roxstrom view state apologies as a means to reinforce human rights and to mend ties, Borneman, on the other hand, takes a more cynical approach. State apologies, according to him, take a more functional role within the political sphere, specifically in the democratization that occurred in Central and Eastern Europe shortly after

the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. Borneman views state apologies as a tool to construct internal unity within democratic countries. He notes West German Chancellor Willy Brandt's apology to Polish-Jewish victims of the Holocaust as being purely symbolic yet also authentic because it was symbolic (Borneman 2005).

2.2 Neoliberalism's Connection to State Apology

Borneman's idea of state apologies aiding in democratization of previously communist countries in Europe connects well with the ideological aspect of this puzzle: its potential connection with neoliberalism. Celermajer states that the "age of apology" signifies a detraction from neoliberalism as an effort to stray from individual accountability towards a collective one. Since neoliberalism prioritizes individualism not only through its attitude but also through policies advocated by its preachers, the idea that an act of seeking accountability from a collective rather than pinning the problem on the individual fits well with this detraction that Celermajer speaks of. Measures taken to cement neoliberalism and the political power of its adherents in government has been seen in cases such as the austerity measures and acts of privatization taken by the Reagan and Thatcher administrations in the United States and the United Kingdom respectively, which saw large cuts to public services and the transition of said services into the private sector. These acts serve to decollectivize public goods and put more emphasis on the individual. Celermajer states the trend is "a sign of late modern malaise, of our disappointment with the promises of a rationalized politics" (Celermajer 2009, 3). She argues that the sudden need for world leaders, especially Western ones, to publicly apologize for wrongs committed in the past, is a backlash against the "rational" neoliberal world that has existed for decades at this point. This is in direct contrast to the popular idea surrounding the "end of history" that was coined by Fukuyama: that we have arrived at the summit that is neoliberalism; there is simply no alternative, no other summits (Fukuyama 2020).

However, other scholars beg to differ. Friedrich directly counters this hypothesis with a different approach. He states that rather than the increased trend in state apologies being a detraction from neoliberalism, it is a symptom of it (Friedrich 2022). I initially agreed with this stance more than the former. Despite Friedrich drawing upon Foucault's theory of power, his theory shows a lot of similarities to Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony. Gramsci's theory supposes that state power alone isn't enough for the ruling class to maintain their status. Rather, there must also be an effort put into acquiring cultural power as well. Gramsci frames this attempt mainly as a way for the ruling class ideology to "make sense" to the average person (Gramsci 1992). This was then further expanded upon by Althusser and his school of structural Marxism, in which there is a distinction in how the ruling class maintains its hegemony in both the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), the RSAs being direct state power projected through the military and police, while

the ISAs are public institutions such as schools, family, churches, and the political (Althusser 2001). Friedrich concludes that state apologies are an attempt for the ruling class to maintain hegemony over society, much in the same language as Gramsci and Althusser. However, Friedrich's theory, deriving from the works of Foucault, is not Marxist. Therefore, Friedrich and Gramsci reach a similar conclusion via different modes of thought. However, that doesn't neglect his influence from these thinkers. Friedrich's theory seems to lean more towards the idea that state apologies are utilized in maintaining ruling class hegemony because the act of apology is cultural. The act of apology, the different circumstances surrounding it, as well as how one apologizes, differ between cultures. Some cultures apologize for some things, while others do not. Therefore, it would not be too far-fetched to put Friedrich's thoughts on the act of state apology as being somewhat Althusserian: that state apologies, as a practice, are another part of an Ideological State Apparatus, more specifically what Althusser would have referred to as the Political ISA.

3 Theoretical Argument

I believe that it is the growing power of minority groups within government that is causing world leaders to feel more compelled to give state apologies. It only makes sense for factions within government, ideally mirrored by their constituency, demanding collective, structural accountability for wrongdoings committed towards them to be the powder keg that brings the individualist and rationalist malaise of neoliberalism into realization. The rationalism and individualism endemic to neoliberal ideology is what Celermajer is referring to when she speaks of a "rationalized politics." According to neoliberals, it is only rational for private interests to prevail over federal interests concerning the wellbeing of the public. We see this rationalism in play immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc; economists rushed in and encouraged the newly born governments of Eastern Europe to adopt rapid privatization and austerity. It is the same mentality and method that was seen in the colonization of Africa in the late 19th century: ideas deemed as "rational" being forced down the throats of vulnerable state entities. This thus ties into Gramsci's cultural hegemony, in that what is deemed as "rational" is also deemed as objective and "common sense," thus further cementing power for the ruling classes. Therefore, I do not agree with Celermajer on the basis that the increase in state apologies is a complete detraction from the global neoliberal order. However, I do see it as a sign of weakness within the neoliberal order. After all, she does specifically state that it is a sign of "late modern malaise," a sickness that plagues the ideology itself. I see this as a contradiction within neoliberalism; it is a component of the ideology that is inconsistent with its other components and thus leads to weakness, just like in the same way that capitalism's contradictions are its weakness, according to Marxists. We are very clearly seeing neoliberalism in action to this day. I do not believe that we are in a post-neoliberal age, although there

have been a few attempted detractions from the neoliberal order, such as in the case of the modern Republican Party and the rise of far-right parties in Europe. However, I do not see these detractions as being completely detached from neoliberalism, but rather a product of it. Contradictions within an ideology, especially a global one, naturally lead to the rise of oppositional ideologies regardless of political leanings. Likewise, I do agree with Friedrich's general theory; however, I do not entirely agree with his disregard for Celermajer's opinion on the matter. I think his usage of Foucauldian thought is very valuable when discussing this topic. I do hold a strong inclination that Foucault's theory on knowledge-power that Friedrich utilizes, albeit conflicting with Gramsci's Marxist theory of cultural hegemony due to the former deviating from the bidirectional view of power that is common with conflict theorists, is still useful when analyzing the nature and function of state apologies. There is a connection to be made between the ways in which neoliberalism entrenches its political power and the mechanism of knowledge-power. For one, neoliberalism seeks to hold a monopoly on knowledge, since that is the function of rationalism: to bring about a universal method of reason that is the origin of all knowledge. That newly acquired knowledge is thus reinforced by power held by neoliberalism, and that knowledge thus further reinforces that power, further entrenching it. If we look at the theories of knowledge-power and cultural hegemony in their similarities with how power and knowledge are intrinsically linked, then I see no problem in attempting to utilize both to support my theory. In addition to this, I think there is a lot of value to be seen in combining the theories of Celermajer and Friedrich into one; that there is, in fact, an illness within neoliberalism, and state apologies as an act perpetrated by individual political leaders is a symptom of that illness. In other words, neoliberalism suffers from both an inherent flaw within it, and a means to express it, and to thus compensate for it.

What is this flaw? The flaw is holding individuals accountable for their actions rather than the groups and systems that perpetuated and allowed those actions. It has always been a puzzle to me as to why most state apologies are given by world leaders who were not in power while the actions they are apologizing for occurred. This is because the focus of the apology is on the leader themselves, rather than the actual wrongdoings committed in the past. Every state apology given by a world leader includes the speaker stating, "I apologize..." clearly showing that they are at fault for what happened; they have taken the mantle of power that has been used to either commit or support wrongdoings in the past. But they aren't at fault, not nearly as guilty as the people who were in power, and not as guilty as the systems themselves. It is performative, but it is performative in the sense that rather than detracting from the neoliberal idea of individual accountability, the act of state apology reinforces it. Gramsci would have likely classified minority groups demanding accountability from their respective governments as forming a kind of counter-hegemony: an opposing force to the neoliberal cultural hegemony. In fact, he stated that the new intellectual within a society ruled by a dominant social group "can no longer consist of eloquence, which is an exterior and momen-

tary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor [and] organizer, as ‘permanent persuader’, not just simple orator” (Gramsci 1992). To further strengthen the connection between Foucault and Gramsci’s theories, Foucault mentioned that one of the core features of knowledge-power is that it originates from the bottom-up; that people, through actions and relationships, enable power to be wielded by the ruling class. Since people interact with and within public institutions (ISAs) in every waking moment of their lives, people are intrinsically a part of this network of power relations that then constitute power for the ruling class (Foucault 1990). This is very similar, although only in function, to Althusser’s interpellation: the psychological mechanism that, through everyday interactions, allows the ruling class ideology to permeate through people’s lives, which then further legitimizes the seemingly objective power of the ruling class. Likewise, this is akin to the personality of political leaders who are giving these state apologies. Being “one with the people” is the pursuit every politician tries to achieve but hardly ever does, mostly due to their socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition to this, my theory also takes inspiration from Borneman. In the absence of a common enemy to focus their own culture around and to also combat rising minority political action groups, the West has decided to rebrand itself as forgiving and remorseful for its acts of genocide and colonialism committed in the not-so-distant past, all while maintaining the neoliberal core tenet of individual accountability. Based off the argument presented, I hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1: The more power minority groups have within a country’s government, the more likely leaders are to issue a state apology.

There is a distinction to be made between heads of state and heads of government. Heads of state are typically more symbolic, ceremonial positions of power, while heads of government are the actual office in charge of managing governance. A perfect example of a ceremonial head of state is the monarch of the United Kingdom, who has issued a plethora of state apologies for actions committed by the British Empire over the last few centuries. It is also valid to assume that the symbolic act of apology should be carried out more by a symbolic position of power. Therefore, I argue that:

Hypothesis 2: Heads of state are more likely to issue state apologies than heads of government.

There is a stark contrast between countries that have engaged in colonialism along with other human rights abuses in the past, and those that have not, regarding the volume of given state apologies. After all, it would only make sense that the volume of state apologies would correlate with the number of atrocities committed by a country during the age of rampant colonialism and imperialism. In fact, Japan is massively overrepresented within the realm of state apologies due to the willingness of its heads of state to apologize to China for the

Japanese military's human rights abuses during the Second World War. I will thus hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 3: *Leaders of former colonial powers are more likely to issue state apologies.*

There may also be a temporal element to this problem other than the grander scope of the "age of apologies". If we assume that state apologies are a tool to garner political support and praise from the public, then there is a possibility that electoral cycles could play a role in tempting state leaders to issue apologies for wrongdoings. Thus, I hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 4: *Leaders of democratic countries are more likely to issue state apologies during election seasons.*

There is a chance that issuing state apologies is purely a temporal phenomenon rather than an attempt to maintain current power relations. I can think of many trends, especially those on the internet, that seemingly spring out of nowhere and last for long periods of time. Perhaps it is the growing accessibility of the internet that has made issuing state apologies have more of an impact. We also must consider the fall of the Soviet Union as perhaps not an ideological motivator, but rather an accessibility motivator. The collapse of the Soviet Union spawned a plethora of sovereign countries with leaders who could do what they want in terms of issuing state apologies and among other things. Therefore, I hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 5: *Leaders of countries who held office after the year 1991 are more likely to issue state apologies than leaders of countries who held office before then.*

4 Empirics

4.1 Overall Research Strategy and Approach

To evaluate my hypothesis, I will be conducting an observational study. It would be unfeasible for me to conduct an experiment as the phenomenon I am investigating is too grand in scope to be contained in a limited space, and, more importantly, I do not have control over the independent variables. I will instead be conducting an observational quantitative study. I do not think a series of observational case studies would be able to capture the many considerations I have in mind for my hypotheses. The ultimate question is the quantity of power and state apologies, meaning that case studies would be unable to account for leaders of countries who do not give state apologies to begin with, regardless of the power of minority groups. This also means that the case studies might be biased towards colonial powers, which would then skew my conclusions. I think a quantitative study would be able to sufficiently capture the scope of my project, as well as capture the alternative solutions to my research question.

4.2 Observing Concepts

My analysis focuses on leaders who have served longer than 100 days in office between the years 1980 and 2025. How I define “leader” is any individual who either holds the position of head of state or head of government within a country. The unit of analysis within my data set will be expressed in leader-years (for example, Blairo5, Blairo6) to easily track the temporal aspect of state apologies I am attempting to observe. I will be gathering my units from European countries. This is because trying to gather data on every leader that served in an executive office in every country within a 45-year time frame would be ambitious beyond what an undergraduate student could manage to achieve. Europe is also a very diverse sample to choose from with respect to my variables; many European countries have a multitude of minority groups and differing systems of government. The European countries observed in this study are Albania, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia/Czechia, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and Yugoslavia. Some countries and regions of Europe, such as Germany and Scandinavia, respectively, were excluded from my empirics. The reasoning behind this is further elaborated on in Section 4.4. I do recognize that in only recording leader-years of European countries, I am excluding leader-years of non-European countries who have issued state apologies, such as those of the United States and Japan. Hopefully, with this paper, scholars in the future will be able to add to my research by including other regions of the world to test my hypothesis. I am also barring leader-years of micro-states from my sample, as not only are there oddities within those states that would conflict with my data (for instance, the head of state of Andorra being the French president), but also those states are ethnically homogeneous, and thus would not be included in my data to begin with. I am only including leader-years of countries that have a population of at least five hundred thousand people.

4.3 Defining Independent and Dependent Variables

The independent variable will be the political power of minority groups within the governments of these countries. I chose the term “power” to signify the strength of minority groups because it is abstract enough as a concept to attribute to observable phenomena. The term also correlates with the language used by Friedrich, Gramsci, and Althusser. The logic behind this specification on power is that if there are individuals in government who identify themselves as being part of a minority group, then ideally, they are going to represent the interests of that minority group. This representation of interest can take form in policy decisions, collaborating with other members of government, and pushing back against decisions that negatively affect their respective minority groups. The latter representation of interest

would cause the dominant group within government to either listen to their concerns or disregard them entirely, and this depends on the amount of power minority groups have within the government.

To define my dependent variable, a state apology is any apology given publicly by a leader towards a group of people, either domestic or international, or towards a foreign country for wrongdoings committed in the past. I will not be including any apologies given by members of legislature or any local office that is below the position of head of state or head of government, because that is simply outside the scope of my analysis.

There is a slight disconnect to be seen between my independent and dependent variables, namely with respect to state apologies given to foreign countries. At first glance, it would not make sense for state apologies given to foreign countries to be affected by domestic minority groups. However, I would argue that it still applies, as expressing sympathy or sorrow towards a foreign group that is relatively marginalized within one's country can be translated as expressing that same sympathy and sorrow towards domestic minority groups. There is a certain attitude expressed within liberal politics, in that caring for one marginalized group means you care for other marginalized groups. By correlating these two variables, I hope to capture that phenomenon within my analysis.

4.4 Operationalizing Variables

Within my data, I will be looking at the difference between the amount of state apologies given with respect to the difference in the power of minority groups over time. For my independent variable, I will be pulling data from the Ethnic Power Relations Core Dataset compiled by ETH Zurich in 2021 (Vogt et al. 2015). In this dataset, the degree of ethnic power within government is expressed ordinally as follows: “discriminated,” “powerless,” “self-exclusion,” “junior partner,” “senior partner,” “dominant,” and “monopoly.” Because of the wide variety in the number of ethnic groups within the countries of the leaders I will be observing, it was necessary for me to convert this variable into one expressed in numbers between 1 to 7. For example, “discriminated” is designated as “1,” while “monopoly” is designated as “7.” I created two separate variables for ethnic power, one for majority ethnic power and the other for minority ethnic power. This allows me to calculate averages of ethnic power within the countries my units of analysis are in, which then allows me to express temporal and spatial variety between my units of analysis.

There are numerous issues with ETH Zurich's Ethnic Power Relations Core Dataset that need to be mentioned. For one thing, this is a dataset that spans from 1946 to 2021, meaning that the years between 2022 and 2025 are completely unaccounted for. Therefore, I had to add an inserted variable that denotes assumptive data based off data recorded in 2021. Another thing that made this data set hard to correct for my own empirics was that the data set didn't

include all European countries. In fact, some of the European countries that were included in the data set only had ethnic groups denoted as “irrelevant,” either because they were too small to matter or because the country being observed was perceived as ethnically homogenous. This means that a lot of countries, and even entire regions of Europe, such as Scandinavia, had to be excluded from my data set.

For my dependent variable, I will be pulling from the Political Apologies database compiled by Zoodma and Schaafsma (2021), along with other scholars, to gauge the amount of state apologies made by heads of state and heads of government between the years 1980 and 2025. State apologies will be a ratio variable, in that they will range from 0 to 2 (there was never an instance within my data in which a leader gave more than 2 apologies within a single year). I will be recording the number of instances in which a leader gave no apologies within a year, the number of instances in which a leader gave one apology within a year, and so on, and compare their frequency with my other variables.

4.5 Control Variables

To test the hypothesis concerning the temporal aspect of state apologies, I added a control variable denoting years between 1980 and 2025. This variable is relatively straightforward in how it will be coded.

It is important to denote the difference between heads of state and heads of government. The head of state is a more symbolic position than the head of government, and heads of state can include monarchs who are not elected by the people. To test the hypothesis concerning the difference between heads of state and heads of government, I added a control variable for this. This is going to be denoted as a dummy variable, with “0” representing heads of government, and “1” representing heads of state.

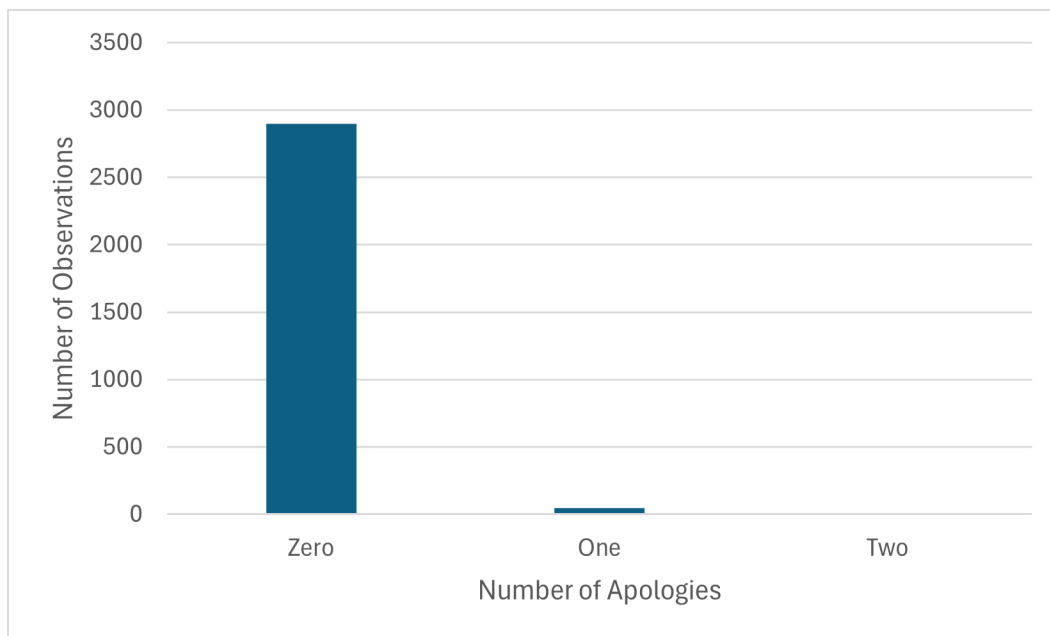
I define “colonial power” as any country that either previously had colonial possessions or still has colonial possessions. So, this includes Turkey, a country that previously had colonies in Arabia and the Levant, and France, a country that had colonial possessions all over the world in the past and still has colonial possessions in Oceania and the Americas. This will be another dummy variable, in which “0” denotes that the country was never a colonial power, and “1” denotes that the country was and/or still is a colonial power.

Election seasons are defined by a year in which there is either a presidential or parliamentary election. This is going to be another dummy variable, in which 0 is denoted as a normal year and 1 is denoted as an election year. This is a concise way of recording this variable, as it is flexible with respect to different term lengths or lack thereof.

4.6 Description of Observations

It may not come as a surprise that the act of apology among state leaders is a rare occurrence. Through my analysis, out of the 2946 leader-years in my data, there have only been 44 leader-years in which a single apology was observed, which is around 1.49% of all observations. There have only been 3 leader-years in which two apologies were observed, which is around 0.1% of all observations. I included Figure 1 (see below) to better demonstrate how rare state apologies are. The lack of apology is actually very significant to consider when discussing other findings. Because the act of state apology is so rare, and because the data set contains many observations, that makes its potential correlation with other variables even more compelling.

Figure 1: The Number of State Apologies



To fully gauge the distribution and other characteristics of the data, I calculated the statistical descriptors of both the dependent variable and minority power. The descriptors are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Statistical Descriptors of State Apologies and Minority Power

Variables	Mean	Median	Mode	Min	Max	Standard Deviation
# of Apologies	0.017	0	0	0	2	0.137
Minority Power	1.98	2	2	1	4	0.673

As shown in Table 1, the distribution of minority power with relation to state apologies issued is relatively uniform. The mean of state apologies issued is 0.017. This mean in particular tells me the proportion of leader-years that exhibited at least one state apology, which is around 1.7% of all observations. The mean for minority power is 1.98. This means that the values that exhibited 4 for minority power are outliers, since they lie at least 3 standard deviations away from the mean. Despite this, however, the distribution of the data is slightly skewed to the right, since the mean for minority power is slightly less than the median. This is significant as it makes the outliers within the data even more pronounced.

With the majority power variable, the statistics are a bit different. The mean is approximately 6.03, while the median is 6, meaning that the distribution of this variable is slightly skewed to the left. The range is between 4.5 and 7. This is due to the inclusion of Belarus in my data, in that both Belarusians and Russians share power within the Belarusian government as senior and junior partners respectively. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Belgium are other examples of countries whose majority power is split between 2 or more ethnic groups. The standard deviation of the majority power variable is approximately 0.85, meaning that there is a lot of variety within this variable. This could largely be due to the inclusion of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belgium, Belarus, and other countries of similar majority ethnic group makeup in my data, as they were very distinct outliers within that variable.

Next are the statistical descriptors of the control variables. These are shown below in Table 2.

Table 2: Statistical Descriptors of Control Variables

Variables	Mean	Median	Mode	Min	Max	Standard Deviation
Head of State	0.481	0	0	0	1	0.4997
Colonial Power	0.292	0	0	0	1	0.455
Election Season	0.174	0	0	0	1	0.3795

The statistic descriptions of the control variables are not worth mentioning for the most part, because they are all dummy variables, and thus the median, mode, and range are self-explanatory. However, I would like to mention that the mean of the colonial power control variable is approximately 0.292, which means that 29.2% of my observations were leader-years

of colonial powers. This is important to mention because it could affect the correlation between a leader holding office within a colonial power and the tendency of issuing state apologies, as there are only a select few countries that are former/present colonial powers. I would also like to bring up the mean of the head of state control variable. Beforehand, I thought I would observe more cases of heads of state than I would heads of government. However, after dwelling on this more, I've concluded that this is largely due to parliamentary democracies having inconsistencies with the actual term lengths for their heads of government. There are numerous instances within my data set in which there were multiple heads of government who held office within a year due to an inability of that country's parliament to form a government. A good example of this would be the recent mess that was observed in the United Kingdom back in 2022, with Liz Truss only serving 55 days as Prime Minister. This is also one of the reasons why I specified my units of analysis as leaders who have served for at least 100 days. If I were to list all acting prime ministers of every country I recorded in my data set, it would have diluted my results. This is because not only are acting prime ministers oftentimes not appointed by the results of a parliamentary election, but also the period they serve is too insignificant to matter.

5 Analysis

To test my main hypothesis, I conducted a regression analysis on my dependent variable for my independent and control variables. I expect to see a positive effect that minority power has on the probability of an apology being issued. This means that I expect that an increase in minority power will make it more likely for a leader to issue an apology. The results of said regression analysis can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: State Apologies Issued by European Leaders Regression Results

Variables	Coefficients	p-value
Intercept	-0.601	0.11
Minority Power	0.0147	0
Majority Power	-0.00048	0.87
Head of State	0.0042	0.36
Year	0.00029	0.12
Colonial Power	0.0288	0
Election Season	0.0017	0.78

5.1 Independent Variables

The results of the regression show support for my main hypothesis. The coefficient for the intercept, -0.601 , shows that if all other variables were held at 0, then the probability that a leader was to issue a state apology would be -60.1% . This is interesting to consider, since it shows that the other variables do in fact have a considerable impact on leaders making state apologies. For the first independent variable, the regression shows that for every metric of minority power gained, the probability of a leader issuing a state apology would increase by 1.47% on average if minority power increased by one category. The coefficient is minuscule mainly because of the rarity of state apologies. Since the p-value is close to zero and thus less than 0.05 , that means that minority power has a statistically significant effect on the issuing of state apologies. Because the coefficient is positive and more substantial compared to other variables, it is safe to assume that my hypothesis that an increase in minority power within government leads to an increased likelihood in state apologies is not false.

For the second independent variable, there is the inverse effect: for every category increase of majority power gained, the probability of state apologies issued would decrease 0.048% on average. This again supports my hypothesis, since if there is no ethnic opposition within government, then there is less inclination for leaders to issue state apologies. However, because it is an extremely small coefficient, and thus because the p-value is 0.87 , the impact that majority power has on state apologies is neither substantively nor statistically significant, directionally speaking. While majority power does indeed have a negative effect, as I predicted, and thus still supports my hypothesis, I find this result to be troubling. Perhaps with the inclusion of other continents, this variable, along with others, would become more significant and substantial.

5.2 Control Variables

For my first control variable, I predicted that heads of state would be more likely to issue state apologies than heads of government. Based on the regression, the probability of a leader issuing a state apology would be higher by 0.42% on average if they are a head of state instead of a head of government. As for the temporal control variable designated as years, the coefficient is positive, which I expected. For the colonial power variable, the regression table shows that given that their country is a colonial power, the probability that a leader issues a state apology would increase by 2.88% on average. Not only is this a significant coefficient, but also this variable contains a p-value of approximately 0. I expected this to be the case, as colonial powers have more past human rights violations caused by colonialism to apologize for, so the results of that are not that profound. What did surprise me, however, were the results of election seasons. Contrary to my predictions, the election season variable had a coefficient of 0.0017 and a p-value of 0.78 , meaning that it is not statistically significant. I attribute this to

a flaw in how I collected data on this front. As I was recording my data, I noticed that quite a few leaders gave apologies either within months after being elected to office or right before they left office. Because I only counted election years as years when an election took place, and did not count newly elected candidates who take office within the election years as being in an election year, these special cases dodged the criteria for contributing to a possibly more positive correlation. Despite that, however, I highly doubt the p-value would become low enough to make that variable statistically significant based off how other control variables correlated.

6 Conclusion

Overall, my data analysis showed a strong, positive effect that minority power has on the probability that a state apology is to be issued. This was not only close to what I expected, but in fact surpassed my expectations. What this means is that there is indeed something to be said about the political and cynical aspects of state apology. To put it simply, if state apologies were not a tool utilized by a dominant group to maintain power and quell the oppositional power put forth by minority groups, then there would not be as strong of an effect as observed. My research and the findings of such do not serve to propose any solutions to the issue of state apologies, but rather to point out their inherent role as a political tool. If anything, my research only exposes more problems with state apologies that need to be investigated, rather than finding any possible solutions. I believe that the search for solutions should be found by the reader and other scholars, and that involves further inquiry into the nature of state apologies.

Despite its profound results, I cannot deny that my research was limited. For one thing, my data collection of minority/majority power assumes that power is strictly a top-down phenomenon, which does not align with Foucault's theory of knowledge-power that I was influenced by Foucault (1990). At the beginning of my research, I initially wanted to look at the popularity of what I referred to as "minority-driven political action groups" in order to take a more bottom-up approach to answering my research question. However, it became clear very quickly that the variable I sought was not tractable, in that there was literally no data out there that measured the frequency of protests made by these political action groups in Europe. Therefore, I had to compromise and settle with a more top-down approach that was easily tractable and had plenty of data on it already. As I already mentioned before, another limitation that I had to deal with was the scope of my observations. I would have loved to observe more than just leader-years within most European countries, but due to both the unimaginable scope of having to observe the entire world on top of the limitations within my own data, I had to be reasonable and do only Europe.

If there is one thing I regret not including in my analysis, it would be not measuring the effect wealth inequality had on the probability of a state apology to be issued. Not only is that variable easily tractable, but also, it would fit nicely alongside my whole theoretical argument on the connection between the act of state apology and neoliberalism. Another factor that I wish I had included would be a variable that accounted for state apologies issued domestically versus those issued in foreign countries. I think studying that relationship alone would be worth diving into. Nonetheless, my research is significant in that it offers a unique and alternative perspective on the act of state apology, and thus warrants more criticism towards it.

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UNITED WE STAND

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Artist Statement

The change in administration leading to an increase in ICE presence, and mobilization of military forces on United States soil have been defining moments of political change seen in the past year. These changes have scared and outraged many Americans, leading to some of the largest peaceful protests in American history. These photos were all taken at various peaceful protests occurring in 2025, across Buncombe and Henderson Counties in North Carolina, breaking the historical pattern of rarely protesting. WNC can and will exercise the power to stand up for human rights.



Firsthand Testimony of Survivors and Frontline Workers: A Qualitative Examination of Labor Trafficking in the United States

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Abstract

Within conversations around human trafficking, the voices of survivors, caseworkers, and activists fighting labor-based abuse are often sidelined. In this study, three individuals with first-hand experience offer insight into root causes, vulnerable populations, contributing factors, and how the anti-trafficking movement can best move forward. Their testimonies highlight the lack of resources and attention that labor trafficking receives, how to ethically approach the inclusion of survivor leadership in developing anti-trafficking policy, the role of civil society in the anti-trafficking movement, and the importance of community-based networks. Participants' testimony also highlights changes that can be made to the legal and judicial system, including: the expansion of right to work and increases in funding for services and outreach in rural communities, access to healthcare, accountability for corporations, accessible pathways to citizenship and legal protection for asylum seekers, criminal expungement for labor trafficking survivors, and training in the judicial system.

I Introduction

IN the 21st century, forced labor remains a part of the American economy. Labor trafficking—a form of human trafficking in which individuals perform labor against their will through force, fraud, and coercion—exists across sectors and supply chains. To combat labor trafficking, our understanding of the issue and its root causes must be informed by those who experience it firsthand—trafficking survivors and caseworkers. This article uses three United States-based case studies to examine push and pull factors for forced labor, the limits of current anti-trafficking efforts, and recommendations for the future of the anti-trafficking movement. The case studies demonstrate a critical lack of resources and attention devoted to labor

trafficking, particularly regarding abuses in rural areas and against migrant and LGBTQ+ communities. Greater survivor leadership is needed to strengthen anti-trafficking policy on local, state, and national levels. Finally, the case studies reveal how community-based networks have incredible potential to facilitate collaboration across civil society, help identify situations of exploitation, support vulnerable individuals, and foster education around trafficking. This study would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts of survivors, activists, and caseworkers.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Contributing Factors

While it is possible for any individual from any demographic to be affected by trafficking, systemic inequalities fuel vulnerability. Low socioeconomic status, prior victimization, a lack of housing and treatment for mental illness, age, involvement with the criminal justice system, access to education, gender, and sexual orientation are all factors that can contribute to an individual's likelihood of being trafficked (Eyerman, Labriola and González 2023). Due to the staggering demand for low-wage workers, ineffective labor laws, and immigration laws that criminalize irregular migration, migrants—especially those who are undocumented or are in the United States on temporary work visas—are disproportionately affected by labor trafficking. The criminalization of irregular migration fuels human trafficking, as traffickers often threaten to report their victims to authorities and survivors may intentionally avoid seeking help for fear of detection, detention, and deportation. Migrant workers are an essential part of the United States economy but receive little protection. In industries such as agriculture, abusive employers can force workers to incur illegitimate debts and coerce them to work until their employers claim the debts are repaid—a form of forced labor known as debt bondage (Brennan 2014).

The conflation between human trafficking, a form of nonconsensual exploitation that does not necessarily involve movement across borders, and human smuggling, the transport of individuals across borders, has dangerous consequences. Policies attempting to restrict migration fuel human trafficking as they increase migrants' vulnerability to being exploited and create barriers for migrants affected by trafficking to seek help. Furthermore, limiting options for legal entry into the United States forces asylum seekers to depend on illegitimate sources, which may push them into the hands of traffickers (Bigej, Murphy-Aguilar and Tiano 2016). A 2014 study of labor trafficking in San Diego, California, for example, found that 30% of undocumented migrant laborers were victims of labor trafficking, and that one's status as an "illegal" migrant in the United States was the most significant factor putting one at risk for being trafficked (Zhang et al. 2014).

As with capitalist systems around the world, forced labor, along with other extreme forms of exploitation, is essential to the American economy. Indeed, the adoption of free-market neoliberal policies corresponds with a 200% increase in the probability of human trafficking occurring within an economy. Free market policies that prioritize the wealth of corporations and individuals over the well-being of the working class exacerbate the vulnerabilities that make trafficking possible (Peksen, Blanton and Blanton 2017). While human trafficking is often incorrectly viewed as pertaining only to illegal activities such as prostitution or narcotics, research on corporate involvement in labor trafficking has proven that human trafficking flourishes in legitimate industries. By encouraging firms to compete to minimize costs while maximizing profits, legal markets may create the framework for wealthy corporations to enrich themselves through human trafficking. Therefore, the framing of human trafficking as a criminal justice issue rather than a symptom of capitalism obscures the culpability of its corporate beneficiaries (De Vries 2018). Labor trafficking is also linked to supply chains with high labor intensity, as firms remain competitive by competing with one another to keep costs low. In addition, high labor intensity supply chains often limited oversight and regulations, which opens the door for abusive conditions (Crane 2013).

2.2 Developments

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic pushed instances of trafficking further underground, hindering survivors' ability to seek resources and aid (UN Office on Drugs and Crime 2022). With job losses and decreased wages, the pandemic also exacerbated the vulnerability of many to being affected by labor trafficking, as well as other forms of labor abuse. In addition, many support services for trafficking survivors and vulnerable communities were unable to operate in person.

In the United States, lies and threats being used to keep trafficking victims from escaping occurs more frequently than the use of brute, physical force. Traffickers may weaponize threats of abuse, threats to harm one's family, the theft and destruction of passports (and other documents), and threats to turn a victim over to immigration authorities. When brute force does occur, women and girls are more likely to face sexual abuse. Economic desperation is also one of the main drivers for individuals being trafficked (Gelb and Palley 2009).

According to data from the United States Human Trafficking Hotline from 2020-2022, 82% of identified labor trafficking survivors were Latino, and 85% had been trafficked by their employer (Polaris Project 2023). Domestic work, agriculture, and animal husbandry were the most common industries identified by the hotline as sources of labor trafficking. The most frequent way for survivors to leave their circumstances was through contact with friends and family, highlighting the significance of community outreach in the fight against human trafficking. According to "Human Trafficking During the COVID and Post-COVID Era,"

87% of labor trafficking survivors reported coercion (most common forms include threats to report to immigration and withholding needs and wants), 79% reported fraud (most common forms include theft, withholding earnings, and excessive work hours), and 39% reported force (most common form: forced confinement).

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) was the first law in the United States to target sex and labor trafficking directly (Congress.gov 2000). Despite only a small number of labor trafficking perpetrators undergoing prosecution or punishment, funding for criminal justice has increased significantly since it was passed. The TVPA uses criminal law as a catch-all solution and does little to address the forces of poverty and marginalization which lie at the root cause of trafficking. The low likelihood of perpetrator accountability and uncertainty around one's ability to access support systems undermines survivors' trust in the American justice system, making survivors less likely to report. Moreover, labor trafficking often targets marginalized groups with a historically adverse relationship with the justice system, who may be lured into trafficking through promises of money, housing, and employment. Because the perpetrators of trafficking often have larger access to social, economic, and political power, the involvement of law enforcement may worsen the situation for the victim and allow the perpetrator to escape accountability (Farrell et al. 2012). In addition, cultural factors against a backdrop of racism and prejudice may prevent survivors from receiving justice: "It is by evaluating victim behavior against this cultural background that prejudicial beliefs along race, class, and gender lines can systematically derail cases involving the most vulnerable victims from the justice process" (Farrell et al. 2012). Law enforcement is often uninformed and ill-suited to respond to labor trafficking cases and may even contribute to further victimization (Farrell et al. 2012). Entities other than law enforcement can provide valuable assistance in combating exploitation. For example, it is crucial to train American nurses—especially those in rural areas—to identify signs of exploitation (McCarthy and Marshall 2018).

Because of the focus on sex trafficking as opposed to labor trafficking within the larger anti-trafficking movement and existing literature, there remains an immense need to turn to the experiences of those on the ground: survivors, caseworkers, and advocates for crucial up-to-date analysis. This study seeks to illuminate gaps in the anti-trafficking movement, vulnerabilities, and best practices, with the goal of informing policymaking and organizing efforts across civil society.

3 Methods

Three individuals were selected to represent different geographical areas and relationships to the issue of labor trafficking, offering diverse perspectives. Consideration was given to include the following backgrounds in the participant pool: firsthand experience surviving human trafficking, social work, backgrounds in migration, policy and political advocacy, and

direct service provision. Only those who had publicly shared their connection to labor trafficking (i.e. service provider, survivor) online were chosen as participants, as not to potentially implicate those who have kept their work and lived experiences private. Time limits were also not set on interviews to ensure participants had the flexibility to share their experiences without feeling rushed or restricted. Such research is not meant to be a comprehensive overview of all possible forms of labor trafficking in the United States, but rather as an in-depth examination of three different case studies. The case studies were kept anonymous to protect the safety of participants and to allow them to share their insights without pressure to conform to a certain narrative, as many are currently employed at anti-trafficking organizations.

4 Case Study Backgrounds

Participant #1 arrived in the United States from West Central Africa as a child. Before being trafficked, she wanted to work for a law firm. After her arrival, she and six other individuals were forced into domestic servitude. After undergoing years of forced labor inside their trafficker's residence, Participant #1 ran away and was then placed in foster care. Later, she was able to complete her degree, work for a law firm, and take on numerous leadership roles in the anti-trafficking movement. She currently works as an advocate to support other survivors of forced labor in the United States based out of the Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia area (DMV).

Participant #2 began her anti-trafficking work as a volunteer advocate in 2016, where she worked in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, and saw more cases of sex trafficking than labor trafficking. Participant #2 later transitioned to working as a caseworker in West Texas.

Participant #3 has a master's degree in social work and experience working with trafficking survivors in the state of Ohio. She has worked in victim advocacy and crisis intervention for both sex and labor trafficking, in shelters with survivors, with the Ohio government, and with an anti-trafficking hotline and task force.

5 Case Study Findings

5.1 Contributing Factors

Participant #1 characterized race and immigration status as major drivers of vulnerability for labor trafficking. She stated that while foreign nationals are overwhelmingly vulnerable to trafficking, dialogue surrounding labor trafficking in the United States can also overlook the trafficking of American-born citizens—particularly those from marginalized communities. In addition to immigration status, race and class constitute root causes that exacerbate one's

vulnerability to exploitation. Participant #1 brought up multiple examples of African Americans in the twenty-first century undergoing labor-based human trafficking. “[Forced labor of African Americans in the United States] is [happening] in this generation, in this century,” she emphasized. Regarding citizenship as a vulnerability to trafficking, Participant #1 brought up another example from a survivor she had worked with, a non-citizen in the United States, who, because of her immigration status, was unable to work legally after escaping trafficking.

I don’t want to fall victim to becoming a criminal or to be re-trafficked because I don’t have papers [the survivor had told Participant #1]. That is why I’m trying to do things the right way, but without my papers, I can’t work; forced to work under the table after I was forced to work for my trafficker for free, and I can’t qualify for any benefit because I don’t have my status. I want to work the right way, to go to school, to be paid the amount I deserve.

Participant #1 emphasized that for undocumented survivors, the lack of rights they have as non-citizens may prevent them from working toward recovery and even force them back into situations of human trafficking. She added that many survivors find it challenging to live and navigate the United States, especially for immigrants and those from other marginalized communities. Participant #1 also stated that, “the root cause of trafficking is poverty.” She emphasized wage theft as a contributing factor, citing workers in America “not being paid the right amount or working for free.”

According to Participant #2, in her experiences with forced labor, the LGBTQ+ community, people of color, undocumented people, and people with disabilities (such as mental health conditions, substance abuse, or hearing impairments) are more likely to be exploited by labor trafficking. She cited factors contributing to vulnerability that included not having United States citizenship and not being able to speak English. Participant #2 brought up how traffickers use false promises of employment and wages to take advantage of “people worrying about, not only their immigration status, but just... trying to make a better life for themselves and trying to get [a] job.” She described how, in West Texas, there exists a large demand for forced and underpaid labor in the sectors of agriculture, oil fields, and construction.

In cases she has encountered, Participant #3 has found that migrants have been overwhelmingly affected. She has seen labor trafficking primarily affect men and boys, although she emphasized that women and girls also experience labor trafficking. Regarding structural issues and root causes driving labor trafficking, Participant #3 cited a lack of education and resources around workers’ rights, especially for workers new to the United States, who are often not informed on how their employers are legally required to treat them: “when we have workers that are maybe new to the United States, or new to the workforce, [they] don’t have information [on what rights they have] readily available to them.” She stated that even US-born workers who have been in the workforce for decades are often not aware of their full

rights. While employers are supposed to post information on workers' rights, those engaged in exploitative practices are likely to avoid doing so. Participant #3 also brought up the stigma and shame surrounding exploitation that prevents many survivors of human trafficking, especially male survivors, and those from migrant communities, from coming forward. "Men and boys are taught to 'pull themselves up by their bootstraps' and not be affected by emotionally difficult things," making it harder to come forward about experiences of human trafficking. Survivors are also dissuaded from coming forward out of fear that alerting authorities could lead to their deportation. Participant #3 added that "the creation of more resources in relation to labor trafficking is a huge need." Services, support, and the healing process may look different for survivors of sex trafficking and labor trafficking, so when human trafficking resources focus primarily around sex trafficking survivors, survivors of labor trafficking may be left behind.

5.2 Societal and Nongovernmental Efforts Around Labor Trafficking

When describing her experience, Participant #1 partially credited her baptism in her home country to her decision to seek refuge in a church. She stated that the church was able to provide her with resources to ensure her safety and access to help. Furthermore, a major barrier for individuals to escape labor trafficking is an awareness that they are being trafficked. In popular culture and the media, human trafficking is often only associated with sex trafficking. Because of this, many victims of labor trafficking do not know that what is happening to them qualifies as human trafficking. Additionally, resources for labor trafficking survivors are extremely inaccessible and limited, preventing many from obtaining their freedom.

Participant #1 stressed a need for more awareness around the issue. She cited how in the media, forced labor is often left out of discussions of human trafficking and emphasized the need to shine a light on children who are trafficked. She cited those who are forced to work in farms, make clothes, and work in dangerous conditions, all while not attending school and not being paid. Participant #1 emphasized that those engaged in anti-trafficking work must examine why the issue receives less attention and how everyday individuals benefit from forced labor. She also brought up over-consumerism, citing a large demand for products without a willingness to critically evaluate where such products come from. She stated:

We are very guilty. I'm guilty, I fight against forced labor, and I'm guilty. We buy these products, we don't know where they come from. We don't know who's making it. We need to address the supply chains, we talk about the demand for sex trafficking, but not the demand for products.

Participant #1 also stated that it was important for the public to view labor trafficking in the United States within the larger context of American slavery, emphasizing the importance of the phrase "modern-day slavery" to convey how the United States continues to rely on labor

exploitation long after the abolition of chattel slavery: “there is no way to address the history of forced labor in the United States without talking about slavery... this country was built by forced labor, and it’s still being built by forced labor.”

Participant #2 described an existing infrastructure of nongovernmental and community-based organizations in West Texas which provides survivors with trauma-informed care. However, these organizations face significant challenges and low capacity as they operate with limited funding and support. This is compounded by the fact that many survivors in West Texas struggle to access Medicaid and Social Security. In her area, there is currently a shortage of lawyers who know how to assist with T visas (visas for survivors of trafficking), and many of her clients had their T visa process halted due to a lack of paperwork and legal help. “It makes it a little difficult because we have to try and find legal aid resources in West Texas, which there aren’t many.” She also stated that more must be done to fix how the community responds to trafficking, such as addressing shame and stigma.

Participant #2 reported seeing more cases of labor trafficking than sex trafficking during her work in West Texas, and a discrepancy between efforts to address sex and labor trafficking. She cited an immense lack of support for survivors of labor trafficking—describing West Texas as a “desert area” for accessing resources.

Participant #3 has witnessed progress within civil society and nongovernmental organizations to address labor trafficking and expand efforts to include survivor leaders. She emphasized the importance of labor trafficking prevention and addressing the demand for forced labor, rather than responding only after the abuse has occurred. More effort needs to be made to ensure employees have the information needed to complete their work safely and more outreach must be conducted to identify potential cases of labor trafficking. As an example of how civil society can contribute to anti-trafficking work, Participant #3 cited how banks can be trained to look for indicators of human trafficking through the use of suspicious activity reports: “industries that we may have never thought would be interested or relevant to the cause of anti-trafficking work have really stepped up and expressed interest in partnering, and there’s really something everyone can do, every single industry can play a part.”

5.3 State Efforts Around Labor Trafficking

Participant #3—like Participant #1—emphasized that almost every single person in the United States unintentionally contributes to labor trafficking, as many products prevalent in everyday use have been made possible through forced labor. Many Americans are unaware of the role that extreme forms of labor exploitation play in sourcing their everyday items, and oftentimes, there are no viable alternatives to avoiding forced labor. As an example, she cited the role of forced—and often unpaid-child labor in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to create electronic devices.

Participant #1 was asked to evaluate the efforts of the United States government on a national, state, and local level to combat labor trafficking. She stated that while it varies state by state, overall, states have not done a sufficient job of addressing forced labor, having focused their anti-trafficking work primarily on sex trafficking instead. In Maryland, where Participant #1 is active in anti-trafficking work, the focus on trafficking has always centered around sex trafficking. However, forced labor on farms is a common form of human trafficking in Maryland. For many states, governments are beginning to incorporate labor trafficking into their anti-trafficking work, but progress is still extremely far behind. Participant #1 cited Virginia's government releasing a statement regarding their desire to begin work on the issue of forced labor. Additionally, her collaboration with the government of Salt Lake City, Utah, to discuss labor trafficking indicates some progress in policymakers' interest in addressing forced labor. She also added that in Minnesota, a state with a significant farming industry, the government is beginning to start conversations on the issue. Regarding the judicial system, Participant #1 expressed frustration over the system "not [listening] to survivors of forced labor ... [and] not having policies that are there to help address forced labor."

Regarding the efforts of the judicial system and United States government on a national, state, and local level to combat labor trafficking, Participant #2 expressed that state funding had positively impacted her work as an anti-trafficking caseworker in West Texas. However, she was critical of the persistent lack of awareness around labor trafficking, especially since "mostly sex trafficking is just talked about in state and federal levels." Regarding the role of the judicial system in combating labor trafficking, Participant #2 expressed frustration over a lack of accountability for labor traffickers. Even after traffickers were found guilty, they did not face sufficient retribution for causing extreme psychological and physical harm. Participant #2 describes her clients' persisting fear, "plenty of [survivors] have shared with me how terrified [they are], and how much power this individual has had over them." According to Participant #2, there is a need for more support systems to help re-trafficking, worsening mental health, and substance abuse among survivor communities, including healthcare, compensation, and mental health resources.

On a governmental level, Participant #3 shared that in Ohio, the government's initiative on human trafficking actively includes insight from over 200 volunteers, including survivor leaders and community members. She expressed that there she had seen significant progress resulting from the inclusion of survivor leaders in policymaking, including a recent victory to expand legal expungement to include potential labor trafficking survivors. She acknowledges that many other states have not made similarly inclusive progress in policymaking. However, other state governments have reached out to her about Ohio's model and what they could do to potentially replicate it, demonstrating that anti-labor trafficking legislation may be progressing slowly. Participant #3 recommended that each state should have a unique approach

with the help of various stakeholders and affected communities. On a federal level, Participant #3 stressed the importance of collaboration across state and party lines to create an effective anti-labor trafficking strategy.

Participant #3 also stated that increased education on labor trafficking is needed for those in the judicial system. She described labor trafficking as trailing behind in terms of education and resources compared to sex trafficking. Participant #3 identified that judges, magistrates, prosecuting attorneys, and others involved in the expungement process [for having crimes one's trafficker forced them to commit expunged] are often misinformed about labor trafficking. Due to a lack of understanding, many survivors are seen as perpetrators instead of victims and may face deportation and criminal charges instead of resources and support. "Something we're looking to prioritize right now," Participant #3 explained, "is increasing the education (about labor trafficking) for judges, magistrates, prosecuting attorneys, and anyone who might be involved in the expungement process." She expressed a need to hold large corporations accountable for ethical violations in their supply chains: "[the] solution would be to go after those large industries and ensure that they have a policy in place that holds them accountable for who is part of their supply chain."

5.4 Changes Needed to Address Ongoing Challenges

To reduce trafficking and support survivors in the United States, Participant #1 believes survivors of forced labor should receive restitution and reparations, stating the importance of "investing in [survivors] financially, [as] they were forced to work for free." Survivors must be provided stipends, receive advocacy training, and be given the opportunity to work legally. She also added that there needs to be greater support for survivors who wish to resume their education. Having been forced to work without pay for years, and having so much taken from themselves emotionally, mentally, and financially, survivors are owed significant financial support as they re-adjust to civil society.

Participant #1 also emphasized the massive, but often overlooked, scale of forced labor. She stated that the term "human trafficking" must be approached with the mindset that it is not just sex trafficking. She explained that if we do not create more awareness and resources around labor trafficking, it will persist. In concluding her interview, she emphasized, "if we must address force labor, we must also address the demand [for cheap commodities]."

To reduce labor trafficking and support survivors in West Texas—and across the country—Participant #2 believes there first needs to be greater public awareness of what labor trafficking looks like. She emphasized that more must be done to inform the public that it is "just as bad" as sex trafficking and explore how survivors have experienced both sex and labor abuse

within trafficking situations. Furthermore, Participant #2 stated that in smaller, rural areas, more must be done to expand resources, such as those for mental health support, as many areas are resistant to helping individuals with substance abuse and mental health disorders.

Participant #3 identified the three largest changes needed to reduce labor trafficking and support survivors in the United States as: increased awareness, expanding resources for survivors, and enacting policies targeting forced labor across supply chains. Additionally, she stated that it is important to include survivors in all anti-trafficking efforts: “I am not a survivor, and that limits my worldview.” She elaborated that survivors must be compensated fairly for their contributions so as to not contribute to their re-exploitation.

6 Discussion and Recommendations

While all three participants bring lived expertise from anti-trafficking work, Participant #1 also brings the firsthand perspective of having survived labor trafficking. All three case studies emphasize how individuals from marginalized communities—particularly migrants—are disproportionately vulnerable to labor trafficking. While Participant #1 highlights race and class as exacerbating vulnerability to trafficking, Participant #2 brings the additional insight of having seen how language barriers, disability, and LGBTQ+ identity can contribute to exploitation. This supports the analysis of root causes and vulnerable groups made by Eyerman, Labriola and González (2023) and Brennan (2014). Participant #3 cited gender—having seen higher rates of men and boys trafficked into forced labor than women and girls in their experience.

All participants emphasized a lack of resources and awareness around labor trafficking. Participant #1 referenced how many of those affected by labor trafficking do not realize that they are being trafficked, and—having the unique regional experience of working in the Washington D.C., Maryland, Virginia area (DMV)—highlighted how labor trafficking on farms in Maryland is often overshadowed. Working in West Texas, Participant #2 was able to speak to both labor trafficking in agriculture, oil, and construction in the region, as well as the general lack of resources—such as lawyers who can assist with the T visa process—for rural areas. Participant #3 highlighted how a lack of general education about workers’ rights can help facilitate exploitation. Overall, the participants suggest a greater need for labor-trafficking-specific resources and accountability for traffickers and corporations who profit both directly and indirectly from forced labor. The framework of viewing corporations engaging in the free market as potential perpetrators of human trafficking, as well as the practical need for accountability for corporations who profit from forced labor, aligns with analysis from Peksen, Blanton and Blanton (2017), De Vries (2018), and Crane (2013).

Input from Participants #1 and #3 on harms caused within the judicial system expands upon analysis of the police failures to handle labor trafficking from Farrell et al. (2012). In line with McCarthy and Marshall (2018)—which highlighted the importance of nurses to receive anti-trafficking training—the case studies suggest a need for those in diverse sectors of society to aid in combating labor trafficking, from religious organizations to banks utilizing suspicious activity reports to identify abuse perpetrated by corporations.

The findings suggest the importance of increasing funding for restitution, reparations, educational opportunities, and fair work opportunities for survivors to combat labor trafficking. In addition, both governmental and non-governmental efforts should work to address unique marginalization across citizenship, racial, class, linguistic, and gendered lines. Those with firsthand experience—especially survivors and those working in under-served and rural communities—must be included in policymaking. Funding for more support services and outreach centered around labor trafficking is necessary, especially in rural communities. These include legal support, healthcare, financial support, counseling, mental health services, and treatment for substance abuse. Such can be accomplished through a combination of governmental, nonprofit, and community-based efforts. Policymakers should look to adopt stricter policies around corporate accountability for abuses that occur along the supply chain, collaborate across state and party lines, expand expungement policies to include labor trafficking survivors, and strengthen labor law safeguards. Immigration policy reform should look to facilitate more accessible pathways to citizenship for asylum seekers and guarantee the right to work regardless of immigration status. Those in the financial and judicial sectors should receive mandatory training on identifying and handling instances of labor trafficking. First responders and those in the judicial sector should receive trauma-informed training centered on survivor experiences.

Future research should seek to evaluate how diverse sectors of society can be better equipped with anti-trafficking education and strategy. This includes labor unions, banks, religious organizations, community-based networks, first responders, judges, and other members of the judicial system. Future research should also look to expand upon the psychological effect of shame that many survivors of forced labor face. As the participants provide only three perspectives, they cannot represent the full nuances of labor trafficking in a country with vast geographic and cultural variations. Because of this, future research should look to expand on diverse survivor experiences, including both citizens and non-citizens, LGBTQ⁺-identifying individuals, and disabled individuals. Future research should also compare manifestations of labor trafficking across rural and urban areas, and in illegal and legal industries, to further shed light on gaps in efforts for prevention and protection of survivors. Greater quantitative research is also needed to understand how rates of labor trafficking have shifted alongside changes in immigration law and overall economic health.

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20 or 200 Years

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I have found myself hiding behind a mountain again
The eyes of someone who birthed someone who birthed someone who had me
Traced these blue edges all the way to where I stand
I feel their breath on my nape, or it's just the hill breeze
Pushing me further into the trees
And the ground still rumbles
And it's getting closer again
And they didn't know what was coming then
And I can't tell when they'll tire of taking
Taking
Taking
Maybe if they hid better
Maybe if I hide better
Maybe if they finally find what they think will save them

