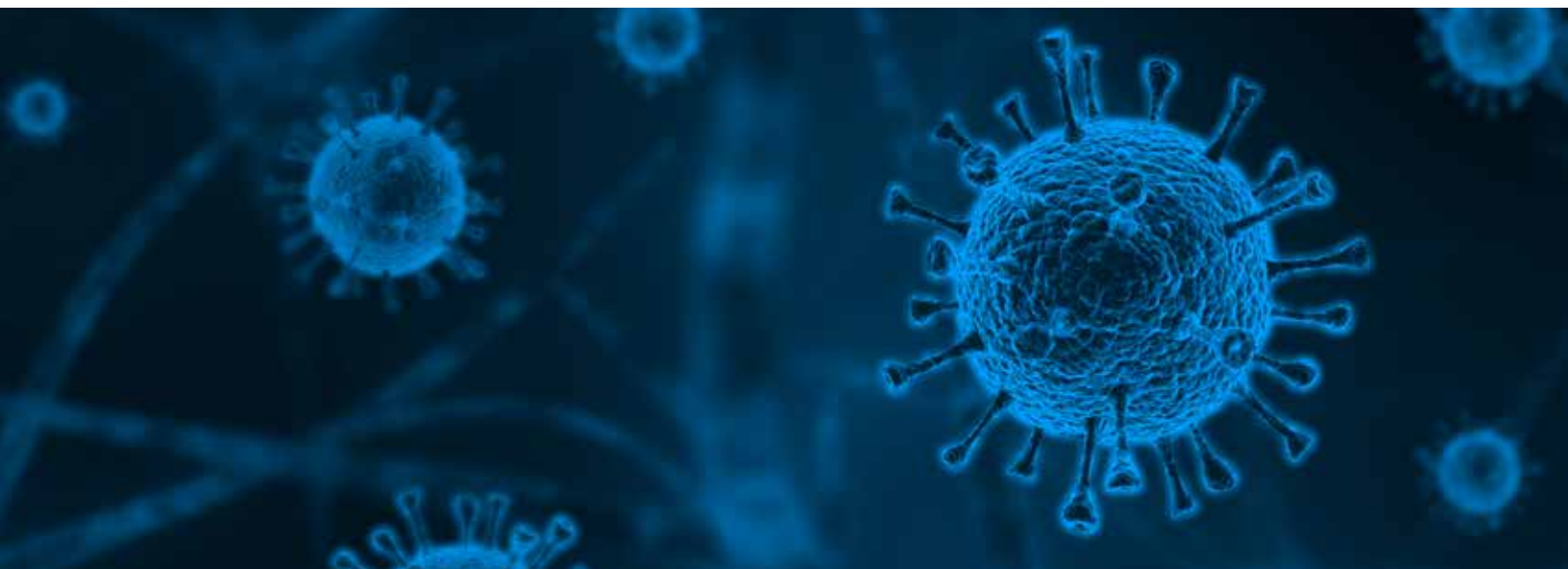


ON THE HORIZON

What to Watch in 2021

Wilson Experts Weigh In





Wilson Center Leadership

Bill Haslam

Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Jane Harman

Director, President, and CEO

2020 turned out to be a year that no one could have predicted. As we look to what is on the horizon in 2021, we contend not only with the usual challenges of international relations, but with a global community still in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic. Here at the Wilson Center, our goal is to provide policymakers with trustworthy, nonpartisan expertise that can help them decide the right course. Such an asset is increasingly hard to find in today's climate of disinformation, distrust, and partisanship, but we are proud to uphold the values expressed in our congressional charter – "symbolizing and strengthening the fruitful relation between the world of learning and the world of public affairs." In this spirit, we present "On The Horizon – What to Watch in 2021."

Aaron C. Jones






Director of Congressional Relations

Aaron.Jones@wilsoncenter.org

@WilsonCongress

202.765.4464

One Woodrow Wilson Plaza
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20004-3027

 www.wilsoncenter.org
 wwics@wilsoncenter.org
 facebook.com/woodrowwilsoncenter
 [@thewilsoncenter](https://twitter.com/thewilsoncenter)
 202.691.4000

Our Programs

Africa Program	1
Asia Program	3
Brazil Institute	5
Canada Institute	7
China - Kissinger Institute on China and the United States	9
Environmental Change and Security Program	11
Global Europe Program	13
Korean Peninsula - Hyundai Motor-Korea Foundation Center for Korean History and Public Policy	15
History and Public Policy Program	16
Latin American Program	17
Maternal Health Initiative	19
Mexico Institute	21
Middle East Program	23
Polar Institute	25
Russia and Eurasia - Kennan Institute	27
Science, Technology, and Innovation Program	29

3 things to watch: AFRICA



Shutterstock.com/ fivepointsix

1

COVID-19 Recovery: Challenges and Opportunities






The COVID-19 pandemic sparked Africa’s first recession in a quarter century. Now, it threatens to drop millions of Africans into poverty. The global downturn has hit Africa hard, as commodity prices, tourism, remittances and foreign investment have tumbled. Africa will be challenged to spend its way to recovery, particularly in countries with high debt burdens. Some African nations have demonstrated a way forward that requires leaders to accelerate structural reforms to enhance competitiveness and growth, and modernize stagnant political systems. Technological innovations such as digital-enabled services and drone usage for humanitarian purposes will also play a part. Regional leaders must also implement the African Continental Free Trade Area to reduce trade barriers and attract investment. These steps will unlock much-needed debt relief and lending assistance from global financial and development institutions, and help Africa make a robust recovery that will prevent it lagging behind a larger post-COVID global rebound.

Featured Experts:

Michael Morrow, Senior Diplomatic Fellow,
Africa Program

Ambassador Erica Barks-Ruggles,
Senior Diplomatic Scholar

Monde Muyangwa, Director, Africa Program

-  www.wilsoncenter.org/africa
-  africa@wilsoncenter.org
-  facebook.com/africaprogram
-  [@AfricaUpClose](https://twitter.com/AfricaUpClose)
-  202.691.4158





Shutterstock.com/ For Her

2

Horn of Africa: Volatility and Competition

Located astride the Mediterranean-Suez-Indian Ocean corridor, the Horn of Africa's strategic value is exceeded only by its long-standing volatility. Traditional powers have long grappled for influence in the Horn. But they are now increasingly joined by emerging powers in the Middle East, Turkey and India, all of whom are intent on muscling into this fragile region. With Ethiopia and Sudan navigating precarious political transitions, the Horn can tilt two ways: toward reform and stability, or into a new wave of turbulence that ripples beyond the region itself. A minefield of fraught issues will determine its trajectory, including the complex inter-state dispute over Ethiopia's new dam on the Nile, foreign power competition over port/seaway access and military bases, and jihadist-fueled instability stretching down Africa's Indian Ocean coast. Larger factors such as pandemic recovery, debt relief, and a demographic explosion of youth demanding jobs and improved governance will also play a role.



Shutterstock.com/Torsten Pursche

3

Africa's Greener Future?

More than any other continent, Africa feels the effects of climate change. Abnormal rainfall and severe weather already disrupt the continent's agriculture, migration patterns, and economies. Africa also boasts the world's youngest and fastest urbanizing population, which makes addressing climate change to avoid predicted security, poverty, and displacement problems imperative. By seizing the opportunity to pivot now, Africa can become a global leader in tackling climate change. African countries are pioneering distributed renewable energy generation and agricultural practices. Scaling these will reduce emissions while creating jobs and reducing poverty. Distributed solar mini-grids alone could provide 10 million rural Kenyans electricity, without increasing emissions. Likewise, adopting low-tech green urban building techniques such as rooftop solar, rainwater collection, and energy efficient design could reduce emissions while providing affordable housing. Africa should also invest in energy-efficient mass transport systems. It is in Africa's (and the world's) interest to fund such green development efforts.

3 things to watch: ASIA 21



Shutterstock.com/ Meeh

1

A Region Changed and Alliances Revitalized

The Biden administration will confront an Indo-Pacific that has changed radically since the end of the Obama administration. Over the past four years, China has grown more assertive in the pursuit of its interests and has demonstrated a greater willingness to openly intimidate its neighbors. Over the same period, the United States dramatically reduced its traditional role. The new administration will likely attempt to rejuvenate U.S. alliances across the Indo-Pacific region. The success or failure of these efforts will weigh heavily on broader questions about the long-term sustainability of American power and leadership in the international system, and the success or failure of the liberal international order in the face of rising nationalism and competitive dynamics with China. The entire region – allies and adversaries alike – will watch to see if and how the United States seeks to restore its position as regional leader.

Featured Experts:

Abraham Denmark, Director, Asia Program and Senior Fellow, Kissinger Institute on China and the United States

Michael Kugelman, Deputy Director and Senior Associate for South Asia, Asia Program

Shihoko Goto, Deputy Director for Geoeconomics and Senior Associate for Northeast Asia, Asia Program

🌐 www.wilsoncenter.org/asia
✉ asia@wilsoncenter.org
📘 facebook.com/AsiaProgram
🐦 @AsiaProgram
☎ 202.691.4020





Shutterstock.com/ Gorodenkoff

2

A Pivotal Year in Afghanistan

As U.S. involvement in Afghanistan reaches its 20th year, the Biden administration faces a series of major decisions. The President-elect will enter into office with 2,500 American troops left in the country. A 2020 agreement concluded between the Trump administration and the Taliban stipulates that all U.S. military forces will leave the country by the spring—but only if the Taliban has ended cooperation with al-Qaeda. Washington will need to decide if and how to follow this agreement, and how to approach a fragile, slow-moving peace process that has failed to contain intensifying violence. And above all, the administration will need to decide how, amid all this uncertainty, it will pursue its core interest in Afghanistan—maintaining a robust counterterrorism capacity—in the face of diminished public support for continued operations and justifiable questions about the security and human rights implications of the potential return to power by the Taliban.



Shutterstock.com/ anek.soowannaphoom

3

A Difficult Decoupling

Much of the Indo-Pacific will continue to face a difficult balancing act. Efforts to boost economic ties with China (despite the deepening security challenges posed by Beijing) must work in concert with efforts to reinvigorate its ties with the United States after four years of geopolitical turbulence. As of late 2020, Asia is the locus of the world's two largest trade agreements, yet the U.S. is party to neither the CPTPP nor the RCEP. These trade deals have deepened regional economic integration, and given Asian nations the confidence to work together and focus on common economic interests. Nevertheless, as nationalist fervor continues to rise across Asia, increased trade relations will not be enough to tamp down growing rivalries and tensions over territorial disputes in particular. The sustainability of decoupling trade interests from security concerns will come under increasing pressure in 2021.

3 things to watch: **BRAZIL**



Palácio do Planalto
commons.wikimedia.org

1

The 'Trump of the Tropics' Faces Biden

As world leaders congratulated President-elect Biden and made plans to work with his administration, one conspicuous holdout remained: President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil. When Bolsonaro at last tweeted his congratulations on December 15, the message was short and cordial—an essential first step for pragmatic Brazil-US relations. While genuine interest in [making the relationship work](#) exists in the new administration, Bolsonaro's past support for Trump and questioning of the legitimacy of the U.S. election will not be forgotten. And other challenges exist. Climate change is a key bilateral priority for the incoming administration, bringing potential for significant tensions. Engagement between Biden and Bolsonaro on deforestation and other climate issues may create space for continued collaboration in areas where progress was made under President Trump, including [trade](#) and [COVID-19](#). The risk? Disagreements over climate change will prove an insurmountable roadblock.

Featured Experts:

Ricardo Zúñiga, Interim Director, Brazil Institute

Paulo Sotero, Distinguished Fellow, Brazil Institute

Anya Prusa, Slater Family Fellow & Senior Associate,
Brazil Institute

-  <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/brazil>
-  brazil@wilsoncenter.org
-  facebook.com/brazilinstitute
-  [@brazilInst](https://twitter.com/brazilInst)
-  202.691.4087 / 202.691.4147



Shutterstock.com/ guentermanaus

2

Climate Change: The World Watches

Deforestation in Brazil hit a 12-year record in 2020, up 9.5 percent [compared to the previous year](#). Government officials see this as progress, since the rate of increase has slowed. (Deforestation rose 34 percent in 2019, as compared to 2018.) Yet many in Brazil and around the world remain highly concerned, particularly given [its importance to the climate debate](#). Pressure campaigns from stakeholders (including the EU, private investors, and even former Brazilian finance ministers) have pushed the Bolsonaro government to take the issue seriously. But some critics are threatening to take sterner action, including divestment, an end to the Mercosur-EU trade deal, and embargos on certain agricultural goods. These efforts will receive a boost on January 20th when the Biden administration takes office and realigns the United States with global climate efforts. This significant shift in U.S. priorities will leave Brazil increasingly isolated as the most conspicuous outlier in the global climate agenda.



Shutterstock.com/ Publio Furbino

3

When Will the COVID-19 Crisis End?

The COVID-19 pandemic slammed into a Brazilian economy already barely recovering from the severe recession of 2015-2016. Amid shelter-in-place orders and widespread shutdowns, GDP contracted 11.4 percent in the second quarter compared to 2019—a [record decline](#). Stimulus measures largely protected the economy from further shocks, and even prompted an economic rebound in the second half of 2020. Yet these gains are fragile. Brazil has largely given up on controlling a [coronavirus spread](#) which has claimed nearly 200,000 Brazilian lives to date, and the nation's COVID-19 vaccine rollout is polarized and chaotic. In the meantime, millions of households will [see incomes fall](#) as an emergency cash transfer program ends. And Brazil's rising national debt and need for foreign investment will [create pressure on policymakers](#) to cut spending and refocus on economic reform. It is a challenging combination, even under better circumstances. The crisis is far from over in Brazil.

3 things to watch: CANADA



1

Border Restrictions and COVID-19




On March 20, 2020, the United States and Canada restricted cross-border travel to “essential” traffic only for 30 days to slow the spread of COVID-19. Nine months later, these restrictions remain in effect with no strategy in place for phasing them out. Most commercial trucking and rail traffic is unaffected, but the impact on border state economies and quality of life has grown. Each nation’s privacy protections (especially for personal health information) have made the technical challenge of screening border crossings by land, sea, and air more complex. While Canada’s pandemic response has resulted in a rate of confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths per million people that is nearly a third of the comparable U.S. rates at the end of 2020, Canada’s limited domestic vaccine production capacity has put the country into a global competition for access. If conditions worsen, Ottawa may seek help from Washington in 2021.

Featured Experts:

Kathryn Byrk Friedman, Global Fellow, Canada Institute

Christopher Sands, Director, Canada Institute

Laurie Trautman, Global Fellow, Canada Institute

-  www.wilsoncenter.org/canada
-  canada@wilsoncenter.org
-  facebook.com/CanadaInstitute
-  [@CanadaInstitute](https://twitter.com/CanadaInstitute)
-  202.691.4301





2

North American Rebound and the USMCA

When the pandemic eases, restoring economic growth will be the top priority for Canada and the United States. President Biden supports the new United States Mexico Canada Agreement (USMCA) and is expected to proceed with its implementation, including the work of new USMCA committees to promote competitiveness and regulatory cooperation, and to facilitate small and medium sized businesses engaging in regional trade. All of this activity will contribute to economic recovery. When the 117th Congress takes up stimulus legislation, Canadian businesses will be watching closely to see if “Buy American” provisions are included in infrastructure and government procurement. Eligibility for Canadian participation in stimulus would permit U.S. firms reciprocal access to Canadian stimulus—and provide better value for taxpayers in both countries.



3

Energizing Climate Policy

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has committed Canada to meeting the goal of net-zero emissions by 2050. The Biden administration will rejoin the Paris Agreement. Thus, the United States and Canada will be in alignment again on climate policy. COVID-19 forced the postponement of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties until November 2021, but this summit will be an important opportunity for President Biden to reassert U.S. leadership. At the same time, Canada and the United States are major energy exporters, and there is significant bilateral energy trade. Canadian oil and gas exports could reach global markets through the U.S. if the Keystone XL pipeline is completed, but Biden has threatened to revoke the presidential permit for the project. Canadian hydroelectricity and small modular nuclear reactor technology could help the United States to reach emissions targets ahead of schedule. The possibility that Canada would impose Border Adjustment fees on imports that pay a lower carbon price than Canada’s – allowed under the terms of the new USMCA – could spark trade tensions.

3 things to watch: CHINA



1

Shutterstock.com

Managing Bilateral Relations in the Biden-Xi Era






The Trump-Xi era saw a historic transformation in U.S.-China relations. Between 2017 and 2020, the Chinese government grew more repressive at home and assertive internationally, while a bipartisan consensus emerged in Washington that China had become the United States' greatest security challenge. Populations in both countries grew more distrustful of each other's values and intentions, especially after the COVID-19 outbreak. President-elect Biden inherits these conditions. He must stabilize and manage U.S.-China competition while addressing a daunting domestic agenda, an electorate wary of globalization, and a Congress and military largely committed to enmity with the PRC. Through briefings, media outreach, and public education, the Kissinger Institute will analyze how politics and perceptions in both countries shape policies in Washington and Beijing.

Featured Experts:

Robert Daly, Director, Kissinger Institute on China and the United States

J. Stapleton Roy, Founding Director Emeritus and Distinguished Scholar, Kissinger Institute on China and the United States

Abraham Denmark, Director, Asia Program and Senior Fellow, Kissinger Institute on China and the United States

-  www.wilsoncenter.org/kicus
-  china@wilsoncenter.org
-  facebook.com/KissingerInstitute
-  @KissingerInst
-  202.691.4038





2

Global U.S.-China Relations

U.S.-China competition will play out over decades on every continent, at both poles, in cyberspace, and in outer space. Competition will affect security architectures, trade and financial regimes, the regulation of new technologies, norms and values, and communities and institutions worldwide, while the superpowers' ability to cooperate may determine the success of efforts to solve transnational crises. For the nations of Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas, managing Sino-U.S. rivalry is a primary foreign policy challenge. Their attempts to balance relations with China and the U.S., or their decisions to align their policies with those of either power, will be a major factor in the evolution of a new world order. The Kissinger Institute will work more closely than ever with area and issue experts at the Wilson Center to mine vital insights on the unfolding great power competition.



3

Ideas, Discourse, and Sino-U.S. Soft Power

Chinese scholars acknowledge their government's "obsession" with developing soft power and discursive power as central elements in China's global competition with the United States. While many American think tanks focus on China's growing military, economic, and technological might—issues of high concern to the Wilson Center—the Kissinger Institute is unique in its commitment to analyzing China's attempts to use its culture, universities, media, public diplomacy, and provision of public goods to win acceptance of its foreign policy goals and legitimize the practices of the Chinese Communist Party. The Wilson Center's commitment to policy-relevant scholarship positions the Kissinger Institute to become the national leader in analysis of the ideas, myths, and strategies that underlie China's push for soft power and the complex relationships between the hard, soft, economic, and tech power strategies of both superpowers.

3 things to watch: ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE AND SECURITY



Shutterstock.com

1

Climate policy is foreign policy






Climate change will upend the 21st century world order. From financial systems, migration patterns, and great power competition, to the potential unintended consequences of climate responses, and issues of inequity and the future of democracy, climate change will penetrate our systems, our relationships, and our lives in ways that have yet to be fully understood. Climate policy cuts across portfolios and demands an all-hands-on-deck response. Diplomacy must raise climate ambition, shape the transformative systems needed for change, and promote and facilitate new modes of multilateral collaboration. We will require agility from financial institutions and trade partners as they craft new supply chains and alternative migration pathways, unpack decarbonization and its impacts, and, perhaps most importantly, create new modes of cooperation.

Featured Experts:

Lauren Herzer Risi, Project Director, Environmental Change and Security Program

Jennifer Dabbs Sciubba, Global Fellow, Environmental Change and Security Program

Sherri Goodman, Senior Fellow, Environmental Change and Security Program / Global Women's Leadership Initiative / Polar Institute

 <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/ecsp>
 ecsp@wilsoncenter.org
 facebook.com/ecspwwc
 [@newsecuritybeat](https://twitter.com/newsecuritybeat)
 202.691.4000





2

Unpack Connections Between COVID-19, Ecosystems, Public Health, and Security

COVID-19 has revealed deep connections between wildlife, the environment, public health, and human security. Much of the world was caught unprepared, but the pandemic is no surprise to experts who have sounded the alarm for decades. A few years ago, epidemiologists at the World Health Organization coined the term “Disease X” for it. The National Intelligence Council’s Global Trends 2025 Report (written in 2008) included an eerily accurate description of how such a pandemic might begin. The threats posed by animal-borne infectious diseases are accelerating. And while approximately 70 percent of these diseases originate with the wildlife trade, these zoonotic diseases are linked increasingly to environmental change, human behavior, and demographic changes. Understanding the underlying risks that created conditions for COVID-19 to emerge, and the systemic failures to prevent and mitigate the spread of the virus, are essential to address the current crisis—and ensure it doesn’t happen again.



3

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene in the Time of COVID-19

COVID-19 has exposed what many in the WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) community have long known: access to clean and affordable drinking water and sanitation is critical to human health and economic prosperity. Even before the pandemic took hold, more than 2 billion people around the world lacked access to safe water, and the leading cause of death for children under five is preventable diseases caused by poor access to WASH. At first, the importance of WASH made its way into headlines, but attention has waned as the pandemic has spread. Competing priorities in response and recovery, low revenues and increased costs faced by service providers, and a growing global economic crisis have undermined essential financing. The implications of COVID-19 on WASH’s financing and availability are clear. To respond to the world’s most urgent challenges fairly and equitably, we need trusted information, clear context, and solutions-focused dialogue.

3 things to watch: GLOBAL EUROPE



Shutterstock.com/ Elena.Katkova

1






Europe's Long Road to Pandemic Recovery

COVID-19 ravaged Europe with unprecedented ferocity and scale. In 2021, the challenge will be to mitigate the health impact of the virus, distribute vaccines widely and equitably across the continent, and engineer an economic revival. The European Union passed a groundbreaking \$2.2 trillion economic recovery package that includes agreement on the bloc's next seven-year budget. Tangible signs of recovery are already visible. Investment activity is stirring. Trade is restarting. Nonetheless, the return to healthy societies and economies will take time, and likely will be uneven within and across countries. Moreover, even with vaccines now available, COVID-19 will remain a scourge. And the changes wrought by the pandemic are profound. The crisis is reconfiguring European supply chains, reinforcing calls for a Green recovery, boosting investment in healthcare infrastructure, and accelerating the adoption of next-generation technologies.

Featured Experts:

Daniel S. Hamilton, Director, Global Europe Program

Catherine Ashton, Bank of America Global Europe Chair

-  www.wilsoncenter.org/globaleurope
-  GEP@wilsoncenter.org
-  facebook.com/GlobalEuropeProgram
-  [@WilsonCenterGEP](https://twitter.com/WilsonCenterGEP)
-  202/691-4353



Shutterstock.com/Ink Drop

2

No Exit from Brexit

The UK left the European Union formally on January 31, 2020. But after months of transition, the new UK-EU relationship truly begins in 2021. Although the two sides struck a Christmas Eve trade deal, uncertainties abound, which means that Brexit's impact will continue to ripple through 2021. Expect new customs barriers, border disruptions, complex regulatory hurdles, and tough restrictions on the movement of people. The UK's trading and security ties are also being upended – including with the United States. A bilateral US-UK trade deal is still to be finalized amidst U.S. concerns that one of Brexit's casualties could be the Good Friday agreement that brought peace to Northern Ireland. Scotland's May 2021 parliamentary election could herald another independence referendum. New rules, new relationships: the Brexit saga will go on and on and on in 2021.



Shutterstock.com/Gabriele Pedrini

3

The Mediterranean: Troubled Waters

Geopolitical tensions and energy quarrels will embroil societies across the Mediterranean region in 2021, and draw the United States, the European Union, NATO, Russia, China and Persian Gulf countries into the fray. Non-state actors such as the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and Hezbollah continue their threats. Traditional differences between Greece and Turkey over maritime boundaries and Cyprus have been sharpened by Turkish efforts to block Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, Israel and other partners from exporting natural gas to Europe from fields under the seabed. Turkey's assertive actions, from Libya and Syria to Nagorno-Karabakh, have strained relations with its NATO allies. The U.S. has targeted Turkish entities with sanctions because of Ankara's acquisition of an advanced Russian S-400 air-defense system. The EU is also threatening to sanction individuals involved in Ankara's regional energy exploration. Tensions could imperil the EU's €1 billion migration deal with Turkey to stop Syrian refugees crossing into Europe.

things to watch: KOREA

An Intensified North Korean Threat

The Biden administration will be challenged with the task of reining in a North Korean nuclear and missile arsenal that has grown more threatening. During the extreme ups and downs of the Trump administration's relationship with North Korea, Pyongyang was able to build more nuclear weapons and improve its ballistic missile capabilities. Its progress has reached a point to which its nuclear-capable missiles now have the ability to reach the United States and undermine the missile defenses of the U.S. and its allies. With the potential for a North Korean provocation ever-present, the new administration may be forced to confront these challenges before it has been able to fully construct a broader Indo-Pacific strategy. The decisions it makes in this crisis will have significant implications for its broader regional strategy.

An Uncertain Path Forward for Pyongyang

Foremost on the minds of Korea watchers at the start of 2021: will Kim Jong Un welcome the new U.S. administration with outreach—or with provocations? Will Pyongyang finally emerge from isolation, or remain sequestered behind its tightly sealed borders and ideology of self-reliance? South Korea's President Moon Jae-in will aim to draw Pyongyang out of its shell. He continues to seek to fulfill his goal of engaging North Korea before he leaves office in 2022—a quest that poses another challenge for a U.S.-ROK Alliance already under significant strain. January's Party Congress in Pyongyang will be watched closely for hints about Kim's priorities on foreign policy as well as domestic directives (particularly on public health and the economy). Washington and Seoul will struggle to find a way forward that allows for continued engagement with Pyongyang, while strengthening the Alliance against the possibility that denuclearization efforts may again fail.

Featured Experts:

Jean H. Lee, Director, Hyundai Motor-Korea Foundation Center for Korean History and Public Policy

Abraham Denmark, Director, Asia Program

Seong-Chang Cheong, Fellow, Asia Program

Katie Stallard, Global Fellow, Asia Program

🌐 www.wilsoncenter.org/Koreacenter
✉ KoreaCenter@wilsoncenter.org
🐦 @korea_center
☎ 202.691.4016



HISTORY AND PUBLIC POLICY



Those Who Do Not Learn from History...

The year ahead in U.S. foreign policy and world affairs presents daunting challenges. Opportunities for progress, too, abound. In helping the policy community prepare, the Wilson Center relies on one of its great strengths – the ability to help leverage lessons from the past. The History and Public Policy Program will continue to expand and study its remarkable collection of archival materials – from previously unpublished diplomatic correspondence on nuclear crises to primary sources on the Cold War – to better inform analysis and decisions today.

Featured Experts:

Christian F. Ostermann, Director, History and Public Policy Program

Charles Kraus, Senior Program Associate, History and Public Policy Program

🌐 <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/program/history-and-public-policy-program>

✉ historyandpublicpolicyprogram@wilsoncenter.org

📞 202.691.4079

things to watch: LATIN AMERICA



1

COVID-19 and Regional Economies

Latin America's [total COVID-19 cases](#) exceeded 13.5 million by early December, making it a global hotspot, and the highest per capita death rate in the world. And the economic fallout is worse than in any other region. The IMF [expects](#) negative 8.1 percent GDP growth in 2020, and double-digit contractions in Argentina, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela. Fully [37 percent of the region's population](#) will experience poverty. And the worst may be yet to come, as a J.P. Morgan assessment places regional growth at only 3.6 percent in 2021. This sluggish recovery will depress tax revenue as leaders struggle to sustain massive social stimulus. Debt is a concern: regional governments have [borrowed](#) \$48 billion in 2020, 13 percent higher than in 2019. Yet there are glimmers of hope. Interest rates are low. Lenders have stepped up. China's recovery buoyed prices for the region's commodities. And the U.S. hosts the Summit of the Americas in 2021, holding the promise of robust reengagement.

Featured Experts:

Cynthia Amson, Director, Latin American Program

Benjamin Gedan, Deputy Director, Latin American Program and Director, Argentina Project

Michael Penfold, Fellow, Latin American Program

Ricardo Zúñiga, Fellow, Latin American Program

<http://www.wilsoncenter.org/lap>

lap@wilsoncenter.org

[facebook.com/LatinAmericanProgram](https://www.facebook.com/LatinAmericanProgram)

[@LATAMProg](https://twitter.com/LATAMProg)

[202.691.4075](tel:202.691.4075)



Shutterstock.com/Sebastian Delgado C

2

Migration and Politics

Four countries in Central America—Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua—will likely dominate the 2020 news cycle. All four nations are contending with health, climate, and political crises that may drive large numbers of migrants to Mexico and the United States. Honduras and Nicaragua are coping with the devastation from two strong hurricanes which destroyed much of Honduras’ industry and agriculture. Both President Nayib Bukele in El Salvador and President Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua (who faces elections this year) stepped up harassment of political opponents and media outlets, a development likely to bring both leaders into conflict with a Biden administration committed to the defense of democratic institutions. The challenge for the Biden will be advancing an ambitious agenda in Central America to tackle the root causes of continuing migration crises with governments indifferent or hostile to reforms encouraged by the United States.



Shutterstock.com/StringerAL

3

Grim Prospects in Venezuela

Venezuela’s political, economic, and humanitarian crises showed no sign of abating as Nicolás Maduro moved to consolidate his authoritarian rule. Legislative elections held on December 6, 2020 drew international condemnation, but ended the opposition control of the National Assembly and undermined Juan Guaidó’s interim presidency. Oil production plummeted, anchoring a catastrophic economic contraction of 80 percent of GDP since 2013. More than 95 percent of households live in poverty. The Trump administration’s “maximum pressure” strategy of crippling sanctions failed to dislodge Maduro, whose allies and commercial partners—Russia, Iran, Cuba, Turkey, China, and India—provided enough essential support to help his regime survive. Venezuela’s economic implosion has led to an exodus of 5.4 million people, straining the resources of neighboring countries already suffering from COVID-19-induced decline. Assisting Venezuela’s neighbors financially while expanding nonpartisan humanitarian relief inside the country should be a first goal of the Biden administration.

3 things to watch: MATERNAL HEALTH



Shutterstock.com/ Sam Wordley






1

COVID-19: Devastating Effects on Work

Women's work is critical to COVID-19 response. Women make up 70 to 80 percent of the global frontline health workers. They perform 75 percent of the world's unpaid care work, which is in growing demand due to school closures and the increased needs of sick and elderly family members. Yet as women struggle to meet the demands of both their personal and professional lives, the pandemic is creating a dangerous dichotomy: women's unpaid work is skyrocketing, yet their paid work is plummeting. In September 2020, 865,000 women left the U.S. workforce—four times the number of men—and reduced the proportion of women in the nation's labor pool to its lowest level since 1988. This setback to gender equity will be felt for years to come. To reverse it, pandemic responses must recognize women both as active decision-makers and as a distinct population severely impacted by the crisis.

Featured Experts:

Sarah Barnes, Project Director,
Maternal Health Initiative

-  <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/maternalhealth>
-  MHI@wilsoncenter.org
-  [Facebook.com/ecspwwc](https://www.facebook.com/ecspwwc)
-  [@Wilson_MHI](https://twitter.com/Wilson_MHI)
-  202.691.4292



2

Humanitarian Settings and Vulnerable Populations

Each day, 810 women around the globe die from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes. Vulnerable populations, including Indigenous women and girls, as well as those affected by conflict and crisis, face a heightening threats of maternal mortality and morbidity. Indigenous women are at least twice as likely to die during pregnancy, delivery, or postpartum than their white counterparts. Poor maternal health and birth outcomes for Indigenous women and girls also are linked to barriers created by discrimination, exclusion, poverty, and distance. Sixty percent of maternal deaths occur in conflict, displacement, or natural disaster zones. In 2018, 136 million people needed humanitarian aid, including 34 million women and girls of reproductive age. And 5 million of them were pregnant. Family planning needs do not disappear during a crisis. Yet women and girls are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence, exploitation, rape, and dangerous birth conditions in times of crisis and conflict.



3

COVID-19: Gender Inequities and Gender Roles

COVID-19 has defined 2020. It also has magnified global gender differences and inequities. Since March, men have accounted for a majority of deaths due to the virus compared to women. While some biological factors contribute, another factor is the societal expectation that men conform to traditional ideas of masculinity. This leads men to smoke and consume high levels of alcohol at a greater prevalence than women, and thus exacerbates health conditions that make men more susceptible to severe COVID-19 infection. Yet if one looks beyond mortality rates, the pandemic has had an outsized impact on women and girls. Women make up the vast majority of all frontline health workers. They also are also disproportionately impacted by increased rates of gender-based violence, lack of access to sexual and reproductive healthcare (SRH), and issues related to economic and food insecurity.

3 things to watch: MEXICO



Shutterstock.com/Vic Hinterlang

1

AMLO and Migration

President Trump failed to deliver on his promise to make Mexico pay for the border wall. But he nonetheless succeeded in collaborating with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) to reduce migratory flows. Indeed, a hallmark of their relationship was AMLO’s willingness to commit precious resources to stem the flow of Central American transmigration through Mexican territory. Through the Migration Protection Protocols (aka “Remain in Mexico”), and a powerful deployment of Mexico’s newly-created Guardia Nacional (National Guard), Central American migrants were deterred from attempting the journey northwards. This development relieved much of the pressure once created on the Southwest border of the United States. The Biden administration fears a renewed surge in migration if AMLO decides that the cost of continuing such efforts is too great—and Mexico’s President surely will attempt to use this decision as a bargaining chip in the bilateral relationship.

Featured Experts:

- Andrew Rudman**, Director, Mexico Institute
- Duncan Wood**, Vice President, Strategy and New Initiatives
- Earl Anthony Wayne**, Public Policy Fellow, Mexico Institute
Co-chair of the Mexico Institute advisory board

- 🌐 www.wilsoncenter.org/mexico
- ✉ mexico@wilsoncenter.org
- 📘 facebook.com/MexicoInstitute
- 🐦 [@MexicoInstitute](https://twitter.com/MexicoInstitute)
- 📞 202.691.4325





2

Security Cooperation and the Merida Initiative

In 2007, Mexico and the U.S. signed the Merida Initiative—a framework agreement to govern cooperation on security and fight organized crime and narco-trafficking. The deal brought closer institutional ties and strengthened mutual trust and understanding between security and intelligence communities in both countries. Yet AMLO has long been a critic of the agreement. In recent months, he and his government have issued statements about ending Merida and basing future relations on the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention. The recent debacle over the arrest and return of General Salvador Cienfuegos (a former Mexican defense secretary) and legislation to restrict the activities (and immunity) of DEA agents in Mexico threaten to undermine trust and derail institutional cooperation. Washington has already expressed deep concerns over both moves. The Biden administration will send a clear message that it will not tolerate any weakening of the struggle against organized crime.



3

Pressure On The Economy And Energy

The close of the Trump administration saw a large number of complaints to the Commerce Department and the White House over Mexican treatment of U.S. companies in many areas, including the pharmaceutical and energy sectors. The deterioration of the investment climate under AMLO was largely ignored by the Trump administration, but Biden likely will take a keener interest in defending U.S. interests south of the border. This approach would generate bipartisan Congressional support, and would signal that AMLO must respect commitments made under the USMCA trade deal. It also is likely that the Biden administration will use the office of USTR and regular diplomatic channels to pressure AMLO to change course on economic management. Expected pushback from AMLO may lead to a risky showdown.

things to watch: MIDDLE EAST



1

Resurrecting the Iran Nuclear Deal

President-elect Biden has pledged to reenter the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) as part of his commitment to restrict Iran's access to a nuclear weapon. Yet President Trump's "maximum pressure" policy, as well as developments such as the assassination of Iran's top nuclear scientist, have made reengagement with the Islamic Republic more complicated. The new U.S. President will also face pushback on the domestic front—as well as from regional partners, including Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—to renegotiate the JCPOA to further limit Iran's disruptive activities. Iran's leaders are likely to defer any major diplomatic decisions until its own presidential elections are held in June. There is little doubt, however, that hardliners have strengthened their hand under the Trump administration's maximum pressure campaign. Return to the agreement may prove difficult.


Featured Experts:

Ambassador James F. Jeffrey, Chair,
Middle East Program

Merissa Khurma, Director, Middle East Program

Haleh Esfandiari, Director Emerita,
Middle East Program


Robin Wright, USIP-Wilson Center
Distinguished Fellow

 www.wilsoncenter.org/middleeast

 mep@wilsoncenter.org

 facebook.com/WilsonCenterMEP

 [@WilsonCenterMEP](https://twitter.com/WilsonCenterMEP)

 202.691.4000





2

New Peace Deals and Political Unrest in Israel

The Trump administration’s Middle East policy drastically altered Arab-Israeli relations and the Palestinian question. With the help of the U.S. president, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu achieved full normalization of relations with the UAE and Bahrain (as a first step), and then with Sudan and Morocco—establishing greater cultural and commercial ties than exist in Israel’s agreements with Jordan and Egypt. These new deals also effectively diminish prospects for a two-state solution, despite that fact that they propose to halt threats of Israeli annexation of the West Bank. Netanyahu has disregarded previous attempts to slow the spread of settlements, and he is consolidating settlement activity before Trump leaves office. The Palestinians are evincing signs of greater collaboration, anticipating a more engaged and inclusive Biden administration. Despite successes, Netanyahu’s premiership is threatened by bribery charges and an increasingly-agitated populace disenchanted with his government’s mismanagement of COVID-19 response and a declining economy.

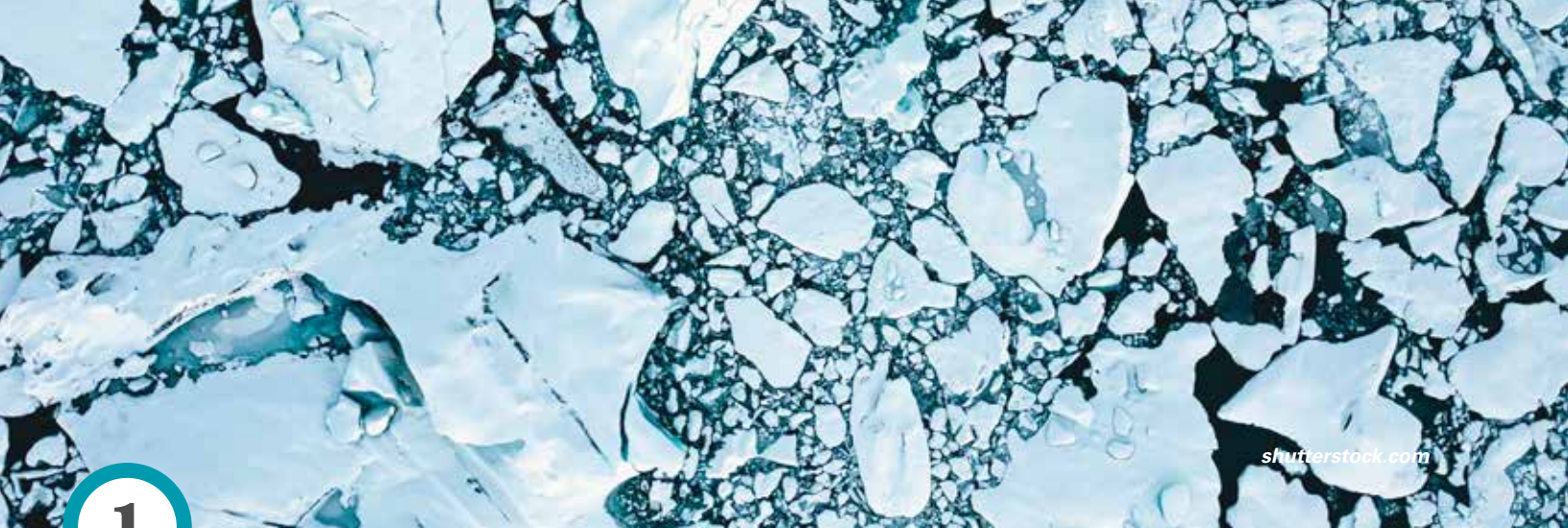


3

Lingering Social and Political Unrest in the Arab States

Since 2019, four Arab States have faced major new challenges to their governments and ruling elites: Sudan, Algeria, Iraq, and Lebanon. Though unrest has subsided under COVID-19 conditions, most demands presented by opposition movements remain unmet. The Biden administration will have to act quickly to ensure that Sudan’s transition does not devolve into a power struggle between the civil government and the military. U.S. policymakers also must reinvigorate the State Department and refine its policies to address both regional protests and the increasingly sophisticated mass movements which are likely to reemerge in deteriorating socioeconomic and political conditions. It remains in the U.S. interest to help its regional partners stabilize politically and increase their capacity to fight corruption, provide services, and increase employment in a productive and integrated private sector.

3 things to watch: POLAR



1

Climate Change and a New Arctic

Climate change has created large-scale impacts throughout the Arctic, as the region is warming almost three times quicker than anywhere else on the planet. In 2020, for example, the Arctic Ocean ice pack reached its second-lowest recorded summer ice extent on record—in essence, the opening of a new ocean. The eight Arctic nations face many diverse challenges and opportunities: the impacts on communities and infrastructure from eroding coastline and degradation of the landscape; homeland security challenges and maritime-related issues, and; questions regarding the effectiveness of existing international governance structures to address the political ramifications of these changes. The Biden administration will bring renewed focus to the issue of climate change—and the Arctic will be an important component of this work.





Featured Experts

Michael Sfraga, Director, Polar Institute and Director, Global Risk and Resilience Program

David Balton, Senior Fellow, Polar Institute

Betsy Baker, Global Fellow, Polar Institute

Evan Bloom, Senior Fellow, Polar Institute

-  www.wilsoncenter.org/polar
-  polar@wilsoncenter.org
-  facebook.com/thepolarinitiative
-  [@polarinitiative](https://twitter.com/polarinitiative)
-  202.691.4002





2

New Security Imperatives

The eight Arctic nations face many inherent security concerns, and the United States must redouble its efforts to address a host of related national, civil, and environmental security challenges. Growing concern about U.S. capacity to effectively project force in the Far North will lead to calls for a “whole-of-government” approach, eliciting a holistic, integrated response from the State Department, Pentagon, NSC, DHS and the and Department of Commerce (NOAA). This approach can better leverage existing assets and resources, and help counter both Russian and Chinese power in the region., The U.S. will build upon a series reports and strategy frameworks developed by the U.S. Coast Guard, NOAA, and U.S. Air Force, and look to leverage forthcoming Arctic strategies from the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army to advance and protect national interests throughout the region. A more robust set of training and domain awareness exercises with NATO may be developed as nations look to build upon lessons learned from previous Arctic exercises.



3

Great Powers in the Far North

Vladimir Putin views Russian economic growth to be inextricably linked to the development of the country’s vast stores of natural resources in the Arctic. To support his Arctic vision, Putin is revitalizing and expanding military and commerce assets along the Northern Sea Route. China’s significant investments throughout the Russian Arctic aim to diversify its energy portfolio while exerting its self-declared status as a “near-Arctic state.” Furthermore, as Russia and China’s regional cooperation increases, the U.S. reaffirmed its commitment to Arctic security by reactivating the Navy’s 2nd Fleet, stationing in Alaska the nation’s second operational active-duty wing of F-35 A fighter jets, and training with NATO allies in the North Atlantic and Barents Sea. The United States will likely increase the tempo and type of Arctic military exercises to project power, reinforce partnerships, and demonstrate capabilities. Greenland’s geographic and geopolitical position will also remain an important component of U.S. military and diplomatic efforts in the Arctic.

things to watch: **RUSSIA & UKRAINE**



Shutterstock.com/Drop of Light

1

Russia and the Biden Administration






President-elect Biden has a nearly half-century long track record on U.S. foreign policy, including on Russia and Ukraine, and his past statements underscore an approach that will have broad bipartisan support. He will seek strategic stability with Russia, provide significant aid to Ukraine, Georgia, the Baltic States and other neighbors in ongoing conflicts with Russia, and voice rhetorical support (at least) for the beleaguered Russian opposition. Biden is duly cautious about provoking direct conflict with Moscow that could spur unintended escalation. An evenly-divided Senate will aim to stymie the White House's policy agenda wherever possible, but January may bring reduced Congressional pressure—triggered by largely bipartisan mistrust of President Trump on Russia—to impose new sanctions. Yet legislators will not rescind existing sanctions legislation. The State and Treasury Departments will update and maintain sanctions designations, taking relatively narrow and targeted new actions. The result will be continuing pressure on Moscow.

Featured Experts:

William Pomeranz, Deputy Director, Kennan Institute

Mykhailo Minakov, Senior Advisor, Editor-in-Chief, *Focus Ukraine* blog, Kennan Institute

Max Trudolyubov, Senior Fellow and Editor of the Russia File

 www.wilsoncenter.org/kennan
 kennan@wilsoncenter.org
 facebook.com/Kennan.Institute
 [@kennaninstitute](https://twitter.com/kennaninstitute)
 202.691.4100

WILSON 50 years
CENTER



Shutterstock.com/Alexandros Michailidis

2

Biden's Approach to FSU States

President-elect Biden likely will take a strong personal interest in guiding U.S. policy on Ukraine. He can afford to take chances on summit diplomacy in the Russia-Ukraine conflict if the White House maintains a hard line on security aid to Ukraine and beefs up NATO forward presence in Eastern Europe. Reform in Ukraine may be constrained by that nation's apparent constitutional crisis, and President Zelenskiy's declining polls. Biden has staked out a careful position on Belarus, deeming authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenka illegitimate, but calling for international action on sanctions against him and his regime. And the recent Armenia and Azerbaijan war over Nagorno-Karabakh has elicited more concern over Russian and Turkish involvement than the maximalist goals of the direct parties to the conflict. This signals a broader, geopolitical view



Shutterstock.com/plavevski

3

Strategic Alignment Between Russia and China

On the campaign trail, Biden and his team spoke of confronting both Moscow and Beijing "from a position of strength." This means greater outreach to U.S. allies, many of which are engaged in intense confrontations of their own with Russia and China. But it also will mean abandoning President Trump's willingness to engage in personal diplomacy with authoritarian leaders, from Putin and Xi to Kim and Erdogan, in favor of renewing an emphasis on democracy promotion. These developments will deepen already serious U.S.-China tensions over trade, security and global governance that have worsened through the Obama and Trump administrations. Vladimir Putin even has begun to speak about the possibility of a full-blown military alliance with China, which would essentially reverse the landmark Nixon/Kissinger opening to Beijing in the 1970s. The Biden administration must tread carefully, or contribute to the rollback of that historic U.S. achievement.

3 things to watch: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



sShutterstock.com/painter_vfx

1

Open Science & Hardware

Low cost and open source hardware made it possible to design and manufacture Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) quickly and cheaply during initial COVID-19 response. But beyond COVID-19, open source hardware is disrupting a range of traditional business models, including those deployed in scientific research. Open source tools are created and released by the public so anyone can make, modify, or distribute them for greater customization, transparency, and reuse. This movement is aligned with open science and open innovation—or, the growing trend to increase public participation in science, technology, and policy and to foster collaboration and sharing. The Biden administration will pursue innovative ideas that build on prior support for open access, citizen science and crowdsourcing, and open data. We expect policymakers will seek to better understand the ways in which these tools change how science is done, enabling new and innovative research and broadening who can participate.

Featured Experts:

Meg King, Strategic and National Security Advisor to the Wilson Center’s President, and Director, Digital Futures Project

Anne Bowser, Director of Innovation, Science and Technology Innovation Program

Benjamin Buchanan, Global Fellow, Digital Futures Project

-  www.wilsoncenter.org/program/science-and-technology-innovation-program
-  stip@wilsoncenter.org
-  facebook.com/WilsonSTIP
-  [@WilsonSTIP](https://twitter.com/WilsonSTIP)
-  202.691.4398





Shutterstock.com/metamorworks

2

Facial Recognition and AI Ethics

Initially gaining momentum through activism within the Black Lives Matter Movement, civil rights concerns associated with the use of facial recognition technologies by law enforcement agencies became a critical policy topic in 2020. Congress proposed (but never passed) a moratorium, while private sector companies made voluntary commitments around the use of facial recognition by law enforcement and other stakeholders. But many key questions related to facial recognition remain unresolved. Customs and border protection and consumer applications are two additional important and underexplored application domains. [Beyond new bans](#) on the technology, policymakers should consider the full range of risks and benefits associated with facial recognition in different contexts. The inclusion of the Artificial Intelligence Incentive Act in the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act means that these concerns will continue to grow in 2021 and beyond. Yet it also paves the way for [a broader policy agenda](#) with ethics at the fore.



Shutterstock.com/B.Zhou






3

The 5G Future

Is China “winning” the global competition to launch fifth generation (5G) wireless networks? How should policymakers think about America’s structural advantages? What can be done to facilitate faster, but secure, implementation in North America? To address these concerns, the Wilson Center’s 5G Beyond Borders project explores how the U.S., Canada, and Mexico can work together to maximize the benefits of 5G and related technology through informed policy solutions. The project offers an overview of the landscape of 5G technology around the globe, while also focusing on the impact of 5G on North American business, and smart manufacturing—especially as the region begins to implement the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement. Cross-border collaboration between those countries will be essential to position the region as a leader in 5G.



One Woodrow Wilson Plaza
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20004-3027

-  www.wilsoncenter.org
-  wwics@wilsoncenter.org
-  facebook.com/woodrowwilsoncenter
-  [@thewilsoncenter](https://twitter.com/thewilsoncenter)
-  202.691.4000

Aaron C. Jones
Director of Congressional Relations

-  Aaron.Jones@wilsoncenter.org
-  202.691.4140
-  [@WilsonCongress](https://twitter.com/WilsonCongress)